

# THE MAINLANDER

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Sabo Bus-stop - By Shuta Bug

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# CONTENT

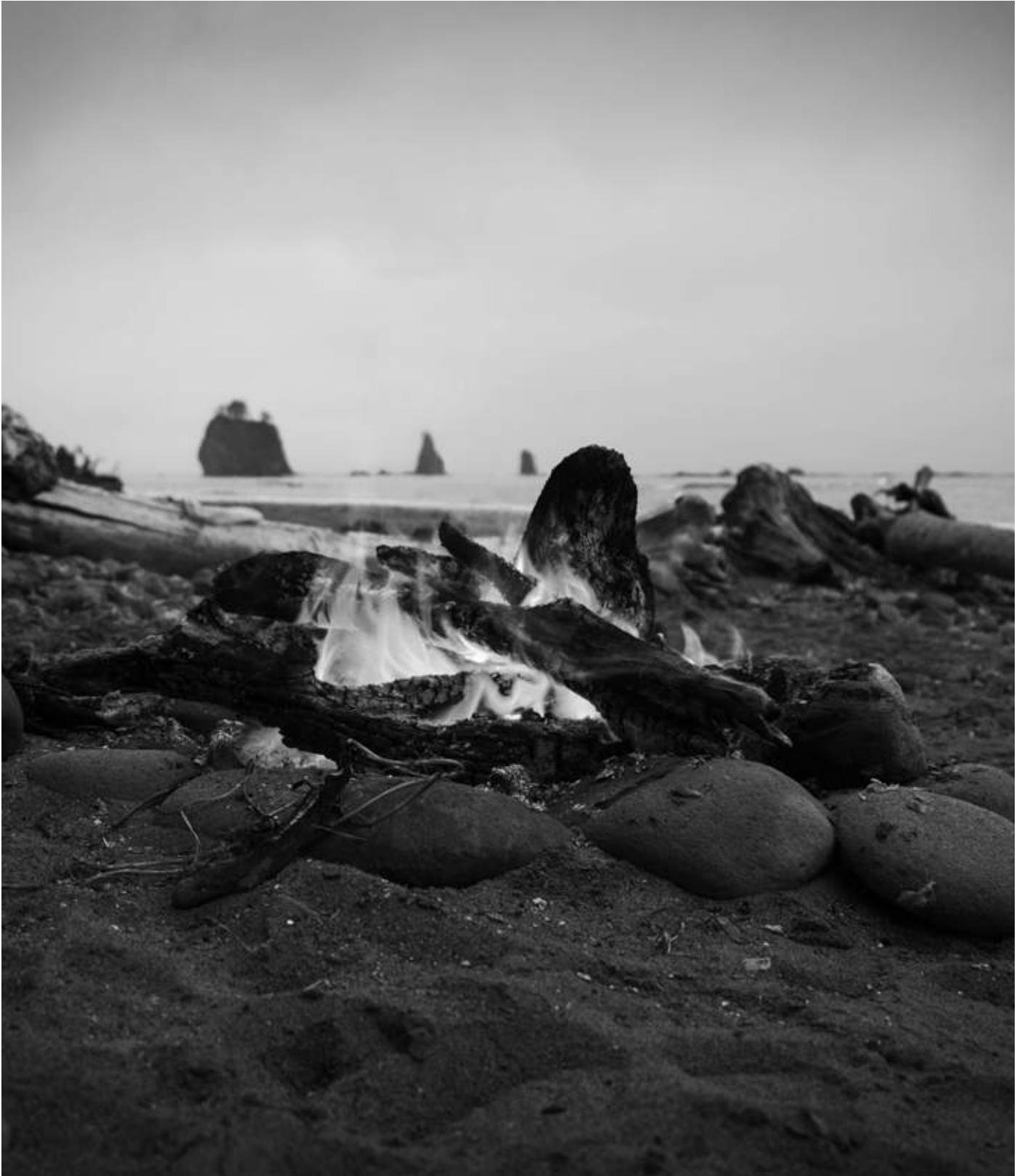
The Firefighter goes in search of Fire	4	Kayode Faniyi
Berlin Skyrider	9	Simi Oba-Pedro
Coal City Stories	15	Ifeanyi Jerry Chiemeké
Constatine	20	Joy Mamudu
Fate	23	Linda Orajekwe
Fourteen Years	28	Bankole Banjo
Full Moon, Natural Causes	33	Ikechukwu Nwaogu
Karma	39	Precious Egbo
Ojuelegba	42	Mystique-Syn Osuchukwu
Taking What I Get	45	Joy Mamudu
The Surrogate	49	Abiodun Awodele
To Be A Man	54	Chukwuemeka Ofoegbu
Funmi	58	Mosunmola Adejo
Cocktail of Tears & Blood	65	Ayomidotun Freeborn
Meet The Shuta Bug	69	Featured Profile



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# A Firefighter Goes in Search of Fire

*By Kayode Faniyi*





*Kayode Faniyi is a writer and cultural critic. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology from the Obafemi Awolowo University. His work has appeared on the The Kalahari Review and Music in Africa.*

*twitter: @kxyde*

K anyinsola thought long and hard about it. There he was, long and hard. And fretful. And she thought about this fretfulness, his fretfulness, long, and hard.

For the duration of a blink she panicked at the enormity of it all. What had she gotten herself into? Na mistake to get boyfriend again?

True, a woman's "nothing" can mask plenty. True, a woman appreciates a man who isn't fooled by the cutaneousness of things.

True, she appreciates, every now and then, the constant, genuine (from the looks of it) concern (unusual in men) for her wellbeing, as though her wellbeing were inextricable from his.

But still. A woman needs her introspection every now and again, needs to live in the pond of her own head, unrippled by pebble boyfriends. Sometimes they need to understand the skies cloud over for the fun of it.

She was furious and wanted, like an electron being slapped around by photons, to break free of her ground-state calm.

She wanted to rent her tank top, beneath which she was naked. She wanted to fling at a wall something that could shatter. She wanted to burn things that could pop and whistle. She wanted to scream screams that each could lacerate a larynx.

She did none of these, sorely though she was tempted. Instead she lay still, contenting herself with her ground state, the back of her head nestling in the weave of her ten fingers, staring up beyond the ceiling into something unknown.

She had not imagined it was this pathological a need, this need for Lanre to seek a personal Nirvana through the Eight-fold Path of her psychological wellbeing. Or his perceptions of it.

She had not imagined Lanre to be the kind of guy who doesn't feel in a relationship, feels less of a lover, is emasculated, if he isn't putting out fires. But maybe it gives him sustenance. After all, did some fires not burn without smoke telling on them? Lanre is a first responder, his love as intense as the high sun at noon, arriving hose blazing, many times at nothing.

All it takes for the battery of questions to arrive is for her to drop the intensity of her liveliness (necessary every now and then; no one can be bubbly all their life). Are you ok? Ehn? What's wrong? What is it? I'm here for you, you know? I'm your G (H,I,J,K ad nauseam, emphasis on the nausea). Talk to me baby. I can tell when something's wrong with you. Talk to me.

