

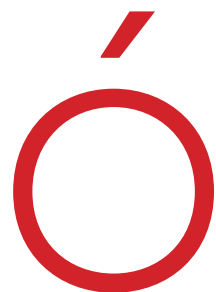
Agbowó

ISSUE 3

JULY 2020



M E M O R Y



About Agbowó

Agbowó is growing to be a foremost African art company providing platforms for African writers and artists that ensure creative Africans can concentrate on creating great art while we ensure they get the audience and the value they deserve.

Our goal is to create immense value for art lovers whether as creators or as consumers of African art as they might have not experienced before- both through the magnitude of our service and in the way we have chosen to deliver them.

Some of our initiatives include Agbowó online literary journal (agbowo.org), the yearly Agbowó magazine (agbowo.org/magazine), the upcoming monthly publication, Monthly (monthly.agbowo.org), our arts events platform, Arts n Chill by Agbowó (agbowo.org/artsnchill) and most recently, our platform for publishing third party publications and artworks, Published by Agbowó (published.agbowo.org).

We will continue to seek new, innovative and trusted ways to uphold African artistry, craft and creativity. Whether through our own initiatives, partnerships or sponsorships, we will remain true to our purpose of providing global access to cultural and creative Africans and helping them gain value and audience for their work.

Agbowó's registered name is Agbowó Creative African Company, incorporated with the RC number 1575748.

Editor's Note

All we remember of a flood is the running, together, for high ground, holding onto things and to each other for buoyance, and the eventual rope or hand. Memory is not an exclusive preserve of the individual. From time to time, super-sized events engulf us in large swathes so that there is no space for the nuance of personal experience and its corollary – personal memory. One such event was the colonial experience. We, the colonized, can all look to one another and ask; what did you lose in that deluge? Ancestral sculptures? A sense of self? Or, perhaps, language? For this reason, every renewed call for a pan-African agenda becomes a call for an alliance based on collective memory, a banding together of the collectively traumatized. Whether or not a sense of collective loss is the right basis for a union is an open question, but it is difficult to doubt the power of such a bond. It, I imagine, has the same quality as bonds formed between soldiers on a war front.

At the time of writing this, the world is only emerging from what has been characterized as a war against “an invisible enemy”, the novel Coronavirus. It is, also, one of those sweeping events that grant us access to shared memory. We will all remember the weeks spent isolated from friends and co-workers and in some cases, family. We will all remember waiting with bated breath as governments revealed rising numbers in the death toll the virus left behind. It is these collective memories that delineate generations and separate us, conscious in this moment, from the rest of history. The colonial generation. The holocaust generation. The civil war generation. The coronavirus generation. Memory brings together and by so doing, sets apart.

This paradoxical effect of memory on the macro level has its equivalent on the micro-scale, on the scale of interpersonal relationships with erstwhile friends and estranged lovers. The past is done, but disagreements occur about different interpretations of it. Person A remembers it this way and Person B remembers it that way. But since the past is a fixed prior event, only one person is remembering correctly. Or maybe both are remembering incorrectly, deliberately forgetting, and so on. Memory, in these and similar scenarios, is almost always tainted by ulterior motives or the feelings with which they have been co-incubated for long periods. The popular phrase “If my memory serves me right-” which usually opens such enquiries into the past becomes the only correct statement in such conversations – memory as servant of personal agendas and favourable narratives.

The only people who remember coldly are the historians and while Coetzee argues, correctly, that “Historians are not simple-minded people. Many of them are able to hold two conflicting beliefs in balance”, historizing is still an action shorn of the frills installed by feelings. Thus, while the representations of historians might be “true”, they do not represent the human way of remembering; a creative remembering. It is for this reason that the artist, and not the historian, is the memory of the people. Art rejects the coldness of strict correctness for the inventiveness and malleability of alternative ways of remembering, the occasional misremembering, the less frequent embellishing, and the utter fabrication.

In 88, Joshua Chizoma sees the utility that such fabrications may present. He tells the story of the rote memorization of a lie for purely functional purposes. The lies we tell ourselves and the invented memories they create are the most important lies of all and are sometimes all that keeps us intact. But what happens when one is rudely confronted with the living, beating heart of the truth? Most times, we unravel. Revelation and its undesirable twin, unravelation. But while in-

vented memories can be a prophylactic therapeutic, they can also be the pathology. Testament to the pathological possibilities of such inventions, Anifowoshe Ibrahim's protagonist in *Silence is a conflagration*, is prodded by tweaks in memory by a strange presence towards the cliff, towards the fire.

While Chizoma and Anifowoshe's protagonists are couched in invented memories, the protagonists of the rest of the storytellers in this issue are seeking a recovery of the unadulterated truth. I have often wondered about the fragments of people we carry around with us. Fragments that they'd be shocked to learn still exist, sometimes even in pristine form. It is safe to believe that the converse – people carrying our lost memories with them – is also true. What won't I do, I wonder, to recover a catalogue of my bad jokes, my accidental profundities, and all the bureaucratic details in between? Won't I feel the urge to go, hat in hand, and beg for my past? In Ifeoma Nnewuihe's *Nostalgia Café*, the protagonist's search tasks technology with the recovery. In Jarred Thompson's *Beyond the Railway Line*, the spiritual is tasked. In Peter Nawa's *Fade*, it is art that is tasked. Art in the service of memory.

Other contributors to this issue are also concerned about the constant erosion of the past and its attendant images. In *Rememory*, Uche Osondu laments- "I have no pictures of Auntie Sola. With each recall, I find that it takes just a little bit longer to remember her face." He evokes the progressive nature of forgetting. Slow and sure. Osondu reflects the fears of Busamoya Modirwa who writes – "Today, your recollection of them is a picture puzzle with shape-shifting pieces, you almost have to give up a part of them to remember another...". What does it take to ensure the permanence of these memories? While a photograph may suffice for Osondu it does not placate Mofiyinfoluwa Okupe who writes in *The One Who Battled Time* "As one day bleeds into another, I find that I can no longer recall his scent." This struggle with time and the forgetting it heralds is the prevalent theme within this issue and reading the poets in this issue, one quickly finds that Qhali Itumeleng's *A Girl's List*, Mary-Ann Olaoye's *a list of forgetting* and Olakiitan Aladesuyi's *Lovers Never Die* may well be in a similar conversation.

But, away from the longing for preservation, there are also memories that although we'd love to do away with, continue to re-present and reinforce themselves. In Kelvin Shachile's *A Dynasty of Memories*, the mechanism of reinforcement is the unexpected discovery of an old diary. But while diaries and the word-portals they present can easily be shredded, what happens when the memory is stored in a face? Ayodele Ibiyemi, characterizing these triggers, writes "Just like her burial place, unlikely places became minefields too. The school she taught, the church we attended and her friends' houses. I managed to stay off some but there was one I could not stay off: my sister. My sister was just five years when we lost our mother but as she grew up, she began to look like her." What does one do about living minefields? Distance, perhaps? Outright abscondment? But how do we navigate healing which, as Pamilerin Jacob posits "is a game of forgetfulness" when we, our scars, our own faces in the mirror are our own minefields? How does one abscond from self?

Moyosore Orimoloye

Minneapolis,

July 2020

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The Memory Issue
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Cover Art
Down to the River We Go
by Fatima Krantz

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READ JOSHUA'S *88*



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READ PETER'S *Fade*



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READ JARRED'S *Beyond Railway Line*



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READ IFEOMA'S *Nostalgia Café*



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READ IBRAHIM'S *Silence Is Conflagration*

POETRY

EDITED BY OLU AFOLABI



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[READ QHALI'S *A Girl's List*](#)



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Wesley Macheso is a Malawian writer currently reading for his PhD in English Studies at Stellenbosch University. He teaches literature at the University of Malawi to survive and he writes to live. His short story "This Land is Mine" is published in *Water: new short story fiction from Africa* (2016). He won the 2015 Peer Gynt Literary Award in Malawi for his children's book *Akuzike and the Gods* (2017). Some of his poems are anthologised in *Wreaths for a Wayfarer* (2020). His work can be read online on African Writer, Brittle Paper, Storymoja, The Kalahari Review, and Agbowo magazines. He edits for www.africanwriter.com and www.africainwords.com

[READ WESLEY'S *Grief*](#)



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Pamilerin Jacob is a Nigerian poet whose poems have appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *Agbowó*, *Poetry Position*, *Rattle* & others. He was the second runner-up for *Sevhage Poetry Prize 2019*. Author of chapbooks, *Gospels of Depression*, & *Paper Planes in the Rain* (Co-authored); he is a staunch believer in the powers of critical thinking, Khalil Gibran's poetry & chocolate ice-cream. Reach him on Twitter @pamilerinjacob.

[READ PAMILERIN'S *Ablution*](#)



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[READ ADETUTU'S *Bodies Are Anomalies*](#)



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Deon C Visser is a South African writer that writes about; political issues (what it means to be a White African), childhood, and queer trauma. He is currently pursuing his Master's in Creative Writing at Rhodes University, South Africa. He has been published in literary journals in North America and Asia (5thwall Press and Insignia Lit, 2018). In 2018 he started work on an epic Afrikaans children's fantasy series called 'The Klippenkraal Kronieke' which he hopes will spark curiosity for South African cultural and mystical contexts.

READ DEON'S *Idea Keeper*



MORWAMPHAKA SELLO HUMA

Morwamphaka Sello Huma is a South African poet and writer based in Johannesburg. He is known for his African protest poetry and performances. He self-published his first poetry in 2016 titled "Country Bard Blues" and has been featured in the Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Anthology (2015), Ons Klyntji (2018, 2019), Writers Space Africa (2019), and Afritondo (2019). Social Media— Instagram: @Countrybard, Facebook: Morwamphaka Sello Huma Poetry.

READ SELLO HUMA'S *In Memory of Those Who Died Unknown*



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Salawu Olajide's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Glass, Salt Hill, New Orleans Review, Paragrammer, Tradition, Rattle, Saraba, Miracle Monocle, Forbidden Peak Press, Soul-Lit and so on. He is also the author of Preface for Leaving Homeland published under African Poetry Book Fund series edited by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani. He lives in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He can be found on Twitter @ohun_meje.

READ SALAWU'S *Hosting the Ghost of My Grandfather after His Burial*



OKUNLOLA OMOLOLA

Okunlola Omolola is an avid reader and a Nigerian writer of poetry and fiction born in Kwara State. She is passionate about mental health and sees writing as a problem-solving experience; a way for reality to shift to the perfect state. Okunlola loves sharwama and yellow. She is currently studying at Babcock University for a B.Sc. in Mass Communication.

READ OMOLOLA'S *Saudade*



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I live in Lagos where I work as a software developer/data analyst by day and a writer at odd hours. My fiction and poetry have appeared in African writer, Kalahari review, Best New African Poets 2018 Anthology, Agbowó Art, Poetica Magazine, The Naked convos, As Equals Africa, Praxis magazine, Watershed Review, Prairie Schooner and is forthcoming in the Animal Heart Press Nigerian anthology. Sometimes, I tweet here: @kitanbelles

READ OLAKITAN'S *Lovers Never Die*



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Shade Mary-Ann Olaoye lives and writes from Nigeria. Her works have appeared in Brittlepaper, Momento Anthology, ThatGreenTea, Fragbits, and elsewhere. She is currently a Social Producer for Minority Africa.

READ SHADE'S *a list of forgetting*



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READ EFE'S *Parasite*

NONFICTION

EDITED BY 'KUNLE ADEBAJO



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Mofiynfoluwa Okupe is a young Nigerian woman studying law at Durham University with slim chances of practice. She is addicted to Twitter and occasionally publishes pieces on her Medium account. Her work is published on The Kalahari Review. Her work majorly revolves around the complexity of human emotions and how we as human beings deal with them. When she is not writing, you can find her fingers deep in a bowl of nkowbi or affirming the beauty of fat black women.

READ OKUPE'S *The One Who Battled Time*



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READ ALEXANDER'S *Teresa Nanziri Bukenya. Paul Serwangas. Esther Chesire and others in the Gaping Yawns of Black Inhumanity.*



KELVIN J. SHACHILE

Kelvin J. Shachile is a Kenyan writer, creative artist, designer and editor. He is the co-author of *Hell in the Backyard and Other Stories* and the author of *Game of Writing*. Kelvin has contributed to over twenty magazines and anthologies including *The Best New African Poets 2018* anthology and the second of the *boys are not stones* anthology: *A Country of Broken Boys*. He was longlisted for the 2019 African Writers Awards-Children's literature Category and shortlisted for the inaugural Wakini Kuria Award for African Literature 2019.

READ KELVIN'S *A Dynasty of Memories*



ŞEUN WILLIAMS

Şeun Williams is a student of history, of yesterday's memories and everything prior to the now, who fancies weaving webs with words, and groping at things at intersections of time-space by means of/through lenses. He is currently PhDing about some 'meaty' part of Lagos history in the *comme ci, comme ça* of Geneva. He can be caught roaming the web via @WheelHelms.

READ SEUN'S *The Atlantic and a Badagrian's Memories*



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Busamoya Phodiso Modiirwa is a Motswana writer and poet with works published on *Jalada Africa: Bodies*, *Praxis Online Magazine*, *Ake Review*, *Kalahari Review* and elsewhere. She is a recipient of the Botswana President's Award - Contemporary Poetry 2016."

READ BUSAMOYA'S *Confronting Conflicting Recollections*



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Akinyemi, Muhammed Adedeji is a writer who sucks at writing his bio. Sometimes he's working as an Editor at African Liberty, other times he's practising how to fly. He lives in Nigeria and has a degree in Law, which he despises except for brags. He likes to think of himself as a centrist but is a liberal on paper.

READ AKINYEMI'S *Íyá Goni*



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Ayotunde James Olumilua, who sometimes publishes under the alias Jay-Jay Raymond, runs a blog where he posts articles, short stories, and the occasional poem. He also freelances and is a music and film enthusiast.

READ AYOTUNDE'S *Everyday. We Quietly Fall Apart*



UCHE OSONDU

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READ UCHE'S *Rememory*



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Jerry Chiemeke is a columnist, culture critic and lawyer. His works have appeared in The Inlandia Journal, The Johannesburg Review of Books, The Guardian, Honey & Lime, Bone and Ink Press, Agbowo and Brittlepaper, among others. A lover of long walks and alternative rock music, Jerry lives in Lagos, Nigeria where he is working on a novel. He is the winner of the 2017 Ken Saro Wiwa Prize for Reviews, and he was shortlisted for the 2019 Diana Woods Memorial Award for Creative Nonfiction.

READ JERRY'S *On the 204th month*



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Ohia, Ernest Chigaemezu is a 21-year-old Nigerian writer. He graduated from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka with a B.A. in English and a minor in History and International Studies. He has works in Eunoia Review, Nantygreens, The Muse, Rigorous and elsewhere.

READ OHIA'S *A Resurgence of Pain*



AYODELE IBIYEMI

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READ AYODELE'S *A Memory of My Mother in 7 Manifestations*

VISUAL ARTS

EDITED BY SHEYI OWOLABI



FATIMA KRANTZ

Fatima Krantz is a 23 years old artist with Kenyan roots but living in Sweden. She grew up in a Kenyan household and was surrounded by strong Kenyan women who have later come to inspire her art.

Her art aims to show the immense beauty of black women from the African diaspora. She wants to show the truth and life of black African women - the dark history but also the bright future. Each piece comes with a poem explaining the history behind each piece and her art covers everything from ancient Africa to slavery and colonialism to today's situation for black women.

[READ FATIMA'S Interview with Agbowó](#)

[VIEW FATIMA'S Mtoto Wangu](#)



ABDULRAHMAN ADESOLA YUSUF

Arclight (Abdulrahman Adesola Yusuf) is a digital artist from Lagos, Nigeria. His works are digital collages he creates using photography and adobe photoshop. His works are an allusion to his personal experience and or imaginations from his childhood. He graduated from Yaba college of technology with a HND in Graphic design, Nigeria. His inspiration ranges from his immediate environment, Animes, high renaissance artist like Michelangelo di Lodovico, Salvador Dali's surrealism and the whole Baroque and Rococo overly ornate art movement. He can be contacted via Instagram @arclight.jpg and <https://arclightjpg.com>

[VIEW YUSUF'S Going Home I](#)

[VIEW YUSUF'S Going Home II](#)



KENNETH AZORTIBAH

Kenneth Azortibah (K-Azor) is a polymath. As a visual artist, he works across multiple mediums, from paint on canvas to digital art. He's always been fascinated by the power of a good story, whether told through image, sound, or words.

"Everyone has a story, but many conflicts would be resolved if we paused for a while, and tried to experience those of others."

Kenneth is self-taught and strives to be a modern-day Renaissance man. He currently works as a designer, creates STEAM-oriented comics as part of The Firenze Foundation, and pursues a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science at Ashesi University.

[VIEW KENNETH'S A Walk Through Time](#)



MARC PADEU

Marc Padeu is a Cameroonian Post War & Contemporary painter who was born in Melong in 1990. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts (IBA) at Douala University in Nkongsamba.

His work questions the memory of the past and the relation to the spiritual in current African societies. He admits to being challenged by the impact of the violence of terrorism on the current society as well as by the contemporary representation of the legacy of the triangular trade.

Padeu was laureate of the first art prize 2016: "Bimbia: memory of slavery and the slave trade in Cameroon" organized jointly by the Embassy of the United States of America in Yaoundé and the program Road chieftaincy. His works appear in the permanent collection of the World Bank Washington, but also in important private collections in the West (Franks-Suss Collection) in a collective exhibition initiated by the Jack bell gallery in London in 2014. He lives and works between Douala and Nkongsamba in Cameroon.

[VIEW MARC'S The Elephant King](#)



MUSA TUKURAH

Musa Tukurah is a fine art and portrait photographer with interest in wedding photography and nature photography. He has been a professional photographer for 12 years and his interest in different genres of photography has evolved over the years. Most of his personal time goes towards creating his fine art/conceptual work. His works can be viewed on Instagram: @musatukurah @tukurahmusa and on Facebook: @mtukurahphotography.

[VIEW MUSA'S *Drifting Away*](#)



JOSEPH IDOWU

Joseph Idowu was born in FCT Abuja, hails from Ekiti state, Nigeria. He studied fine and Applied Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, where he majored in Painting and currently exploring the pyrography technique. He has also trained at the universal studios of Art, National Theatre Lagos, and a resident artist at Oberhi Studios Lagos. He has several awards/prizes including the Numartville Art Competition 2018 to his credit and participated in several group exhibitions including IMPART FAIR at Eko Atlantic, Lagos. His work is influenced by his enthrallment with children, and the ability of their cultural background to nurture them. He is engrossed by the approach of the society in relation to abilities of the average African child. His work merges visual representation of children forms, and imaginary silhouette heads contrary to the usual portraiture in order that challenges the audience to see differently.

[VIEW JOSEPH'S *Superstar*](#)

[VIEW JOSEPH'S *Songs From Time Past*](#)



EMMANUEL "BOBBY" ARCHIBONG

Emmanuel "Bobby" Archibong is a digital visual artist and the Creative Director of The Sunflower Express. He believes art is boundless and should be fully explored. His work explores the dimensionless and liberal forms of art. He is enthusiastic about incorporating nature into his pieces. He loves cats and can be found on Twitter and Instagram @bobbyarchibong.

[VIEW EMMANUEL'S *Ndifreke I*](#)

[VIEW EMMANUEL'S *Ndifreke II*](#)

[VIEW EMMANUEL'S *Ndifreke III*](#)



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[VIEW MARTINS' *Nostalgia*](#)

[VIEW MARTINS' *Finding the homeward path*](#)

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JOSHUA CHIZOMA

“Those early days, her prayers were light and beautiful. Full of hope. It was where we bonded; she and I and God against the day. So it was only natural that after our prayers one night, two weeks after my fifteenth birthday, that I said to my mother, ‘Mummy, I am pregnant.’”

1.

My mother left my father’s house on a Sunday. We had just returned from her new church when she started throwing our shoes and dresses into bags. There had been a studied vehemence to the way she gathered our things, as though the very act in itself required some violence. The brothers from the church formed a line outside and heaved our bags into a waiting lorry, while the sisters sang hymns about a sinner who had ‘come home.’ With their white robes and dreads, they were quite the sight so that our neighbours all came out to watch.

My father stood by the front door, observing the spectacle with a pained smile on his face. It would have been beneath him to try to stop us; my mother was his second wife. It was his other wife, Nnenna, who went with her from room to room asking her in a sing-song manner, *kedu ihe di ihea?* My mother seemed not to hear her. She had a glazed look in her eyes, and would often stop to peer deeply into the distance before continuing.

When my mother was done packing, she grabbed my hand and began marching outside. Nnenna ran after us. She caught up with us at the top of the short stairway leading outside. She pulled me from my mother’s grasp and squatted till her eyes were level with mine and said,

“This man,” she pointed towards my father, “he will always be your father. It is in this house they will pay your bride price. My boys will always be your brothers.”

She paused to wipe her face with the back of her hand.

“I want you to never forget that. I don’t know why your Mother is behaving like a goat,” she said.

We left afterwards.

Our new house was close to the rail road. It was one room in a row of identical rooms an ambitious man had built as close to the tracks as the government would allow. Sometimes at night, the blaring of the trains’ trumpets would encroach into my dreams, making my heart race and leaving my bones shaking. Those times, the house would convulse like it was having a coughing fit, and Mother would sprinkle the house with the blood of Jesus. This—sprinkling of the blood of Jesus at regular intervals—was one of the many things that my mother took with her as we left my father’s house. The march to religiosity that had begun with us going to the new church gathered momentum till the point where our lives became heavily sautéed in the religious. My mother stopped calling me Madonna, choosing rather to call me Chibuoyim, Jesus *pikin*. She stopped using makeup. She flushed all her gold jewelry into the toilet, and started wearing long flowing skirts she called ‘printing’. She also began to pray.

Nights after we closed our shop and she had taken her bath, she would come in, a towel hugging

her tall frame, the stinging scent of Dettol soap announcing that it was time for prayers. She would get me to kneel at the foot of the bed, her hands clasping mine. Her voice would rise as she sang hymns that sounded like dirges. She'd end with "Daddy Chineke..." then launch into long discourses. It was there that she went through the events of the entire day, asking God to forgive that woman who refused to give her change for her customers, asking God to help Sister Clementina get a new job seeing as her husband just died, asking that I remain an obedient child of God, one who did not give her mother grief. My mother told Daddy Chineke everything. He was the custodian of her every secret. It was as though with him, a tap came undone and bits of her came flowing out.

It was there, on my knees, that I learned that adultery could be living with a man who was already married. And because adultery was a sin, my mother had had to leave my father.

Those early days, her prayers were light and beautiful. Full of hope. It was where we bonded; she and I and God against the day. So it was only natural that after our prayers one night, two weeks after my fifteenth birthday, that I said to my mother,

"Mummy, I am pregnant."

2.

When you left your husband's home, your heart housed no malice. As you slung your fears over your shoulder and walked out the door, it was another kind of burning zeal that drove you: the knowledge that you were doing the right thing. You had had a singular purpose. You had seen the light. You were Paul after the Lord threw him from his horse.

When people laughed at you for throwing away a perfectly good marriage, you paid them no mind. Their mirth did you no harm as long as you knew you were doing the Lord's bidding. Samson did not go about explaining to everyone why he carried dreadlocks now, did he?

You also gave no place to regrets. There were times when you thought of your husband, about how he had been such a loving father to your Chibuoyim, and the weight of what you did to him would sting you. Those times your heart would fill to the brim with sadness. Sadness was what you felt, but never regret.

However, the day your daughter told you she was pregnant, you found doubt at the door of your heart. You wondered if you had made the right call. That was why you did not shout at her. You simply turned the other way and went to sleep.

The days after the announcement her eyes followed you everywhere as you cooked and washed and opened your shop, yet you did not say anything to her. You left unspoken words hanging between you both. You did not even give her the satisfaction of a beating or a yelling. You left her an anti-climax.

One month passed. Then two. Her breasts got fuller, and her skin lusher. She developed a gentle slope on her stomach, almost imperceptible, one an unsuspecting person could attribute to over-eating. As you watched her transition into motherhood, you realized that all of those markers were biting indictments of how you had failed at the one thing God had entrusted into your hand.

You found solace in doing the mundane things. The familiar gave you reassurance. It told you that the world was still firm under your feet, and that the little things over which you had control were still intact. Thus it was that you were at your station on a Tuesday, mopping the church's tiles in

preparation for that evening's service when you noticed the woman.

It wouldn't be entirely correct to say you noticed her just then, because before then, she had always existed at the periphery of your vision. She was one of the ushers in your church. She had no child and you always felt sorry for her whenever the pastor made jokes about barren women. One day he had made jokes about David's wife's barrenness, saying, *if the Lord ties your womb, forget it. Even your village people cannot untie it.* The church had roared with laughter, and you had caught the look on the woman's face; the look that said she wasn't sure if it was appropriate to laugh, the look you have on your face the days women in the church made jokes about girls who run after other women's husbands and then settled in to become second wives.

That day, when you got to the place she was seated, you realized that she was sobbing. Quiet, gentle tears racked through her being. You laid down the mop, sat across from her. She lifted her face to look at you briefly and continued crying. You said to her,

"My daughter is pregnant."

It was the first time you were saying that to anyone, even yourself. As you said those words, it was as though a dam burst open and words came tumbling out, rivers and rivers that carried fear and regret as it swept you along. The flood was so great that you went into a fit of hiccups. The woman had looked a little startled, but still she took your hands and cooed, "Take it easy, take it easy oo."

After service that day the woman called you to her car. You stood by the side of the car while she tinkered about, preparing to drive home. She did not give you a glance the whole time. You kept thinking, "Did she forget me?" Then as she turned the ignition she finally looked your way and said,

"There is a woman I know. She stays at 88 Faulks Road. She can help your daughter."

It took you two weeks to visit the address she gave you. That was because the address kept slipping your mind. It'd come and you'd push it to the back of your thoughts where it'd disappear out of sight for a while, only to appear again. It'd be scratching the back of your throat, teasing you, and then disappearing. On the Tuesday that you eventually tried to locate this woman you took a bus, after your midweek service, when your resolve was strongest. You stopped at 45 Faulks Road. That used to be the group headquarters of your church. You used to be in the choir there before your cell was considered big enough to form a new branch. You decided to walk the rest of the way. You walked fast, keeping your head bowed so no one would recognize you. It had rained earlier, so you were careful to sidestep the puddles, your feet nimble and lithe. As you walked you mumbled the tags on the gates under your breath, 23, 42, 87, then 88. You stared at the gate. It was brown and huge. You stood there for more than thirty minutes; no one came out of the compound. Then you turned and went home.

You repeated the cycle a couple more times before you finally found the courage to walk up to the gate and knock.

3.

My mother came home one evening and announced,

"I am taking you somewhere. Pack your bags."

She did not add any other detail, and I did not ask. The next morning my bags were packed when the taxi man she hired showed up. He made a joke about my travelling even while school was still

in session, but neither Mother nor I laughed. The ride was quiet, with Wizkid's voice pouring out from the car's speakers. At some point the driver increased the volume to drown out the silence that enveloped the car.

It was almost 9am when we got to the place. My mother rapped at the gate and a woman peeped at from a small opening by the side of the gate. She did not first ask who it was. When she saw my mother, she opened the gate. She had strikingly clear eyes and a smile that enfolded one like an embrace. She and my mother exchanged looks and I knew that my mother had been there before; transactions had gone ahead of me.

As the woman took us on a tour of the compound, she kept saying to my mother,

"She will be fine, don't worry. We will take care of her." She did not say anything to me.

My mother followed me to the room I was allocated. As we walked along the corridor, several girls in different stages of pregnancy looked out, and as though finding us uninteresting, went back to whatever they had been doing. My room was at the end of the hallway. I was to share it with another girl. It was simple, with two single beds, a table and no other piece of furniture. The girl sighed when she saw us enter, then cleared one side of the bed.

My mother helped me unpack. When we were done, she sat on the edge of the bed.

"You will stay here till everything settles." She looked at the ceiling. "I will be coming to visit you from time to time. I have made arrangements with the Madam. It is better that way."

She left five crumpled one thousand naira notes on the table, then left.

After my mother's departure, the girls crowded into my room. They were girls in all shapes and sizes, bonded by their bulging stomachs. They appeared animated as they fired me with a barrage of questions: *how old was I? Had I even taken my WAEC? Was that my mother? She was so young!* I had never seen so many pregnant women in the same room before. In their midst, I felt the stilling of the trepidation of my heart, it was as though I was finally allowed to unclench my fist.

I tried keeping up as much as I could, but whenever I reached up for air another question was thrown at me. When they had exhausted their questions I asked my roommate, "How far along are you?"

There was silence, then uncomfortable coughs and shuffling feet. Then the girl smiled brightly and answered,

"I am six months along." Then added, "Erm, we don't talk usually about it like that."

"Oh," I replied. "This is my third month, I think." The girls started laughing, asking, "What do you mean by, 'I think'?"

In the coming weeks, I would come to notice that the girls studiously avoided the subject of their pregnancies. When they discussed amongst themselves, they made plans around it. They talked about going back to school. About finding jobs. It was as though it was a momentary glitch, that when they walked out of the gates they had the intentions of picking up their lives where they left off.

It was during the quarrels that the secrets came spilling out. Grace who was raped and carrying her father's child. Ekpereka whose third child it was, who had the ability to get pregnant like a chicken. Nnedi whose family disowned her because her father was a pastor and she had gotten pregnant for one of the church's elders.

We had a communal sort of existence. There was a roster for cooking, and washing the bathrooms and toilet. We shared rooms and spoons and body heat. Between us we found cures for back aches, offered foot rubs, braided each other's hairs, and survived. The routine was the same: we woke up, swept the compound and then prepared to eat. After breakfast, those who were not too far along did other things like sewing, or weaving, or making hair. The others just laid down in their rooms. Sometimes a nurse would come in to check in on us, bringing tonics and blood supplements. In the evenings, we sat around the verandah and told stories. Nobody ventured past the gates. It was like a secondary school boarding house only that everybody actually respected the rules.

Madam operated a ministry. It was unorthodox, and the flock was mostly women looking for children or needing deliverance from marine husbands. We constituted half of the congregation on any given Thursday. During sermons, she would go on about hell and promiscuity and girls who made it a business having sex with boys. We would sit on the other side of the hall, exhibits to how true her testimony was. She believed in rituals that sometimes bordered on the theatrical. She once asked a woman to buy a wedding gown, and makeup and performed a mock wedding in the church, with her son, Junior acting as the groom. In about six months, she came in to tell us how the lady had done her introductions, her face beaming with smiles, her voice lyrical as she knelt in the middle of the compound, with her hands raised to heaven, the sun drawing a rough sketch of her figure on the floor.