Shut up. Just shut the hell up. That, is what is now wrong with me. So what if they'd earlier done Taqwa Bay in all its tranquil glory?

It was her first time out on the sea, and those canoes with out-board engines masquerading as boats hadn't helped matters. Not one tiny bit.

She'd latched on to Lanre like a leech latches on to whatever a leech latches on to as the water rushed past, immediate and psychedelic in its terror.

One by one, the horizon ate up Lagos Island's citadels of capital. Sea-faring ships on the way to the high seas slithered past tooting gruffly their horns. God, they were slow. And gigantic! Oyinbos in sailboats sailed past. It could only be them. Oyinbos.

Some daredevil boatmen went even faster than the boat she was in, jumping, borne by the unseen hands of giant waves. Then shore. Finally, shore.

She got used to the water soon, egged on by Lanre. The receding water pulled the sand from beneath her feet. She giggled. They kissed. The salt stung her eyes and relented. She wandered farther from shore, farther into the turning and turning sea (this is the only beach at which you can try this and not become plankton, Lanre said).

She jumped into waves, ducked under some. Some slammed into her. Sent her clawing and kicking to right herself. She shrieked. With glee. They kissed. Hugging tightly. As if to squeeze the life out of each other.

She felt a oneness with this nebulous, endless thing. It was how omo omis must feel. It was

home. She belonged here. Right here at the hem of this turbulent calm. It had been exhilarating. No, it had been exhilarating!

So what?

Back home, she'd retreated into her shell, for no reason really. Her mood had just called timeout. Inexplicably. Nothing was going on. She wasn't even tired. She just did not want to talk. Why would he not just get it?

She'd told him nothing was wrong eight times now, EIGHT TIMES! but he still wouldn't give her space to breathe (talk to me baby, he implored again, as if on cue, and she resisted the strong urge to exhale dramatically and roll her eyes). And this when he knows she isn't the kind of girl to play girl with her feelings. But it never stops him.

Perhaps his selflessness is a circular selflessness – an elaborate selfishness, a from-me-to-you-back-to-me, a selflessness whose ultimate end was not her but him, a selflessness that was the ying to the yang of his turbulent mind. His inextricable linkage of their wellbeing probably made sense this way.

They'd met at a training thing, one of the many things banks are obliged to subject their personnel to – not that you could tell that some of them had undergone any training at all.

You naturally deferred to him. He exuded a centripetal influence. Things revolved around him and tended towards his centre. It hadn't been a surprise when he was made group leader.

She had woven scenarios in her head long before he came to sit beside her one training afternoon, her Arsenal key-ring the Judas who kissed Jesus.

I see you around. You don't say much but your face betrays you. What are you hiding... and you support Arsenal? Have you written your will yet?

She learnt in two months. That, one – he was magnetic in public. That, two – he was an

unsure, fretful thing in private.  
Just what the link was between  
these two personas was the  
e=mc2 she was searching for.

And now he wanted a fire, fire-  
fighter's axe swinging, water-  
hose raring at the orgasm.  
Fine. She would do better.  
She would give him a fucking  
inferno, something that roared  
and bucked and heaved, like  
Sango, or anyone who could  
be lord and husband of the  
mother of all things turbulent.

She could go down the Biodun  
route. Biodun has been calling  
me, she could say, still looking  
beyond the ceiling. He would  
recoil slightly, even if he  
quickly gathers himself.

They'd swapped ex stories in  
those early days, censoring  
just enough details, tucking  
backdated jealousies behind  
a veil of mirth that sometimes  
slipped.

She'd dated Biodun for three  
long years, till he left for  
England, too suddenly quickly,  
like, you know, a plane falling  
out of the skies. Not that she  
had wished him any ill. Biodun,  
who had been able to upset  
her equilibrium by the simple  
act of existence.

And unbalanced, she had  
needed him—required him  
even—to sit ever closer to her  
fulcrum. Till suddenly he left  
her upended, clutching. Till he  
left her flailing wildly.

She had since peeled a patch  
of bark from around the trunk  
of that tree of memory. She'd  
salted it, copiously.

That tree had wilted and  
withered. She'd hacked the  
carcass into morsels which  
she fed into a funeral pyre.  
The ashes were loaded,  
meticulously, into urns which  
were swallowed by the sea,  
under the surveillance of  
dry, pensive eyes. It sounds  
straightforward now, but it had  
taken a whole lot more than  
five sentences to get over him.

I've always believed it's a waste  
of energy hating someone we  
once professed to love, Lanre  
would offer, joying in this new  
fire, pyrophiliac that he was.  
What's the point?

Well, here's the real point, she  
would not reply, both love  
and hate are a misapplication  
of energy. A misplacement of  
priorities.

He's coming back to Nigeria,  
she could continue, tone as  
uniform as North Koreans, the  
implication so low-hanging he  
could gnaw at it with his teeth,  
because, why else would she  
be telling him?

The silence would be one of  
those tense silences, a silence  
so silent you knew something  
shocking had to jump out of it.  
Out the corner of her eye she  
would see him squirm, unsure  
how to confront this new  
reality, this lapping fire, this  
impending loss.

Or she could travel down that  
well-worn path, condoms not  
being one of Lanre's favourite  
things. (To tell the truth, she  
couldn't blame him – skinny  
dipping is just too good, too  
involved, too involving, too

*His erection  
shrank  
instantly into  
insignificance  
(he was almost  
always erect  
around her,  
like she was  
a tarantula  
bite, and he  
unfortunate).*

agricultural, to wrap-up in things inhibiting and plastic. Biodun had once compared it to eating a banana with the skin intact.)

Lanre prides himself on control, keeping a tight rein about his wits. He reckons he knows just when to detach his module so things don't balloon out of shape. And there is always Postinor, never mind the accusation in the eyes of those salesgirls. Never mind the conspiratorial whisper with which they suggest she put the pack in a black bag. Never mind that last time around it prolonged the Suicide of Spurned Eggs by two too many days, with the extra cramps and padding and all.

But best laid plans also go awry. Safety itself has blind spots. Something could slip in and swim all the way. They say condoms aren't entirely failsafe, that there's always a smidgen of a chance something could squeeze through. The Postinor could be mere placebo, Postinor only in its nondescript whiteness, this being Nigeria after all. Or shit could just be written in your stars. All of which meant that one never could be quite sure what wasn't what. Except you weren't doing shit at all.

And so Kanyinsola turned into Lanre, so she could look him not in the eye, but between the eyes, that point from where the nose grows down into a nose. Tongues of fire danced upon his face. The pyrophiliac brightened at the kindling of the fire he had always suspected was burning, hemmed her legs in with one leg, and pushed into her so she could feel the tautness, the alertness, of his body. I'm pregnant, said Kanyinsola, having arranged her face into the hangdog likeness of distress.

His erection shrank instantly into insignificance (he was almost always erect around her, like she was a tarantula bite, and he unfortunate).

She watched the fear jump into his serene eyes, watched the brightness on his dark face wither into dread. She heard his heart tum-tum-tum like a big bass drum beneath a chest steadily going to fat. She saw his square jaw drop, saw the gushing stop, saw the limp hose fall to the floor from deflated hands, heard

the clatter of its nozzle, saw him shuffle slowly backward.

Wait, what? he said, his eyes two Os beneath bushy brows that now looked like drumsticks mid-beat.

A millennium passed, in which it was found that Hitler did not expire in Berlin but lived on the fullness of Nazi gold and the odd Brazilian nymph near the expended Guyanan utopia of Jonestown, and in which the globe warmed so much fish learned the many joys of sand.

I'm pregnant, she said, again. Seven weeks. At the corner of one eye a tear swelled into a globule and then ran, carrying with it mascara. A blur descended over the room, inserting itself into the machinations of clarity. She sniffled, tightening the act. He shifted away from her and sat up on the bed, back to headboard, legs crossed, gaze fixed beyond a blurry Henry frozen in full flight on the opposite wall.

But I thought..., he started, one hand unfolding over itself, gesticulating. It couldn't possibly be... She cut him off that path of suspicious doubt, beginning to bawl. She was a Hilda Dokubo, a Blessing Nwosu. The tears seemed real enough. No, the tears were real enough. His voice trailed off and fell. Then his hands fell too, having become tongue-tied. He couldn't even look at her. She chuckled an inward chuckle.

The speechless helplessness would eventually wear off to reveal a cold-eyed trouble-shooter. That much she knew. The fire-hunting son of a Titan would return to the scene of the incident with a million fire trucks blaring their one million war-songs. When the fire-fighting effort was in full swing, she would reveal herself to be intact beneath the cgi. He would fume, his ears smoking like a Danfo's silencer, like a character from a cartoon. She would kiss the birthmark shaped like Italy on his thick neck, and maybe cook him something nice.

She was hungry, come to think of it.



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# Berlin Skyrider

*By Simi Oba-Pedro*



*Writing has been Simi's  
desperate act of sanity for as  
long as she can remember.  
She longs to quit her day  
job and make literature  
and photography the  
centerpieces of her life.*

Four doctors and six x-rays later, nobody could tell Olori why her right knee hurt like it did. It started off as minor discomfort, then pressure and now, it felt like all the tendons were torn. It was why she always had to recline and stretch her right leg when sitting, like she was doing now in the middle of Murtala Mohammed Airport. Because of the angry, sometimes curious glances she got about her sprawling leg, she had ordered a knee brace from Konga.

Olori was on her way to Abuja, and in another four days, Borno. She had been to sixteen Nigerian states in six months, and sometimes traveling by road was the only option. She had come to absolutely detest the sitting for long hours, not cooking her own meals, and even the sightseeing. She couldn't wait to quit at the British Council in six months when she would have saved enough to open a small studio cum gallery and afford rent on her own apartment. Most of her belongings were stashed at her parents and she looked forward to having furniture she could call her own, a kitchen to beat eggs in and an internal environment she could

control.

Her flight was being delayed without explanation or apology and she adjusted her right leg and her luggage. Julia Michaels was on repeat in her ears and her chewing gum had lost its taste in her mouth. Water was dripping from the roof and a cleaner had put a bucket earlier to manage the leak. She sighed. This was the one of the main gateways to Nigerian's economy, the nation's busiest airport and the roof was leaking right in the middle. The airport was humid as the air conditioners were almost permanently off or faulty. The band of her shorts was damp and there was a fan in Olori's left hand waving furiously at her face and neck while trickles of sweat slid down her cleavage uninterrupted. She had to come to the airport at least two hours before her flight and expected to leave the airport two hours after landing because it took forever to retrieve baggage and other checked-in items. The excuse was that the conveyor belt system was old and slow. The ethics of the uniformed officials was another shameful matter entirely. Olori's tail bone whimpered from being

stuck in the same position for two hours and she was shifting in her seat when she saw Chris.

She had imagined this moment for seven years now, and it was happening on this hot Tuesday afternoon, her almost 33 years old, with rough braids and her top clinging to her body. All of her expectations – the eye contact, followed by stopping in tracks and a clap of thunder in the sky – were cut short as he didn't even look in her direction. He was walking towards the entrance, dragging his box behind him and had stopped to make a call. He was less than four feet from her and he looked like he always had. He still used Power by 50 Cent, she could smell it. Inertia held her captive as he watched him. His gestures were animated, his voice clipped as he spoke to whosoever was supposed to pick him.

Olori had always expected him to call or at least mail her. She could not accept that he wouldn't eventually. Hours turned into days, days into weeks, weeks into months and her tears continued to flow. She called him and he didn't pick up. One night she got drunk and set her phone on permanent redial for six hours. She knew him to be impatient and irritable, but he never dithered. She wrote his parents and his parents wrote her back.

She knocked on his apartment door, but it's either he was never in or seemed to know that she was the one. She mailed him every day for 131 days. She told him about her day, sometimes attaching a picture of a painting she had done. She always apologized and reminded her that this wasn't constructive; his attitude, his silence. He never replied. He didn't block her, he just stayed mute. She went to his Faculty, his spot in the library, his favorite coffee shop, visited Francis in the hospital but she never saw him or bumped into him. Francis was in her corner throughout that period, with his left hand set in a cast because of an accident that was her fault.

She liked telling the story of their relationship, about how they were friends throughout their four-year study at the University of Lagos, and how he had had a controlling girlfriend. That

relationship ended during their National Youth Service Corps year and they became closer. She had been his breakup buddy and sounding board. At the end of service year, she had moved to Onikan to be near the art hotspots: Freedom Park, Muson Centre, Bogobiri house, African Artists Foundation, TerraKulture; and he had gotten a job in Lekki. They went exploring almost every evening and he attended all her Behance exhibitions. She never guessed how he felt about her until he kissed her on Oriental Hotel rooftop after a night of spoken word, barbecued goat meat and a bottle of Baileys. She kissed him back and it was magic. Three weeks later, they were in an official relationship and their happiness was unparalleled. When Chris got a scholarship for his Masters' degree in Germany eight months later, it took her less than a minute's deliberation to decide to go to Germany too. After all, her two preferences, Paris and Amsterdam were just train rides away. They could even go on vacations together, she reasoned.

Freie Universität Berlin quickly became home for them. In fact, being away from Nigeria brought them closer because all they had was each other. They both lived in the Student Village near the Schlachtensee Lake although in different buildings. Chris enjoyed his Physics and she breezed through Art History. Chris was the sanguine one, so he made friends and his friends became her friends. Life was perfect for them. Chris was her first boyfriend and he was perfect. He wrote with lipstick on her bathroom mirror whenever he slept over and had flowers delivered to her door every Sunday evening by 5pm. He bought her expensive white nougat chocolate. He was sensitive to her needs and moods, and was respectful of her space and time when she needed to paint. He had held her hand while her belly button was pierced and sat in the hospital reception for three hours when an infection ravaged the wound. He was embarrassingly honest with her, and all her complicated 'onion layers' as he called it faded around him.