4.

Your favorite bible story is the story about the meeting between Abraham's servant and Rachel. It was one of the few times you viewed the bible as romantic. Also it reminded you of how two lives could meet, like streams, and flow into each other, upsetting nature's set course. Your pastor called such meetings divine encounters.

You believe in divine encounters. You started believing in them from the day you became born-again. That day, the man who would later become your pastor had come to your shop asking to spend only ten minutes with you. You had let him because it had been a slow day and you were bored, and also, he had been so polite. Those ten minutes changed your life forever. At the end of it, you had become born again, and two weeks after it, you had packed out of your husband's house, dedicated fully to your Lord and personal savior.

The day Daa Ngozi showed up at your shop, however, you were not certain if the Lord's hand had directed her steps, or whether she had been on the voyage by herself. Daa Ngozi was the Local Government Chairman's third wife. People made jokes behind her back about how she was his third wife and he, her third husband.

When she came in, she sat near the door and received the market women as they came to ask her if her husband, the LG chairman was well; if he going to seek re-election (Their cards were ready, he need only declare.)

She presided over the fiefdom with quite some finesse. After the visits had trickled down, she cleared her voice and said to you,

"Nma Chibuoyim, there is something I wanted us to discuss."

She continued after you did not respond.

"My son said he and your daughter made a mistake." She gave you a conspiratory wink that said

you were supposed to understand these things. But you did not think it was funny, and you liked the idea of conspiracy even less.

“Is that what he said? So, he now boasts in his sin?” You asked,.

“This woman *sef*,” she slapped your thigh. “They are children *nau*. Besides he is making amends now, isn’t it? That is why I am here to talk to you, woman to woman.”

And as she spoke to you, a thought ran past the corridors of your mind. You raced after it, all the while listening to Daa Ngozi’s voice as it rattled on in the background. When you caught up with it, you stared into its eyes, it was filled with mischief. It giggled. It whispered to you, ‘What if the baby is dead.’ You told it, ‘Stop, you trickster. My grandchild cannot die, in Jesus name.’ But it obviously did not hear you, or it did not believe in the power of Jesus’ name because it kept repeating it to you, painting pictures in your head, pictures that became so vivid that when the thoughts faded you found tears leaking from the sides of your eyes. You began to sob, quaking in your seat.

Daa Ngozi stopped and stared at you. She asked,

“What’s wrong?”

“My daughter lost the baby.” You said.

Her eyes narrowed in disbelief, and the smile in her eyes dried up. In that frozen moment, you both recognized the lie for what it was. She could have asked you, ‘But why did you not say that earlier?’ She could have shouted, ‘You are a liar, you have sold the baby for money. You think I don’t know?’ But she chose the path less onerous for her son. What she did was blink, grab you and start weeping. By the time she left your shop that evening, half of the women on your street knew that your daughter lost her child.

That became the story you remember, and in the days to come when you narrate it, the story would grow in leaps, the tapestry woven so tight to hold the untruth.

Whenever you were asked, you said: Yes, your daughter had been living with your sister. Yes, she carried the baby to term but when she had tried giving birth the baby had died. Yes, it was very unfortunate, but she would be back, maybe it was just God’s will.

You’d forget 88. You’d forget the first time an errant thought had run through your mind as your pastor preached in your shop one day. That time, what it had whispered was, “Don’t you know Jesus needs you to leave your husband?”

5.

We rarely had visitors. Most of us at 88 had escaped our homes for exactly the solitude it offered. My mother usually showed up every Saturday evening. I would carry a bench out to the verandah and we would sit. She would be careful to avoid looking at my stomach while I sorted the provisions she brought. She always added things I did not need, like sanitary pads or my WAEC past question sheets. I would remove them and push them towards her. She would look at them as though surprised, then pack them away to take home.

I kept waiting for her to ask me about the pregnancy. About how it happened, but she did not. She told me about our neighbors, about church, about how the members of the choir missed me, but she never asked about the baby. One day I said to her,

“Do you want to feel the baby, it has started kicking.” I took her hands and placed it on my stomach.

Immediately, I saw her eyes dilate in fear. Her whole being became rigid with terror, as though I had ambushed her. She snatched her hand away from my stomach and got up to leave. Her fear had been so palpable that I wanted to run after her to find out if she was okay.

I wanted to show her the words lodged in my heart and the stories they tell. I wanted to apologize. I wanted to tell her that all the times she preached to me, that I listened, that I still thought fornication was a grave sin. I wanted to let her know she was a good mother, that it was I who had been the terrible one. Above all, I wanted her to believe me. I wanted to run into the cleansing embrace her forgiveness would bring.

As my stomach grew, it became harder to avoid the subject so the time we spent together became shorter, till the only thing that told me she visited was the box of provisions Madam left at my door.

There were days we had foreigners visit. They usually came with their cameras, and always insisted they wanted to see us in our natural state, which meant that they wanted us looking ragged, our rooms reeking of squalor, picture friendly for their cameras. They seemed to get a certain high from gory stories. The grimier the better. So I began telling them that I was brutally raped when I was on my way back from school. That it had been retaliation for even attempting going to school. I also told them that my mother had been with me. That she had tried to fight for me, but that the hoodlums had clobbered her with a stick and that she lay in the hospital fighting for her life. The first time I told this story, the woman called me a survivor, she called my mother brave.

Her declaration seemed to quell my hunger a little. So I began to look forward to these visits, so I could gorge on the tears they shed and the hugs they gave me. The stories I told varied depending on the audience, but the endings remained the same; my mother was always incapacitated from helping me. Not because she chose not to, but because she couldn't.

6.

Some days you remember you have a daughter. When, perhaps, you are arranging the provision in your shop or when you hear the members of the choir in church singing *'There is a new name written down in glory'*, you'd remember you have a daughter and that she had been pregnant. A certain kind of panic would seize your heart. But then, you'd also remember that the baby died. And you'll relax.

Other times what you remember is that you do not know where your daughter was. Those times, snatches of memory would sail down to meet you. You would remember that she was supposed to be writing WAEC. Or has she already taken it *sef*? You'd crease your forehead and try to untangle the mess in your head and sort out the times and dates correctly. But you'd begin to feel dizzy and you'd leave it alone. After a while, it would be your default response, leaving it alone. And so darkness became comfortable in that part of your brain that had light. Soon, you were forgetting other things, little details like locking your shop and wearing underwear before leaving the house. You would become totally consumed and the rays of light would become farther and farther apart.

Then one day you would find yourself staring into the eyes of a kind old man. He would be flashing a little torch between both your eyes. You would read the label on his labcoat, Dr. Amadi. He would be saying,

"Do you know where you are, ma?"

Madam called it adoption. She said the women who came wearing sunglasses and pointing with their lips, who left carrying babies, that what they did was adoption.

She would say,

“Thank God. Adaolisa’s baby has been adopted. I’m sure the family would take good care of the child.”

She did not disclose what went on in her office, or the bundles of notes the women gave in exchange for the bundles of joy. She didn’t have to: we knew. After the adoption, Madam arranged for the new mother to get a ‘grant’ from her ministry, the purpose of which was to put the girl’s life back on track. The grant varied depending on whether the girl had given birth to a boy or a girl, or twins.

Sometimes, the women came before the babies were born. They were the ones who would rent a room at the hotel across the street few weeks to delivery and leave with the baby as soon as it was born. Those ones were particularly picky, often looking at the pregnant girls and trying to guess how beautiful the babies would be. Madam helped with their selection, she had a knack for telling who would have a boy or a girl.

In my eighth month, a woman and her daughter came in. Madam took them round the rooms, reeling off names, ages and states of origin as though we were statistics on a chart. I was lying on my back when they got to my room. It was the only position in which the baby didn’t feel the need to furiously kick. The woman pointed at me and said,

“I like this one. What do you think, Amara?”

Her daughter lifted her face from her iPhone long enough to say,

“Yes, she is beautiful.” It appeared the choice wasn’t really hers.

“Can we arrange with her?” The older woman asked.

Madam smiled genially and whispered loudly for me to hear.

“Of course. It is a matter of cash.”

When they left, Madam called me to her office. She avoided looking directly at me, fiddling with the books on her table as though she was looking for something.

“We have to determine what we will do with your baby. Your mother has stopped coming and her shop is locked.”

“What happened to her? Do you know?”

“The neighbors said she was taken to the hospital. They said she collapsed or something.” She then stopped whatever she was searching for and stared at me. She sighed.

“Look, I honestly do not know what to do. The arrangement was that she would be making payments each month and after your delivery, you would go with your baby.”

Mother and I had not discussed it, but I knew in the same way things unsaid sound louder. I was supposed to have the baby, then leave it with her and continue with my education.

“My mother, she is sick. She forgets things. Sometimes when we are praying, she would tell God

to help me pass my common entrance exam. I took the exam five years ago,” I said.

“I don’t know why you are telling me this...”

“I want to have my child adopted.” I cut her short. I had made that decision a few weeks back. It was the only option that gave me even a semblance of peace.

“Eh?” She asked, as though she had expected more resistance. “Are you sure? Should we not wait for your mother?”

I shook my head. She grinned.

“Don’t worry; they will take care of you very well. You are still a young girl, you can go back to school. *Shay* it was WAEC you were about to write eh?” Her cheerfulness was suffocating.

“I want them to call her Nneka. You said it is a girl *abi*?”

“Yes, I am sure you are going to have a girl,” Madam said. “There is no problem. I will make sure they call her Nneka. After all, a mother should get to name her baby.”

I sighed. She did not even try hard enough to conceal the lie.

“One last thing,” she said as I got up to leave. “Who is the father, will he give trouble?”

I considered the question for a moment, my thoughts resting on that yellow boy who had asked me to come to his house to collect my Government textbook he had borrowed. The boy who had fumbled with his green boxers when he finally convinced me to lie down for just a brief ‘something’. The boy who was barely a man, whom I had had to push him gently away from me, pick up my textbook and leave afterwards because he had been embarrassed that the condom had broken. The boy who had not met my gaze after we finished and could only respond with, “My father will kill me oo” when I told him I was pregnant. That boy would not give trouble. He couldn’t.

“No, he won’t.” I said. As I stepped out into the sunshine, the baby started kicking again.

The end.

Ablution



PAMILERIN JACOB

"Healing/ is a game of forgetfulness"

In the shower, water dribblets pop off
my wrists like sequins
& those that trickle, vein both arms
until I am licked clean by dryness,
bare as a plate. Failed again to rid
myself of it. Nothing washes off
a hushed voice stapled to the dermis.
Don't you just
 envy the serpents—
how letting go comes easy to them?
An adult one sheds its ~~skin~~ past
twice a year. Humans wait
seven years for the same
miracle, & when it happens we are
clueless, feel no different. Healing
is a game of forgetfulness, the abstraction
of wounds. I suppose it is easy to forget when
you have no hands to remind you of his
hands. No elbow to remind you of his
jab, not separate from the sore. The
more I wash, the littler I become, till all that is left
of me is nothing but his voice.

A Dynasty of Memories



KELVIN J.
SHACHILE

"I ignore the mug and the spilled tea and open several pages until when I can see some clear letters of a paragraph I wrote about silence. 'What about it?' I wonder. Like the first one, I cannot really see every letter well but at the end it is clear this is what I wrote: 'Kill it now, make the decision to be heard, if it is hard to talk, better write.' I guess it is silence that was to be killed. The line still makes sense."

There was a framed portrait in my grandmother's living room, right on the wall where one would have mounted a television. She deliberately had it placed where everyone in the living room would see it without a strain. The panchromatic portrait was a painting of an old town, the houses well-spaced, the path so narrow but lined on both sides with trees. The river had a narrow bridge but still it flowed, sometimes when I moved so close it felt as if I could hear it flowing, the birds chirping, and the soft sounds of the water as it moved over the pebbles of that beautiful river that nourished the town. Grandma used to tell the story of the portrait; that it was a gift from her friend Dr. Smith.

"He gifted me this piece because it meant so much to me. It is a painting of our own," she would say. "This town wouldn't have existed if this river never did," she often added.

It was a painting of the younger Nairobi. She said it dated back to just few years after the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway. "If the artist had painted people on it, it would have been Asians in khaki pants."

A year after grandma's burial, I went back into the small brick house. The living room smelling of dust and dullness, the silence of an abandoned house giving me thrills, I hated even the sounds of my footsteps as I walked to touch the empty wall where the portrait had been. I cannot tell, till today, why I needed that portrait but I just wanted to see it. It wasn't there anymore. I wished the person who had taken it would turn it and read the words I had written on it on the night I spend with grandma before my parents transferred me to a boarding school. She had taken my hand and instructed me to write anything in English. I was still in elementary school, had not many words to write. *Memories*; she instructed me to write it. She laughed and I smiled; we turned it and placed it back on the wall. That was the last night she saw my face and, all the other times, she said she couldn't know who I was unless I spoke first.

"It's me, grandma," I would say.

"Who are you? I cannot tell." She then would plead with lots of humility that it wasn't her choice not to remember voices and or be able to see again. She was too old.

Then she died and the portrait was taken. The furniture in the house were shared out I hear and the empty house was left with nothing other than echoes of my breath and footsteps as I stood in the living room, brushing on the same place I feel the words I wrote behind the portrait touched the walls of a house whose warmth has faded and the only thing left are memories.

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It is a day right after I missed the portrait on the wall and my heart yearns to take in more of what I must have left behind before I went away. It is on a Friday, the late morning hours of it, I walk into the small room we call 'the inside Book-Play room'. A room that holds thousands of my childhood memories and now houses a collection of books I retrieved from other rooms in our house and those that I bought with my own money. That makes me proud. I step inside the silent place to notice the patch of uncovered brown and white papers piled on the lower part of the shelf and I feel it wasn't me who put them there, but they are mine. The blue, black and red handwritten stories are mine, the experimental stories I wrote several years ago, the unfinished book manuscripts I started writing then abandoned because they wouldn't make sense at all, the funny and really stupid stories I wrote for my nieces and nephews when I was starting to love writing, the cover designs and very ugly art pieces I made to spice up a room I wanted to look like an art gallery and an ancient museum.

I laugh and smile silently as I kneel to slap off the dust and push the pile well into the shelf. I push aside several papers to uncover the green covered notebook, the smile on my face fades, my heart races and I feel the coldness engulf me like it missed me when I had the brown winter jacket on, the one I bought on my trip to Oxford. I pick the notebook and hold up the hot mug of black tea I had placed down back into my hands as I settle in the old designed armchairs of the little room that is filled with history, little collected art, books and manuscripts, I take in a deep breath and carefully watch the cloud of steam rise from the mug up into the still air touching the white ceiling, just like the kind of memories and little secrets I wrote in this little notebook I titled 'If God's Children had Wings for a Birthday Gift.' Memories from my age seven to almost age seventeen – that is a decade. I am now almost twenty two and it feels more strange to realize the same words I wrote still makes me want to have those wings I wished I had as a gift for my sixteenth birthday.

Page one, the ink is fading, I cannot read the words well, the handwriting is bad and untidy, so sad I cannot see what is below the catchy title: Is Life Really a Movie? I cannot believe once in my life I had such a question in my mind, I struggle with the papers until the mug slides off from the little stool and falls on the floor, breaking into tiny pieces and letting the hot black sugarless tea spill angrily as if all it wanted was for me to take it. The day I wrote this piece must have been a bad day – my thoughts agree. I ignore the mug and the spilled tea and open several pages until when I can see some clear letters of a paragraph I wrote about silence. 'What about it?' I wonder. Like the first one, I cannot really see every letter well but at the end it is clear this is what I wrote:

"Kill it now, make the decision to be heard, if it is hard to talk, better write."

I guess it is silence that was to be killed. The line still makes sense. The next clear paragraph I see is about my worries for friendship. I wrote about this boy I would really love to have for a friend but then he didn't seem to see how much lonely I was in class to even say a word that I could build to a lasting friendship; so weird. I flip on until when I find yet more chilling confessions and nothing comes to my mind other than the wish that no one should have read them. That is the point at which the little notebook gets into my hands well and I force my hands apart, then tear it into pieces with a force of a bulldozer. The tiny pieces fall on the floor, some on the mug pieces, others into the cold spilled tea that is now staining the white tiled floor. I'm shivering when my niece walks into the room to ask if I'm okay. I nod my head and excuse myself, a soft sorry comes and the door closes.

I am alone still, with nothing more than myself, a question worth being written in the teared up notebook pops up in my mind: Can it be that I have something hidden connecting me with realms beyond those I know? My mind still responds with a yes, a yes that escapes my lips smoothly and I feel the curtain behind the armchair caressing my neck, I jump from the armchair and pull the curtains apart and then the full view of the green backyard reigns, the fascinating beauty of the rose bushes that no longer grow flowers and the little avocado trees that have never had fruits, the

creepers of the old fading passion fruit that flowers but never bears fruits. Things over here in our countryside home are breathtaking, strange and powerful. They behave as if they have got wings, which they flap, and decide when to be productive and when to remain memories to those that know them intimately like I do, because I planted them myself, mostly on rainy evenings when drizzles wouldn't stop until darkness ruled.

A strange warmth rushes through my veins. I turn the armchair to face the window, I sit on it still staring at the backyard, silence and thoughts overshadow the view. I dive into a soul-searching solitude and even forget if I'm breathing, I cannot hear myself, strange encounters and connections. It is so clear to me that every day I wake up, it is not as the same person. However much my face doesn't change, my inside, my thoughts do; what do we call that? Maybe I am just growing, but does every growing person feel such a close connection with nature, art and history. I mean, does everyone feel the time-distance every time they visit a gallery or when they touch a manuscript. Do archives make sense to people, does the morning dew, the setting sun, the canopy formation? Do landscapes make strange sense to others outside of beauty and geographical landscape formations? Do they really feel that connection with their lives, the existing drift from being oneself in their presence? A feeling too strong to ignore and too strange to believe. Sometimes, for example, my eyes don't hurt when I look directly at the sun. Well, I'm overthinking, some say. But I know, it didn't start today, it began years ago. Such confessions and the truth of who I feel I am are all written on the tiny pieces of paper on the floor.

Hours go until the scent of fried onions fill the air around me. The distant smell of pounded garlic awakens me from that little place I had found comfort. I stare into the hot burning afternoon without regard for the scorching sun. I admire the warmth. I think of telling someone of this strange encounter, but who will believe? I am not complete I know, I will write it once before I forget. I will leave the room for some time and return yet for another chance to see myself, to see my inside and see into the tiny places where I didn't see when I had the chance to, because I didn't believe I was human. I now know I am. I know I'm imperfect and that there is still one thing I shouldn't have written in that green notebook, the truth that once while growing up, I had a vision of something, a feeling of someone I would become in some years to come, that day when I wished I had wings to fly into my future to confirm my fate. It came to pass and the night before today I had a slightly similar dream that opened me up to the possible realities of me in some years to come. \Then I came here to see the notebook and now I have it in pieces. There must be a chance that maybe a bigger story than this one might come to be told. I will be full when I finally realize I don't need those wings now, until when I will need them really.

It's lunch time. I have to wipe the spilled tea away and pick the broken pieces of the mug from the floor. This room has to be closed, closed from someone like me who feels strange connections and visits tiny places when I walk into it. I will leave it as a playroom for the children and a library for the readers. The distance back to the days when these mattered is way too far, it smiles not but I am glad the memories do.

Bodies are Anomalies



ADEDIRAN ADETUTU

"his hands found their way to my stretch marks, /he said one looked like a trapezium. /I laughed and said / "I hope it traps you"."

I hang on to loose things
that always fall away
like another man's body breaking into a tale.
The first time I learnt a man,
we both lost sound to echoes
bouncing on carefree skins.
My body has a way of stammering across my thighs and breasts,
his hands found their way to my stretch marks,
he said one looked like a trapezium.
I laughed and said
"I hope it traps you".

*A body is a collection of lines
coming from different places
I am sculpted like a tilted equation
what's on the right is not equal to the left.*

I count my breasts and something is missing
I find it on a weighing scale,
bodies are variables
always talking, always changing, always different.
I count the stretch marks
another man translates it with his fingers

it stretches, I shrink.

I have a meltdown in my bathroom

I cried with the water.

After the water left

I look into the mirror,

it called me blessed

I go to work.

Back home, my mother awaits a body.

Rememory



UCHE OSONDU

"I have no pictures of Auntie Sola. With each recall, I find that it takes just a little bit longer to remember her face. I am standing in front of the chair, her voice resounding against my eardrums, but I cannot see her face, like the blind man in the Bible, I am seeing trees. And then it clears. I worry that I would forget Auntie Sola; that everyone already has."

I can feel my shirt sticking to my skin; that wet sticky hold of sweat on your skin like the grip of an infant on your finger. The fans are on full blast but I find my eyes searching for them to make sure they are still on from time to time. It also doesn't help that today is a full house at church (Sunday School Rally) and I came late, so I am stuck at the back, hidden in a corner with no leg room, and on a plastic chair that might give way. The lady beside me is using her church manual to fan herself; I didn't bring mine so I am watching her in envy. The heatwave has been terrible this year, but I can't help but wonder if it is not the 'hottest' year like everyone has been harping on about. Memories of walking from Anatomy to Independence Hall at the university, standing under the sun in secondary school during the Corpus Christi benediction on the field, or the year in primary school that teargas was thrown into our compound and we were scampering for water, flood my mind. Sure it is hot, but there have been hotter days. Or am I lying to myself with these memories? Am I turning up the temperature in those memories just to be contrarian? The microphone is in front of me before I know it, and now I have to remember a bible verse from a long time ago. The heat is forgotten, for now.

The Screwtape Letters terrified me growing up, so much so that I have not returned to reading it even now; at that time when I was questioning my faith, religion, spirituality, the book terrorised my thoughts. Now when I think about the book, how it made me feel like I was losing a battle I never signed up for, apart from the fear that creeps slowly into the fore, there's the memory of my favourite aunt from church growing up: Auntie Sola. Auntie Sola always treated me like what I had to say, my doubts, were worth listening to, worth engaging. She never took my fears and dismissed them outright, with an Amen, bible scripture or anointing oil. I feel like I have long since strayed from the path of questions, wandering the roads of persistent doubt; I wonder if Auntie Sola is surprised at this. We had had a conversation about The Screwtape Letters and other religious and theological books that I was perusing at the time. I think that was the last time I saw her, sitting on a plastic chair that stood in the centre of the church as it begins to clear out. If I try hard, I can see the people sweeping and clearing around me, and the pattern of the Ankara she was wearing. It is hard to trust if this was truly the last time I saw her because each time the memory is conjured, the number of people is different and it is never the same pattern as the last time.

I have no pictures of Auntie Sola. With each recall, I find that it takes just a little bit longer to remember her face. I am standing in front of the chair, her voice resounding against my eardrums, but I cannot see her face, like the blind man in the Bible, I am seeing trees. And then it clears. I

worry that I would forget Auntie Sola; that everyone already has. I worry that I will never return to the boy I was when she knew me – excited by Bible sword drills, reciting memorised verses and enthused about church services – and that she would be displeased with me, her memory tainted by my wandering of doubt-filled roads. Some days, I am itching for pictures of her, to remind myself that she existed and I am not just conjuring this memory from thin air. I worry that I would forget the sound of her voice.

Death leaves us with a care basket of various things, like a well-mannered visitor thanking us for our hospitality. It leaves us with either riches or debt, junk or antiques, and memories. **You Raise Me Up** by Josh Groban, a song, is still a heart-wrenching trigger for the first time I remember experiencing death up close. The violins, and Mr. Groban's falsetto, send me back to the chapel of my secondary school, the lights are off and a slideshow is playing. Pictures of schoolmates, classmates and friends slide after each other, while my vision is blurring by the tears forming at the corner of my eyes. For days, weeks, after we resumed that term, I can still hear – if I strain my mind's ears long enough – the silence of the halls, the hollow laughter as we tried to navigate the memories that came with our collective loss. I remember being scared to pick at memories of mates I had lost. What if the last thing I had said was mean? Or we fought and now all I have left is this item I stole in vengeance? I remember pretending like the song didn't exist for the next few years. I remember my silence during memorial events, and days long after that term. I remember that I had a friend who drew the most wonderful comics and made me feel like being away from home was not that difficult if you just opened yourself to trying. I do not remember his voice clearly; I am grateful there are pictures of my friend.

Teju Cole writes in his essay, **Memories of Things Unseen:** *Photography is inescapably a memorial art. It selects, out of the flow of time, a moment to be preserved, with the moments before and after falling away like sheer cliffs.* I do not like taking pictures, and yes being non-photogenic plays a role in this. However, I find that taking pictures often detracts my attention from the moment that I am currently immersed in, from the life I am living at that time, from the memories I am creating. If the other person asks, sure, I will take the picture, but I most likely am not comfortable, or nervous, if I am the one asking to take a picture at a meetup. There are no pictures of me on my matriculation day into the university, but the events of the day are easy to recall: how I was late and didn't get a seat in the hall, meeting the parents of my friend, and the awkward lunch at Mr. Biggs with a self-invited guest. My graduation from secondary school was well-documented with pictures, some of which are now lost, but the memories I remember are the ones that are not captured in the pictures. It feels just like Teju Cole wrote, that singular moment is preserved and everything else is trimmed away. I mourn the lost pictures; without them my preserved moments are gone too.

It bothers me that I have no idea how old Auntie Sola was. Or what she really did – I knew she was a lawyer but where? Or what she wanted out of life? I only knew her within the confines of church, and my struggle with faith. I wonder what her memory of our last physical discussion, the one I recall, is. I wonder if over time she would have lost the sound of my voice, and just recalled my name. I am older than I was when I saw her last, I am no longer the little boy she called a big man, and at some moments I am envious of her. Sarah Manguso, in **Ongoingness: The End of a Diary**, speaks of ...*No more time, no more potential. The privilege of ruling things out. Finishing. Knowing I'm finished. And knowing time will go on without me.* I am left with this memory of her, these swirling emotions of her kindness and my failure in straying too far, wandering for so long a time that I am afraid she will not recognise me. Sally Mann asks, in **Hold Still: A Memoir with**

Photographs: *Where does the self actually go? All the accumulation of memory... when someone dies, where does it all go?* I wonder what happened to Aunty Sola's, or if she would know; I am envious that I am not finished. I have always prided myself of having a good memory, of being able to store things in my head – numbers, text, of being able to recall events and experiences of self, or shared with friends, that others seem to have forgotten. I was made to memorise the whole Book of John growing up for a quiz or competition of some sort, there was also the time I memorised my whole Integrated Science notebook for an exam that was approaching and understanding concepts seemed too tasking. I am no longer good with memorising facts and figures, a side effect of aging I believe, but moments and the emotions I felt at that time continue to impress themselves on my mind. The seething rage the first day I refused to go to church because I wasn't feeling well and I was beaten for it; the heady feeling of being in love for the first time and writing my first poem for that love; the overwhelming relief that came with realising that I could never make the woman I loved then love me like I wanted, and let go. Some memories refuse to be tainted. *Memory is never a precise duplicate of the original... it is a continuing act of creation*, Rosalind Cartwright notes in her book **The Twenty-Four Hour Mind: The Role of Sleep and Dreaming in our Emotional Lives**. I am left wondering if this holds true for the emotions that I attach to these memories. Oliver Sacks writes in his book, **Hallucinations:** *We now know that memories are not fixed or frozen, like Proust's jars of preserves in a larder, but are transformed, disassembled, reassembled, and recategorized with every act of recollection*. Am I continually recreating and reconstructing these emotions each time I try to recall? Can I trust the actions I am taking based on these memories and the emotions they invoke when recalled? Who do I trust if I cannot trust myself to be true to myself? *It's the past that tells us who we are. Without it we lose our identity*, declared Stephen Hawking.

I have found myself wondering what happens to our memories as we grow older. The more memories one acquires seem to be more ammunition for nostalgia, and regret, when our bodies are failing but our minds are still active. I have found that when I am sick, or having one of those days where my body is refusing to engage with the world, my mind plays back memories that I thought I had long forgotten, sometimes deliberately, holding them up against the sunlight, like checking the authenticity of a naira note, asking me to confirm their validity. Friends that have left, words said in anger, moments of fleeting happiness that can never be gotten back; all laid bare before me. The whole event is crippling, my chest tightens and suddenly it feels like I can't move, like maybe I will be better off dead, devoid of all these memories. In these times, I crave the ignorant bliss that I imagine comes with amnesia, of truly forgetting. Manguso writes, *the least contaminated memory might exist in the brain of a patient with amnesia — in the brain of someone who cannot contaminate it by remembering it*. I would need only to live in the present and not fear the crushing waves of nostalgia and regret that come with the flooding of memories. But if the past is indeed what tells us who we are, informs our identity, then the fear of who I would be without my memories begins to seep in. I am caught in two worlds: to remember or to not remember. And then it creeps back in: my envy of not being finished yet.

It's been five years since I received news of Aunty Sola's death, but I find myself returning to thoughts of her often these past few months. I didn't know her outside of church, so I always assumed that in time I would forget her. But this memory lingers, like the taste of pepper on your tongue long after you've stolen meat from a pot of stew: no one else knows, but you can't deny it to yourself. Meghan O' Rourke, citing a psychiatrist, in **The Long Goodbye** writes: *the people we most love do become a physical part of us, ingrained in our synapses, in the pathways where memories are created*. So maybe, just maybe, my fear is invalid and forgetting her is not entirely possible. Worrying about if I am living up to this memory of her I cannot forget becomes a new challenge to deal with, a new foe to vanquish.

I do not remember the bible verse. It seems that this memory of mine, that I had found great pride in, might not be what it once was; I am no longer the boy who had verses on the tip of his tongue. I sit down on the chair and open my Bible, staring at no word in particular. The heat is distracting, the grip of my shirt cold and discomforting. Maybe this is, or isn't, the hottest year of my life yet, but that knowledge does nothing for my situation. This is the cost of participating in life, some memories would be lost, tainted by the art of recollection. It might be how we know that we are still alive, still unfinished, as memory *runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither – memory the capricious seamstress*, stitching together our lives and nature as so wonderfully described by Virginia Woolf in her book **Orlando: A Biography**. Other things we might never forget, and be left reeling afresh each time the waves come crashing into the shore of our minds, left to deal with the overwhelming feelings of nostalgia, regret, lost joy or gratitude. I close the Bible and weigh it in my hand; it is too heavy to fan myself with. I am no longer the boy I once was; there is loss in that memory but there is an astounding amount of hope in that loss. I am now the big man Auntie Sola saw back then. Manguso writes: *Time punishes us by taking everything, but it also saves us — by taking everything*. I am still unfinished.