Olori dropped her hand fan as an air

conditioner gurgled to life and brought her back to the present.

Her phone beeped on her lap and someone bumped into her outstretched leg. She didn't apologize. The insults aimed at her and the announcement blaring from the speakers about boarding for the 3pm Abuja passengers were distant sounds. Fear, anger and regret through her as Chris turned and met her eyes. She forgot to breathe as she looked at him. Nothing had changed.

Chris's family had come visiting for Christmas. He was born on Christmas day so it was a double celebration. She had met his mum before she left Nigeria and kept in touch. Meeting his dad, two younger twin sisters; Morounfolu and Eniola and his best friend and cousin, Francis was a bigger deal.

The twins were 15 years old and the life of the party. Francis was quieter, easy going and pleased to finally meet his cousin's girl. She ran around to ensure their comfort and planned an itinerary of events to make sure they had the right exposure to the beauty that is Germany and also that they were never bored. She cooked Nigerian meals and took his sisters shopping. One night during the first week of their 19-day stay, he had taken her in his arms and buried his head in her hair, thanking her for making his family her family. She cried.

It was the day after his birthday, after a lot of cake and peppered snails and pounded yam, after sharing gifts and receiving them that it happened. On the itinerary for that day was a trip to the new Berlin Sky rider Park in Kreuzberg. Olori had been there a month before at its opening and had taken the roller coaster ride. She had put it on the itinerary immediately. That morning, Chris's mum and dad decided to sleep in and Chris wanted to give her some time alone to bond with his sisters as they would be leaving in a week. Francis volunteered to drive them and it was settled. The thirty-two-minute ride to the park was full of tense excitement as the girls chattered away. The park was crawling with people and there were long queues at every

turn. Not wanting to disappoint the girls, she ushered them to the inline tube water slide. Eniola was scared of large bodies of water and refused to go in. Morounfolu decided to be brave on the condition that Francis took the ride with her while Olori took a video with her phone. She had agreed and over forty people gradually teemed into the slide.

Olori stood stunned, unable to move, still recording a video as the water slide collapsed twelve minutes later. There were screams from the pool and from Eniola who was standing next to her. She still had nightmares about that day; seeing people drown, seeing people being flung far and apart, seeing metal bend and thrust and slam into bodies. Eniola screamed and screamed. The events that followed happened in a haze. Emergency services went into action and closed off the area. She remembered being sent to the hospital with others for being in shock. Eniola had held her hand in the ambulance, crying and saying she had not seen her sister or Francis.

Olori tried to call Chris but she couldn't find her phone. He found them two hours later, in the hospital after Eniola called him. He rushed in with his mum and dad and Olori closed her eyes. Her hands shook, her skin was clammy as the build-up of emotion clogged her chest. She tried to sleep but the screams and the panic as more people were brought to the hospitals pierced her senses. She tried to remember detail by detail what had happened and yearned for her phone. She never found her phone but she saw the video she shot on the news hours later.

After hours of lying still and pretending to be asleep, steady silence took over the hospital floors. A nurse had come to check her twice and she overheard her telling someone that she was still in shock and she needed time to rest. Tears slipped out of her eyes and she tried not to sniff. The cup of coffee she had in the morning continued to curdle in her bladder and the joints were beginning to rebel against the hospital bed. She sat up and was hit by a wave of nausea, she stayed still for a moment

and opened her eyes to find Chris sitting in a chair with his head nesting in his palms.

'Babe?' Olori called out tentatively, her voice shaking. This could only mean the worst. The Berlin Sky rider Park accident was her fault, their undoing.

Chris looked up and she read his pain in his red puffy eyes.

Chris never cried, this could only mean the worst. Olori recoiled and burst into tears. Chris sat and watched her. She needed to explain, to apologise, to do anything that would make it right but instead her words snuck out of her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. A bitter taste rose from her throat to her tongue, her stomach contracted violently and she rushed through the door marked toilet in her hospital room. She dry-heaved over the toilet bowl for a few minutes before washing her face. She remembered to pee, wringing her hands and took deep breaths to keep dread at bay and face whatever had happened, whatever would happen. But Chris was gone by the time she came out of the toilet. That was the last time she had seen him. Till now.

Morounfolu had died from crushed lungs and Francis had his left hand amputated because it had been affected by gangrene. The guilt started to eat at her as she stood at Francis' bedside and it had not stopped ever since. Painting about it, writing about it, making apologies every

Christmas to Chris's parents and Francis didn't stop it. Even Eniola hugging her after she was discharged from the hospital didn't assuage her guilt. They forgave her. They told her it wasn't her fault before they returned to Nigeria with Morounfolu's body six days later.

Francis had remained in Germany for four months and she visited him every day. She cooked him food, painted him and for him, and read him books. She was there for his physiotherapy and when his prosthesis was secured for the first time. She knew Chris was always around. His perfume lingered in Francis' room and left her longing for him. Francis told her to give him time and promised that he would come around. Olori wrote his parents, apologising profusely for taking their daughters to the park, apologising for the accident and wishing she could turn back the hands of time. She always asked how Eniola's therapy was going. She sent the paintings she had done in Morounfolu's memory. They wrote back, asking about her welfare, telling her it was an accident, telling her to concentrate on her schoolwork and thanking her for writing. There was never any mention of Chris. She stopped writing them after a while. They were far too kind and that turned her guilt meter up a notch. She left Germany two years after the accident. She painted a series of gripping horrific images of that day which she called

*He wrote with  
lipstick on  
her bathroom  
mirror  
whenever he  
slept over and  
had flowers  
delivered to  
her door every  
Sunday evening  
by 5pm.*

‘Berlin Sky rider.’

Her brush strokes told her version of events of the accident and immortalized the thirty-two people who had lost their lives. Her series had put on the radar of the British Council and seven years later, she couldn’t wait to fly under.

Chris’s eyes fixated on her and he ate her up. He still hated her. She had killed his sister, and turned his best friend and cousin handicap. He still had not forgiven her and the tremor in Olori’s jaw assured her that he never would.

Her phone vibrated on her lap and it was a welcome distraction. She had never learned to cry in style and she blinked back tears while clearing her throat. When she looked back up, Chris was hugging a woman. She was shorter than him and she stood on her tiptoes and kissed him. She smoothened his ruffled hair and disheveled shirt. The ring on her left hand glittered. She also happened to be carrying a baby that bore a spitting resemblance to Chris.

They walked out of the airport, hand in hand. He didn’t look back.

‘Last call for boarding Flight Number 2227, Destination Abuja. Last call for passengers boarding the 3pm Abuja flight. Approach Terminal 3 now.’

The blare of the speaker was like a drill in her cerebral cortex forcing her back to the present. She reached into her handbag for a handkerchief and blew her nose. She stood up and made her way to the terminal with her hurting knee and heart. At least, she hadn’t missed her flight.



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# Coal City Stories

*By Ifeanyi Jerry Chiemeka*



*Ifeanyi Jerry Chiemeké is a lawyer and freelance writer who lives in Lagos. A foodie and enthusiast of the Fine Arts as well, Jerry's works have been featured on Brittlepaper and The Kalahari Review.*

It's been one of those days. The kind of day that leaves me feeling undervalued, undermined, and feeling that I deserve better than what I'm getting from the tyrants who call themselves my employers. I'm wondering whether I'm actually cut out for the career path I chose, or whether I missed the call when it came to determining professions. I am scared of failing, scared of ending up as an also-ran, scared of letting down my family and myself.

I could end up choking to death on these depressing thoughts if I remain seated behind this office desk, so I decide to take a walk to clear my head. Hands in pocket, earphones plugged, playlist swinging from John Mayer's "Stop This Train" to The Script's "Breakeven", I look for a different perspective, a new distraction, something to save my mind from the drudgery that is paid employment.

"Okpa di oku. Okpa di oku!"

The call pierces through my earphones, and ultimately interrupts my thoughts. She is selling a meal which is a distant cousin of moin-moin though made from a different plant,

and more filling. I stand and stare at her and my eyes meet hers. She walks in my direction, assuming my interest is in buying what she has to sell. A smile finds its way to my face as I inhale the steamy aroma of her stock. It reminds me of the city to which the meal is indigenous, of a phase in my life and of a girl named Oge.

I first ran into her three years ago at a students' conference; one of those conferences where youths gathered for purposes other than the central theme. I needed the distraction; I was in my final semester and my project supervisor happened to be competing with the villain in Maleficent to see who was meaner so I took the trip to ease my mind. Then again, the host university was located in a city of which I knew nothing about except its popularity for coal and limestone and I wanted to find out more for myself.

I had been drawn to her wit, and despite her attempts to ward me off, finding my over-confidence annoying, I found ways to bump into her for a better part of the three days the conference lasted. I was in a camera-happy mood

and even when she did not want to, she ended up in my phone's photo gallery. My stubbornness ultimately paid off, and by the time I made the return journey to school, my contact list had a new addition.

The four-hour trip from coal country to Ancient sands had Oge's image dominating my thoughts, and while I faced the last lap of my undergraduate sojourn, I longed to see her again. There was something in those eyes that reminded me of Nse Ikpe Etim, there was the nose I wanted to rub with mine, and there was all the sarcasm I could not get enough of. As Fate would have it, we had a chance to choose the location for the next phase of our academic pursuit, in our quest to become lawyers. I couldn't pass up the opportunity; I chose Coal City.

I got what I wished for, and while that branch of the Nigerian Law School was not the most conducive in terms of infrastructure, there was something to look forward to on weekends. My first official weekend in Coal City had coincided with Oge's birthday, and I remember telling Clara, a friend whom I had accompanied for shopping at the city mall, to help take my purchases back to school, as I had something 'urgent' to attend to.

"If I don't return by 8pm, something is wrong," I told Clara.

I met with Oge at a secluded area of the city mall upon

Clara's exit, and she told me of how her birthday was shaping up to be a bore-fest. I took a ride with her on the mall's roller coaster and gave her a treat, all too glad to save the day. I returned to the campus by 9pm that day, Clara and my other colleagues wearing huge cloaks of worry on their faces. I was right; something was wrong. Oge was what had gone wrong with me.

More trips to the heart of the city on weekends followed, accompanied by long phone calls, but while I flashed all the signals, her heart refused to switch from red to green. I eventually poured out my feelings in black and white, but my application for admission into Oge's emotional space was turned down.

As is the usual reaction when a man's love is unrequited, I withdrew, cutting off all forms of communication. This did not last long though. Just when I thought I had her out of my head, text messages with the words "I miss you" flowed in. I began to hope again, and laced my love-boots. In my opinion, there was still a chance of being Oge's significant other.

My fondness for Oge began to reflect in my attitude to the city. The "okpa" began to taste better, especially when washed down with a 35cl bottle of Coca-cola. The city lights became brighter, the roads appeared smoother, I fell in love with music from Phyno, and places like Trans-Ekulu, Nike Lake and Independence

*I don't plan to steal love away from anyone, but I am just saying that if Oge opened even one of her emotional windows, I would jump right in.*

Layout began to appeal to me. Heck, I even joined in fervent prayers when the governor of the state was away from the country, unable to perform his official duties due to a mysterious illness.

In spite of the long nights out however, red light never turned to green, and in time, I threw in the towel, channelling the energy to my academics. I was however civil enough to provide room for one last rendezvous; after my make-or-mar professional examinations, I delayed my journey home by a few days, agreeing to spend time with Oge in one of the city's half-decent guest houses. It was in one of those suites that I found out the reason why she had refused to grant a lease of her heart: someone was already in residence.

Twenty-months have passed since I last set my eyes on Oge. Communication is infrequent, but nothing, nothing beats physical contact. Technology can only do so much, and phone calls don't give me the chance to stroke her hair. I miss her to bits, and the feeling is mutual, but circumstances are a lot different now, and wishes remain wishes.

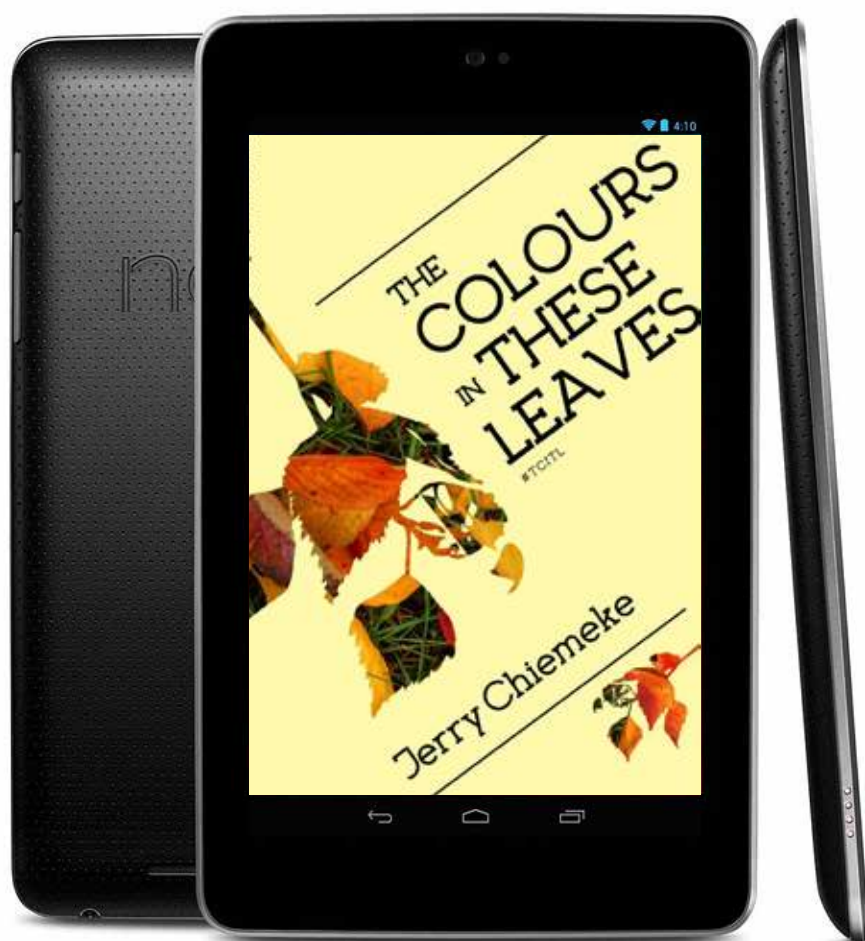
Now I don't plan to steal love away from anyone, but I am just saying that if Oge opened even one of her emotional windows, I would jump right in. I know her heart is someone else's, but I wouldn't mind being allotted just a corner of the room, with a little mat to lay on. I get curious; I want to find out just how her brand of lipstick tastes, how flexible she is and how fast her pulse can get.