Beyond The Railway Line



JARRED
THOMPSON

"That evening a storm heaved itself through the vulva of the heavens. Lightning whipped the air into a frenzy as I sat up in my room with the blinds open watching the flashes go off like bombs of light in my bedroom. I didn't tell mom or dad about seeing Ouma because they'd worry too much, assuming that my meds were out of sync again."

My grandmother's head pushed through the metal of the fence at the university. She looked exactly the way she did in the photographs mom kept of her: dark mocha skin with a bush of grey hair that'd been combed to resemble the shape of a mushroom. She wore a blue and white maid uniform; the one I suspect she was always seen in while alive and working in the houses of the rich in Cape Town. But this was Braamfontein, what was she doing here?

I blinked, hitting myself in several places to make sure I wasn't seeing things again. It had been 3 years since my last hallucination. Dr. Paul had calibrated my meds perfectly since the last one that literally sent me screaming through traffic.

"Thomas has early onset of schizophrenia demonstrating hallucinogenic characteristics." Dr. Paul told mom 3 years ago, her face turning cold and grey like the skin of snoek. I hadn't a clue what all that fancy lingo meant, but I knew I was different. I could never explain it to others but deep down I felt it.

I felt I knew the internal workings of nature but this knowledge never revealed itself in words. No. It was more like atmospheres: momentary tears in the fabric of my senses where the whispers of alternate realities lay hidden.

Ouma kept staring at me through the palisade fencing. She was looking at me as if she wanted to tell me something, begging me to come closer. So I did. The closer I got to the fence the wider her eyes grew wider until it looked like they might fall right out of her skull.

"Hey watch out!" Someone shouted, making me fall back on the university lawn. A black Range Rover drove by, hooting at me. The woman driving the car wagged her finger, mouthing the most obscene things in my direction.

The person who had shouted walked up and extended their hand, pulling me onto my feet. I held the elongated fingers of a woman, a young woman, whose black fingernails caught my attention. She had long, red braids that were tied in a loose bun on top of her head with plump cheeks that made it seem like her mouth was filled with food.

"Are you okay? I didn't mean to startle you but you were heading straight for that car."

"No. No. It's fine. I wasn't looking where I was going."

"You looked completely out of it." I didn't answer, my eyes drifting round her body toward the fence. Ouma had gone.

“You sure you’re okay? Hey aren’t you in my philosophy class?”

I took another good look at her. She was right. We were in philosophy together. She was the most Afrocentric student out of the lot of us, always brining up African philosophy, arguing for the wisdom of *our* indigenous cultures to “define who we, as Africans, are”. Prof Weaver dubbed her the “post-colonial experience”. The name kinda stuck and she seemed to own it.

“It’s Karabo.”

“Oh yes, I remember. I’m Thomas.” I said. She had a fresh soapy smell to her. It made me think of how musty I must have been coming off. “Thank you for your help. I gotta go.” I fumbled with myself, making sure that nothing had fallen out my pockets.

“Yeah, sure. No problem.” She picked up her bag and carried on down the path toward the student center, not looking back at me.

That evening a storm heaved itself through the vulva of the heavens. Lightning whipped the air into a frenzy as I sat up in my room with the blinds open watching the flashes go off like bombs of light in my bedroom. I didn’t tell mom or dad about seeing Ouma because they’d worry too much, assuming that my meds were out of sync again. They wouldn’t understand that this was different to my previous episodes. The details in Ouma’s face was way more real than any episode I’d had before.

“Ma I was wondering...how did Ouma Venus pass away?” I asked at dinner. Mom raised her eyebrows while dad burrowed into his mash potato.

“Well boy, before you were born your Ouma Venus lived in Cape Town. She was a maid in the white peoples’ homes back in the day when everyone else lived on the outskirts of the city. Ouma Venus lived with Uncle Devon in the back courters of the MacNab vineyard. We never saw her much because she worked hard to give us the comfortable life we had. But...” Mom stopped, filling her mouth with salad.

“But?” I finished my food, pushing my plate to one side and focusing my attention on her.

“Ouma Venus got ‘the calling’ late in her life.”

“The calling?”

“Do we really have to speak about this at the table?” said Dad, slicing through his lamb chops and making the screeching sound of serrated knife on plate.

“What do you mean Alan? That’s what they call it and that’s what happened.”

“I know that’s what happened. It just all very...uncomfortable.”

“Ag man. Stop being such a *laanie*. You’re a coloured man living in A-F-R-I-C-A. Sandton is still Africa you know. Get used to it.” Ma waved dad off, turning to me again.

“Ouma Venus became a sangoma, Thomas. Though she was classified coloured in those days she was more black than anything else. She came from a black mother and white father. So I guess you could say she was ‘first generation coloured’.” Ma rolled her eyes when she said this; I sensed a frustration uncoiling itself on her tongue.

“So Venus was actually black?”

“That’s right. Her mother was a Zulu woman who had an affair with a British tourist. These kinds of things have happened and have been happening since...well Jan Van Reinbeck I suppose.”

“So we’re black?”

“No! We’re coloured.” Dad stressed, his mouth cutting into the word “coloured” as if he were carving it out of a block of wood. I didn’t see the need to stress the difference.

“Anyway,” continued Ma, “When she got the calling Uncle Devon wasn’t very happy about it. It made him even angrier when she decided to go ahead with the training to become a sango-ma.”

“Why was he angry?”

“I think he was unsure of what it all meant. And maybe he felt that his daughters should be above such unChristian things.” Ma’s eyes shot over to dad as he got up and cleared the table. Dad retreated to the kitchen, banging pots and plates without saying another word.

“So that’s why Uncle Devon divorced her and moved you guys to Joburg?”

“That’s right. Venus tried to fight for custody but Uncle Devon earned more money when he got a job at a furniture factory near Riverlea. Plus he said her ‘sangoma ways’ weren’t good for us Christian children. The judge sided with him in the end.” Mom went quiet, taking her lips to the mug of coffee in front of her.

“Then what happened?” I asked.

“She disappeared.”

“What?”

“People said they saw her on the train the evening she went missing. Some told us they saw her crossing the railway lines. But...she just vanished.”

“How can that happen? How can someone just vanish and no one hear from her for years?”

“People went missing all the time in those days.” Dad spoke up. “It happens to lots of people, young and old every day. Even today. We just don’t hear about it.”

“Uncle Devon started telling people that the whole sangoma thing made her lose her mind. That maybe she wanted to disappear, out of grief of losing custody of her children. He told your aunt and I that she probably took her own life.” said Ma.

“But what do *you* think happened?” I asked.

“I can’t say boy. It’s like one of those mysterious in life that never gets solved. We just hope that wherever she is, she’s at peace.”

“Maybe your father was right. She couldn’t handle losing her family for ‘the calling’.” said Dad

“She loved us, *really* loved us. She wouldn’t have vanished without telling us where she was going.” Mom got up and walked upstairs. The sound of running bathwater from began to gurgle between the three of us.

“Come dry the dishes.” said Dad, dropping a dishcloth in front of me and walking upstairs.

Blades of grass brush up against my legs. The sun sears red against my eyes. It's setting. There's a silhouette on the horizon, running toward me, waving its arms. It's a person. No. A woman.

Ouma.

I run toward her unable to feel my legs; I'm floating toward her. A dark cloud rises above the horizon, it scatters into a million black dots.

Birds? No. Crows.

They explode above Ouma, towering, dominating, about to collapse onto her.

"Ouma run"! I yell.

She's waving her arms still, she's mouthing something.

"I can't hear you."

The horde of crows nosedive on top of her, covering her from view. I cannot will my body to go any faster. They're tearing at her flesh, they're ripping her apart, piece by piece, and laughing while they do it.

"Voetsak! Go away!"

By the time I get to her it's too late: they've skinned her with their beaks. She's all bone and raw pink.

I can't even close my eyes against the horror.

"Bury me. Bury me." she says over and over before one of the crows slip into her mouth, gagging her. She tries to swallow but the crow is too big, there's too much of it to swallow whole...

"And how often do you get this specific dream?" Dr Paul asks me, pressing his ballpoint pen to his black notebook.

"I got it for the first time two weeks ago. Every day since then it's been happening more regularly."

"Anything happen a few weeks ago that you think could have triggered it?" He looks up at me over his spectacles, watching my body language.

"No, nothing that comes to mind. Maybe it's just school stress. I have kinda been flunking some of my classes. I'm worried I'll lose my bursary."

"Well I suggest you try and organize extra lessons for yourself. Or let your parents know that you need academic support. You have to trust them Thomas. They want the best for you."

"Yeah I know." I undo my shoes and draw my feet up on the couch next to me, taking to rubbing the soles of my feet to relax myself.

"Now I still think your meds are keeping you well-balanced but I would like to suggest you get some herbal anti-anxiety medication. And maybe something to make you sleep soundly. Here, I'll prescribe you something." He scribbles down on his pad while my eye catches a new painting on the wall behind him.

"That's an interesting piece."

“I just got it. Picasso’s *Minotauromachy*. So visceral don’t you think?”

“The girl,” I say, “she’s just standing there with a candle and flowers, facing a the beast like that.”

“Something about her seems so regal, doesn’t it? Like she knows something about the beast that we don’t.”

“The man over there. He’s just running away from it. What a coward.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He should protect the girl. He should face the beast. How can he leave her to fend for herself like that?”

“Maybe she believes in the goodness of the beast in a way that he can’t?”

“You can see it in her face.”

“What do you think she knows?” Dr. Paul turns his head to one side and scribbles something down on his notepad. I get up and move toward the painting to get a closer look. My face hovers over the image, focusing in the area of skin around the girl’s eyes. For a moment I think I have the answer, then it slips from me.

“Well, our time is up. Here’s the prescription for the sleeping tablets. And the name of the herbal remedy. I’ll have Jonah call you in about a month to schedule another session ok.”

“Okay doc.” I say, gathering my things.

Karabo and I have started seeing each other on a casual basis. It started when I defended her views in philosophy class when she criticized European Existentialism as “a bourgeois philosophy that had very little connection to the African concept of Ubuntu”. I couldn’t argue my point as eloquently as she could but I could tell she appreciated my support in class.

“You wanna grab a drink sometime?” She asked me after class one afternoon.

“Yeah that’d be great.” I said, grateful that I hadn’t had any strange dreams or hallucinations for a good week and a half.

We had semi-bitter wine at Kitcheners in Braam a week later. The place was unusually quiet for a Wednesday night but then again it was the middle of the month. Still, you still got your general artsy types that spoke at uncomfortably high volumes, knew every barman and seemed to never run out of cigarettes to smoke.

“So you’re going down to Cape Town at the end of the month?”

“Yeah. I asked my parents to take me to where my Ouma Venus used to stay. She disappeared before I was born and well...I want to find out more about her.”

“She disappeared?”

“No one knows what happened to her after my mom’s family moved up here.”

“And your mom has never wondered?”

“Both my parents are very weird around the topic. But I guess they think taking me down there will ease my curiosity.”

“And will it?” She takes a sip of wine while handing over her lighter to a group of older men sitting not too far from us.

“You know a lot of people here I see.”

“Yeah, I come here a lot.” She shrugs, digging out a spec of dirt from her fingernails.

“Can I tell you something? Something I haven’t really told anyone.”

“Ofcourse.”

“I’ve been seeing her, my Ouma Venus. She appears to me sometimes. She comes to me in my dreams too. The sleeping meds my doc prescribed has blocked the dreams somewhat though. But it’s like they’re my only defense against this thing. Sometimes, when I’m in one of those deep thinking moods, I can feel an hallucination brewing at the base of my brain. It’s like a strange bubbling sound, a ring so faint I wanna scratch the insides of my ears to stop it.”

Karabo listened to me go on about my visions and dreams without showing an inch of surprise. She nodded frequently and drank her wine slow.

“You know what you need.” She said, squeezing my hand tight. “You need imphepho.”

A week later, Karabo and I sat on the rooftop of her student residence overlooking the concrete heart of the city. The buzz of Joburg reached up towards us even from that height. Rush-hour traffic had just started to die down and the sun had given up its last coughs of light.

“Here. Eat this.” Karabo said, handing me strange-looking mushrooms.

“I’ve never done shrooms before Karabo. Are you sure about this?”

“I’ve done this plenty of times. Trust me. It’s an amazing experience. Plus it’s a clear night so the stars will give us ambiance. And once the imphepho is burning who knows what our minds will reveal.” Her braids were cut shorter now; they hung just above her shoulders like curling pieces of biltong.

I ate the mushrooms like she asked me to. They tasted bitter and earthy. Then she lit the imphepho with a match. “Put your head over the bowl and breathe in.” She said, turning on a speaker that started playing a compilation of esoteric chanting and African drums.

I breathed in the fumes, wheezing against the bitter smoke that burnt my nostrils and throat while making my eyes water.

“Breathe in. Deeper. Deeper. Just for a few more seconds.” She rubbed my back as I coughed and wheezed. I began to feel nauseous, lightheaded, then—like a power plug being yanked out its socket—I plunged...

When I woke up Karabo had disappeared. The evening had taken on a biting chill with the wind from down below swooping up to the rooftop, carrying wafts of cooking oil, exhaust fumes and sewerage from below.

“My boy.” I turned round and saw Ouma standing behind me with her arms open, ready to embrace me.

“Ouma” I mouthed, feeling a magnetic pull toward her chest. I collapsed into her arms the way a beached whale would delight in being pushed back into the ocean. She wrapped her arms round me and breathed on me. Her breath smelt like wet mud and then I saw it:

Four men come up behind her while she is walking home over the railway lines. White men, smelling of liquor, looking for trouble. They spotted her, walking alongside the road, heading home.

“Come show us what you can do.”

They refuse to leave her alone. She runs into the bushes and they follow her on foot. She trips on a thorn bush.

I stop seeing. Ouma is still holding me. I try to speak but can't. She just holds me, breathing. I try to feel for a heartbeat but she's hollow. Then I hear scrambling, voices shouting, coming from inside her chest. One of the voices is hers and the others are male. She's cursing them in Zulu: she's cursing the land they now own. The land they've taken. The sound of a gunshot makes me jolt out of her arms, falling to the ground. I look up at her and she's smiling down at me.

“Bury me.” She says, opening her mouth as wide. From her mouth I hear the distinct sounds of shovels scrapping and digging into the earth. The sound of something heavy rolls and falls mutely down a hole.

Ouma closes her mouth and charges toward me. I get out of her way as she runs right past me and jumps off the rooftop.

“Ouma no!” I run toward the ledge and look over. But there's nothing there. Blood drains from my brain and air fills every crevice in my head. I'm unable to stay awake.

When I woke up I was laying in Karabo's bed. She was beside me, running her fingers through my hair with one hand and tracing circles with her other hand in the cradle of my palm.

“What happened?”

“You blacked out on the roof. You started talking in your sleep, a lot of gibberish and mumbling. I got Chris to help carry you down to my room. Are you feeling okay?” She sat up, pushing her hair out of her face and handing me a glass of water.

“Yeah, I think so.” I took the glass, savoring the moisture of the water in my mouth. “I think I know what I have to do now.”

I explained my dream to Karabo. Again, she seemed unsurprised by what I had seen.

“How can we be sure that our dreams aren't real?” She asked me once I relayed my entire vision. “How can we really know that all of this that we see, feel, touch, smell, breathe, isn't just a tiny part of all that there is to experience?”

“I don't know how. But sometimes I wish it didn't always had to be me who felt these things. Sometimes I want to feel tiny. And not part of larger forces out of my control.”

She laughed, handing me my car keys. “You probably should get going. Your parents will

be calling soon.”

“Yeah, you right. Thanks for this.” I got up, gathering my things. A part of me wanted to sleep there with her. But I sensed even a girl like her needed her time alone.

“I’ll message you when I get home.”

“Drive safe.” She said, kissing me on the cheek and brushing a bead of sweat off my brow.

At the end of the month my parents and I took a trip down to the Cape winelands where Ouma Venus and Uncle Devon stayed. It took some explaining but eventually mom got the MacNab family to allow us onto their property to visit the old back courters where she used to stay.

There wasn’t much of the back courters left to see though. The building had been left in ruin: without a roof, doors or windows it was handed over to the elements of decay. All the paint had flaked off the walls and the cement between the bricks barely held the structure together.

“So many memories...” Ma said as the three of us stood amongst the ruins. Even dad was taken up by the sense of nostalgia in the place. The inside was just a hollow of dust and stone; anything that could suggest a family once lived here was gone. I put my hand to the stone, feeling the heat of it rise up to meet my palm.

We stayed for a weekend in a quaint guesthouse not far from the old railway lines that ran through the area. One night, when my parents had gone to sleep I snuck out the guesthouse and headed down to the old railway line. It was a cloudy night, with no moon or stars in the sky, only the sound of crickets dancing in the air. When I spotted the old railway line overrun by weeds my pulse began to press against the base of my neck. I walked over the railway, retracing the steps I knew Ouma Venus had taken. I wasn’t sure how I knew the right way to go, but I trusted where my feet would take me.

My thoughts drifted to the painting in Dr. Paul’s office then, finally, I stumbled upon the spot. I know it was the spot because of the sense of Déjà vu that rose within me. The earth was dry and hard with blackjack bushes sticking out. I got out the tiny shovel that I’d packed in my backpack and started digging. The earth refused to give way at first, but the more I placed my weight and muscle behind the shovel the more hospitable it became. After several hours, I had dug a substantial hole in the ground. By this time the clouds had cleared from the sky and a crescent moon hung like a celestial tear drop over me.

My clothes were sandy, my nostrils dry, with the heat of my body attracting a healthy swarm of mosquitoes and gnats that bit at my ankles and wrists. I was about to give up when I hit something with my shovel. It was round and hard, harder than earth and smoother than stone. It was bone.

“Thank you boy for making us come here. I didn’t know how much I needed to see this place again.” Ma said, turning to face me from the front of the car as we made our way back to Joburg.

“I needed to see it too Ma.” I looked out across the flat land that extended far beyond

what I could see, imagining all the bones waiting patiently beneath the earth to be transformed back into soil.

We got back home round ten that night. It was only when I started unpacking that I realized I'd neglected to take my meds for the past week. A wave of anxiety washed over me as I started questioning whether anything I had experienced in the past week was real or not.

I dug into my backpack, pulling out the fragment of skull that I'd unearthed beyond the railway line. What remained of Ouma was just a fragment of a forehead, a piece of an eye socket and an unfinished jawline. But how was I sure that this was in fact Ouma Venus and not some other, unlucky stranger?

I couldn't be absolutely sure. But I didn't care.

Later that night I went out into the backyard and buried the skull at the base of our Mopane Tree. It was round the time of year when the first Mopane worms were hatching from their larvae and slithering down along the bark.

"It has been the driest of seasons for farmers all over the Cape. Water levels are at an all-time low in the area and government officials have confirmed a state of emergency in the area. Day Zero is fast approaching and the surrounding areas and provinces have begun donating water to the arid regions, in hope that this drought will end sooner rather than later. Let us hope that day zero keeps getting pushed back."

The reporter on the TV waves off flies and dust as she reports on the drought in the Cape. I'm drinking green tea in our lounge on a Saturday morning, thinking of meeting up with Karabo later on. My dreams and hallucinations seemed to have stopped, for now.

"There has, however, been some torrential rain this week, owing to a low pressure system coming into the Western Cape from the East." The reporter continues as montages of dry land, fruit sellers and wine buyers flash across the screen. "Who knows what effect this will have on the economy in this province?"

I look to the Mopane tree and notice the yellow and white stripes of the Mopane worms catching the morning light. This year more worms have hatched on our Mopane tree than any other in memory. Each week I collect a bowl of them, fry them and eat them with spicy tomato gravy. I never used to eat the worms from the tree before but I guess it's true what they say: your taste buds change over time.

END.



BOBBY ARCHIBONG

Ndifreke I.



Bobby Archibong

Ndifreke II



Bobby Archibong
Ndi freke III.

This poem was removed for editorial reasons.

This poem has been removed for editorial reasons

Everyday, we quietly fall apart



AYOTUNDE JAMES
OLUMILUA

"As I approached the cul-de-sac where our old apartment was located, in the rear end quarters of the complex, I felt a rush of feelings overwhelm me. But these feelings didn't come with the memories they were tied to. Were these feelings orphans of memories that died with adolescence or whiffs from a vault where most of my earliest memories were rendered inaccessible?"

Every time I take a warm shower, I have a flashback from a past that increasingly feels like a self-conceived myth. It is the moon-lit memory of me standing in front of a wall, bathing. I don't know if I was bathing myself or someone else was doing it for me, but I remember shuddering from the impact of the warm water on my flesh. Sometimes, this flashback triggers a reaction that produces a muddled state of being. It feels like a mixture of regret, trepidation, and an infatuation with immortality. Some call it existential anxiety.

Me coming across the term gerascophobia wasn't a coincidence. I Googled "fear of getting old" months ago. It was one of the nights I have where my thoughts are all over the place, and my priorities lay around my mind like clothes scattered around a disorderly room, begging to be sorted out. But before I discovered the name, I was familiar with the feeling. To be honest, I feel the name is effectively just another synonym for anxiety that was packaged as a mental condition, but the discovery made me bolder about the nature of my disillusionment. Months before, I had taken a tour into some relics of my past, including old neighbourhoods and schools. I had felt an obligation to confront the lure of the past, in the hope that maybe I'd come to some kind of resolution about what it may want from me or at least get some closure.

The first place I went was my old primary school. It was now deserted and looked smaller than I remembered it. I had to bend my 6'5" frame just to get past the gate. As I took a walk down one of the main corridors that was flanked by classrooms, the smell and feel of impending rainfall opened a box of vague memories. I imagined the 11-year-old me walking past the older me, while imaginary students and staff members went about their businesses. He was wearing the school uniform—green shirt and shorts—and he had a fresh low fade with a left-of-center parting; his mother called the haircut the Eze-Goes-to-School. She always emphasized how she wanted the fade to be as low as possible every time she took him to the barbershop with the low-hanging ceiling at mammy market. She would sit in the background, mostly watching the barber in action, but occasionally casting absentminded stares on whatever was outside the window. After a few moments, she would regain herself and look in the mirror for a sight of her only son's face. She would then tease his reflection or stick out her tongue, and he would smile. He would watch her drift in and away from expressions and emotions. There was something about her reflection in that mirror that seemed to capture her sum in parts. It was like a montage that played out time every time he sat on the revolving chair.

As ever, the young me's gait wasn't straight, and his arms swung about like he had partial control of them. His mind was mostly immersed in one banality or another. I imagine he was imagining himself as Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson for the umpteenth time that day while he continued to walk beside me down the corridor. The Rock was probably knocking Jabronis' teeth out and just kickin' ass while being criminally charismatic the whole time. Suddenly, the school bell rang to signal the end of break time, and a frantic rush ensued. All the students dispersed from the corridor

for the classrooms. They jostled for room in the doors to squeeze themselves into before the vice principal showed up with a wooden cane in one hand and aimlessly flogged the bodies clustered by the doors without mercy. The younger me sprinted for his classroom before the vice principal could get to our end of the corridor. When he got to the door, he stood still and looked back at me. I was shocked to my very core that he could see me. He had a sad look on his face; a look foreshadowing something invisible to the older me. Finally, he waved at me and collapsed into dust so fine that I couldn't see it. It was then I realized, for some unknown reason, that he had not been walking beside me; he had been walking with me.

I spend a sizable share of my time imagining things. Sometimes, I use made up worlds to involuntarily combat boredom. Sometimes, I consciously resort to immersing myself in the very conditions that plague me. It could be through art that help me process my experiences or imagined scenarios that help me assess society and the ways we share common humanity. One could exaggerate a tiny bit and say I'm something of a masochist in this sense, especially as I live in Nigeria. Every morning, economic realities set forth at dawn with fresh determination to dampen souls and kill dreams. I am most familiar with disappointment and the feeling of wondering what could have been if I was born in a saner clime. But even sanity is relative in context. For example, over in the West, there are endless ideological wars that are doomed to never be won. Over here, it is incompetent leadership that renders people hopelessly vulnerable to the harsh realities of life. A couple of years ago, when I told my friend Uruemu about how I feel "stranger" and more jaded with every year that passes while we ate grilled fish in the secluded corner of a club in Warri, he told me I was just broke. He was convinced that the economic strife in Nigeria had made a then 24-year-old me disillusioned, and that acquiring the means to provide would dispel my dark clouds. "Guy, na money you no get. If you find better work wey go pay you better salary, everything go smooth," he'd said. I shrugged and sipped my beer, but I knew deep inside of me that my problems were beyond the undoubted powers of money.

My unhealthy attachment to my past worsens the older I get. The more memories I accumulate, pleasant or terrifying, the more memories I feel the need to connect with in a way I can't seem to figure out. The feeling is something like a miserable meta-nostalgia that has the capability to cloud over my mood. The second place I visited in my quest for what I don't know was the first place my father settled when he moved to Warri from Kaduna in the late '80s. It was where staff members of Nigeria's state-owned oil corporation used to live. My father had gotten a job at the Corporation, and that was where he would be based with his family for almost a decade. The place had a suburban feel to it, and quite a number of the inhabitants were upper middle-class families. Most of my memories of the housing complex are vague. So vague that I doubt the authenticity of some of them. I was so young then that some of it may just have been from my imagination or stories I heard about the place from my family that I reshaped around myself.

As I approached the cul-de-sac where our old apartment was located, in the rear end quarters of the complex, I felt a rush of feelings overwhelm me. But these feelings didn't come with the memories they were tied to. Were these feelings orphans of memories that died with adolescence or whiffs from a vault where most of my earliest memories were rendered inaccessible? I imagined it was the latter, and I wondered if there was a key to this vault lying or hanging around somewhere in the housing complex. I also wondered if I would ever find that key as I approached the apartment in which I spent the first three years of my life. The sight of a man emerging from of the front door stopped me in my tracks. I was about twenty yards away from him. He looked left and right, stretched, and started to wipe his doormat with a broom on the front pavement. When he finished, he motioned to go back in, but then caught a glimpse of me. He stopped for a moment, stared at me thoroughly, and looked around again. It was a quiet afternoon, and no one was around us except for the birds whose chirping was amplified by the serenity. He nodded in

salutation. I nodded back. Finally, he wiped his feet on his freshly tended doormat, and retreated into House 1 on Kano River Close.

The worst thing about existential anxiety is the feeling of hopelessness lodged at the very base of the spirit. The ultimate knowingness that whatever diet you adopt or amount of exercise you do, whoever your “life coach” is, or whatever outlook you have on life, you will never find the answers you seek. I used to try to find out from one of the many gods people follow if he had the antidote for my troubles, or at least why he made me the way I am, but in characteristic god fashion, he didn’t respond. That’s something all the gods seem to have in common; they don’t respond. Then something all their followers seem to have in common is convincing themselves that they do. Sometimes, all it takes to dampen my spirit is the sight of a toddler with his mother. I start to see my younger self in the boy; his carefree manner, playfulness, shamelessness, freedom. It seems unfathomable to me that a life so peculiar is destined to disappear forever, yet nothing in the world is as certain as this omnipotent destiny. Even the euphoria from accomplishment is short-lived and quickly followed by a crushing anticlimax. The feeling of “now what?”. Existential anxiety is the feeling of perpetual disillusionment that is occasionally interrupted by distractions of life’s beautiful things. The fear of things unknown, the desire to re-experience past events—sweet or bitter—irrespective of its inevitable pointlessness, the fear of death. Death. Death of people, ideas, conceptions, dreams. Loss. The solitary picture of a valiant soldier who died at war lost in a house fire, never to be seen again by his widow. Oblivion. A tweet forgotten forever.

So what is the way to live with this affliction? I don’t know. I can only speak for myself. But I’m certain there is no way around the feeling. In the past, I’ve tried combatting it by abusing pleasure and impulse buying, but overindulgence only leaves me emptier. Giving in to every speck of craving one feels is a dangerous life. There have been times in the past when I would spend money on something I couldn’t afford in a silly act of rebellion against whatever metapower put the bittersweet taste of human existence on my tongue. I can’t count the amount of times that, halfway into a pathetic binge, I remembered how I am my worst enemy. I once bought a plain piece of cake with the last cash I had on me in a restaurant I had no business being in. I was not hungry, neither was I particularly craving it. I just felt the urgency to make myself happy, even though I knew the cake could not and would not make me fulfilled in that moment. Not really. Nothing really can. But I’ve realised that every person has a balance they must find. Not everyone will feel their anxiety melt away if they get a house by a lake. I believe the balance can be found if we honestly assess ourselves; everything from our predilections to our tolerance levels. What do I like? What are the consequences of doing the things I like? Do I really like the things I like? Is the consequence of doing what I like worth it? As I have found out, the balance is not a certainty. The balance can be ambiguous. It should be ever evolving and its susceptibility to circumstances should be constantly managed. But the drab reality is that balance watching is just a coping mechanism. I wish I could end this piece with a flourish of hope, but there isn’t any in the context of the bigger picture. All we spend our lives doing is pulling ourselves out of one quicksand and bracing ourselves for the next time we’ll walk into another one. That is all there is.

Grief



WESLEY
MACHESO

"I dread the tremor of ringtones/ The dark side of a buzz may be a mother dying"

I can't tell you about loss,
I have never seen her face.
My mind is a puzzle refusing to be completed:
dry wells of tears / empty faces
 staring /
hands that held nothing
 but pity.

Oh, and that call that broke the silence,
shattering my heart into pints of
anger despair disbelief sadness.
A stupefied emptiness colourless in its menace.
A sadness so deep it put the night to shame.

I dread the tremor of ringtones
The dark side of a buzz may be a mother dying,
fading into nothingness in your absence.

Grief is that smirking grin on the face of God
crushing your dreams under the foot
of his omniscient wisdom.

I don't want to go to heaven.
I long to see my mother.

What is life like for a biracial artist in 2020?

Fatima Krantz surely has something to say about that.

An Interview by Sheyi Owolabi

Fatima is a Digital Illustrator whose journey began when she was born in Mombasa, Kenya to a Kenyan mother and a Swedish father. She moved to Sweden at a very young age. Through her journey, she has had to deal with the reality of looking different from everyone around her. How did these realities lead her down the path of becoming an artist whose work predominantly speaks to African femininity and the power of womanhood?

I had a quite enlightening conversation with Fatima. With an honest and quite assured demeanor, she shared her perspective on the realities of being a black artist working out of Sweden, how she managed to balance her work as an artist with her day job. And the challenges of creating & surviving during a pandemic.