*"Okpa di oku! Oga, i-nwe-ne?"*

I look up. The woman's eyes nurse hope that I will buy from her. I shake my head and smile, not because her okpa is inferior or not steamy enough, but because I fear that after eating, I just might be tempted to board a bus to Coal City, just to get a chance to rub my nose against Oge's.

Jerry boldly surfs the waters of loneliness, heartbreak, and depression, coming through with a fortrightness which can be mildly unsettling to a first time reader.

Bura Bari Nwilo



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# Constantine

*By Joy Mamudu*





*Joy Mamudu writes in her spare time and whenever she is not too worn out from her day job. She blogs on [missmeddle.wordpress.com](http://missmeddle.wordpress.com).*

*twitter: @msmeddle*

Everything reminds you of him. It's not funny anymore. You realize this as you stare at a pale, pretend version of yourself in your tiny hanging mirror. You are about to leave the house for work, and you would really be better off buried deep under the duvet, slowly morphing into a crumpled bed sheet yourself.

It has been long enough. You smile ruefully because you keep asking questions about your feelings for him, but it never helps, the questioning. Instead, memory blurs around the edges and you wonder if you didn't just dream it all up - maybe you were in a coma the whole time, and it never really happened.

Today you went to the salon to get your hair done. The hairdresser opened up a bottle of hair oil, poured some into her cupped hand, and rubbed it all over your head. The perfumed scent of the oil filled your nostrils, and choked you with memories of him.

Babyyyyyy

What now?

You left your scent on my pillow yesterday. I can smell

you everywhere, it's driving me crazy!

Aww, but I didn't use any strong perfume or anything...

I know, but I can smell you. And there's this other smell... on the pillow...

Oh, maybe that's my hair oil... I miss you, baby. I wish you were here.

You snap to as you realize the hairdresser is done, and has moved on to another customer. Hastily you pay up and leave, hoping the madness you fear lives within you has not begun to manifest in public.

The following day, you are in the bathroom, your phone blaring from its spot on the bed. The song you are squealing along to comes to an end, and another one starts up. It is Robin Thicke, swearing he is lost without her... you rush out, soap suds dripping down your face, your bare feet almost slipping on the tiles as you rush to snatch up the phone and change the song.

It used to be his ringtone, that song. It was how you felt about him then. You can never quite

*You left your  
scent on  
my pillow  
yesterday. I  
can smell you  
everywhere,  
it's driving me  
crazy!*

make it through to the end of that song, but you can't bring yourself to delete it either. That song is a metaphor for your love life; you are done with him but can't quite let go. So you vacillate between telling yourself you are over him, and wondering what he did that was so terrible.

You remember the year when you were pouting and sniffing because, hard girl that you were, you didn't know how to handle him travelling out of town and being away for months at a stretch. You recall him scooping you into his lap, telling you it would be okay and he'd be back for you. It was the cheesiest line ever, but somehow he made it okay when he took a short video of both of you kissing. It was a deep, clingy kiss and you were still pouting when it was over.

It is Saturday night and you are perched atop the decking of the uncompleted building close to your house. You have your earphones firmly planted inside your ears, there is an empty bottle of Matelot not too far from you, and you are clutching a chilled bottle of Romero in your right hand, left hand alternately wiping your wet cheeks and ferrying a slim menthol cigarette to and from your mouth.

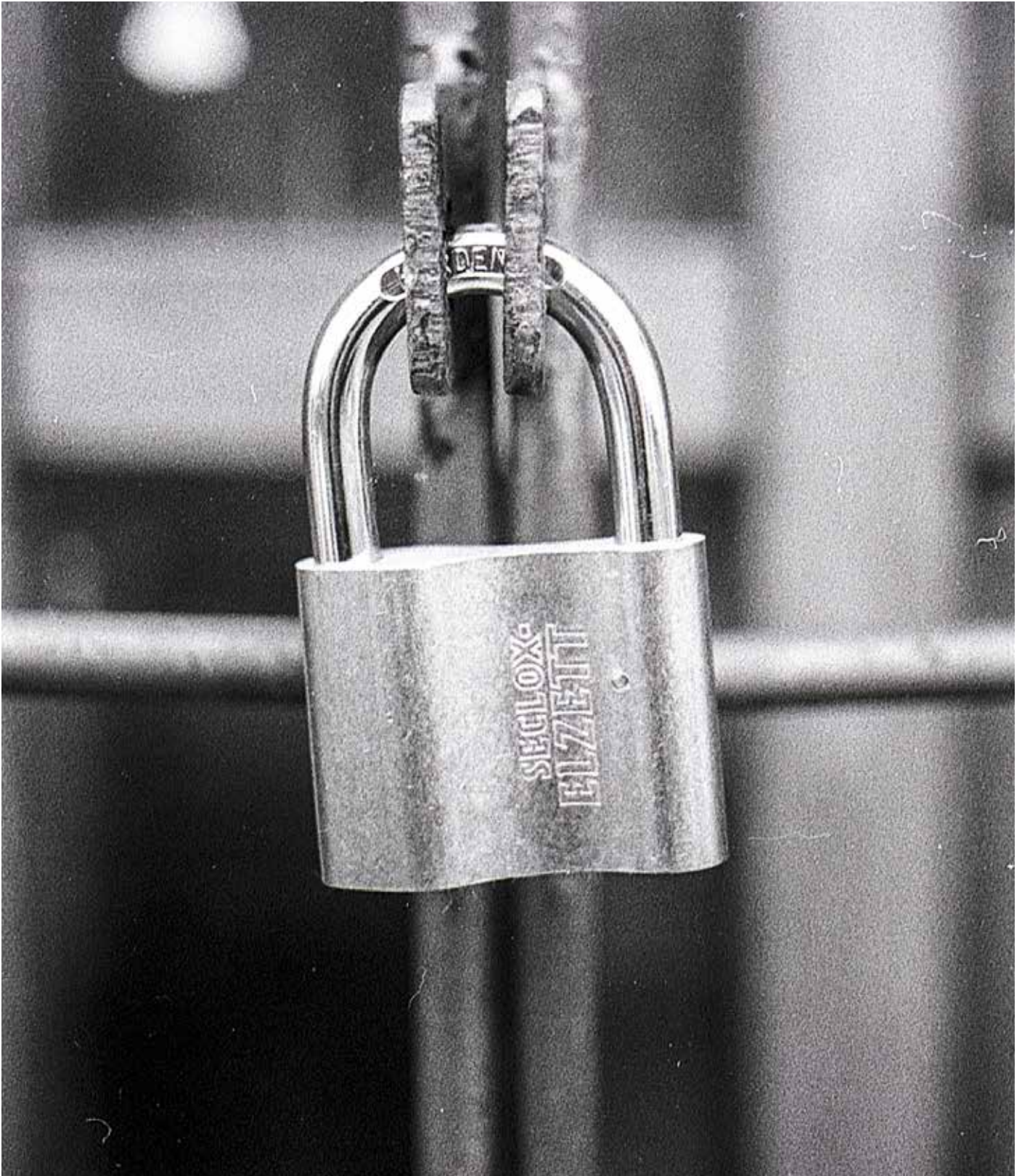
You think of all the guys who could have been good to you, if only you hadn't been blinded to their advances. You had saved yourself for him even while you were broken up...