FATIMA KRANTZ

Fatima Krantz is a 23 years old artist with Kenyan roots but living in Sweden. She grew up in a Kenyan household and was surrounded by strong Kenyan women who have later come to inspire her art.

Her art aims to show the immense beauty of black women from the African diaspora. She wants to show the truth and life of black African women - the dark history but also the bright future. Each piece comes with a poem explaining the history behind each piece and her art covers everything from ancient Africa to slavery and colonialism to today's situation for black women.

Tell us about your background. What was it like for you, growing up?

I grew up in a small town on the southern Swedish countryside with my Kenyan mother and siblings. We were the only immigrants in our neighborhood, and most people who met us had never seen black people before. Growing up there wasn't easy - as a child I didn't really understand why other kids didn't want to (or wasn't allowed by their parents) to play with me. People said we were dangerous and dirty. This really hurt my self esteem growing up, but I had the kindest and most encouraging mother who always, always stood up for me. When kids in my school bullied me, she would literally come to my school and bring those kids to a locked room and teach them a lesson haha! She was and is a lioness so eager to protect her babies and thanks to that, I still turned out fine.

Would you consider yourself an artsy child while growing up? What was your earliest memory of making art?

I was definitely artsy. Art is and has always been my escape from reality. I loved to get wrapped up in small details and just disappear into my world of creativeness. One of my earliest memories, that I can remember so vividly is sitting in my room after my parents divorced and we moved to a new town. I could spend early morning to late night sewing new clothes for my dolls and cutting their hair. It never ended. We moved pretty far from my dad and we had a complicated relationship, but every time he came he brought me a new doll, which was my canvas at the time.

How have your experiences and your environment shaped your work as an artist?

I lived in such a white environment and

I wanted to create art to counteract this. Where I grew up, black people was just so un-normal to people. I think these fears come from never seeing and interacting with black people and black culture. So my art aims a lot towards normalizing black art and black people and create a more open society.

What is it like being a mixed race visual artist? What are the realities that this peculiarity brings that influence your work as an artist?

I'm so inspired by Scandinavian art too - the simplicity, neutral colors and often a lot of abstract. At the same time I really want to create art that speaks for the people from the african diaspora. So I guess my art ends up being somewhere in-between the colorfulness and rich history of the african diaspora and its people swell as the simplicity of Scandinavia. But also just being a third culture kid also means a lot of black people don't see me as black, and white people absolutely don't see me as white so I think that makes it hard for people to relate to me as an artist.

You mentioned during our earlier conversation that you work as a flight attendant by day and an artist by night. Certainly, it won't be easy to juggling both responsibilities. How do you combine your day job and making art?

I think I spend an unhealthy amount of time creating art. Especially now that I am having a huge creative burst! Of course now due to corona I lost my normal day job and have to combine three other jobs to pay the rent, and then doing art. I live with the kindest and most considerate man who gives me so much space to create art. Working digitally on an iPad makes it all a lot easier of course, I spend all of my nights in the couch with the iPad in my hand. And when I used to fly it was such an easy tool to bring on layovers. Flight attendants sure spend a lot of dead time in hotels.

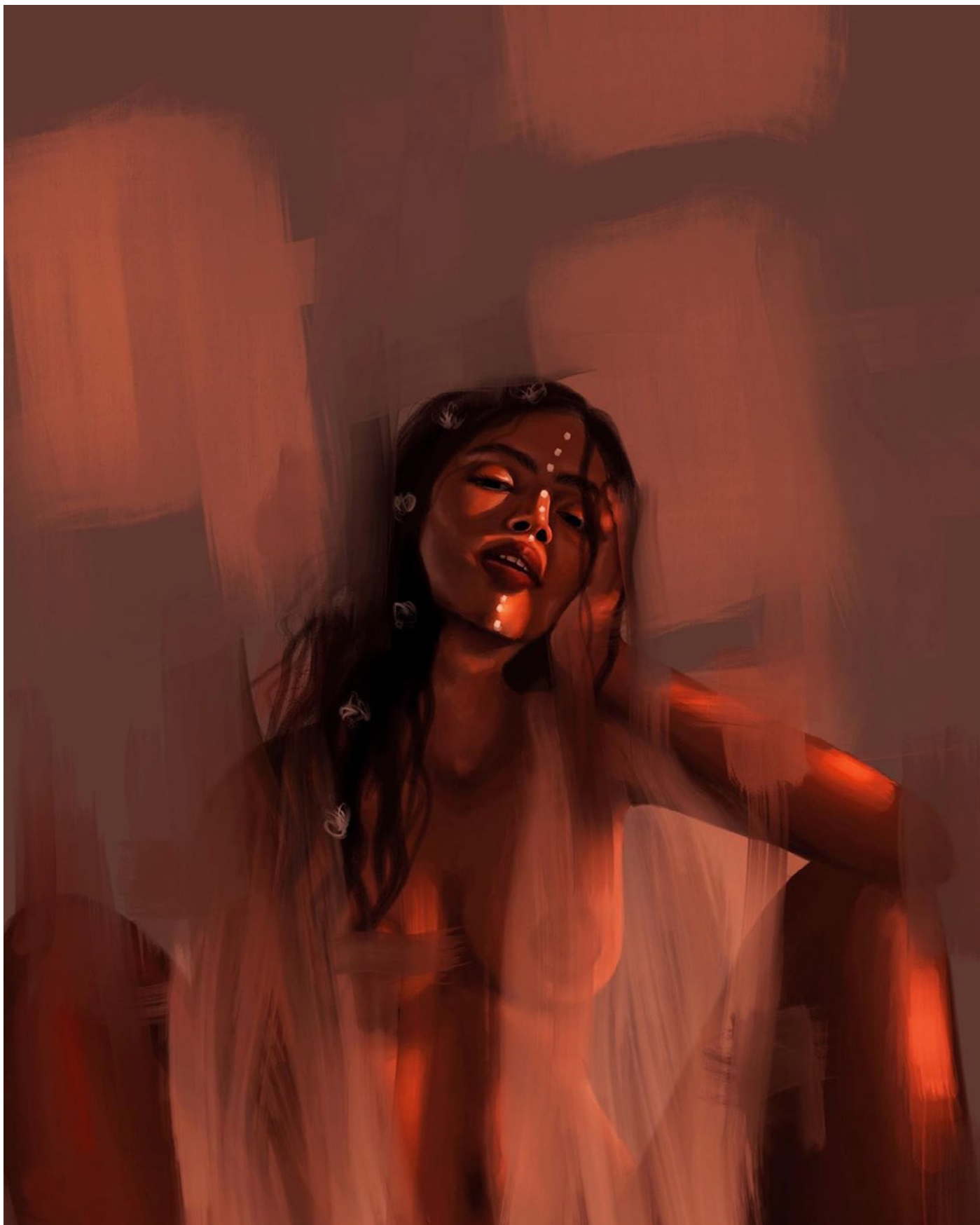
You seem to really enjoy making art. So, why aren't you doing that full time?

I don't want to HAVE TO rely on my art. I'm not one of those artist who can create in all endlessness. I have periods where I am able to create, and periods when I just can't fathom myself to create anything. I want the freedom of going to a normal job where I know I will get paid and then be able to create art in my stress-free freetime. I also want my art to be affordable, I don't make a lot of money with my art because I'm pretty cheap but I don't want to be some super exclusive artist that only rich people can afford. I want people who can't normally access art to be able to access my art.

Art to some extent is subjective and the audience have varying degrees of reaction to works from artists. How has the reception towards your work been so far?

99.99% of my reactions have all been good. My art is a lot about womanhood, motherhood and simply living on this world as a black woman. But I do notice when I make something about religion or politics people usually unfollow me on Instagram. I don't really care, Instagram is extremely shallow and most people on the internet generally are very sensitive to anything that is against their views or opinions.

There are artists especially from Africa whose families are not fully in support of their pursuit of art as a career. What does your family think about your being an Artist?



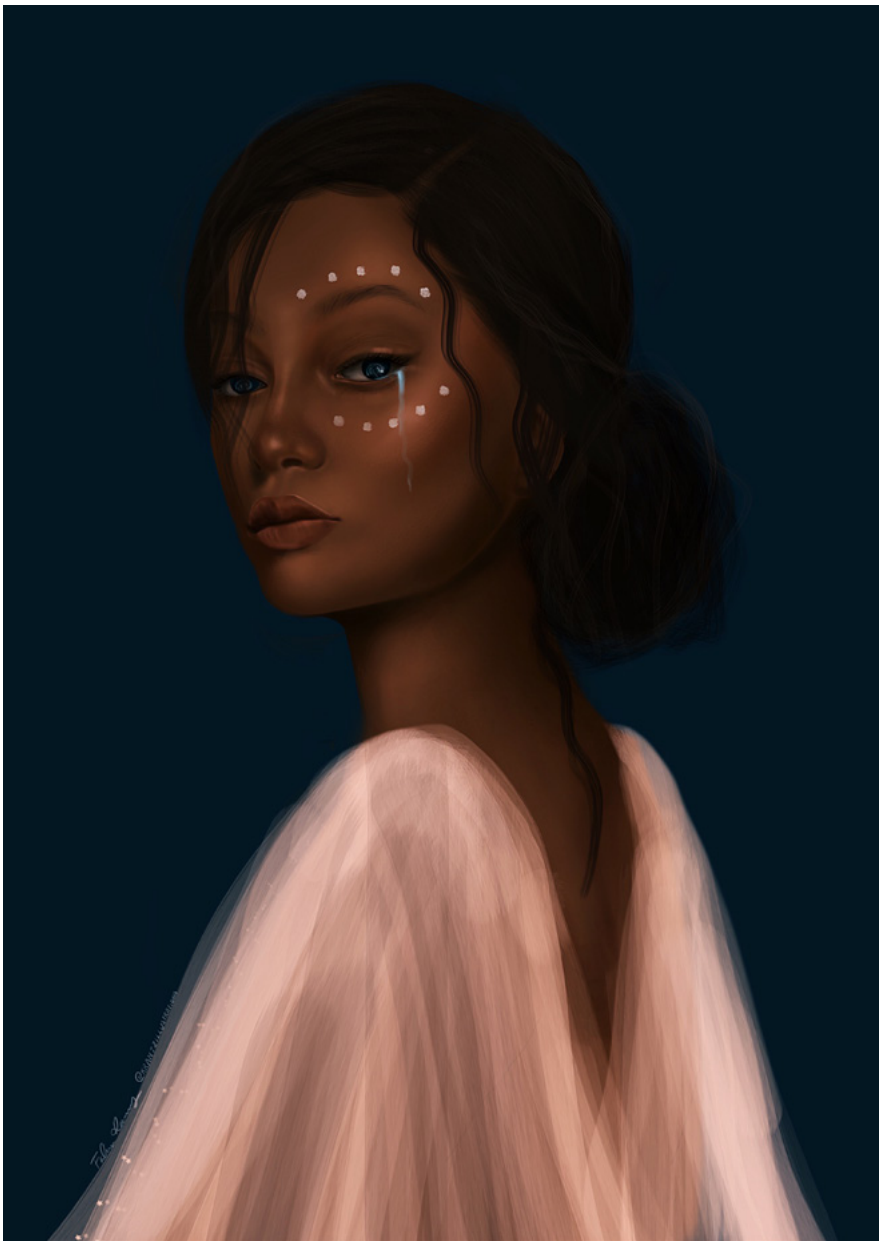
FATIMA KRANTZ

Head Full Of Dreams

I come from a very hard working family. In Sweden, like many other places, art is something main-
Agbowó | MEMORY | JULY 2020

ly available to the upper class and people with academic background. So my family never really had access to art and maybe because of this never got interested in it. Literally no one in my family cares about art. They are however very supportive of my art and I guess they don't dislike it, but they're also not necessarily interested in it. I do however think if I ever wanted to do art full time, they would never agree with it. My father doesn't even know I do art and make money on art, and I don't dare to tell him because he really think it's a waste of my time, haha!

Asides your environment, what other source of inspiration fuel your work?



FATIMA KRANTZ, *Ocean Eyes*

I love to get inspired by the works of other artists. I don't have anyone in particular who inspires me more or less. As much time as I spend on doing art, the same amount of time I spend looking at other's art. I love art in all forms, classical, digital, visual, writing and poetry, you name it. Basically all of my inspiration comes from other artists.

Some artists want to change the world with their art, some want to make money while some want to do both. What kind of impact do you want your work to make?

I want to change peoples view on black artistry. I also want other black women to have access to art that represents them. I to see a future where black art is everywhere on the streets, in shopping malls, on the internet. And a future where black women don't feel the need to change themselves such as perm their hair and bleach their skin to fit into a white stereotype just because they have never seen themselves represented in beautiful ways.

You can get familiar with Fatima's work via her instagram @krantzillustrations and her Esty page <https://www.etsy.com/se-en/shop/Krantzillustrations>



FATIMA KRANTZ

Mtoto Wangu. 2020

A Memory of My Mother in 7 Manifestations



AYODELE
IBIYEMI

"Just like her burial place, unlikely places became minefields too. The school she taught, the church we attended and her friends' houses. I managed to stay off some but there was one I could not stay off: my sister. My sister was just five years when we lost our mother but as she grew up, she began to look like her."

I: The Face of Memory

I have always occupied myself with the question of whether memory has a face. I imagine that such a face – if it exists – is always morphing; lined with contours of fleeting images, events, places, time, smells; shifting around like sand.

– Yinka Elujoba

From time immemorial, human beings have always been bothered with closure; ending a thing permanently. There are no wars without death and, most times, people fight to end things. This desire for an end is often without recourse to the subject. While certain individuals are considered public enemies and ended by the state, it is always without recourse to the feelings of the family members of these 'public enemies.' Perhaps this desire for closure is copied from nature itself as one of the only constant things about humanity is death. No matter how long a person lives, it is inevitable. Sometimes death comes earlier than expected but it comes anyway. However, with closure come memories. Memories of wars, people and events linger long after they are over. Memory is vivid, yet it is hazy. Memory is light, yet it is heavy.

Like Elujoba, I have also wondered if memory has a face. If it does, for me it would be the image of my late mother; temporal yet permanent. It has many manifestations but it is what has dominated my mind the most. On a Saturday morning in 2004, I was in front of my grandfather's house when I saw vehicles pull up in front. I immediately knew that my mother, who had been admitted in the hospital for a while, had died. I was a teenager and since then all I have of her are memories. That day, I did not cry. I also did not cry when, some days later, the church organized a burial program. But those days remain etched like a bad scar. The paradox of it is how it has added events and scenes to my memory, like thick blotches of paint on a white wall, while also removing from me memories of what life would have been with my mother. Memories manifest in many ways for me and I try to understand them as I grow up. Some I have ways to manage, some I don't but I know it is an unending task.

II: Memory as Pain

The death of a loved one is like an amputation – C.S. Lewis.

When I found the quote above, I knew it was true for me as I navigated life. I grew up imagining what would have been if my mother had not died. Like one living with an amputation, I'd tell myself that things would have been different, better, and I would have had more help. Memories were painful and, as I try to process the pain, I often get new revelations and new ways she would have been helpful to me. Like an amputated arm, a part of me went with her; perhaps it was the part that stabilized things because that was one of her major roles in my life growing up. She was all I had growing up and when she died, memories didn't help as they reminded me of when I had it all together. Whenever I struggled with life, memories would remind me that I might not have struggled if she was alive. Whenever life was seamless, memories also questioned what joy was there in a motherless and rudderless life. Memories reminded me of stable periods, enabled by my mother, of unstable periods, alleviated by her. She seemed to always have it all together and her death exposed the fragility and inadequacy of everyone in the family. I always wondered whether every child lost their childhood stability eventually or whether I lost it simply because of her death. And memories attach to landmarks so memories would remind me that, the last time I saw her physically, she complained of leg pain. This memory of pain has been a constant which I didn't know how to repress for a long time.

III: Haunting Memories

Just like her burial place, unlikely places became minefields too. The school she taught, the church we attended and her friends' houses. I managed to stay off some but there was one I could not stay off: my sister. My sister was just five years when we lost our mother but as she grew up, she began to look like her. I would often relate with my sister without looking at her face. I could not stand the face of my mother which she wore daily. I could not hate my own sister but I avoided her face actively. On this innocent face is my mother's face, bright and firm. Memories haunt and I am still unable to confront it. I always long for the common dreams people have of their dead parents, giving them instructions and petting them but I never had one. Even with my longings, the semblance of it I have, I am unable to confront. I hope to look my sister in the face for long someday, maybe I can separate the mother from the daughter. In secondary school, after I had lost my mother, I was always singing burial hymns for fun and I looked at the rectangle shaped Mathematical set box like it was a coffin because it looked like one. I said it out repeatedly until AyoOluwa, a smarter friend, called my attention to it. That was a stage and I got over it. Memories haunt like life is a bad dream but I have no solution to it yet.

IV: Fading Memories

Of course nothing prepared me for my mother's death, not even her long illness, so I did not revel enough in the times we had together. I wished there were enough landmarks; pictures, videos, trips and other things I can hold, feel, touch or see after her demise. The memories I have are often hazy and, as time passes, they fade. I often try so hard to remember scenes that I am tempted to make them up in my imagination. When I am confronted with a situation, I try to imagine what her reaction would be if she were there or what her reaction was in a similar situation in the past. Many times, I am unable to muster the memories and I blame myself, for not paying enough attention, for letting myself forget. Memories connected to grief as I grew up and I often found myself walking in a minefield. The first five years, I avoided our old house, I avoided the part of the new house where she was buried and I still don't sleep in the house now as an adult. It is a minefield for me. Memories fade and no one is to blame. I might have to write that somewhere so I stop beating myself over for the faded memories of my mother.

V: Memories as Respite

In moments of exhaustion, memories come in handy as respite. Sometimes when life gets overwhelming, the human brain activates memories of good times and it creates a bittersweet feeling. As fleeting as the joy might be, sometimes it is all that is needed. Sometimes it is memories that serve as respite in the midst of crises. Memories offer reassurance. It suggests that perhaps good times might return. Even when the situation shows that it won't, memories are dwelt in and they help. There are those who downplay the importance of memories, those who charge others to move on or look forward. I often ask them how to ignore one's past. How do you ignore the very person that you are? For me, no one else can serve as my mother and it is simply impossible to move forward from her. The gap remains open and all I have are memories. How is it possible for me to move on from that? I don't think it is. It is in memories that I dwell when I tell myself that my mother has stopped growing old even as I grow. Memories help to freeze her in time, instead of killing her. Memories can serve as respite but they seem to have a mind of their own, acting as respite sometimes and acting as a reminder of pain some other times. I try my best to make memories into respite. I remember the good times and pretend like the bad times were simply scenes that did not occur.

VI: Memory as Personal

The debate about the personal and the public is a popular one and it cuts across many discussions of human life. A lot of what we call personal nowadays are actually public and vice versa. The line between the personal and the public has been blurred. Collective memory is why my mother's burial had hundreds of mourners and why many older neighbours would look at me with pity whenever they met me after my mother's demise. In retrospect, it is difficult to call them well-wishers as others are wont to do because if they wished us well, they would not have triggered me with the pity look each time they saw me, they would not have come to trigger my grandfather with each condolence visit. In the days when the family mourned, many would drive themselves calmly to our house and then begin to perform and throw themselves to the floor on seeing us. This memory is my first introduction to hypocrisy and it comes back each time I see people mourn others. I now see mourning as a performative act, done to please oneself rather than the bereaved or the dead, for of what use is mourning to the dead? Mourners are usually plenty but the memories of mourning are personal and not collective. It is the same way I remember the death of Gbenga Adebayo, the master comedian, musician and actor. It shook the country but what I remember is the collective memory: the performances, the shape of his casket and the crowd that mourned him. The gap he left was filled poorly in popular culture but I moved on, like thousands of his fans. Only his family members and close associates would have memories that are personal enough to haunt, to pain and to please. The death of my mother is personal to me and I cannot even express how much it has defined me. I still cannot put it into words and if I ever do, it is just so I get some respite from the memories.

VII: Curating Memories

"He who can curate memories has mastered life."

I hold the quote above to be unassailable and truthful, at least for me. After years of living with a consciousness of memories, I know that memories have to be curated carefully. The ones that haunt have to be avoided most times and the ones that please have to be reenacted as much as possible. 15 years after the demise of my mother, I decided to bring the memory of her burial to the

fore and revel in it. Over 100 pupils from the school where she taught before her death lined up on the road waiting for her as the corpse was brought from the mortuary to the church. It was like a guard of honour and I imagine that she was quite important to her colleagues and pupils. It took 15 years for me to understand the significance of that but now that I do, I magnify it and convince myself that she died a hero. It helps me appreciate her more and it guides my life decisions. This memory serves the dual purpose of pleasing me and giving me closure, as it reminds me that even in death, my mother had people who appreciated her.

I now understand that life itself is a minefield which we navigate daily. Rules are fluid and cases have to be treated based on their own merit. Only very few things are certain in life, one of them is memories. It is then the responsibility of each person to curate their memories according to what they want to dwell on. It would be reductionist to say therapy is merely the curation of memories assisted by another person but the bulk of what therapists do relies on memories. Maybe if we pay more attention to memories and are deliberate about the one we create and curate, the world would be better.

Silence is Conflagration



ANIFOWOSE
IBRAHIM

"A throttling of a throat is how I hold myself in. She never sees me but I'm always around. Holding her hands, under her rug, a shrug of her consciousness. I watch her cut herself and I hold on like bandages. Women who are quiet are a living place, a slow fire waiting to conflagrate."

She enjoyed simple moments.

A certain stillness engulfed her as she slowly clipped her nails. The quietness in her large room spread out around her. Unhurried. *Tā!* Her nails broke off. A gentle breeze dawdled into the room occasionally. She watched as her hijabs danced like ghost masquerades. *Tā!* They broke off. A sudden surge of blood gathered around the tip of her cuticle. She felt a tinge of pain. She dropped the nail cutter and placed her right ring finger on the spot. A small splurge of blood painted her finger tip. She raised her finger to her eye level as if to examine the redness. She grinned. Then, dipped the finger in her mouth. She felt oddly satisfied.

The house opened to her sullen countenance and there was a temporary rendezvous between them. She picked up the nail cutter to continue cutting. A brief image that appeared to flash non-stop in her mind stopped her. It disappeared like the fickleness of a camera's flash. Every time, she was sure that the image of this event had occurred. Every time, she wasn't sure if it was true. Every time, something nudged her and again she was faced with this great question.

She watched the ceiling as if in a trance. As if in trying to remember there was a storage squared into her asbestos. Again, the image flashed. A staircase and the ray of sun spotting from a window. She blinked slowly, trying to delay its disappearance but she was too late. It was gone.

Tired, she continued. *Tā!* Another broke off. The small gathering of blood had stopped. She tried to distract herself. The details of her room were becoming more apparent. The inexistence of sound except her own breathing and the ticking of the clock startled her. *It was 6:30pm, it should have been back.* The clock hung from the wall above the bed as if to make a statement. In a corner was the mat she prayed on. A bedside drawer sat close to her. She put her cut nails on it. There was a solemn consciousness in the coldness of the house. The green colour of the room grew in her, she shuddered. Her husband had chosen this colour. *Men, their lack of sense of colours,* she thought. A rug spread through the length and breadth of the room like the overlapping of a map. Whenever she vacuumed this room, she was sure there was something the rug was trying to say to her.

She continued with her nails.

A sudden clatter of plates jolted her off the bed. Startled, she rushed down the stairs into the kitchen. A surge of breeze wheezed past her face as she reached the kitchen door. She felt it. She didn't pay attention as she swung the door open and found broken china plates lying disproportionately around the floor. The shards scattered all over like cigar ashes clustering on an ashtray. She felt an instant urge to check around to ensure she was the only one at home. This was not the first time this was happening this week. Two days ago, her small garden at the backyard was attacked. A flower pot broke and a sprouting hibiscus was cut and strewn around the ground. When she had told her husband, he had laughed it off and told her it was the rats. Previously, it was the bathroom

shower being left open. It was the TV being switched on.

But rats don't break plates, she was certain. She pulled out the utensils drawer and took her turning stick. First, tiptoeing, she checked the corners of the sitting room. Then, the bathroom. Then, the guest bedroom. Then, the kitchen again. Satisfied there was no one inside, she opened the door opening to the compound and stepped out. A car horn blared from outside the gate. A deep sigh reached her throat and she dropped the turning stick on the pavement around the entrance. It was her husband.

Slow creak. Prayer place. A small gathering of blood. The clatter of plates. The gentle moans emanating from matrimonial noises. The successive horn for the opening of the gate. People, humans, I was there.

A throttling of a throat is how I hold myself in. She never sees me but I'm always around. Holding her hands, under her rug, a shrug of her consciousness. I watch her cut herself and I hold on like bandages. Women who are quiet are a living place, a slow fire waiting to conflagrate. It's why I enjoy her body.

You might not understand. I enjoy the anatomy of silent things. I enjoy things I can trace my hands around. Like dust. Like sharp sand. Like a body. A woman's body.

When he had settled in and taking a shower, she had tried to talk to him.

She wasn't much of a talker so she always had to wait.

Her husband, who had married her in a bid to silence his mother, was forty-five years old. He had a bulking physique and an onerous face that carried a perpetual smirk. The smirk exaggerated into a grin whenever he tried to smile, which he did so rarely. He carried a mean look. Spotted a small goatee. He wore a singlet and a short around the house but when he was outside he was that lawyer, that property law expert, bursting with gators, combed afro, polished suits and free-flowing long ties.

"Okay, so you want to tell me what is on your mind this night?"

The way the word rolled out made her feel like she was in an inquisition. Nothing came at first. She didn't know how to start, how to bare herself before him in a way to make him listen. A little courage and she spilled.

"I don't know what happened today in the kitchen but our plates were broken." The words, the way they spun on her tongue like they were red carpet guests posing for a quick shot was a norm. She was scared of him.

"Okay. So?" The dismissive response was sharp. She heard it and swallowed.

"I was hoping you could call the fumigation man," she said this almost whispering, "maybe he could send these rats away"

"Rats?" He raised his face to her for the first time. A line of worry was drawn on his forehead. On a second look, it was a line of confusion. He squinted. "What do you mean rats? Rats don't break your plates. Never heard of that."

Because he was now staring directly at her, she felt the need to be more careful with her following words. "I don't know what happened to the plates," she said, "they were in the drawers. I was upstairs when I heard a loud noise. I came down and I found them broken on the floor"

"And you were sure nobody was in the house?"

There was a pause. “Yes,” came the meek response.

“Okay, can I see the pieces of the plates?” He asked.

She wasn’t sure what to make of the question but she was sure he was doubting her again. “Why?”

He looked sternly into her eyes and gave a smirk. “You know why.”

“I don’t.”

“You do.” He paused to see if she would give a response. When she didn’t, he continued. “Everyday there’s always a new story about something happening in this house. The last time it was the garden. I went there after you told me, I didn’t see anything broken. Everything was in place. No broken flower pots or cut flowers. Nothing.”

“What are you talking about,” she retorted, shocked. “I cleaned the garden this morning.”

“No, you didn’t. Yesterday night, I went to the garden and there was nothing there”

“Are you calling me a liar?” She asked, her voice cracking as if they were sore.

“No, I’m not. I’m just saying I didn’t see anything when I checked.” He affirmed.

There was silence for a moment. The sitting room cradled in the mechanical sound of the AC coming from outside the window. She took a deep sigh and stood up.

“Where are you going?” He asked.

“To bring the broken pieces you want to see.”

“Oh good.” He dipped his hands in the wash hand bowl, washed and used the back of his right hand to wipe clean his mouth. Then, he stood up too. “Let me follow you. Let’s see it together.”

What you might begin to ask is why I settled for this body?

I know this because many have asked before. And I have told this story a thousand times. You have heard it a thousand times too. It usually goes like this:

Two good friends, who grew up loving each other like brothers fall in love with a girl. Yes, I am capable of love. That I’m not human doesn’t mean I do not relish the little beauty of life. This girl, involved in this gentle love story does not know of this communal love. We were also not aware of our shared interest. Life goes on with both sides. Making moves at a person. The double entendre is unleashed at us.

To clear off this steam, we ask her to pick. She picks him. Him? Him! When I asked her why she picked him. She said, “You rarely ever talk, you are too silent.”

Silent?

They reach the kitchen. The cabinet and floor sparkled. The pleasant smell of the air freshener she hung on the window bars flowed between them. The arrangement of plates and cups on the tray in a corner showed her vigor for tidiness.

He surveyed the kitchen quickly. Smirked, then reached the conclusion to ask the question.

“Where are the broken pieces?” He asked, confused, because he wasn’t seeing anything.

“Here,” she pointed at the corner she had swept them earlier. “Look at them.”

“Where?”

“There,” she looked at him and pointed with a strange throw of hands.

“I can’t see anything,” he paused and raised his hands and shoulders as if to say I don’t understand what you’re saying.

She stood blank, unsure of what was transpiring. For a moment, she was unmoving. Then, she bent down to pick the pieces. She stood up. “Here,” she pointed a piece at him, “take it from my hands.”

He watched her movement with careful consideration. *What was she getting at*, he thought. He couldn’t see anything. *So where are these pieces? What’s she pointing at me? Is this a charade?* “What are you doing?” He asked, perplexed.

“Nothing. I said take it from me.”

“I said I can’t see anything you are pointing at me, woman!” He said, shouting.

“What do you mean you can’t see? Are you blind?” She searched his eyes for a moment. Satisfied, she continued, “Just take it from my hands.”

He reached to collect the pieces she was holding in her hands. All he touched was her skin. He pinched her.

She retracted her hands quickly. “Why did you do that?” A frown on her face.

“Nothing. Where is the piece you’re talking about now?” He raised his hands for inspection. There was nothing there.

The broken piece clanged on the floor and shattered a little bit more. She was startled by the sudden sound. He didn’t move or flinch. That was when she saw it, she was the only one who could see or hear the broken pieces.

“Woman, you haven’t given me any children to play hide and seek with. Get yourself together.” He said and burst out of the kitchen, angered by the pageantry.

Eka pada Sirsasana. The yoga pose. The foot-behind-the-head pose. I practice every morning before I visit her memories. She doesn’t meditate, but I am her meditations. There’s a subtle awareness that I take from it. To reach this pose, you have to allow for endurance. Reach gradually for the pose. Watch your body concoct with strains of pain. Let your legs stretch out of their thresholds, your head bent beyond recourse. Rubber-elast your body with the knowledge that at the end, when for months you have practiced, your body will relax into this pose. It will be as easy as picking your nose.

With her, I had practiced this for months. I sprinkle a little clip of this event on her. She catches a glimpse and I make it disappear as quick. Make it like a camera’s flash. I was sure she would cross this threshold. And when she does, she would be able to see it all. What better way to own someone than to hold all that they remember in your hands? Be the foot behind their head holding them down?

He had gone upstairs to pray. She was in the kitchen recovering from the pain that came with the words he said.

I looked at her the way you look at a baby when a sudden rush of cuteness ravages their eyes. She was

approaching tears. She was close to the one thing I never wanted to see fall from her eyes. So, I repossessed her body.

She froze. Her eyes closed for one long moment and jerked open wide. Something in them looked like the white part had enveloped the small darkness. She grinned. Pulled open the kitchen drawer and took out a knife.

Men can be cruel. How she fell in love with him is still a mystery to me. I love this woman who has never seen me. She has never loved me.

But I can make her not love anyone.

She walked into the room and found him in a bowing position. His head to the ground while his back arched upward. Something in her tingled at the sight. She wanted to lunge forward and reach for him but she had to wait. She was powerless now. She looked around the room briefly and settled to sit on the bed.

She could see it now. This event that flustered and disappeared, it was hers. It was his. In her eyes, the event replayed itself in slow-mo that she watched it unfold like it was a walk through a panorama. Like VR was placed on her and she saw everything. There was no reason to blink slowly now. The montages flipped scene after scene.

This is what I played:

Yells and moans. The thumping of the floor. The air dense with the taste of sea-mist. A solitary ray of sunlight seeped in from a window at the corner of the spiral staircase. Her foot clambering up, right before the left. A splash of red on the montage for effect. The silence of the house as SFX. She climbs further up. Listening to the thumping. She's unsure where it's coming from. The nearer she closes in, the clearer the sound. She can hear a gasp now. Then another scream. It's clear this is not a scream for help. Maybe a scream of pleasure. Maybe something else.

She reaches the top of the stairs. The sound is clearer now. There are four doors here. She listens carefully and determines it's the second door to the right. She moves forward and pushes it open.

There's a loud creak. The screams stops. The moans stops. As if there's an interruption of an ongoing conversation. She sees him now. He sees her too. There's a bewilderment in her eyes. There's a surprise in his eyes, his mouth wide open like a zoologist seeing an animal for the first time. She sighs. Turns her back at them, her husband and this woman who is watching her, and she leaves the room. He calls after her. She hears but does not respond. Her legs shaky, her fingers twitchy, her soul hurt. She walks down the stairs crumbling under the weight of her body. She holds the rails for support. When she reaches the ground, she walks into the kitchen.

He was still praying when she stood from the bed. She looked past his shoulder into the green wall as he recited Suratu-Fatiha again. His bulky figure stood firmly while he stared down at the prayer mat, her prayer mat. Something in her tingled. She made a calculated move.

She thought, *why not do it now. You can't handle him when he's not praying. It's when he's at his weakest.*

The knife on the bed snaked out from behind her. She reached over, grabbed it, and waited carefully for a good posture. She thought it was best he prostrated again, his back arched to the rest of the world. His face to the ground blindfolding him.

He was bowing now. His body forming the number 7. She remained vigilant. Her eyes patrolling the length of his body. Something prickled her again and the image of his opened mouth flashed again. Her eyes reddened and once again she felt her legs shake as if they were Spaghetti sticks breaking into themselves.

As soon as he went into prostration, she lunged forward as quickly as her body allowed. She studied his back for a quick moment and plunged the knife into the right side of his back. She pulled it out as fast as it went in. He gave a howl and fell over his back. She sat atop him. He was trying to fathom what was happening when she dug the knife, already red with his blood, into his heart. It was fast. He tried to hold her hands. His face lightened. Realizing what was happening, he pushed her away with the full weight of his body. She fell, hitting the floor hard, but the thud was muffled by the rug. She reeled in pain as she watched him attempt to stand in pain. He couldn't. His chest spurted blood and his white jalabia soaked as if dipped in red paint. He crawled away from her.

"Where's she?!" She shouted the question at him. "Who's she?!"

He could see there was a strange rage in her eyes. The kind you saw in an animal going for its prey. Was she the woman he had married? He rested the back on the wall. "who?" he asked almost whispering. The blood streamed down. He put his hands on the knife and struggled to pull it out. He wriggled in discomfort and the strain of pain ran through his body. He screamed and reclined. He was weak.

"Who is she?!" She asked again. This time, the question came like a bark. She grabbed the stool beside the bed. She leaped towards him with a devilish rage. This time, she was determined to end what she had started. Before he could recompose himself, she hit him repeatedly three times. She howled in blind anger. She whacked the stool on his head and he slumped a little further off the wall. By the fifth time, his head hit the floor with a thud. He was lying flat on his back. She dropped the stool.

He wasn't moving. His eyes stared blankly into an empty space. Drool ran down the corner of his mouth. She kicked him twice to confirm. When he didn't move, she bent down, and without recourse to caution, she yanked out the knife. He gasped. Half here, half disappearing.

Her eyes returned to its normal state. She saw the room differently now. A pool of blood had formed around him and gathered around her feet. She pulled back from him. Her body recoiled.

She dropped the knife. Blood dripped from her fingers as she tried to process what had just occurred. A gentle breeze seemed to leave the room. She felt the silence she was used to as it flooded in.

I watched in awe and horror of her unfolding ruthlessness. As she dug into him. As the squirt of blood formed a puddle around him streaming down like his consciousness. There was a certain gnash of terror that superceded my possession. She stood there and her performance of abhorrence for this man, her husband, submerged my predictions. It was the images, not me, I realized. When she had dropped the knife, I abandoned her body to seek refuge in a quiet place. Bodies like hers housed loud terrors. Tonight, the deed was done. Maybe, I could make new images, new montages and new memories. Maybe, I could love her the next day.

Saudade



OMOLOLA
OKUNOLA

“the wind is a farrago of glass prisons &/ haunting illusions.”

noun • /saʊˈdɑːdə/

A deep emotional state of nostalgic or profound melancholic longing for an absent thing or someone that one cares for while simultaneously having positive emotions towards the future. It often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never be had again.

i.

I am smoke trapped in a jar, frozen
the air is fractured &
the wind is a farrago of glass prisons &
haunting illusions.
Silence breathes on my neck
I am choked by the juxtaposition of
forgetting & embracing,
remembering & burying.
The morning withers,
the flowers along the sidewalk groan in heat,
their ardency blinds me.

ii.

It is 2012 again. The city is pulsing. Your friends are on the roof, laughing, dancing to the stale air of smoke and crushed flowers. The harmattan has made me restless, in search of warmth and wet lips. I look beyond the dry gin on the table and crawl into your chest. I know you speak your mother's language, but I taste the gin on your lips. Your mother's lonely presses into me. I want to scream out her silence. I want to untangle her from you, I want to make you unlearn her existence. The night throbs. I watch you fold back into yourself. I watch you shiver and scream, the ache of lost years pounds a bullet into your chest. You don't have enough warmth for both of us.

iii.

“You cannot bring me out of this, you cannot make a broken bird fly” you once whispered in the cathedral, between fits of gasps and the pastor's sermon. We held each other like glue holds my torn sandals, like the Bible holds the congregation together. You said it feels like someone put you in a deep sleep, stuck you in a video player and put you on loop. You were stuck constantly looking at the other side, yearning to fit into history, an anomaly, a fervent anachronism. I could have sworn that nothing else existed, that everything was a magnanimous lie, except *you.*

You're s h i f t i n g, phasing in and out of my mind now. I forget how you look sometimes. There must be a glitch somewhere. The echoes of you, comforting, yet marginal. The night is a cacophony of distant drums and I feel you calling me, scratching a piece of you out of my memories. It is 2012 & I am in your bedroom once again, singing- "Let me give you life. Let me make you dance to victories of shed trauma". I breathe. Panic wraps around my chest like vines.

iv.

Glitter

h
a
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in the a i r,

takes the form of rose-coloured dreams. The clouds gather over your head in a nimbus. Your mother's linen drapes over your body like a finely carved coffin. There you are, bleeding again, calling death again. The TV blares in the background, echoing a litany of exorcisms. You are disintegrating, like fine dust. The ghost of your mother calls you home.

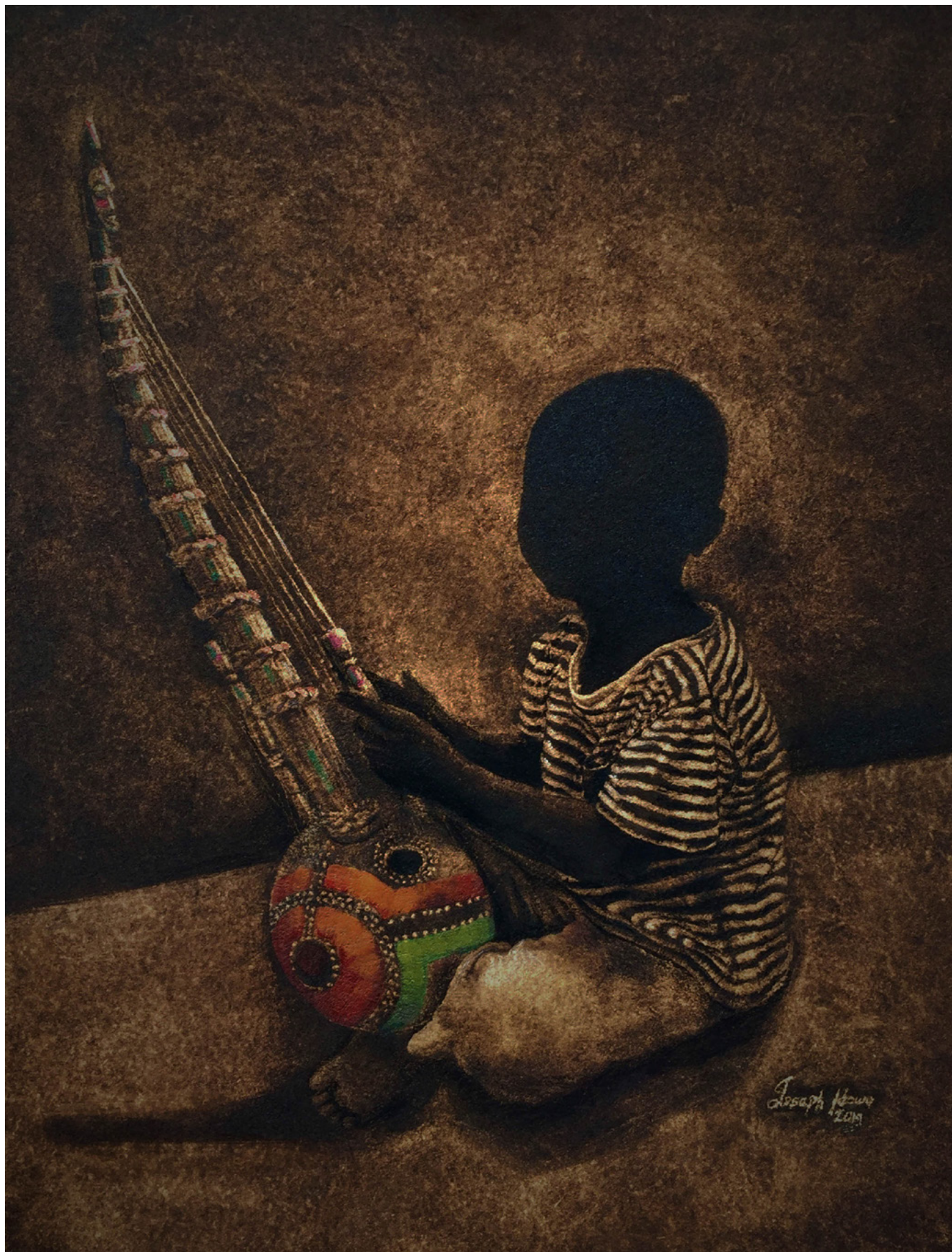
v.

I hold you in my arms till you melt
the stars whisper your eulogy
the moon engraves a scream
in my chest.



JOSEPH IDOWU

Superstar



JOSEPH IDOWU

Songs from Time Past

A Resurgence Of Pain



OHIA, ERNEST
CHIGAEMEZU

“For every human connection I build, I do so with the hope that they would last forever...”

“Loss is a great thing.”

—Shade Mary-Ann Olaoye

1.

I am finding it hard to breathe.

It is as though my lungs are unable to take in enough air lest they burst, and my whole body is beginning to grow faint.

For every bad news I receive, I start to feel my body act out, at least for a few hours. It begins with my heart. My pulse doubles like I have just begun some metre race. I feel the blood course through my body in full speed, threatening to rupture every veins. My legs follow suit, they become wobbly, forcing me to take a seat in order to regain my composure. My brain gets clogged up in inactivity; its constant struggle to send and receive body signals slows down. It puzzles me, how my body is unable to take action in the wake of an unfortunate incidence. How I am required to pause for hours and watch as life lingers around me; people moving about, trees swaying, animals of all sorts alive, awake. How I begin to feel like leaving my own body because I am alarmed at how difficult controlling it has come to be. No matter the severity of the situation, I am still unable to carve out a path to self-redemption. No way to handle grief. No definite routine to keep me living in moments I used to enjoy.

One early morning, after my mum called to say dad had been poisoned, I could not think straight for some days. My sheen of self-possession had failed me as I imagined how it could have happened. Even as she assured me that my dad was getting better, I still panicked and I could barely use my time to do enough school work. Alone, in the silent morning, I felt broken. And my body became a house collapsing on itself.

2.

We both never spoke.

No, not in the way the others did using calculated excitement and overfamiliarity. But we knew each other, because when I had seen her at the Total Filling Station in town one afternoon, she had waved at me with something resembling a smile. The next time, I met her at the market. She was limping under the weight of a bag of foodstuff she supported with her leg. I asked her about her baby; she asked if I had started reading the materials that were recommended for Dr Ahaiwe's test in *Studies in Fiction*. The last time I saw her, I was traipsing past Mary Slessor Hostel, the evening

breeze on my face, hands folded on my chest, eyes tearing as I thought of the squabble I had earlier on with Essien. I had missed the first 'hello', a single word struggling to come out full and direct, and I wished I did not. The second one came out unsure but it was enough for me to turn around and give a slightly aggrieved smile.

Her name was Helen. She had a very remarkable face. She was married, just like most of the girls in my class. Helen had one close friend whose name I never got to know. They were both married, and they were of the same height, skin colour, and physique.

Sometime in March 2019, whilst locked in the arms of my lover, I opened my WhatsApp to find a picture of a bloodied body on everyone's statuses. This body, in jean trousers and Turquoise blue shirt, was under a Water Truck, the head crushed to a pulp. There was another picture. In this one, Helen was seated under the sickly trees at the court of the G.S Building, cross-legged, in the same clothing as the body. Soon, people made collages of the two pictures. The story was that Helen, who had set out for home having learnt that no classes would be held on that day, was knocked down by a car, and before she could get up, a truck had climbed over her head. Helen's death was heart-rending, something one could possibly not wish for an enemy. It broke me, showed me how brief life could be. How, one minute, someone could be up and about enjoying life and, the next, he is lying still, dead. That night, I could feel fear everywhere inside my body.

3.

Loving Emmanuel came effortlessly.

It felt like surrendering all doubts for I was sure he would love me defiantly. Emmanuel did not love me in the same way he did others and, even if he did, I knew he showered me extra attention, what no one else besides my best friend, Ebuka, could do. It was in the way Emmanuel lingered around me, the way he held eye contact, how he asked me out for walks. At first, he would show up wherever I went. At 'The Writers' Community meetings, in class, at the theatre, at poetry readings, at study groups. I never hugged anyone, but then he came along and taught me how hugging someone could come naturally. I had never felt safer.

For every human connection I build, I do so with the hope that they would last forever, bringing into being certain goodwill. I always strive to make things work out, to appear selfless, even reliable. So, when Emmanuel began to invite me for walks, I gladly availed myself. It started out slow at the beginning. I thought him self-centred, a friend who brought back the topic of discussion back to himself, and it irritated me. Nevertheless, he seemed interesting. A lot of personal details, adventures, romantic stories, all totalling to make up a really quirky human with broad shoulders and a tiny waist.

Emmanuel loved poetry. He loved spoken word too. He introduced me to Button Poetry, sent me a folder containing videos of Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye and Rudy Francisco; some of his favourite Spoken Word artistes. He loved Simi. He loved spaghettis. He loved chanting poetry lines that made him swoon. He loved listening too, because unlike speaking which he did with so much impatience attached, he always wanted to know more about me, like, the things that interest me. Or the ones I was afraid of.

Now, I mention his name so casually in conversations for the simple reason that I am trying to eternalise him, to keep the memories of him alive and breathing in me. Of course, whenever I say, 'Emmanuel used to bring me here' or 'He liked this or that', I could tell that the person I am talking with will think of him right away. I keep telling them how funny I thought he was, how kind, how interesting, and later, the silence would sit coldly between the two of us until a new

topic is brought up.

The weeks that followed his death were full of raw, harsh grief. I remember how blurry everything went. The fear, the anger, the loss of appetite. The pity on everyone's faces, the struggle to concentrate on my books since his death happened on the day before my degree exams would kick off. The calls. Trying not to cry publicly. The judging comments everyone made on social media. The senseless, insensitive humour they were all trying to make with the manner in which he died. It was really a hard time.

A month later, anything that looked like excitement disappeared so abruptly that I did not notice. Life seemed bleak, and the times I scampered around the grief, trying so hard not to poke at it lest I fall into a pervasive ennui, I wondered if I were ever going to get better. The grief lingered with such intensity, surprising me with its different stages. Overwhelming sadness, deep thoughts, irritability, the need to be with people, the need to be alone, and the courage to remain strong. One night in June, while spending the first semester break at an uncle's house in Nsugbe, I had walked into the sitting room to find a viral picture of Emmanuel on NTA. It was like opening a healing wound, and that night, the tears flowed nonstop. I had never sobbed so uncontrollably, so painfully, for so long. It gradually dawned on me; the fact that my own life became open and appeared to be solely defined by the tragedy of losing him, and nothing could have prepared me for the parameters of such loss.

4.

Her name was Shimmer.

Chizaram had named her for the reason that he thought she shimmered, and since I was yet to find a suitable name after finding her at my doorstep, he gave her the name he had been saving for a pet. This happened minutes before he had said she was the ghost of an old lady from my village who had come to distract me from my books, and I thought he was being ridiculous.

Ever since I was a child, I have always fancied owning a pet. It was like one of those dreams my siblings and I still share and we would all spend time discussing our undying love for small animals, how beautiful it would be, having to care for something much smaller than each of us. But my parents would never hear of it, particularly my mum who has a stubborn fear for animals that are not chickens or turkeys. I would go on to staunchly harbour that love for pets because meeting Serena, my uncle's German Shepherd; Cynthia, his male cat; my landlady's female cats, Jennifer and Jessica and her unnamed rabbits, strengthened the desire even more.

Cats have always been my favourite, those sweet, majestic felines with subtle ways of pulling at my heartstrings. They act independent, carving out their own territories, affording me enough time to do without them. And, whenever they crave my attention, or return home to me, I am forced to feel lucky that they even consider me. The unconditional love of a pet was what Shimmer gave me. But then, the facts that she was not exactly mine, and that she could one day disappear made me love her with caution.

One evening in July 2019, as I washed my clothes, it dawned on me that it had been exactly three days since I saw Shimmer. Her disappearance felt odd. The small compound was empty without her usual 'welcome home' strut every evening. The purring and late night meows at my window or the feel of fur curling at my feet were no longer there. For some fleeting seconds, I began to grow upset. I tried making a mental list of the number of neighbours who were never cool with her, people who I suspected might have done something awful to her. Then the possibility that she might have wandered off or her real owner had come to take her crossed my mind. But no, I would rather not think that way.

It was only after I had finished washing that the smell became strong, or maybe that was the first time I noticed it. I had thought it was coming from one of the dead mice Shimmer occasionally gifted me, so I moved to look for the body. The search was quite fruitless, and each time I thought I was getting close to locating where the smell was coming from, I would be mistaken. One last check under my outdoor cupboard took me to Shimmer. There she was, curled up in an unnatural angle, eyes slightly open but unseeing. It was as though someone had tossed her aside like an unwanted toy. She almost did look inanimate. One side of her stomach was open and large worms crawled in and out of it; an obvious picture of death staring boldly at me.

In my room that night, I sobbed the weight of all my losses. For the first time in years, I was reminded of all the people I lost, all the good things I was never able to keep, and it hurt me deeply.

5.

Everything seemed normal at the start of the session.

ASUU had just called off the five months strike in February and, as the university community busied itself with semester work, there were assignments and tests to write, schemes of work to catch up on, and some crazy lecturers had begun making life difficult for some unlucky few.

But indeed life was already difficult for those of us in our finals. While many battled with poor grades, others had financial issues, or were having a hard time collaborating with their supervisors over their project thesis. Twice in a week or so, the course representative would stand in front of my class to make an obituary announcement. It was always about a parent of my course mates. Gradually, the announcements became too much until I lost count for there were too many people to commiserate with and not enough money to contribute for condolence visits. It saddened everyone that the deaths were happening when emotional support from family was greatly needed.

But those were not the only deaths that happened. The ones that followed rocked the whole school, puzzled everyone, made every Tom, Dick, and Harry see the irrelevance of the school's security system. The most surprising fact was that these deaths, with other unfortunate events, happened within the month of August, each heralding the occurrence of the next one.

It first started with the robbery at the Brotherly Supermarkets at Hilltop. The thieves had come on two consecutive nights and carted away wares as if they had been paid to do so. Later, they waylaid innocent students coming back from morning mass and robbed them with locally made guns. Infamous for the robberies that used to take place in the past, Hilltop was considered an unsafe place for any student looking for accommodation outside the university's hostels.

Next was the news of girl who bled to death after an abortion. It was all over the campus and the judging comments from every mouth flowed like water. That same week, there was also a report that one final-year student of Public Administration had been stabbed on the neck by a neighbour over N100 electricity bill. He did not survive the injury. Then the following week, the thieves came again. This time, they went to a lodge at Hilltop, robbed the tenants, raped some girls, and mutilated the head of a boy. Soon, it was as though the thieves were not just thieves. Because the next time they struck, they came for a young boy who was believed to be a cultist. The following morning, pictures of the body lying in the pool of blood circled everywhere on WhatsApp.

But the violence did not stop even as security men paraded the campus. Another person was killed at Beach, the area students lodge after the school's second gate, and there were other series of rapes happening. Before long, people were afraid to leave their houses for lectures.

In all of these I felt vulnerable and afraid; hoping that no day would see the end of me. It bothered me and, even though I acted as if I did not, I knew within me I had never known fear this strong,

this bold. I decided to take extra measures in existing because it had never been that tasking and I was never going to be reckless, not when I had few months before I left school. The early morning gunshots reminded me of the lurking thieves. The street harassments from members of the SARS group provoked me. The gossips shared amongst my course mates in hushed tones irked me. But surviving was my utmost expectation, something possible.

6.

Dera was everyone's friend.

She was the sister-in-law to my landlady's daughter and she was also a tenant living in my lodge. During the period she first came to the lodge, I tried to avoid her, to give her that space I normally give strangers. But her warm spirit would always pull me and, within seconds, I would be laughing so hard to any of her jokes.

There are the fondest memories I have of her though. Like when she would always tease me and call me the greatest male chef in the lodge because my Jollof rice smelled tasty. Or the times when she called me the Godfather of her unborn child. Or when I and Chibuike had gone to return her laptop at the house that belonged to her department, and she had welcomed us both and given us milk cookies and fruit salad and a native dish from Nsukka. Or the memory I have of her washing her clothes and telling one of my neighbours about the things someone could eat to stop diarrhoea. All of these memories still haunt me.

In September 2019, most departments in the school were beginning to hold their degree examinations and the excitement all the final year students had was boundless. As it has always been, on the day of the last paper, the final-year students would wear white shirts and the undergraduates would sign on them. Then they would go on to drench the final-year students with water. On the night of 26th, I had joined my lodge mates to pour water on my next-door neighbour and Dera was there, with her bulging stomach. As the whole event happened, she mentioned that my last paper was on the 28th and that I should get ready to be baptised by her. But that was the last time I would see her.

After writing my last degree exam, Chigozie and I had set out for home only to find the entire compound disturbingly calm. For a moment I began to suspect that something awful had happened. The dread of something unfortunate was what I hated, the feeling that grief is probably lurking around, waiting to materialise, waiting to haunt me. And so, something terrible had happened after all. Because when I decided to go to my Landlady's to greet her, all I could find were people sauntering about with gloomy faces. There was a baby boy at a corner and no mother was in sight. And the sudden realisation that Dera had passed away while I danced all around campus jubilantly hit me with an unimaginable force.

7.

In all my life, 2019 was the most tragic.

And yes, I have to always remind myself that I owe my being the truth— to possess it, to live in it. I have to reassure myself that all open wounds heal, that being vulnerable can be another kind of strength, that I am capable of taking up the duty of reassembling my selves in this body.

I am the draftsman of my being, a painter hurling colours at a canvas, making into existence something oddly beautiful.

Idea Keeper



DEON C VISSER

"I hear the manic whispers of figments and phantasms."

Sticky images tornado
like oceans. Ebbing
rivers flow and crash
on the wastelands of my mind.

Makers make, and
creators create.
As the sparks of revelation,
light and cascade, and
cast shadows on my innermost surface.

"They are mine you see, they litter the landscape
they cluster and clutter" I hear the manic whispers of
figments and phantasms.

"I keep them safe here,
like pearl to oyster,
I keep them near here,
like nuns to cloister,
I keep them dear here;
untouched,
undisturbed,
safely
unrealized."

An old man materializes.

"My name is the idea keeper,
how do you do?"

Look!
Do you see how they sparkle and shine,
collected and boxed one through nine?

Look!
I mouth off to the sky,
as pretty things impale my eye,
as I flit and fleet,
spit and sheen

and rub forgotten
present moments.
Look!
I mouth off to the sky,
as every man's mind awakens.
and every muse's touch straightens.
I know,
keepers keep
store and steep
stack and shine

For the do-er that stands,
next in line."



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KENNETH AZORRIBAH

A walk through time

Ìyá Goni



AKINYEMI, MUHAMMED
ADEDEJI

“Iya Goni will be remembered as a poem, an essay, a prayer, and a guardian; and it’ll be you—Goni—who will cover her memory in a white cloth.”

Time fractures your memory like a kid in cast. Like the kid, you remember why you are in cast, but the incidences between your cast days and recuperation nights are blurred by time. You will remember it in hallucinations. The memories will come to you like a trader in the market, promising to be true and honest, but also leaving you doubting. You will settle for the memory that appeases your emotions the most, and the one you pick is the memory of your mother’s first tears.

You are walking on empty roads with your mother, seeking a tailor to sew your graduation clothes. Your mother is the villain trader who sells textiles to every other child in your class but forgets her son. Your anger and protestation will not go unnoticed, and your mother will burrow hastily in search of a tailor that will make your shirt ready for your graduation the next day. The stars will glisten on her tears, and instead of asking her why she cries, you will look away and remain angry. She is trying to make you feel bad for her mistake and you will have none of it. When she opens her mouth and starts talking to the wind, you’ll listen to her talk about the hardship of parenting, the fears of not being enough, and the challenges of being married. You are nine years old, only caring about your primary school graduation. Your heart is the shell of a tortoise, but only because your mother made you that way. The graduation will hold later the next day, and you will do yours in a pair of buttoned up denim jacket; one of the few kids without the chosen graduation fabric. When your graduation clothes arrive a few days later, you hide them in your pile of abandoned clothes. That will be the last time you see them.

You spend your teen ages as a witch hunter trying to find evidence of your mother’s witchcraft. A woman is not allowed to be this fierce unless she is a witch; so you will occasionally tear through her room, trying to find the charms she uses in commanding respect from people and fear among her children. You will find very little; a black soap in a white container, pills in white paper, prayer points written in Yoruba, and lots of jewellery. But you will affirm she is a witch, certain you will catch up with her someday.

Happiness is the most fleeting concept in memory. It erases faster than grief. Grief is like grease on white linen; it lingers for long until you either wash it away or accept it as a fabric of your existence. Your mother’s mother triggers an early memory of grief for you. The woman’s firm lanky arms will trap you in a loop of your first pepper bath. It is because of the ₦200 she sneaks into your palm from which, after racing to your neighbour’s house, you buy ₦100 candy in order to deny your mother from taking all of your newly acquired wealth with a promise of saving it for you. When your mother asks you for the money, you will give her an old ₦50 note, and she will give you a slap in return. The stars will never align more perfectly than they did that afternoon. You run into your room to bring three more notes; ₦20, ₦20, ₦10. She will tell you that the note her mother gave you is new, and she will be right. You will crawl on your knees for lying, and have

a pepper bath for being defiant about lying. You will hate her even more.

The next time you will have a pepper bath, it will be your mother's 6ft 2" frame trapping you in the bathroom as she whoops your ass in the morning for losing a pair of sandals she bought for you, for losing a Samsung flip phone with Bluetooth connectivity in 2007, and for staying mute about the losses until your father discovers them. The lesson you will learn from that experience is to cover your tracks better, and that is what you do when a boulder tears your left leg, and you bleed non-stop for 6 hours. You will tie your socks around the mess; pretend you have a minor prickle, and spend twelve hours sleeping away your pain. The success of that covert op will encourage you to steal a few notes from your father's purse, and your mother will sniff it out of your maths-set. The woman is definitely a witch; you just do not have evidence.

You do not remember in detail how many times your mother bought new sandals for you in secondary school because you won't stop misplacing and damaging them. Memories of maternal love will be buried in a well of suppressed anger and, for every time she does something you value, you tell yourself it is reward for what you endure. They say your mother gives to people without thinking, but all she gives to you are slaps and hard labour. You are the orange tree that is beaten with sticks not for the errors of your siblings. Everybody is your responsibility; even your parents when they fight. Responsibility chokes you, and you run. You run to the crime-infested streets of Johnson Awe, Apata, where you become a notorious PS2 player, skipping school for a session, and still managing to get promoted. You run to the tiny bully laden streets of Challenge, where you gamble your transport fare away, and barely ever lose, even if you have to break a few bones while at it. Responsibility is the truth; it will catch up with your false personality someday.