Flicking the cigarette butt away, you look up to see the ripeness of the full moon and for a little while you are humbled by the knowledge that life will always go on, the world is full of underrated beauty and hope, and you are but a tiny speck of nothingness in the grand scheme of things.

You scroll through your music playlist and get to Robin Thicke – Lost Without You. You take a gulp of the red. And hit delete. And it's not so bad after all.

# Fate

*By Linda Orajekwe*



*Linda Orajekwe is a graduate of English language and literary studies from Lagos State University. A social media manager and a Journalist with a certificate in public relations from the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. She promotes the African culture and literature through her blog [www.linorajji.com](http://www.linorajji.com). When Linda is not writing, reading, beading, sewing or talking, she's definitely watching a movie or looking for shadows to chase.*

Her husband's dirty clothes from yesterday are still unwashed. The children will soon return from school and lunch is not ready yet. .

Mama Osas picks up the match box from the trolley close to her television, the cellophane of salt, her container of Maggi and another of ground pepper and heads towards the kitchen.

Maybe I go just make yam for them, or small concoction rice. I no get power to cook another thing .

She has been sleeping since everyone left the house. Rest only comes in snatches when her husband and children are out. The kitchen is located at the back of the 'face me I face you' house, not far away from the toilet.

"Mama John, good afternoon o", she greets her neighbor who is engrossed in the song as she washes the mountain of clothes in front of her, her movements synchronized to the song.

Her stove is on a cabinet for easy access because of her condition. Her hand

impulsively caresses her baby bump and she smiles. She is carrying a messiah, a savior, the son who will remove suffering from her life. Everything suddenly has been good for the past few months. Her husband refrains from hitting her, scared that he might hurt his son. All he does is throw insults instead of the blows that had been her portion during the other pregnancies. This boy is special, and is to be protected from harm.

Some touches her lightly on the arm. It is Mama John asking if everything is fine.

"No mind me jare. I dey fine, I just dey think some things."

She picks up a tuber of yam and starts peeling.

"You see as papa Gift take beat mama Gift this morning?" Mama John says. She ignores her.

"You dey hear me so?"

"Me? Na wetin you talk?"

"Where your mind even dey sef? Na wa o. I say whether you no see as Papa Gift take hammer Mama Gift this morning?"

Mama Osas rolls her eyes and replies, "I hear o, wetin happen sef?"

"Wetin happen? Wetin dey happen for that house wey pass Gift? Me I no even know who that man marry sef, whether na Gift abi na Mama Gift."

"Ehen? So na Gift make am wan kill him wife this morning?"

"Yes na. Gift been dey complain say she no wan go wan go school, naim her Mama beat am. Papa Gift wey no know wetin happen for the matter, just hear him pikin dey cry, e no even ask wetin happen, e just give the wife pow for face!"

A sudden stab of pain makes Mama Osas drop her knife.

"Yes o, na so the surprise sef take catch me. You dey drop knife, me wey almost drop my pot of soup nko? I thank God sha say e nor fall, because for this economy, my husband for just kill me throwaway!"

Another stab of pain hits. Experience from having three children tells Mama Osas what is happening. She picks up her knife and continues peeling, faster now.

"Na so o. That girl ehn, as she small so, every time her mama go dey cry because of am. Na everything wey she want the Papa dey give am."

Mama Osas grunts.

"I even hear say Papa Gift dey touch him pikin," Mama John whispers. "Na die that man dey find so. Him go just die throwaway. Tufiakwa!" Mama John moves a hand in a circular motion round her head and snaps her fingers to express the abomination.

Mama Osas stops peeling suddenly.

Athink they tell me say make I begin come hospital once I smell labour make my pikin for no die?

She packs everything including the yam peels back into the cabinet.

"Mama Osas, wetin you dey do?"

"Nothing o."

She remembers that for some reason Mama John is always around when she's having a baby. She won't let that happen this time.

"This one wey you dey squeeze your face so..."

"Na nothing o, na so I dey do my face sometimes o, I no even know why."

Mama Osas returns to her room with hands still dirty from peeling yam and picks up the nylon bag holding her delivery items that had been carefully arranged for more than a month.

Minutes later she walks out of her room and jams the door shut, then walks out the compound. She bites her lower lip from groaning aloud as she waits for an okada. One stops for her after a few minutes.

"Madam you dey go?"

"Yes o. Fate Hospital."

"Hope everything dey ok."

"Just carry me go," she says.

"Na one fifty o" he says, his face changing from concern to annoyance at her tone.

"Ehn? 150 ke? Wetin them dey carry fifty naira?"

"You dey go abi you wan talk story?"

"Oya make I give you 100 naira," she says. He kicks his bike in preparation to zoom off.

"Oya carry me make we go."

In ten minutes, they are at the hospital. Mama Osas only finds a two hundred naira note in her wallet and hurries inside without waiting to collect her change. Immediately she enters the reception, she screams, "Labour o! Labour o!"

Two nurses come to her aid.

“Na our patient she be?” the younger nurse asks.

“Yes, she register for here.”

“You no serious o. So if I no register for here nko? You no go answer me abi?”

Mama Osas raises her voice, releasing some of the pain she has been suppressing for almost an hour.

“Madam no be so, na new nurse be this,” the other nurse says. “She just start work yesterday na im make she dey ask. How your body?”

“Na im you dey see so o, make this boy comot for my body make I rest.”

“God go do am for you, na small small,” the new nurse says.

The doctor on duty came out as soon as he was informed about Mama Osas’s presence. She screams immediately she sets eyes on him.

“Doctor my boy wan come out o.”

The doctor smiles.

“Take her to the labour room and get everything set. Call me when she is ready.”