It starts the day you grab a pair of electric wires from your mother, throw it away, and she would start shouting that you are about to kill her. When her noise subsides, she tells you to take a shower as she does after every beating, hands you two paracetamol tablets, then whispers to nobody in particular; *kilode t'ofe p'ami?* Your mother who has consistently made a veteran of you through multiple battle scars is asking why you want to kill her. What do you say?

You laugh.

It is dark, and your laughter sounds like a sniff. She does not pay attention. She goes ahead to ask why you are not like the other kids in the area who do not give their parents any trouble. When you point out that their parents do not attempt to murder them for every mistake they make, your mother will say she is doing it because of you. You wonder how trying to murder you will help you build character. The memory of that night blends with the dark room and will haunt you for a long time. Like Jesus, you carry the cross of your actions.

Goni, she will call you one morning, and ask what you want her to do better. Asides knowing that you have the same nose, and that she laughs with her mouth open, and her teeth clenched, you do not look at your mother in the eyes long enough to know what she looks like. Noticing your noses happened because you had measles and had to lie in a position until she tells you to turn, while she applies calamine lotion on your body. During your measles saga, she will sit in a corner of the room and look at you till you sleep. You sleep most of the time to avoid having to look at her. How then do you tell—teach—this woman how to be a better parent? The one thing you want her to stop doing is the one power she has over you; beating. You do not respond. You look away, pretending to think deeply about what she just said, accompanying it with a deep, faux philosophical sigh. The only thing you think about is how to get out of the room.

That morning, she will open her memory log and hit you with the number of times you could have died, starting from when she was pregnant to your last hospital admission, but carefully omitting how she could have killed you at least a thousand other times. It didn't matter because you didn't

pass out. It was only the ones where you gained hospital admission, the time you had thirty injections in two days and a death sentence with Doctors saying diagnosis shows that you are healthy, even as you struggle to breathe. She will tell you how the neighbours call you *Goni*, after a former governor of a northern state, because everyone is in agreement that you will someday be great. You blur prophecies out of you memory because they bore you, but you enjoy the Goni talk. It is also on this day that she calls you *Asiwaju*, prophesising about leading a lot of people into success, beginning with your siblings. All the bloodshed was for you to be named leader? Cut the crap, woman. You pick your wings and run very far from home.

The next time she sits with you and talks in the same dour, calm, and emotion triggering tone, it will be at the hospital, after you have attempted suicide. She will cry and ask why you let things get out of hand before seeking for help. She will beg the doctors to keep you alive, and when they do, you will fly away. It would be one conference after the other. It did not matter before, but it does now. She wants to know where you are; you are suddenly a thief being monitored by cameras. One day she calls you to ask why you do not love her, and you will ask her how you are expected to show her love when you wear a body of damages. She will cry over the phone, telling you how she has always been afraid; wanting you to be way better than she is, than your father is. She will apologize for being too hard, and you will come back to her. You will tell her you love and forgive her. You will apologize for your 21-year-old anger.

For the first time, your memories of grief will be ironed by the months of joy and tucked in place by genuine laughter. She will tell you about her trade and ask you what to do with what customers. You will tell her how you think she should live, and she will call you a week later to tell you she has done as you told her. The images become wrinkles; you go to see her, she is happy. You leave, you return. She is sick. She is happy to see you. She is not getting better. She is getting better. It becomes a blur of starched grief—and laughter. She will talk about the woman who left you and how she cannot wait to hold your child. You will blush, and tell her she will, just a few more years. You say seven, she says two. You both laugh.

She will not see your son, not in person; maybe as a guardian angel watching above you in white wings spread across the sky to protect you from harm. But she will not be there. She will die on the day she was born. You will travel fast, but not fast enough to see her put into dust. You want to tell her one more time; *I forgive you for everything, and I love you*. Iya Goni will be remembered as a poem, an essay, a prayer, and a guardian; and it'll be you—Goni—who will cover her memory in a white cloth. She will be remembered only for what she did right. She will become a dove.

Nostalgia Café



IFEOMA NNEWUIHE

In this version of it, you are rolling around a grass field in Owerri. You are laughing so loud and the sound of it is emerging honestly from your throat. He is taking pictures of you with his phone and with his other hand against his belly; he is wrestling laughter and trying to steady himself. He can't afford to laugh too hard. If he does, the pictures would be blurry, remembering would be blurry.

In this version of it, you are rolling around a grass field in Owerri. You are laughing so loud and the sound of it is emerging honestly from your throat. He is taking pictures of you with his phone and with his other hand against his belly; he is wrestling laughter and trying to steady himself. He can't afford to laugh too hard. If he does, the pictures would be blurry, remembering would be blurry.

"Make a video, make a video," you manage through riots of laughter.

"No. Whenever you see these pictures, I want you to remember today in whichever way your imagination sees fit. A video will give you one way of recollecting and I don't want that."

You stick your tongue out at him and boo. "Your own is always different," you say, getting up and dusting your leather skirt.

This is what you choose to remember in your first session.

.....

When Doyin first gave you the flier, you scoffed.

Nostalgia Café

Relive your past for 2000 naira only.

You read out in a mocking sing-song voice. Ever since the MMM thing, you hardly trust her judgement.

"You really should visit. People have been talking about how mad the experience is."

"Which people?" you ask sarcastically.

"People ah." She says eyeing you a little. "Visiting would show you how not great that whole situation was." She adds and you see her ploy for what it is. You hiss and dump the flier on her bed.

.....

The day he had called and said he didn't want to be "friends" with you anymore, Doyin was taking a shower and you were lounging on the couch watching New Girl. He had stopped answering your calls and replying to your messages after Owerri and you couldn't understand why, so you called him incessantly.

“Why? Did I do something wrong?” You asked.

“You don’t remember?” He asked, the anger in his voice travelling clearly across the static of the shitty network.

“Remember what?” You ask defensively, pleadingly. “Tell me, what did I do? Let’s talk about it.”

“You honestly do not remember what happened in Owerri? You want to tell me that you don’t remember what you said? You are such a fucking liar. Now I am sure that we really can’t be friends.” He said and hung up.

You remember telling him that you sometimes claimed to not remember things when you did not want a confrontation and the knowledge that he thinks you are lying right now makes your stomach hurt.

When Doyin hears you clapping your palms together and laughing in that unbelieving manner, she runs out of the bathroom, water dripping down her body. Her yellow towel barely holds her breasts together and somehow, that makes you laugh till you pee your shorts. She watches you warily, wondering if this was an emergency or not. When you grip your phone and toss it at the mirror across the room still laughing, she opens her mouth in shock.

“Ahn ahn what happened? Why are you doing like this?”

You don’t tell her because you do not want an “I told you so.” You do not tell her because you do not want the sympathy that comes after the “I told you so.”

Doyin regarded him with such pornographic disdain whenever he was in your apartment. It was so vulgar and when she could get away with it, she said nasty things about him and rolled her eyes. “Poet my foot!” she would often murmur if you used it in relation to him when talking to other people.

“That’s what they used to get you, ẹ pẹlẹ o!” she said the day she saw you reading the framed handwritten poem he gave you for your birthday.

.....

Doyin’s father had been an unsuccessful writer who took out his frustrations with his career on his family. He would often talk about how he was much better than most of the writers and poets who were enjoying what he termed “undeserved acclaim.” For weeks on end, he neglected his family and locked himself in the only bedroom in their self-contained apartment to “write.” He came out only when he was hungry or needed to use the bathroom.

In this short window of **time** when he did come out, Doyin would sneak into the room to retrieve necessities and see what he had been working on, and she mostly found the disappointment of a blank page, rolls of used up tissue that smelled like mould and an ever-decreasing bottle of Jergens body lotion. When her mum died, he used writing about his grief as an excuse for why he couldn’t plan a befitting funeral. So Doyin, at 17 years old, had to do it.

The poet was definitely not her favourite person from the time she got to know that he was a poet. What angered her more was his insistence on making a living solely from his poetry. He had told her that he didn’t mind starving for his art and she hissed so long and hard that you were convinced that she was a python. After he left that day, she told you about her parent’s love story as a cautionary tale. Instead, the beginning of it sounded so romantic to you that you curled up on her bed and cuddled with her fluffy throw pillow as she spoke.

They had met an open mic in Ghana, at the only artist residency her father ever had the luxury of attending. Her mother had been a locally famous singer/songwriter in Lagos and at the time they met in Accra, she was touring with her band. Some months after their first meeting, her mom got pregnant. They got married and her mom knew that some things had to change. She dropped her guitar and picked up as many jobs as she could as an events planner. She eventually started a cleaning company but her house sat unkempt until she returned because her writer husband refused to clean.

It is not like you didn't get the gist of what she was saying. You did. But your parents; your family was so unlike hers. Your parents were accountants who met at an ICAN tutorial centre and courted each other for four years before they got married. Your two elder brothers were accountants. Your parents didn't stop you and your siblings from pursuing art but they didn't encourage it either. When you became a full-time photographer after uni, they said nothing discouraging but their attitude towards your work made you feel unserious, like you were not truly living the life of a person with a university degree. When you won the photography competition, you mum congratulated you but some days later, she asked when you were getting "something steady." Your parents were both civil servants till they retired and the family bookshelves contained mostly accounting, finance and Christian books save for your few Judith McNaught and Nora Robert romance novels.

So for you, listening to this sounded like a fairytale that fate dealt a tough hand. Like the story of Oedipus before the prophecy started to unravel. The poet was already making money from his poetry. He had a spoken word YouTube channel of about 30k subscribers. He had a much-anticipated collection coming out soon. You guys were going to be fine. Besides, you weren't even dating, you were "friends." You were "going with the flow."

.....

One Sunday as you are stalking his Instagram page, you mistakenly like a post from 32 weeks ago. You cover your head with your pillow to hide from the pathetic stench of what you are doing on this hot Sunday afternoon. You remember one of the days you were at the rooftop of his building, kissing. The "tu-dum" of his Instagram push notifications beeped and he brought out his phone and hissed. "This one will not stop stalking me." He turned the phone screen towards you. Fadeke, a girl he "used to know" had liked a picture of him from 64 weeks ago. He never told you how things ended between them, you realise for the first time.

You stew in your shame because you have become her— needy and annoying and obviously stalking his page. You hate that you can now empathise with her. You remember how you had worn your face as if you ate unsweetened yoghurt and said, "Why do people behave like this? Nawa o!" That was in February.

You realise that you don't remember the colour of the shirt he wore that day and your heart slaps against your chest. You frantically search your gallery to see if you had taken any pictures of him that day but you hadn't. You remember that it was short-sleeved, that it was button-down. You even remember that he was wearing a white singlet underneath, but you do not, could not remember, the colour of the shirt and your heart slaps against your chest even more aggressively. *I can't forget. I can't forget. Not so soon. I can't forget.*

You ask Doyin for the flier.

.....

The first time you go there, the crowd is unlike anything you know. You are not surprised. This is Lagos and people like nonsense, after all. The Nostalgia Cafe is located somewhere in the CCHub

Building on Herbert Macaulay Way. Ever since it opened, business owners around CCHub complained about the chaos the new startup was causing. Vehicle owners who frequented that route lamented about how remembering the past was causing so much traffic. They pleaded with the government to sanction it so police officers from Sabo police station were dispatched there to maintain order. Instead, they collected bribes from people who wanted to jump the queue and threatened whoever protested with a show of their loaded guns.

On Twitter when people complained about this, the handler of the Lagos state government account tweeted, “Is it because they are still allowing you people to do business?” and deleted it promptly but some people took screenshots of the tweet. Eze had tweeted, “We pay our taxes at the Nostalgia Cafe so why should we not be allowed to do business?” A fellow tech startup founder whose business was close to the Nostalgia Cafe tweeted saying, “If we are being honest that business is constituting a nuisance along Herbert Macaulay Way. Last week someone fainted and a commercial bus almost hit another person all in the name of ‘remembering’.” One of the founders of the Nostalgia Cafe quoted the tweet saying, “Baba is it because we did not allow you to buy shares in our startup that you are saying this one? Talk, let us know where it is really paining you.”

Some churches secured discount offers for their members while other churches, jealous churches rebuked their need to remember, calling it heathen activity. They claimed it was not of God to revisit the past. The churches with the discount offer claimed that it was looking into the future that was a sin and not remembering the past. Doyin had gotten two fliers from her church and given you one. Since the fame of the Nostalgia Cafe soared, her church used the leverage of having discount offers to entice newcomers.

In true Lagos fashion, people flocked there before 6 am to remember. A session of two hours cost 5,000 but with a church discount, an hour and thirty minutes was 2,000 naira. The cafe could take thirty people in their remembering room at a time and initially, the founders thought they weren’t going to be getting up to 10 people a day. In their first week, they got over 400 people and had to start looking to scale their business.

When it closed at 7 pm in the evening, most people refused to leave and begged to be allowed to remember. 9-5ers were rumoured to keep a space on the queue at the beginning of the day and steal time off work or come during their lunch break to remember. Older people were initially doubtful but after a session, most of them went to give testimonies in their churches. On social media, you read that a man with Alzheimer’s had remembered, thanks to the technology and now, foreign investors were taking interest in the Nostalgia Cafe.

A former child soldier in the Biafran war— now an old man with a face dark and folded in on itself like a raisin was brought there to remember by his daughter and as he came out of the building he could not stop crying, “Nnem o, nnem o, obodo ajoka, achorom nnem o,” his face in a distressing trance. A week later, Aljazeera did a piece on his life and on the Nostalgia Cafe with the English translation “My mother, My mother, the world is wicked, I want my mother, ” as the title.

You hold on to your flier because it carries the 2000 naira discount code and if you are going to be indulging in this mess, you hope to do it as cheaply as possible. As you are about to join the queue, you see a mutual friend of the poet and you. The last time you spent with him was in Owerri. If you are being honest, Eze was more his friend than yours. You only became friends with him on that trip and because you were “friends” with the poet.

“Chidera, hi!” he calls out to you. “How are you? I haven’t seen you in so long. Well, since Owerri anyway,” He says in such jumbled excitement and so you know that he knows. His smile is over-bright and his hug when he reaches you, too sympathetic for him to not be aware that you and the poet were no longer friends. You wonder if he would be cruel enough to bring him up.

“Hi, Eze! Why are you here?” you ask nervously.

“Oh, I work here!” he says with a slight smirk on his face as if this is information that sane people already know. “I wrote some of the code for the application. Or “Cafe” I should say,” he adds, finishing with air-quotes. “I can take you through if you want.” He says pulling out his pass.

“I wouldn’t want to chance anybody. That won’t be nice.” You say even though you decline because you are not quite ready. He cocks his head and stares at you. “Are you sure?” You nod so convincingly, your vision begins to blur. You are not sure you want to remember yet. You are not quite sure if you want to remember in the way that Doyin wants you to remember. What if you find that you had been a fool all along? What if remembering proves too painful to bear?

You walk towards Sabo market and take a bike to your apartment. When you are safe in it, you lay on Doyin’s bed and cry for the first time since you last heard his voice.

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He blocks you. Everywhere. Even your burner accounts are blocked. You find this out the next time you try to see what he has been up to. This. This feels like the biggest betrayal. The hurt calcifies into needles that prick you behind the eyes and cause them to water and a pendulum of sadness swells and bobs up and down in your throat. You squeeze your eyes shut till a dull headache quakes at your temples.

No more crying oh, no more fighting oh, no more tears oh, I got my freedom, power and more... you remember Doyin singing yesterday in her croaking voice when she found you crying on her bed to cheer you up. “Crying would solve nothing. Genevieve Nnaji would not approve.” She said, rubbing your back gently. You swipe at the stray tear that made it through and block him back. Everywhere.

.....

Owerri carried a zeitgeist of its own. The poet was commissioned to write a poem about the Oguta river and you wanted to capture a collection of landscape pictures of the East for your website. After the images you did of Ojukwu Bunker went viral, the gallery and believers in your work had been nudging you to do another Eastern Nigeria series. You had heard about Oguta River from your mother and she had nothing good to say about the two-toned river. Whenever this was the case about something, the temptation to find out for yourself was ever great.

It seemed like blessed timing- the idea that you and the poet could jet off in the name of art and holiday with each other. You offer your family house to save money but you didn’t tell your mother because you knew she would disapprove.

Your eldest brother, Chima told you everything you needed to know, where to find the keys and begged you to be careful. You excitedly called the poet and told him and he suggested making it a group trip. You remember your mother and the fact that she didn’t know but you tucked the fear that came with that in an obscure part of your mind. You say a hesitant “Sure” to persuade yourself that you are okay with it.

For the journey, there were eight of you. You the landscape photographer, the poet, Jumoke the video vixen, Eze the coder, Sukanmi the layabout with a rich dad, Felicia the wannabe with no rich dad and no job, Ayo and Ope the couple whose names were always mentioned together like this. You had invited Doyin and her girlfriend but she reminds you that her job as an auditor did not allow for such useless luxuries even though she sometimes travelled from state to state for work.

On the morning you were set to leave, she hugged you like you were leaving the apartment for good and told you not to trust the poet and also to tell your mother what was going on. You reminded her not to leave the lights on and to call Njideka every night because it was a constant quarrelling point for them. Then you kissed her on the cheek and got into the bus that the poet had rented to take all of you. That was at the beginning of July.

.....

In the second session, you choose to remember the beginning again. And Owerri. You remember the day you met him. You were speakers on the same panel at an Art Festival in Ibadan and you remember the way you couldn't stop smiling away from each other's eyes. You thought he looked like Lakeith Stanfield but without the obstructive beard. His face was clean-shaven and boyish. You remember the way he leaned into you and said, "I think we are going to be very good friends" after you shut down a sexist comment from someone in the audience who said photography was not a good job for women. He had worn a pair of black shorts and a black graphic T-shirt with some lines from Christopher Okigbo's *Mother Idoto*.

Before you, mother Idoto,
naked I stand,
before your watery presence,
a prodigal,
leaning on an oilbean;
lost in your legend...

You remember staring at his legs, at how glossy the hairs on them looked. You had tried to picture him rubbing them down with coconut oil or vaseline. Then you picture yourself doing it and an urge pooled at the base of your tummy.

The remembering moves to Owerri. You remember the day at the grass field that was filled with laughter and you remember the sex. You remember dancing with him in the living room and how it made him self-conscious and ever so beautiful. You remembered the day at Oguta and the brilliant pictures you took and you remember him openly joking on the boat that the green and blue unmixing waters were like his parents and that he does not blame his mother for leaving. You remember the forced laughter that came from the others after the "joke." You remember sitting outside the house with Eze and saying how nice it was to be in the East at this time of the year when the noise of Christmas did not disrupt the singing of birds and insects as they made themselves known to the night sky.

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At your first session, they asked you to fill out a form.

1. Who do you want to remember? You wrote "him" and then slashed it and wrote his name.
2. What do you want to remember about the person? You scribbled "the love" with an accompanying question mark.
3. What time period do you want to remember? You initially wrote "July." Then you remembered that July was Owerri and Owerri was good but Owerri was also terrible so you slash it out and write January till July.

Then, you put down your signature releasing them from any liability, should remembering trigger any unexpected emotions and behaviours.

You were not quite ready yet to see if you sabotaged the best thing in your life and if it happened that you did, you might as well relive the good parts as a buffer. A female attendant takes out a small round object encased in plastic and asks you to come with her. She motions for you to un-

button your shirt and when you do, she sticks the object on your chest and it feels like nothing. She takes you into the remembering room and it is like any other regular coffee and pastry shop. She asks you if you want anything to drink and you shake your head no. She pats you on the shoulder and leaves. There are other people sitting in the Cafe. Some have a pensive look on their faces, others are smiling, some are jotting in a frenzy, some people are crying silently, there is an overwhelm of emotion when you look at their faces but when you focus on you, they blur and your memory heightens.

Then it begins.

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It is not that you had not tried to remember the hard parts of Owerri on your own. You remember yelling that evening when Felicia broke one of your mother's plates while she was making dinner. You remember screaming that you regretted the trip and you remember seeing the poet pause his smoking to stare at you, pleading with his eyes that you take it back and that enraged you even more so you said you regretted letting them stay here. You were scared of your mother finding out and you were PMSing and the stress of being a houseguest for two weeks was wearing you thin.

He tried to get you aside, to talk but you took a shower that ran too long, forgetting that the light situation was terrible and that the water situation depended on the light situation. Nobody else could take a bath that night and for the first time on the trip, you didn't sleep in the same bed with him. Your period began the next morning with an unrelenting pain in your pelvis and he fetched water for your bath from the well outside because there had been no light the night before and no way to pump water. You felt apologetic and ashamed when you saw him wrestling with two big iron buckets but you did not apologise for the night before. You honestly disliked Felicia and you hated the fact that she used to sleep with poet long before he met you and the insecurity of having them in the same house- in your family house, the insecurity of her still being his friend was doing your head in.

.....

After breakfast, your phone rang. Your mum knew. Your cousin Odinaka had called her to say that you were now a big girl o. That he saw you coming out of the gate of your family house and your mother had to pretend like she had been aware of your trip to the village and that you were staying in the family house. You remember Odinaka because he had been the one sneaking small bags of uncooked rice and raw meat across the fence the day of your grandfather's burial. He had also been the one picking money at your cousin Adaeze's wedding and when it was time to count it, his bag of money seemed half as full as what he had packed off the stage.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked silently.

"Because I knew you would have said no" you replied.

"How many of you are there?"

"Four." You lied. "All girls."

"It's not safe. You people need to leave that house today." She said with an air of finality.

"And go where mummy?"

"Achom ima. I don't really want to know. All I know is that it is not safe for you girls to be there. Lodge in a hotel. I can call De Chima for you people to stay in his house till tomorrow." You cringed at the thought of staying at your uncle's house and inhaling the scent of old age, of otaba,

of ginseng and garlic.

“We are not leaving.” You said defiantly

“What do you mean by we are not leaving?” her voice was getting higher.

“We are not leaving. Nothing has happened since we got here.”

“And so what? My friend you-” she said and the phone line cut off. About ten minutes later, she called back but you didn’t pick. She called and called and by 6 in the evening your phone had registered 40 missed calls from her and 10 unread text messages.

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You remember seeing your mum’s text saying she had sent De Chima and his sons to check up on you the day after. This was after you eventually left the bathroom. You remember the disappointment etched on your parents face as they drove you to the bus park the next morning. Your mother’s fear had brought her to Owerri to look for you by herself.

.....

Second Session:

It was seven in the evening or so. There was no light. Felicia was making dinner in the kitchen. Again. Ayo and Ope and Eze and the poet were playing Whot. Sukanmi was dozing on the three-sitter. You were smoking weed in silence on the couch. Suddenly you hear banging at the gate. Rapturous banging. Everyone sat straight up and stared at each other in fear and curiosity. Felicia’s head peeked out of the kitchen and she gripped the cooking spoon tightly, “Who is it?” she asked. *What if they have come to rob us? What if they have come to kidnap us? What if they have come to use us for ritual?* The questions lay heavy in everyone’s eyes. You make for the stairs and everyone scurries after you. You run, swinging the rechargeable lamp and Sukanmi bumps into you, still sleepy. You decide that the safest place to hide is your father’s room but the key to the door is downstairs in the kitchen cabinet so you tell everyone to stand still and you run back down to the kitchen letting the adrenaline and the sway of the high you are slowly experiencing lead you. The stew Felicia was making is bubbling on the cooker but you are too high and too distracted by searching for the keys to turn it off. You retrieve all the house keys and run back upstairs. The banging stops as you get to the top landing and you sigh in relief. You throw all the keys on the floor like dice and begin searching each paper tape tag for the one that carries the word MASTER on it.

As you are searching, the banging continues again in full earnest, like the person banging had stopped to go get reinforcement. Electricity comes back on and the sharp reinstating of light makes your teeth chatter and you glance at the undeniable fear on the faces of the others. You open the door and everyone bundles into the room and picks different places to hide. You hear someone wrestling with the chain on the gate and ask “Onye no ebe a? Who dey here?” but you do not recognise the voice. You hear another person by the mango tree that sits close to the window of your dad’s room and you motion for everyone to enter the bathroom...

WE HAVE BEEN SENT BY THE LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT TO SHUT DOWN THIS PLACE DOWN. EVERYBODY GET UP!

Your head feels packed with too many happenings, too much light, too much information. It feels like a too realistic bout of sleep paralysis. You are still in the bathroom hiding with the others but you are in the Nostalgia Cafe and DSS Agents are shouting for all of you to get up and leave and

you can see Eze asking one of them something and you can feel tangible fear in the poet's breath as it heats the back of your neck and you can see Eze falling to the ground and hear the banging on the gate of the village house and it is like moments before orgasm when you know that something is coming but you have to remain patient to experience it. One of the DSS agents is flipping chairs over and another is pulling out wires and grabbing laptops. An old man is crawling on the ground because his glasses have fallen off and he is trying to find it and you are running down the steps of CCHub with the Cafe's remembering device still stuck to your chest and then you remember whispering so loud that everyone hiding in the bathroom could hear, you remember rambling, you remember saying to the poet, *this is all your fault, this is all your fucking fault. Doyin was so right, you are a waste of time and we are in this mess because of you, this is all your fucking fault. You are a waste of space and that is why your mum left. That is why your mum fucking left.*

You remember the merciless pounding on the gate and the silence with which he took your abominations and the sound of the guns as they blast in the Cafe behind you takes on a sordid melody. And so the banging, the gunshot, the chaos around you moves with the beating of your heart, with the beating of your collective hearts as you run down the stairs and into the street.

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Lovers Never Die



OLAKITAN
ALADESUYI

"i remember you, a moving train, an unending song"

a portrait of your smile plays in my head,
your eyes sparkling with the light of a thousand suns

i close my eyes and you are here—the sharp jut of your forehead resting in my palm,
your nose, a fat letter M competing for space

i remember you a talking spirit. never still, never silent
always teasing, always jesting, making joke after joke like you were born to do it

i will not remember you a sad-broken-boy, begging for the mercy of death
i will not remember you with hell in your mind and death in your eyes
i will not speak of you on fire, longing for the coolness of the sea

i will remember you loud, like you always lived, a sea without borders—leaping, boundless
i will remember you giving yourself without respite, all or nothing
i will remember you shining, with all the lights of the stars

i remember you, a moving train, an unending song,
i remember you, in the quiet evening light,
your body ablaze with the flame of youth
your heart filled with the love of a million lifetimes

i remember you with fire
i remember you, K.

The One Who Battled Time.



MOFIYINFOLUWA
OKUPE

“Time is stealing him from me. As one day bleeds into another, I find that I can no longer recall his scent.”

*I thought I could stop
time by taking apart
the clock.....*

*Nothing can keep. Nothing
is kept. Only kept track of*
—Paul Tran (Galileo)

Time is stealing him from me. As one day bleeds into another, I find that I can no longer recall his scent. The same scent I sought out daily, burying my nose in the crevice of his neck, taking deep, long breaths. In this sacred ritual, I was absorbing his essence and impressing it unto the surface of my lungs.

Every breath was home, I am homeless now.

Nothing can keep and nothing is kept so I do not know how I expected to keep these memories of him. I do not know how I was so foolish as to underestimate the power of time. Perhaps it is not foolishness, perhaps it is the fact that our love was galactic, of another world so I assumed it was impervious to time. It was because every time I looked into his eyes, I saw eternity. I can no longer see his eyes.

I am fighting a battle with time.

On some days, I win. On those days, I see us sitting at Terrakulture, laughing and sharing food, our spirits dancing in the wind to a song only we can hear. On those days, my face is cradled in his palm and he whispers life into my ears. On those days, I can feel the heat of his breath on my neck, I can feel his tongue trace along my belly, I can see the desire in his eyes, I can smell the lust that always simmered between us. The days I win, I feel like a god. It feels like we defeated the darkness and that we are still bathing in the marvellous light.

In my victory, there is deceit.

The days I lose are brutal. There is a visceral pain that comes with the betrayal of your mind failing to remember happiness. On the days I lose, we never existed. It's a kind of paralysis to plead with your mind to remember joy, and it refuses. The world in which he and I loved has been consumed by fire and submerged in water. Our love is Sodom, is Gomorah, is the sunken city of Atlantis. Our love is the wood that termites have eaten and turned to dust. Our love is the carcass that vul-

tures are waiting to eat. Our love is a nameless and shallow grave. On the days I lose, our love is nothingness.

In my defeat, there is truth.

Time will kill everything. Even us.

Time has killed everything. Our love is buried beneath the passage of time.

Nothing can keep, nothing is kept.

I cannot keep you.

'They are in the past now, just fading memories.

This journey changes everything, nothing is the same

The person you shared your life with no longer knows your name.'

—Ruth Murphy (*Alzheimer's Journey*)

I could never forget his name. Even if I forgot all else. What does forgetting even look like? How do you forget a man whose pieces you search for in the mouths of other men? How do you forget a man whose dreams you carried in your soul? How do you forget a man whose laughter lulled you to sleep? How do you?

What does forgetting look like when even after I am in the arms of another, I replay our moments in my mind like my favourite film. There is a kind of love that keeps memories alive, despite frequent efforts to bury them in the sand. Bodies that refuse to rot, memories that refuse to fade. I read a lot about people suffering from Alzheimer's to understand how they forget everything, even the children they split their bodies to birth.

One of my favourite films is *The Notebook*. In it, a pair of lovers wrote a book chronicling their epic love story and the man reread it to his wife when she developed Alzheimer's and forgot him, forgot their children, forgot their love. As he read every line, I could always see the desperation in his eyes as he pleaded with her to remember him. She never did. Then at the end, as he read her the same story he had read her a million times, magic happened and she remembered. The power of love caused all her memories to come back to her and she called him by his name. In that moment, the man felt validation, relief and most of all, I'm sure he felt their love was undeniable. Even though time had attempted to steal him from her, it turned out that time had merely borrowed him. Love will resurrect memories. Even from the deepest abyss where we tossed them, the power of love means they do not die.

Whenever I think of resurrection, I think of Ezekiel 37, the prophet writes about the valley of dry bones where God led and commanded him to breathe life into dead things:

"He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry..... So, I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army."

Ezekiel 37:1,10

This is the way love resurrects dead memories. This is why they never die. No matter how hard we try.

But what do we do in the meantime? How do we make sure memories are just memories? How do we heal and not chase after a love that no longer exists? How do we make sure memories do not form a noose around our necks? How do we free our hearts to love again? How do we win a battle against time? I will tell you how I did it.

First, chose the rest of you. Choose your head, your fingers, your neck. Choose the birthmark behind your ear. Choose all the little things that make you, you. Look at yourself and will yourself to become whole. Remember the time before them. Remember that you existed, that you were whole. Command your *Ori* to take you back, to completion. Then your heart will come back, in a slightly different form. A little bruised but you will be whole.

Second, cry. But not too much. Just enough to wash away the pain. To rinse away regret. To baptise you as you reincarnate. Your rebirth will be glorious. But as you cry, you must keep the water beneath your neck. Do not drown. Tears have a way of blurring your memory. Welcome the mirage. Embrace the distortion of your past. It is necessary. We must confuse time, weaken its hold on us.

Three, starve the darkness. Feed the light. Always feed the light. In the darkness, you will never win against time.

Four; laugh, write, jump. Do not be still. Time is always moving, so must you. Do not allow sorrow to take hold within you. Do not allow sorrow to build a mansion of despair within you. Seek joy. Run. Sing. Do not become a statue.

Five. Love again. Love yourself again. Let love bleed from every crevice the pain is pouring from. Love is the ultimate joiner. Never forget. Your Maker will. You will be whole again.

*'But though ocean waves may sever
I from thee, and thee from me,
Still this constant heart will never,
Never cease to think of thee'
—Mary Weston Fordham (For Who)*

Fire is as formidable as time. I read somewhere that 'love is friendship set on fire'. Maybe that is why we never forget those we loved. Burning something is an irreversible process. It can never be undone. Ashes will always remain ashes. The Phoenix does not exist in our world. If you freeze someone's heart, it can thaw. If you burn it, it is burnt.

Perhaps memories drenched in the intensity of love are not permeable to the decay of time. Oceans have indeed severed me from him but yet the smell of his perfume stops me in my tracks. Yet when I close my eyes I can see the gap in his teeth and a mouth spilling over with laughter. When I close my eyes, I hear the melody of his voice. There is a kind of imprint a soulmate brands on your heart, comparable to tribal marks my people bear. The passage of time does nothing to erase the *ila* of an 80-year-old woman. With wrinkled skin, sagging breasts and eyes that have seen the passage of a thousand moons, her marks will never fade. They sit on her face with the confidence of those that cannot be moved. This is how my memory of him exists.

They are tribal marks that have weathered all the storms, yet remain seated, remain present. Several

moons have passed and I remember him like I left his bed last night. Time has tried to fade them the way an ugly scar heals. Yet scars remain, even when they are healed. With time, scars become a thing of beauty or a nonentity unworthy of any attention. Who am I, this small girl, attempting to battle against the elements? What madness has possessed me to exchange blows with time? It is the madness of love. It is the intensity of a thing that refuses to die.

When they ask me who I am and what I have done, I will tell them I am Mofiynfoluwa, the one who battled time. And won.

a list of forgetting



SHADE MARY-ANN
OLAOYE

“the name of the man is the first thing to go”

the name of the man is the first thing to go,
followed dutifully by his face, his hands and how he felt on your bed.
there is a period where it is more, and you forget the way he calls yours
even when you have memorized all those moments,
when the light penetrates your mind sufficiently enough— but the darkness is just as quick,
and you forget again.

you are in the toilet seat and you cannot remember who gave you the frame signed *xoxo*
this is the terror the comes with your forgetfulness,
how everything in your physical home is meant to remind you of someone
but your half-eaten mind cannot fill in the spaces that are gone in.

home was built on your skin, and you remember that there was once a touch, a kiss, a constantly
drank glass of happiness.
the taste is lodged somewhere in your throat and your tongue tries fruitlessly for a conjuring,
but coming together are the names of these lovers—just the first letters
because something else has swallowed the rest and has refused to give them up.



MARTINS DEEP
Nostalgia



MARTINS DEEP

Finding the homeward path

The Atlantic and a Badagrian's Memories



SEUN WILLIAMS

I am thinking back on how I would sit in the moist, fine sands at the 'Point of No Return' on Badagry's Atlantic coast, and build sandcastles, and run after tiny sea-crabs and after my own shadow.

I am a small-time Badagrian, and that fact tends to shape my worldview and outlook in a number of ways. But before I relate one little way in which this aspect of my background would sometimes mould my thought and imagination, I should provide a little detail about who, to my mind and for my purpose here, a Badagrian is.

By way of nationality, a Badagrian is Nigerian, specifically a native of Badagry, a coastal town in present-day Nigeria's south-western extremity. Badagry is a border town, adjacent to Benin Republic's Sèmè-Kpodji town on the west. As an Atlantic and lagoon-side slave port, Badagry was a crucially important depot of the transatlantic slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I mean some 300 and 200 years ago. Indeed, its prominent role in the history of the transatlantic slave trade on the Bight of Benin, West Africa's 'Slave Coast', was only latterly overtaken by its neighbour ports, Lagos and Porto-Novo, to the east and west respectively. However, the terrible trade is not the only historical conjuncture for which my hometown is renowned. Badagry is also popular for being an early foothold of Christian mission in and British colonisation of what became Nigeria. Around these three epoch-making sagas, considerable memorialisation, monumentalisation and place-making have been and are being done across the town.

With that in mind, I think it seems fair to say, metaphorically, that every Badagrian who grew up in Badagry suckled on memories of that trilogy in Nigeria's history—the transatlantic slave trade, European Christian mission and British colonisation. And this is one kind of lifelong suckling, some sort of breastfeeding that one hardly ever gets weaned off. Right from infancy, motherland fed us this memory-milk in many different forms—stories, fables, idioms, songs, dances, festivals and remembrances, and, more concretely, as museums, monuments, historical sites, public arts, relics, memorabilia and curios. The thing is, everywhere you turned, your entire senses caught something of the varied forms in which those distant yet intimate historical episodes and memories of them come at you. Those pasts and their memories were constantly retold, re-imagined, re-invoked, and re-enacted. A visit to any of the three museums in Badagry will give you an idea of what I mean. Essentially unprofessional as many of the curators and tour-guides are, when they begin their umpteenth recital, they will come off to you as some master Malian—add, if you like, an 'r' in-between the 'a' and the 'l'—griot or minstrel carrying on his or her trade at their best!

Coming from this background, I am here now standing by the shores of Lake Geneva, smooth, colourful pebbles beneath my feet, as I stare at the gentle swans and gulls playing on and in the waters, and at the Alps' snowy caps in the horizon. Here, almost 3,000 nautical miles between me and

motherland and her many children; here, fondling the coconut-shell pendant of this thing around my neck, reminiscing about my childhood, as I type these words into my phone with the other hand. This crescent-shaped waters remind me of the Atlantic, the Badagry bit of it. It reminds me of how, as a short black boy, I would sit barefoot, under the steaming golden rays of the beach-sun, for the sun takes on some kind of magical life at the beach, a magic that is only best experienced first-hand and can never truly be captured through words or pictures. Here I am regurgitating and ruminating on the years of memory-meal—literally so, as would an impala chewing the cud on tender, lush grasses. I am thinking back on how I would sit in the moist, fine sands at the ‘Point of No Return’ on Badagry’s Atlantic coast, and build sandcastles, and run after tiny sea-crabs and after my own shadow.

I reminisce the many different stories we were fed, of how scores of thousands of the fore-fathers, -mothers, -sisters, -brothers and -children of diverse peoples with whom I would now identify as my fellow nationals were gruesomely loaded onto ships that were no better than Nazi concentration camps and carted away into the terrible agonies of the slave plantations in the Americas. I remember how we grew up hating to even see anyone around us eat sardines, not to mention have one ourselves. Because the sardine’s jam-packed-ness and oily ‘mess’ was the simplest way the awful conditions in the belly of a slave ship were illustrated to us. I think back on how what I now know to be loads of *Sargassum* sea-weed from the sea’s abyss once washed ashore, and our then-bachelor uncles told us those were smithereens of the many thousands of our kinsfolk who never survived the Atlantic crossing trying to gratify their homesickness.

I recall once when, while picking firewood with my mother in the extensive coconut plantation adorning our beach, I witnessed an unfortunate scene where a coconut fruit suddenly dropped on the head of an unsuspecting boy and he momentarily fainted. When we got home, I asked my mother why these many drupes of coconuts could not have helped us out by raining down heavily on the enslavers and slave merchants who came to capture our peoples. Mother then made me realise that the coconut trees were all late-comers to the scene; that they were only planted in the dying days of the slave trade. How much really can coconut trees do in the face of canons and swivel guns!?

Here I am, thinking back to those times when I would sit in the beachside zephyr and I would think of the Atlantic as a really big reservoir bearing the roaring rage and strident echoes of the hues and cries of those countless enslaved peoples being hauled away. I am now recalling, with much catharsis, how I would sit there and think that the ocean’s waters must have been salted by the tears of many a wailing shackled captive. And even today, each time I find myself at a beach, any beach for that matter, specifically the shores of any mass of saltwater, I still think of home, and of my peoples, forcefully carted away, seasoning the waters with their tears!



MUSA TUKURAH
Drifting Away



PETER NAWA

“Jean-Baptiste was running. He had been running for a long time for different reasons.”

Jean-Baptiste was running. He had been running for a long time for different reasons. He would run to the market to buy tomatoes. He would run to the football pitch to play with his friends. He would run against cars in the streets. Then one day his father told him to run and his legs took off faster than he thought they could. He continued to run past trees, past bullet shots, and past borders.

That morning he was running because he was late for school. When he did eventually stand outside the door of his classroom, he couldn't breathe fast enough. There was sweat dripping from his face and his white shirt was soaked in patches— armpits, chest and back, they looked like islands on a sea of white. He shut his eyes when he heard the teacher's voice behind the door. He had been praying that she would not be there when he arrived.

He knocked on the door and entered before waiting for a response.

“Je suis désolé,” he said before remembering his error when the class erupted in laughter. “I am sorry.”

“John you are late again.” Mrs. Manda looked at him just right above the spectacles that had dipped to the bridge of her nose. After three failed attempts to pronounce Jean-Baptiste, she had resorted to calling him John instead. Everyone followed suit. Jean-Baptiste hated it but did not know the words he could use in English to let them know.

“I am so much sorry,” Jean-Baptiste said in his heavy French accent.

The teacher shooed him away and he rushed to take his seat to avoid any further attention. He went to the back of the classroom where his existence would be forgotten. For the rest of the day he would not comprehend what the teacher said. He estimated that his English vocabulary was restricted to less than 200 words. He always thought in French before attempting to translate what he had to say in English, and it often came out wrong. He had decided it was best if he remained silent and only spoke when it was absolutely necessary.

Jean-Baptiste was called John in the classroom, but outside he had come to embrace another name, Refugee. The word sounded heavier in English than it did in French; it was also spelt differently— Réfugié. Each time he heard the word, it was a reminder that that he did not belong. His family and himself were strangers among the people they lived with. They had left the place where their feet touched the earth and confirmed they belonged. The air they breathed was fresh and brought forth life. The hills a testament to the wonders the land held. For Jean-Baptiste, he called it home for the first ten years of his life and no one called him a Refugee there. It was also the place they abandoned when his father came and told them to run.

The images of that day were still vivid in Jean-Baptiste's mind like a recently printed photograph. It was dusk and he heard a car slide into the yard with the screeching sound of burnt brake pads complaining at the pressure. His father, with sweat pouring from his forehead and eyes alert, slammed the door.

"Where is your mother?" he asked Jean-Baptiste, who was seated on the carpet playing with his twin sisters, Clementine and Claudine. Their eyes widened at the sight of their father.

He pointed and said, "In the bedroom." Jean-Baptiste watched his father disappear while he continued to play with his sisters.

It was only when his parents came back into the sitting room arguing that he realised that something was wrong but he did not want to ask what it was.

He heard his father say, "They are coming. They are coming." He kept shoving the curtain to the side while he peeked, as if he was expectant of guests who were bringing something nice.

"Let's go together," his mother said, tagging at his father's shirt. His father was still by the window not paying any attention to his mother's pleas.

"I can't. I need to stay here. I need to take care of this place," he said.

"We shall find this stuff. Please let's go as a family. I heard on the radio that—" his mother said, before being stopped mid-sentence by a gunshot that had gone off in the distance. Jean-Baptiste's mother screamed while his father closed the curtain and backed away from the window as if the guests he had been expecting had arrived. His sisters had their palms over their ears and had started to cry. He was afraid that something was about to happen to his family. They began to hear faint screams followed by a rapid succession of more gun shots like rain drops.

"Listen to me Marie, you have to go now. Just like I have been telling you. Please go now," his father said, firmly holding Jean-Baptiste's mother in his arms. He had only heard him call his mother by her first name twice before and on both those occasions he was upset.

Tears streaming down her eyes, she reached for the twins and yanked them up from the floor. Their delicate bodies obeyed the strength of his mother's arms. Jean-Baptiste's father gave his money-thick wallet to her, but before he did so he pulled out a passport-sized photo. He got down on his knees to be level with his son. Jean-Baptiste saw his reflection in the glassy eyes of his father. He felt the warmth of his father's thick hands against his arms. Jean-Baptiste felt his own eyes begin to well up even before his father spoke a word.

"Jean-Baptiste," he said, pausing to collect himself, "you need to go with your mother and sisters."

"Why?"

"I do not have time to explain it now. But take this," he said and placed the passport-sized photo into his son's palm. "I will find you. Until then when you look at that picture remember that you are the son of Pierre Ndasingwa. You are my son. Take care of your mother and sisters."

Jean-Baptiste tucked the picture of the serious looking face of his father into his pocket. His father then grabbed his shaking hands, and let the palms trace his face starting from the hair down to his forehead, over the cheekbones and the rough texture of the beard.

"Do not forget me Jean-Baptiste. Do not forget your papa." There was a strain in the voice as if each word was a desperate plea.

"I won't forget you, papa," Jean-Baptiste promised, and wrapped himself around his father's neck.

The moment was interrupted by another string of gunshots.

“Run!” his father shouted, as he unlocked Jean-Baptiste’s arms from his neck.

The force too strong for him to continue holding on to his father, he was pulled away. A face covered in tears, Jean-Baptiste stretched out his hand and brushed over his papa’s face one last time.

“Go!”

Out the kitchen door they ran into the night. They ran into the bush. They heard more rapid gunshots accompanied by agonising screams of desperation, anguish and pain but they kept running and did not look back.

It had been three years since his fingers touched the face of his father. Jean-Baptiste had expected that he would lose the feel of his father’s face, but he had never expected he would forget what he looked like too. He had begun to notice that his father’s face had become blurry and his features were not sharp each time he tried to remember him. He would shut his eyes and attempt to summon every memory he could piece together of his father’s face. The left lazy eye, broad nose, full dark lips and medium afro. When he shut his eyes the face came together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It was only in his dreams that he would have conversations with his father, and even those often ended abruptly. However, Jean-Baptiste was afraid, he did not know how long he could continue relying on his memory to form the image of his father. Sometimes he would feel his pockets for the photo of his father, but it was not there. It never would be.

When they left Rwanda, Jean-Baptiste and his family found safety at a refugee camp in Goma for two years. Each day they saw new families enter the camp and Jean-Baptiste saw the space in the camp shrink as new tents went up. Officials in sky-blue United Nation vests came and counted them like they were counting herds of cattle, they asked questions about their health, took inventory of what they left behind and if they remembered the names of any of the perpetrators. The Red Cross would also distribute bags of rice and beans just enough that they would not starve to death and in some instances, they put vaccination droplets into Claudine’s and Clementine’s mouths. All of Jean-Baptiste’s family at one point or the other had malaria, or diarrhoea. They were fortunate it was not fatal as it had been for some other members of the camp who had had to be wrapped up in sheets and taken to be buried in a cemetery that was nothing more than a couple of holes in the ground. There was no tombstone by which they would be remembered.

The refugee camp did not remain home for long because after two years they heard that trouble was brewing in the centre of Zaire. The rebels were headed their direction on their way to Kinshasa to get rid of Mobutu Sese Seko. Kabila had given instructions to destroy everything that came in their path. Unless they left, they would find themselves in the middle of the fighting and would not be able to make it out in time. It was still not safe to go back home. They had to continue running.

Jean-Baptiste’s mother made the decision that they should head for Zambia because it was safer, calmer and they would decide what to do when they got there. They were able to walk for four days with no trouble before they met a band of soldiers in their path. The four soldiers pointed their AK 47 rifles at them. They demanded money. Jean-Baptiste’s mother gave them the last bits of Zaire she had saved on her. Pleaded with them to let them go so they could continue on their journey. However, the soldiers did not believe that was all they had. They began to search everyone to see if they had any money hidden somewhere or anything valuable they could sell.

By the time they got to Jean-Baptiste they had unearthed a substantial sum already. One of the soldier's wanted to dig into Jean-Baptiste pocket but he blocked him with his palm.

"There is nothing," he said.

"Take out your hand," the soldier said angrily. Jean-Baptiste resisted despite his mother urging him to obey everything the soldiers said. It was only when they pointed the rifle to his head that he removed his hand from the pocket. The soldier threatened to blow up his head and feed his pieces to the hyenas.

The soldier then put his thick fingers into his pockets and fished out the passport-sized photo. The soldier held it up to the sun as if to take a closer look and to show his friends.

"This is what you were hiding, you prick," the soldier said staring at Jean-Baptiste but his face had loosened.

The soldier took out a lighter from his pocket and lit it. He then took the passport-sized photo of Jean-Baptiste's father and placed it against the fire. The flame engulfed the small paper as the image that was on it was decimated to ash and flew with the wind. The soldiers laughed afterwards as Jean-Baptiste felt a lump growing in his throat. He felt the tears trickle down his face. He did not do anything else because he knew his father was gone. He had kept him close to him for two years and he had been turned to ash in seconds.

The next day after being late for class, Jean-Baptiste was returning from school. Out of curiosity, he walked over to a man who sold paintings by the roadside. A lanky dreadlocked man puffed his cigarette as he looked at the canvas. The canvas had what appeared to be an incomplete painting of a celebrity that Jean-Baptiste had seen on television. He could not remember his name because it was complicated, all he could recall was that it began with a K. Jean-Baptiste watched the man delicately hold the paint brush and dip the tip into ink. He placed the brush on the canvas and the second eyebrow of the man he was painting appeared. Jean-Baptiste watched the man's intricate movement of the paint brush as it kissed the canvas. The strokes went from left to right, left to right, left to right with the flick of his right wrist. The man put the paint brush down and put the cigarette to his lips. He stepped back to admire the work he had done.

He then turned around and saw Jean-Baptiste holding on to his backpack and gazing at the painting.

"You shouldn't be looking at it. It is not finished," he said and pulled the cigarette once again, released the smoke first through his nose then in bursts through his parted dark lips.

"Je suis désolé," Jean-Baptiste apologised. It had become his default response to anything someone said that he did not understand.

The man either pretended he understood what Jean-Baptiste had said or he decided to ignore it altogether. "What is your name?"

"Jean-Baptiste."

"What?"

"Jean-Baptiste... John," he said after remembering the right name to use.

"You are the refugee right?"

"Oui... yes," Jean-Baptiste said, lowering his eyes as if he had been asked something too shameful to be uttered.

“My name is Wycliff,” he said, tossing three strands of locks over his shoulder as he stretched out his hand to Jean-Baptiste.

Jean-Baptiste took his hand and realised that his palm was harder than he imagined it would be. He had expected a warm, soft palm.

Jean-Baptiste looked around and saw the other paintings that Wycliff had done. There were more paintings of portraits, landscapes, animals in the wilderness, and the occasional buildings. It was a painting of a mother with her children that reminded him of his own family. He reached out to feel the paint.

“Don’t touch!” Wycliff shouted.

He pulled his hand back before it touched the painting.

“Sorry... Sorry... Sorry,” Jean-Baptiste said, accent rolling over the double R.

“Paintings are like babies. They are fragile, you need to handle them with care.”

Jean-Baptiste continued to move from one painting to the next as if they were communicating something inaudible to him. They were drawing him in by how real they looked.

“Teach me,” he finally said.

“Teach you what?” Wycliff said.

“Draw this,” Jean-Baptiste said pointing at an incomplete painting.

Wycliff laughed before he said, “I do not have time to teach you my friend.”

There was a prolonged silence between them.

“Please.”

“I am sorry my friend. This is not a school where I teach people, I am very busy,” Wycliff said, waving his hands.

Jean-Baptiste wanted to continue pleading but did not know what more to say beyond the please he already said. Instead he lowered his head and shoulders. Downcast, he decided it was time to walk back home. He turned around and began to be on his way. Then he felt himself immobile. Wycliff’s strong grip was holding his shoulder.

“Listen, I don’t have the time to teach you, but the best way to learn is to watch me paint,” he said, while flicking the paint brush in his hand.

Jean-Baptiste nodded, then smiled.

For the next month, Jean-Baptiste went to Wycliff’s by the roadside after school. He watched him work his magic with the paint brush and colour on a blank canvas. He marvelled at how Wycliff was able to draw these vivid, intricate images from his memory. When he was done he would stand back, light a cigarette and when he was finished with the last puff, move on to the next blank canvas. Jean-Baptiste would also listen to the stories Wycliff would tell him as he painted, as if the two blended well together.

“If you are here every day, what time do you have to do your homework?” Wycliff asked him one day.

“At home,” Jean-Baptiste replied.

Wycliff stopped painting for a moment and turned around to face the boy. The red paint was still dripping from the tip of his paint brush.

Then he said, “You need to get all the education you can, Jean-Baptiste. You do not know when it can be snatched from you. I dreamed of being a doctor in a white lab coat and a stethoscope around my neck, treating patients and healing those who are almost dying. Then death snatched my father and before I finished mourning, death came back for my mother too. But it snatched more than my parents, it got my dreams too. Now all I can do is imagine them on the canvas.”

Jean-Baptiste heard Wycliff’s voice crack towards the end. He also noticed the liquid at the shores of his eyes. Before they could escape, Wycliff brushed the back of his hand over his eyes as if some dust had just caused an irritation. He quickly turned around to face the canvas he was working with.

“You can still be doctor,” Jean-Baptiste said.

Wycliff let out a forced laugh. “My time has long gone. But you can still be anything you want.... You can be a doctor, lawyer, engineer, accountant—”

“Painter,” Jean-Baptiste ended the sentence with a smile.

Wycliff stopped painting once again and turned around to see Jean-Baptiste’s face beaming. He smiled. “Yes, Jean-Baptiste may be a painter too. But that should be last on your list.” Besides his mother, Wycliff was the only one who refused to call him John. He wanted to call him by his name even though he pronounced it incorrectly. He made the last syllables of his name hard and sharp when they should be gentle almost like a whisper.

They continued that way for a while; Jean-Baptiste going to the roadside after school to watch Wycliff paint. They would occasionally share a bottle of Coke or packet of Amigo biscuits, while Wycliff told stories of growing up in a compound Jean-Baptiste could not remember the name of. The relatives who abandoned him when he became an orphan. The Catholic priest who taught him the difference between oil and acrylic paints. How he planned to open up a studio with a large gallery space.

He also taught Jean-Baptiste how to pronounce difficult English words.

“Deef-fer-ren-t,” Wycliff would say slowly.

“Dif-f... Dif-f-erren,” Jean-Baptiste repeated.

“T... You have to stress the T my friend.... Different-T,” Wycliff said.

“Diff-ferentee.”

“Close enough. We shall get there.”

Jean-Baptiste also loved it when Wycliff asked him to wash the paint brushes when he was done painting for the day. He would gaze at the colours mixing with the water as they created coloured streams on the ground. He longed for the texture of the bristles between his thumb and index finger.

Then one day, Wycliff put a paint brush in Jean-Baptiste’s hand and gave him a small blank canvas. Jean-Baptiste was so overwhelmed that he wrapped himself around Wycliff who remained still, unsure how to respond to the gesture. When Jean-Baptiste loosened his grip, he did not know what to do with the gift that he had longed for.

“What do you want to paint?”

“A man,” Jean-Baptiste said with a satisfied smile.

From there, Wycliff showed Jean-Baptiste how to hold the paint brush gently just like he was holding a pin. He told him to grip close to the bristles. He taught him the combination of colours and how to get the subtlety of shade. Wycliff showed him how to work with oil and acrylic paints. He told Jean-Baptiste that oil paints gave a richer and more vivid colour, while acrylic paints dried quicker. He instructed him to start with painting a fruit. An apple or an orange before he could graduate to painting ‘A Man.’

Wycliff often shouted, “You are a natural!” when he passed by a canvas his protégé was working on.

Jean-Baptiste would flash his smile back, “Thank you.” By that time his vocabulary had improved from the limited initial words he had known. He could say more than his default sorry. He could construct questions and he asked many of them. He was also capable of holding an argument.

There was only one thing Jean-Baptiste desired to paint more than anything, portraits. No matter how hard Wycliff enticed him to try landscapes or buildings, he failed to stir him away from portraits and eventually he gave up. Jean-Baptiste took a while to perfect his portraits. The eyes would be disproportionate; the texture of the hair would be off; the facial details too elaborate for a novice to capture. If it wasn’t that, he struggled with the different shades of the African complexion from black to coffee to dust.

Eventually the skill came. The eyes became the right size, he spent hours getting the details of the hair, and he mastered how to get the gradient of the African skin perfectly. He began to believe Wycliff’s words that he was a natural. With each significant improvement that Wycliff saw in Jean-Baptiste’s work, the canvas sizes grew larger.

In the six months after Wycliff first gave Jean-Baptiste a paint brush and blank canvas, he had already painted Michael Jackson, Pele, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Princess Diana, Nelson Mandela and countless other celebrities. However, there was one portrait he wanted paint because it was not only important but because the person was beginning to fade from his memory. He had no picture to copy from and see if he got the nostrils correct, he had to rely on his often unfaithful memory.

When he decided to begin the portrait, Jean-Baptiste would close his eyes before the brush touched the canvas. He would try to summon his father in the midst of the blank space of his shut eyes. His father’s hair, his forehead, his large eyes, his nose, his lips when he smiled, sometimes his smell. The face came to him in flashes and would fade. It was never a sharp focus but a blurry image that did not want to stay in his mind too long. Sometimes he came in moments and at different stages of his life. From the time he played football with him as a six-year-old to him picking Jean-Baptiste from school to the time fear was on his face and he told them to run to the passport-sized photo that was burnt. Often, he would find himself crying as the rawness of the loss would envelope him. The memory would escape the moment he tried to hold onto it long enough. Despite the frustrations, he was stirred by the ambition that he would finally have an image of his father that he would never forget. He imagined his mother’s look at the painting and remembrance of her husband, the twins would know their father.

After a month of paint brushes, generous tubes of oil paint and one blank canvas, Jean-Baptiste stood back and admired the work of his hands. Right before him was the face of his father. It looked as if the piercing eyes were staring at him and declaring that he was proud of his son. A few portions of the painting were still wet but Jean-Baptiste was done, there would be no additional strokes.

Wycliff came and stood next to him, locked his fingers on his right shoulder.

“Done?” he asked with a smile.

“Done,” Jean-Baptiste replied with a smile on his face and two thumbs up.

“Fine looking man. Fine looking man,” Wycliff said, his approval visible all over his face.

“Aren’t you going to sign it? People need to know you are the next Picasso or Michelangelo. You do not know whose wall it will grace.”

Jean-Baptiste got the paint brush and dipped it in black paint. He then signed it Jean-Baptiste and put the date of completion.

For the next few weeks, Jean-Baptiste did not paint anything else. He waited for the oil painting to dry. He just went to the road side and stared at the portrait after school, sometimes wondering if he could add something to his father’s face, maybe one wrinkle. No one else other than Wycliff had seen his work. So, when a tourist dropped by and began to look at paintings as if he was inspecting for some clue at a crime scene, Jean-Baptiste became anxious. He had studied tourists who came to view Wycliff’s paintings and learnt what their various expressions meant. A bare glance meant the painting was just okay, a quick nod could mean it was interesting, while a couple of minutes’ stare and stroking of the chin symbolised that the painting was interesting and a purchase could be imminent. The blonde tourist in a khaki Safari shirt and shorts with a pouch across his waist went through all the expressions that Jean-Baptiste had learnt as he swept through the paintings on display. Jean-Baptiste was nervous to find out what the verdict of the tourist would be when he saw the portrait he painted. The closer the tourist got to his painting, the faster his heart pounded that he had to breathe through the mouth just to calm it. When the blond man stepped in front of the portrait, he bent his neck slightly to the left and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Then he stroked his chin before he moved on to the painting of a pride of lions Wycliff had done. Jean-Baptiste was relieved. The man had stroked his chin even though he did not inquire any further about his painting.

Once the painting had dried, Jean-Baptiste intended to bring his mother and the twins to the road side. He was yearning to watch their faces light up as they saw the man they once knew. He even expected his mother to shed a few tears and she collected it to pin against the sitting room wall. When they left Rwanda, his mother would talk about their father every day. Telling them how he would find them and they would be a family again. She always said he was not too far and if they remained very silent they could hear him calling their names. But lately, she did not talk about him anymore. The three years were sufficient to snuff out any hope that he would find them as they had drifted far away. It felt like each time she mentioned him, it was peeling a recently healed wound to expose the scab.

Jean-Baptiste had to convince his reluctant mother to visit the road side with the twins by lying that it was part of a school project he was working on. The day he was supposed to take his mother and the twins to the road side, he could not concentrate in class. His imagination kept taking him to his mother, the twins, and the portrait of his father. He imagined his mother dancing and stamping her feet at seeing the painting of her husband. He wanted to show the twins so that they would not forget the face of their father because he was there. Jean-Baptiste did not pay attention to anything the teacher said. He was John the painter. He was the refugee who wanted to paint the rest of his life.

As soon as class was done Jean-Baptiste dashed home to fetch his mother and the twins. They made the three kilometre trek to the road side. His mother was frustrated that he did not tell her what the project was about. He told her that it was a surprise. The twins were just happy to go to a place they had never been before. They thought the word road side sounded grand and

important.

When they eventually got to the place, Jean-Baptiste introduced them to Wycliff, who was surprised to meet his protégé's family. He showed his mother and siblings some of the work that Wycliff had done. They admired them with ohhs and ahhs. Jean-Baptiste warned his sisters not to put their fingers on any of the paintings. The ball in his chest began to beat faster with excitement as he approached the place where he had left his painting. He watched his mother's face, intently waiting for the reaction. When he got to the area, the painting was gone. It was missing. The stand stood empty. Jean-Baptiste's heart dropped and the smile faded. He looked around to check if Wycliff had moved it to a different place.

"Wycliff, where is my painting?" he asked in short, sharp bursts.

A broad smile appeared on Wycliff's face before he said, "You are a real painter my friend. A real painter."

Jean-Baptiste was confused, he did not know what Wycliff was referring to. He failed to connect the excitement that was radiating from Wycliff with his question.

"I sold your painting. Remember that blond tourist who came yesterday. He returned," he said handing him crispy five hundred dollar notes.

Jean-Baptiste crumbled to the ground and the notes slipped from his fingers as he buried his head into his hands. He could not believe that he had lost his father once again.

"Papa! Papa! Papa!" he kept saying.

His mother was confused why her son was calling out for his father when Wycliff handed him the money. She watched the twins pick up the notes that had begun to drift away as a result of a slight breeze. She wondered whether the money was for the school project he was working on.

Confronting Conflicting Recollections



BUSAMOYA PHODISO
MODIRWA

"Today your recollection of them is a picture puzzle with shape-shifting pieces, you almost have to give up a part of them to remember another, shroud yourself with mourning again and confront the ground that opened to swallow them, the soil that sits atop their graves compact and committed to the labor of keeping a body under."

An old picture your grandfather hangs next to the dream catcher in the living room, an heirloom that need not be divided, it is a distant dusty old memory but yours still, collectively. You look at him on the picture and see all the faces you have imagined him wearing. Having not lived long enough to see you become has come to mean you imagine him most times than you remember him.

Before you were old enough to open the front door by yourself, there were things that let themselves in, made your grandparents' house their home. They found your grandfather smoking his cigarette and away. It is the cancer you cannot pronounce that made of him an absence. What came in and took him stayed away longer before it came back for your grandmother. It came quietly and unannounced, but the story goes she knew her time was almost up. So she channeled her goodbyes through your little cousin, five at the time and unable to honor the gravity of the words, he told on her as soon as her light dimmed. Asked them to dress her in her blue and white St. John's uniform and that was it, she too was gone.

Today your recollection of them is a picture puzzle with shape-shifting pieces, you almost have to give up a part of them to remember another, shroud yourself with mourning again and confront the ground that opened to swallow them, the soil that sits atop their graves compact and committed to the labor of keeping a body under. You ask of it to give up one detail or either one of them, one story to immortalize them and perhaps help you remember who you are. Memory is a crafty thing so you have forgotten much more than you can remember of them. Every December holidays your family gravitates to eulogizing them without even trying, it is just a thing they do out of pure nostalgia. You have noticed how your mother, who is the firstborn of your late grandparents, says very little when her siblings talk about them. Your aunt, who seems to have a trunk worth of memories, sitting next to you on the floor says, 'But they were also strict, too strict,' then breaks up in laughter. Inside her laughter you can hear the twenty-year-old girl who liked Christian fellowships and boys all the same, who received lashings till she was black and blue but would still return home way past curfew, bible on hand and a boy's jacket on. All this you learnt from your other aunts in other eulogizing ceremonies that she did not grace.

Over the years you have come to notice that reminiscing about your grandparents has become a

papier-mâché of borrowed memories, one detail here and another there. When you finally gave yourself permission to mourn your grandfather, it was two decades later and it all came in like a gentle storm. For days a small memory of his hands played on your mind like a precious stone glistening against a setting sun, over and over again until memory hungered for presence; the place where this picture repeated itself in your mind was left eroded and gouged so hollow you needed to remember more to fill the empty if not bring him back. You so desperately wanted to remember the rest of the picture but whenever you sat still and focused, you found yourself chasing after a mirage, you seemed to forget it all. Then when not even trying, perhaps taking a shower or reading a novel, you would catch a whiff of his scent, sitting down under the *Mosetlha* tree, his big hands like bible pages holding the truth, his hand lines so vivid and sure, like paths promising good years ahead together, in this memory you know that even he did not think he would be gone a few years later. You forgive his leading the way on which your grandmother came following; you feel like this is what they mean when they say closure.

‘Remember when RraLesego came back from Kgalagadi and for a week we would be spoiled? As long as he was home we ate rice with sauces, beans with meat and ate potato chips seasoned with a lot of chili?’ ‘Remember when MmaLesego would make you iron your uniform in the dark because you spent the afternoon playing *sunababy* and *diketo*? Remember? Remember? Remember...?’ all a chorus followed by stories, stories reaffirmed by grunts and glinting eyes in the dark, those that did not remember the bits of memories listened intently and took mental notes, yourself among them. With each year you have come to learn that you did not really know your grandparents, to eulogize them you have kept close their fond memories but left the memories you did not like so much to wither with time. Memories like how vicious your grandfather’s rage was, how one time he beat up your uncle to the point of bleeding, how when he was this angry your grandmother had no say on the punishments, she kept quiet and cowered into a corner, praying with her eyes for mercy for her children. How one time she asked her first son to escape through the window when RraLesego had gone to fetch his belt. There was also a time when he tied his son to his 4x4 Hilux and drove on in the yard like a wounded lion, in his mind, all this a well-deserved punishment for a little school boy. These were memories that would be re-told without the somberness you thought they deserved, something that started to irk you as you grew older.

MmaLesego was spoken of as one who would make a person eat a whole pot of dumplings by themselves if they dare cooked them wrong and hard. She was the one who remained behind when RraLesego worked a thousand kilometers away from home, always gone. You think a lot about the loneliness she must have endured, raising seven children who missed their father all too much, keeping the house in order and the small fat-cake and snacks business running. When men are spoken of as hard workers you wish that conversation could acknowledge women too, women like your grandmother and your mother who have gone through the breaking-back labor of raising families by themselves even with their husbands present somewhere. You wish to remember your grandmother on days like this as strong, tenacious and giving. To be a mother even in your era is a challenge not many get the acknowledgment for.

There are stories you hear every year but can never find a perfect fit for them in the already existing picture in your mind, but if you must remember your grandparents well you must be honest with who they were and this one year you struggled. Someone passing by the road would have thought you were all talking about a great harvest or a good fortune with all the loud voices and laughter, despite the ugliness in some of your late grandparents’ memories. You cannot stomach some stories because how was it not abuse then? When you stand to go cry in your room, you are a moonless sky and no one notices you slipping away. You wonder to yourself why you can all laugh about

hurtful things done in the name of parenting and speak of them like they were acts of heroism. You wonder if you owe your loved ones forgiveness or pardon once they are late, if they now assume positions of deity where they no longer have to answer for their actions. You wonder how you can ask the dead to heal what they broke even in their passing and to what degree you can hold them accountable. To have your grandparents now is to have all of them, the good and ugly and you don't know how to hold that blowing out amber of truth.

You don't remember much about RraLesego's passing, you just remember at six years being told you cannot go watch as they lower him to the ground, that you were too young. About three years later when it was MmaLesego's funeral, you remember the frail voice of a woman, advocating for you, as the cars filled up to go to the burial site she said, 'Ke ngwana wa moswi tlhe batho,' meaning you were daughter to the deceased. Just those words made room for you on a red Hyundai back seat. At the grave yard, your uncle only two years your senior, last child of your grandmother wore a black suit and looked all too old for his age. He was squatting on one knee while holding his chin the way older men do when they are thinking about the weightier things of life, weighing their options. A single tear streaked down his eye and that was it, you never saw him crying beyond that, which made you feel guilty for wanting to cry when he just sat there dry-eyed so you held back too.

You do not know if your desperation to remember this beautiful part of your past has left you with pure memories or not, time has also done its faithful work of leaving chunks of your memory unaccounted, which has left you with more questions than answers. Questions like, have you imagined any detail to flesh out your memory? Are the people in your mind the ones who once lived? Does it matter at all that you did not know them enough to visit their graves and lay flowers on the sunken soil that has embraced their decay? Do their spirits wander the earth (or wherever it is departed souls go) asking what kind of granddaughter you are and don't they miss you? Which you? The petulant little girl always home sick for a city they did not know? A city in which your mother thought she had found sweet love but it left her heart with a cavity so dark it needed pulling out? Like a tooth? Do they know that she left the city and its tiring hunger demanding for her to give, give, and give? Went back home to be a parent to their other children? You wonder if they know too that this granddaughter of theirs went back to the city to live a clichéd life of a writer forever typing her days away in little corner coffee shops. Are they proud of you? Now a twenty seven year old girl who doesn't know how to be an adult without constantly questioning everything? Like why did they find the call of death so urgent? It is hard to hold their memories dear without asking yourself if this is all there is to life, living days forever looking back because someone always stays behind and never comes back, because they are never coming back.

A Girl's List



QHALI ITUMELENG

"The first boy to discover words dancing inside me was Simphumziwe./ We were 10 hopscotching towards 11"

Sweat annoyed our bodies but we loved the sun too much to play with the shade
Sun
Songs
This is how we spent our days.
We hurried like a swarm of bees when the song paused. Each to choose a pretend-husband for the game.
I chose Rhananel
We were eight. He was caramel. Oceanic.
The sun followed him only
he smelled like the sea whilst all the other boys smelled like my dad's socks
I had been waiting for the perfect unalarming moment to kiss him,
my blond and brown-eyed Jew.
My moment came and in the air I caught my first kiss from Rhananel
Rhananel, my sweet life-changing piece of Israel.

The first boy to discover words dancing inside me was Simphumziwe.
We were 10 hopscotching towards 11
dressed in green and black
white socks, black tough shoes.
We spoke until our parents' hooters pricked our bubble. When I got home, I wrote—
I wrote until I felt my heart swell
until a rainbow erupted in my tummy
and spilled onto the pages of my diary
turned me into something wild and magical
then something moved in my chest
I could not touch it, nor remove it.
How can I make this feeling stop?
I had to ask mama. Mama knew everything.
I ran to her, she was taking her evening bath
washing life away.
"Mama, mama, I think I have a crush. Help me, his name is Simphumziwe"
She buried her head under the water,
the first of many times she would not have an answer for me.
Siphumziwe, my beginning of the end.

The first boy to plant fairies in my heart was Aviwe
I only wanted to see his face
so, I drew it in every class
and wrote his name on every surface I found.
He smelled like sweet adventure
he gave me his sweater
his big-boy-scented sweater.
He followed me for years long after
we used to walk hand in hand
water begging to separate our palms.
Then family day came,
we could not run fast enough to hide away from the world
so we hid behind the music room
with only the stars to watch us, we both knew we would lose our lips to each other.
His legs trembled but I took his nerves away with a smile.
My heart pounding, he made me forget the world with one arm around me
my head rested on his shoulder
we looked for Jesus in the sky.
When we both found him, his left hand held my right hand, my legs crossed, eyes closed, lips
puckered
and we began to move towards each other.
Teeth wrestled. Noses jostled from side to side.
Aviwe, my sweet last scent of innocence.

The first boy to walk me out of my girlhood was Akhona
naked
doubting
I laid in his mother's pool house facing the ceiling.
The little girl in me walked to kiss Rhananel goodbye under the sun,
to kiss Aviwe goodbye behind the music room,
to kiss Siphumziwe goodbye in my diary.
I looked for my father above me, but I could not see him
so, we did it.
I wrapped my legs around his waist and sunk my arms in his back
I clung to him
I clung to my youth
He came.
I cried.
Akhona, my end.



ABDULRAHMAN ADESOLA YUSUF

Going Home I (2020)



ABDULRAHMAN ADESOLA YUSUF

Going Home II (2020)

Parasite



EFE OGUFERE

“in the manner of oddities, grief collects in strange places”

in the manner of oddities, grief collects in strange places,
like fingertips—
picking wildflowers from the undergrowth
to adorn the ephemeral graves of road kill.

on quieter days, longing suddens into hiccups
& other days— tremors, that only settle when a body is spent
on acts of moral turpitude.

the day her eyes exchanged fireflies
for a forlorn stare
& their favourite star plotted its descent across the night sky

her fingers, tightly interwoven, squirrelled around
his heart & squeezed until it cracked.

& it is said that of all his bad decisions in life— three scores & three
the worst was committing her memory to music, to scent,
to taste, to aventurine pendants, to kodak,
to road trips & vodka.

ON THE 204TH MONTH



JERRY CHIEMEKE

“You always talked about the abundance of bliss that comes with divine presence, but these days it’s hard waiting for a God who appears busy with 6,999,999,999 other people.”

(Notes from a memorial written on December 25, 2017)

It’s our third consecutive Christmas Eve vigil. Yea, Dad feels there is something more “seasony” about the night services, even if there is no way to catch up on the fifteen crossover masses we passed up on over the years. The melody of the hymns fade into monotony and my denim jacket cannot shield me from the chills that come with thoughts of the date.

It’s seventeen years, 204 months, 884 weeks from the day I will always refer to as “Black Monday”. Memories of unwashed dishes still linger, yea, memories of you gasping for breath on the floor, of that old Toyota Celica, of futile prayers. Your jollof rice and decorating skills remain unmatched, never mind that it’s been thirty-six months short of two decades. Sometimes I want to ban Christmas firecrackers, sometimes I want to erect fences twelve feet tall just so mischievous neighbours don’t get to throw those silly things into other people’s compounds; who would have thought that a sound associated with joyful tides (never mind that it could be confused with guns) would cause your heart to skip one beat too many?

Stephen doesn’t do much DMX anymore (actually, he faded out and became a jailbird), it’s more of Rick Ross and MI Abaga now. The Sony three-disc changer is not much of a thing these days either, and I know you always complained about the scantily clad girls on Channel O and those devilish songs on the old rock-oriented MTV, but do you know that a track that has people simulate intercourse with walls and chairs became a viral sensation across two nations? Do you know that you can become a worldwide celebrity with something as simple as a “two plus two is four, minus one, that’s three, quick maths”?

Mom, remember when I would run to give you my own little account of bible stories I had read? Well those days are a distant memory now; I haven’t even read that book in eons. Not to worry though, I still know what is there, (it never changes, right?) and in any case, it’s not cool believing in the words therein lately; millennials think it’s a large compilation of fiction with loads of horse poop...not like all that ‘faith talk’ worked when we needed it most.

All that ‘pastor’ talk I used to bandy around in my seven-year-old days? Forget it! I pray differently with my lips now, and I worship at different altars too, altars with smooth entrances whose back ends I can get my hands around, altars damp and sometimes bushy. Much is made about the impossibility of wandering beyond redemption, but there are late evenings I think I may have strayed too far, pre-supper reveries where I think of the moonlit stars I have left in my wake and how there may be no one to call me back home.

I still don’t look forward to Sunday nights (not like the frequent sleep paralysis helps), I still have

this mild dread for the early hours of Monday mornings and, no, it's not because of the impending working week...not like I do too well with 9-5s. There are mid-mornings where I kid myself that maybe it's all a dream I am having at age nine, a vision of my life at best, where I don't have a moustache or know what a clitoris is, and that you'll soon come screaming at me for being lazy on a Christmas Monday. In a way, I am still that little boy you scolded for stepping out to be punished for dirtiness even when you washed the uniform two days before. I still feel that I am never good enough, that ability will never translate to anything worthwhile, that I'll probably be an also-ran.

I don't have any photos of you to hold on to, so I look out for you in garden branches that you loved to discipline me with, I look out for you in spelling errors on CRK answer sheets, I look out for you in sad Nollywood titles which you always abhorred. I find it hard to process what your touch felt like, so I search for you in staff rooms of French teachers, in steamy chat messages with divorcees, in the endearing stares of senior colleagues, in the morning-after stale breaths of ladies who may have blown out more birthday candles than I have.

You always talked about the abundance of bliss that comes with divine presence, but these days it's hard waiting for a God who appears busy with 6,999,999,999 other people. These things can be reduced to an issue of serotonin levels now, and you can't blame those who hold on tightly to the Xanax, the Fluoxetine and the Citalopram to fight the blues. I still think Happiness is a gift, but then, anything that keeps one from a tube of Sniper or the railings of a bridge is really welcome.

I can't say much for the quietness or holiness of these nights, but I only wish that you rest easy, Mom, that you sleep in heavenly peace.

Merry (?) Christmas, I guess.



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Hosting the Ghost of My Grandfather after His Burial



SALAWU OLAJIDE

"It is an unholy thing to look a ghost in the face."

It is an unholy thing to look a ghost in the face.
Today, my grandfather breaks into my dream again,
I know it is him by the crooked shape of his shoulder.

Even in storybooks, most ghosts
stand backing their interlocutors,
so I pour some dry gin on the earth
in the manner the ancestors are greeted.

I bump into the darkness of my grandfather's room
and face the eastern side of the wall,
I call him by the name of his animal
knowing fully well, if nothing at all
I owe him the debt of memory.



MARC PADEU

Elephant King

Teresa Nanziri Bukenya, Paul Serwangas, Esther Chesire and others in the Gaping Yawns of Black Inhumanity



ALEXANDER OPICHO

“My surprise is that I have tried to read books, magazines and Journals of History, politics and culture from Uganda as much I can, but none has ever mentioned Idi Amin’s brutality on the people of Yembe.”

Karl Marx wrote in *the Eighteenth Brumaire* and in the *Scorpion and Felix* that memories about the dead hang like a monster on the minds of the living. And it is true; today on my mind hovers the memory of love between the two Makerere University Students, Paul Serwangas and Esther Chesire, which led to their violent death and the death of Teresa Nanziri Bukenya alongside the state-sponsored terrorism on Kenyans living in Uganda during the reign of Idi Amin Dada. My memories of these dark and savagely acts on the humble lives by Ugandan politics of that time derive strength from the celebrated silence about the plight of Kenyans in Uganda under Idi Amin Dada. It is the silence shrewdly calculated to sweep the memories under the carpets but, no, the youth of today in the likes of Taban Amin Dada must be informed of what the political ancestry of Uganda did to the powerless of that time.

This is how it was, Esther Chesire, a Kenyan, was a student at Makerere University. Her boyfriend was Paul Serwangas, a Ugandan. They loved one another in the measure of Anthony and Cleopatra, or Romeo and Juliet, or Princes Diana and Dodi Al Fawayed, or like King Solomon and Queen Sheeba, or Napoleon and Josephine, or Mugabe and Grace, or Karl Marx and Hellen Demuth his house girl, (by the way, are you aware that Karl Marx impregnated Demuth his house girl and she had a son for him who grew up to be a pogonophilic bibulous sozzler poorly gifted in the brain, only to live and die at an old age as a thrasonical lorry driver? Kindly read Francis Wheen) or like all the famous affinities of the last two centuries as chronicled by Lynden Orr. This was the time Teresa Nanziri Bukenya was a mathematics teacher at Makerere University, she was in charge of the girls’ dormitory or hall for the girls at Makerere University (all halls for the boys at Makerere Universities have names, eponymous ones like Nkurumah Hall, Nyerere Hall, Patrice Emery Lumumba Hall, and many other names that would come as much as forces of history would produce for Africa politicians with stellar performance) but the hall for girls was not having a name, it was just known as a ‘hall for girls’. Teresa Nanziri Bukenya introduced hot water in the hall as she reckoned it would improve girls’ performance in mathematics. Suddenly, girls became used to a shower at any time, they became smooth and comely to the look, their beauty campaigned without a convoy into the palace of ignorant desire with Esther Chesire at the front row. Then night runners mushroomed at the court-yard and out-skirts of the hall for girls. All types of night runners; those

hooting like owls, others cooing like wild pigeons, whistling like hyenas and not mentioning those who mewed like aphrodisiac cats. Most of the night runners were from the military *hofrat*, the top brass of the council of the military state.

Teresa Nanziri Bukenya was a strict catholic and a pre-feminism feminist. She secretly introduced street lights and security lights at Hall of Girls. One late evening she pressed the button for the lights on, the watching public had their sight swamped with plethora of mooning male cats in mewling mode, the mooning cats ran for their lives at snail speed. They were slow not because they had been made tired by a life dedicated to serial mooning, but because they were all pregnant of glomming tax-payers money, illiteracy, self-congratulation, tribalism, sadism, libertinism, incompetence, impotence, anfractuositities in victimhood to the syndrome of cult of dictatorship. They could not run, they just wobbled under the heavy weight of their bulging stomachs. Was this not a cost-free fulsome optical nutrition to the public? Courtesy of Teresa Nanziri Bukenya Lights at the Makerere Hall of girls.

My dear reader, have you ever read *Love Letter to Satan* by Karl Marx? What of *Ode to Death* by Adolf of Hitler? And what of *Oualenem*, a drama in poems by Karl Marx? If you have then salute for yourself and if you have not call yourself a village pipkin of Aristophanic proportions. And the Pipkin was an ex-parte military lover in a crush for Esther Chesire before wooing her. And just like Shakespeare asked, 'How can I love you and you have never wooed me?' The Army officer wanted to command the love from Esther Chesire without wooing her. She never gave in, like the pre-Juliet lover to Romeo, Chesire was already in love with love, and her love was ear-marked for royal blood from the Buganda Kingdom, the one *musaja wa basaja jabasinga* Paul Serwangas. This was when the Military Hofrat became sick of mad jealousies under the full spell of Tybalt complex, they chose to kill Serwangas by shooting him and to make Chesire estranged in teen-widowhood, and the army panjandrums thought that perchance pangs of bombazine will make Chesire to come begging for their love, to come but out of despair. But no, just like the way Juliet never loved Tybalt the Murderer of Romeo, Chesire never loved Amin's army men, the murderers of Paul Serwangas. But because Amin's men shot Paul Serwangas when he was in the company of Esther Chesire and her fellow Kenyan running mate ('running mate' is Kenyan word used to describe a girl that has no lover but usually accompanies other girls going to meet their boyfriends so that she can benefit by enjoying a share in free meals, drinks, club tickets, and car rides offered by the boys to their lovers), they panicked that the girls would reveal their acts of brutality. Thus they demanded that Teresa Nanziri Bukenya accepts to conspire with the Army so that she can produce Esther and her running mate to be killed as a way of removing the evidence. Nanziri Bukenya declined stubbornly. You know what happened? She was kidnapped by the army and taken to the banana field somewhere in Buganda Kingdom. She was shot dead. She was 37 and half-way pregnant. Esther Chesire and the running mate were kidnapped and kept at a secret place, possibly raped, and then killed. It was somewhere in June 1976.

These acts of Amin's state-sponsored brutality on the two young female Kenyan students in Uganda were not out of irrational, impetuous, spontaneous impulsivity. They were rational, proactive, intelligently calculated acts of political revenge on Kenya for having helped the Israeli commandoes to rescue an aero-plane from France that was carrying some Israeli nationals captured and held hostage by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) at Entebbe, Uganda. The ninety minutes of Entebbe raid by Israeli commandos succeeded because of the invincible hand of top government machineries in Kenya. It was a moment of humiliation to Idi Amin and an act of Anti-Jihadism, and hence Amin went for the powerless as the only way of venting out his ire. And Amin's ire did not only stop with Esther Chesire and her running mate, it went for all Kenyans in Uganda. Idi Amin mobilized all Ugandans into a moment of very strong nationalism that sang one song; 'Kenyans must go!' Kenyans working in Uganda were ordered to leave Uganda without

carrying any belonging. They left all the money, movable properties and immovable properties they had worked and bought. Most of them came back to Kenya on foot; it was so risky to use a car, a bus or a train. Moreover, most of the Kenyans already had been shot dead by the paramilitary. Those who suffered most are Ugandans with Kenyan ancestry who had settled as peasant farmers in Engombolola ye Eburnambutia (Eburnambutia District) around Yembe town in Eastern Uganda; this region was also known as Entare. The people of Yembe town had their ancestors that came from Western Kenya, they had moved to Uganda generations ago. By Amin's time they were living as Uganda citizens, speaking the same language as that of Bugisu and Masaba Nation of Mbale district in Eastern Uganda. But Idi Amin did not recognize the naturalized citizenship of the people of Yembe, he looked at them as betrayers, enemies of the state and enemy aliens that helped non-Muslim captives at Entebbe. Idi Amin got full support of the people of Uganda when he unleashed terror on the powerless citizens of Yembe town. They were killed, their wives were raped, their daughters were raided and taken away, their cows were rustled and, left with nothing, they were forced to go back to Kenya at gunpoint; they were made to migrate to a place they never viewed as home. One of the survivors of this brutality on Kenyans and perceived Kenyans is now a watch-repairer in Westland, an up-market neighborhood in Nairobi. When I talked to him in January 2020, he averred that Idi Amin armed the Karamojong militia. He remembers that the Karamojong militia came armed with long guns to vandalize and loot cows and women of the unarmed people of Yembe; he also remembers that as a young boy of around five years he saw the men from Karamojong Militia raping his mother in rounds as his father looked on helplessly. After raping his mother, they forcefully took away his sisters. His father took him and then they walked back to Kenya. They have remained landless and homeless ever since, but he grieves that he has never seen his sisters again.

My surprise is that I have tried to read books, magazines and Journals of History, politics and culture from Uganda as much I can, but none has ever mentioned Idi Amin's brutality on the people of Yembe. I have read Mahmood Mamdani, Susan Nalugwa Kiguli, Peter Kagai, Goreti Kyomuhendo, Nasumbuga Makumbi, Austin Bukenya, Timothy Wangusa, Jane and Juliane Okot P'Bitek, John Ruganda, Okot Benge and Beverly Nyambozo, Yoweri Museveni, Janet Museveni, and General Muhozi. All these are writers with a focus on human rights, freedom, human dignity and democratic freedom, but unfortunately, none of them have ever mentioned the plight of the people of Yembe town under Idi Amini Dada.

Last year, Dr. Susan Nalugwa Kiguli was to read a poem on the plight of Asians in Uganda under Idi Amin at the 2019 East African Cultural and Literary Studies Conference held at Lalibela University in Ethiopia. I only wondered why Dr. Kiguli did not think of coming up with a poem on the plight of Kenyans in Uganda under Idi Amin. The logic behind this argument is that the life of Asians in Uganda under Idi Amin have already been chronicled by Mahmood Mamdani in *Politics of Class Formation in Uganda, From Citizen to a Refugee* and also in *Bad Muslim, Good Muslim*. Why Ugandan scholars talk about Luwero triangle but often avoid talking about the political brutality perpetrated by Idi Amin on the peasants of Yembe town can be attributed to the collective psychology of strong Kenya-phobia among the people of Uganda or unconscious auto-racism among most of African intellectuals who happen to think that they can get to enjoy an internationalized intellectual stature by discussing the plight of Asians in Uganda but not that of Kenyans.

However, good judgment can rationalize away all of Idi Amin's time as the bad times of Africa, the times which Ali A. Mazrui was detained, Okello Oculi was detained and banished, Okot P'Bitek was dismissed from his job and then the reading community lost him to mysterious death, a tragic eventuality which makes those times not to be saluted with silence in the history of East Africa. Like the silence I witnessed among the thousand plus men and women attending the 2019

East African Communication Association Conference (EACA) at Movenpick Hotel in Nairobi, the silence that engulfed the room like a powerful cloud of mute darkness when I mentioned that the academic community and the Media in East Africa must work together and demand President Museveni to release Dr. Stella Nyanzi from prison. I tell you my dear reader, a hall which was filled up to the brim with over a thousand people from all over East Africa remained mute, I thought I was addressing the society of the hearing impaired. In my heart I remembered a line in Dante's poetry; 'Those who remain aloof when injustice is perpetrated will occupy the hottest place in hell.'

Let not intellectual snobbery and bourgeoisie trappings make us to nurture and culture ourselves into a self-defeating sub-culture of silence when Dr. Stella Nyanzi is languishing in prison, let us join hands with other Mauverick organizations like the Pen International to call for fair forgiveness of Dr Stella Nyanzi. Let us not blame her for being a self-appointed martyr and being vulgar. Being a self-appointed martyr was one time described by Wole Mamdani as Kamikaze, a *martyriological* front to oppression. Intellectual vulgarity is not mis-civilisation; it is useful strategy in resisting tyrannical politics. It keeps the enemy busy, it keeps the enemy restless. Dr. Nyanzi's vulgarity was done in good faith as part of the intellectual struggle for the education of a girl-child, collective freedom, fair governance and dignity of a woman. These are some of the virtues that Teresa Nanziri Bukenya died for. If we remain silent by remaining aloof through backing off from such like crusaders of human rights when they are brutalized by the state, then we are only leaving them to languish in the gaping jaws of the yawning black inhumanity. It is so sorry that our reward for this type of cowardice will be nothing else other than earning ourselves the hottest place in Dante's inferno.

In Memory of Those Who Died Unknown



MORWAMPHAKA
SELLO HUMA

“remember the burial of Dompas, burning in front of the police-station”

Sharpeville Massacre

Remember the dead— remember their names
and faces. Remember their wives and
children, who sacrificed their lives for freedom
in the name of defiance campaigns
remember the burial of Dompas, burning in front of the police-station
remember Jabavu, remember Orlando, remember Langa
remember Sobukwe, remember Kgosana and Tsolo
the young blood who spread the voodoo
remember their pluck and courage.

Remember the racists and betrayers, they are still alive around us
remember the hate, the rope, the kicks, the beatings
the choking machine, Sjamboks, police dogs and Kwela kwela’s
remember the dark clouds of bravo-bravo-ville.

Remember the banned songs, musicians, poets, writers
and slogans formed against Bantu Education Act
remember the pact between ANC and PAC,
remember the strong-black-women
their black love and unity

their dress code and pride
remember the noise, the running and the panic,
the falling and the shootings, without signs, without
warnings.

Remember the Garveyite leaders who made us believers,
some were thrown deep into the bottom of the sea and
some died without graves
some were hanged for treason without trials
and some are still imprisoned without political amnesty,
remember the injured, the paralyzed and the black survivors
remember Marikana, remember Boipatong,
remember Sharpeville.

Make Moments Whose Memories Make You Proud.

At Agbowó, we are continuously thinking of how to make moments of African artistry. We wonder if we'll ever be able to capture all of Africa's magic, but we are sure we will continue to try. We will continue to strive to capture and share the diversity of ideas, identities, personalities, perspectives, stories, and most of all, the frailties of firsts.

Sitting in your room tickling your pen or in recent times, caressing your keyboards, to sing you a tune about a future, about a past, about a moment, you wonder if you can make this happen. We often forget this moment that precedes our magic. Those unsure times that seem to endure, when we are cracking under our own pressure and sometimes breakdown due to our inability to create the sparks. The beauty of today's age is that you can literally have a world of audience at a time to witness your magic. But similarly superposed, is a world of audience that has come to bludgeon us for our mistakes, our beliefs, our peculiar understanding of things, and our ideas as they fully form. These preceding moments become frail memories, overshadowed by either our failures or resounding successes that usually eventuate. When we tell our stories, we speed past them as we rush to talk about the ensuing success or failure, despite having spent most of our time dwelling in them.

I hope you take a moment to try to recollect these periods, and use them to reinforce your present, that whatever you feel now, as you prepare to make a new magic, a new moment, you are capable of making it work. And if not, you will rise from it.

That is what we believe at Agbowó as we move to our fourth year of collecting moments of African magic and artistry that become awesome memories.

Habeeb Kolade
Executive Lead, Agbowó

Agbowó

COLLECTORS OF NEW AFRICAN ART