Dr. Esele walks into the ward. Inside, a woman sits on the edge of her bed staring at a newborn inside a crib just beside the bed. She turns when she becomes aware of his presence and looks up at

him. He nods in answer to her unspoken query. Everything is fine.

\*\*\*

Mama Osas is tired from pushing for so long. It has never been this difficult for her. A part of her mind reminds the fact that this is a boy, and she relaxes before summoning all her strength for a mighty heave.

“I see the head,” Dr Esele says. “Keep pushing.”

A baby wails.

She’s done it, finally. Her son is here, her world will change for the better.

She watches as the doctor takes the baby from the nurse who is going to clean him up. “I’ll handle this myself. This is one special baby.”

Mama Osas smiles.

The cry of a baby snaps Dr. Esele to the present and he looks at the child being stretched towards him.

“He’s yours now, thank you for this precious little girl,” the woman says with a British accent while staring at the baby who is now in the crib the boy once occupied. Dr. Esele starts rocking the boy in his arms so he can stop crying.

*She walks out of the room and with the baby in one arm and her bag in the other, looking back one last time to ensure she’s forgotten nothing behind.*



"Hope she's fine? No complications?"

"She's fine," he assures her. "We need to leave now because the new mother will want to see her son."

"Of course," she says. She retrieves a suitcase from beneath the bed and drops it on the bed. "This is yours, five million naira cash, as agreed."

Dr. Esele drops the baby on the bed and opens the suitcase. His eyes widen at the number of freshly minted one thousand naira notes in one place.

"Thank you for doing this for me," the woman says. "It means a lot." Gently she lifts the little baby from the crib and cuddles her.

"What can I say?" Dr. Esele asks. "We thank God."

He locks the suitcase with care and picks up the baby, dressed in a coverall that isn't part of the things Mama Osas brought. Of course he has an explanation for that already.

"This is it then. We part ways to never see again."

"Of course," he answers. In his mind they have never met. He doesn't even know her name, she never told him.

She walks out of the room and with the baby in one arm and her bag in the other, looking back one last time to ensure she's forgotten nothing behind.

Never again will she go through the ordeal, this is her last child. Never again will she care for a child only to have him die in her arms.

One is better off with a healthy daughter, than a sickly son

# Fourteen Years

*By Bankole Banjo*



*Bankole writes to live. Winner of the Christmas Nostalgia Contest (Naija Stories 2012); Finalist, Farafina New African Writing contest (2013); Gold Winner, Young Lagos Advertising Ideas Festival (young LAIF 2012); Winner, Miami Ad School Scholarship competition (2014); he currently works in Corporate Communications of a foremost Insurance Company. His short stories have been featured in a couple of anthologies including the ANA Review (2013), Of Tears and Kisses, a collection of short stories on Naija Stories (2012), A Basket of Tales, a Benue ANA publication (2015), amongst others.*

*twitter: @banky\_writes*

Ray's submission was as expected. Having contributed several short stories to Jaguda Quarterly, the young writer's love for blood and gore had become familiar.

A cursory scan of the opening paragraph once again proved the genius with which the writer curated devastation. However, there was something unnerving about this entry. A sinister veil clung to every word, and line after line, the tale built to a tempo too haunting to dismiss. The editor reached for a cigarette, lit up, laid back on the recliner, and began reading the story a fourth time.

The mandate was clear: they were to bring his head.

The Hyenas understood the task. The legend had been told from generation to generation.

They were the privileged ones; the ones chosen to add another glorious chapter to the legacy of the Society. The six of them waited in silence. In a few minutes, they would earn their spots in the Hyenas' Hall of Fame and become part of the Hyenas' thriving folklore. They would be immortalized.

This was the day the Hyenas had chosen. They would rejoice and be glad in it. Church bored him. The rites and rituals were a drag. For many years he avoided any kind of congregational worship. But this day, he was left with no other choice. He had asked the hand of a retired Archbishop's last daughter in marriage. There was no way the renowned clergyman would give his blessings anywhere else but in church.

"If anyone has any reason why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, please speak up now or forever hold your peace," the officiating Bishop announced unrushed, each word reverberating off the cathedral walls.

Having never witnessed such an objection he adjudges this portion another banal requirement that ought to be done away with. He desperately wants to yawn, but he puts up an attentive veneer, an art honed from years of practice. After all, he was going to be an Archbishop's son-in-law.

"If there is no one, then we shall proceed," said the Bishop in a manner which showed he

had done it by rote many times.

"Before nko," the groom muttered to himself as the Bishop launched a brief sermon e about the sanctity of marriage. He heard without really listening and waited for the only part that mattered to him.

"Do you, Adeagbo David, take Ilekhomon Elizabeth, as your lawfully wedded wife, to haveand to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sicknessand in health, until death do you part?"

"I do," he answered with a depth and fullness in his voice, as he looked into the eyes of his pretty bride. She blushed, and cast a glance at the diamond-encrusted ring resting on her fourth finger.

The Bishop turned to her and repeated the same lines.

"I do," she replied and the church came alive with a standing ovation.

"You may now kiss the bride," the Bishop shouted above the thunderous applause. That was the sign they had been waiting for.

Six of them got out of the mini bus and jogged towards the east entrance of the cathedral.

They approached with axes in hand, chanting the Creed of the Hyenas in unison,

"...to do as told, to defend as needed, to fight, to die, to kill, to protect, whatever itmay cost me, even the ultimate price, to defend the honour of the Hyenas worldwide."

Sighting them, congregants seated close to the entrance sprang up in a frenzy and pandemonium ensued. Soon, the hysteria spread across the massive cathedral like a tidal wave. Horror had come to church.

He heard the familiar chant from afar. It was something from his past, from a dark corner of his life he never wanted to relive. He saw them as he turned towards the exit. They look like a Nollywood version of The Expendables:

purple bandanas tied across prominent foreheads, taut biceps encased in snug black T-shirts. They look exactly the way he must have looked that Friday afternoon fourteen years ago.

Akeem became the Amir of the Muslim Students' Society, Federal University of Lagos in the latter part of 2002. Smallish and whippet-thin with a brush of goatee on a narrow face, the Amir was respected by his ummah but fiercely avoided by the rest of the student populace because of his aggressive views on campus gangsterism. Sermon after sermon, he berated the evil and swore that given the chance he would do everything within his powers to rid the institution of the menace. That vehement commitment had compelled him into the student union, where he was eventually elected President of the Students' Union Government; thanks to the massive support of his course mates in Mass Communication –the largest department on campus- and the Muslim student society.

It was then they began to call him Alfa Aluta. He couldn't have asked for a better nickname.

Alfa Aluta went after known and suspected cultists with cut-throat ferocity. Many were arrested, some were dismissed from school while others faced legal prosecution and ended up behind bars. Many more were forced to publicly denounce their membership. In one semester, the university was purged. Fellow students cheered him on and the authorities applauded his quest. He became a hero.

But he had made enemies amongst the various fractured confraternities. Only one cult group mustered enough leverage to take him on. They called themselves the Hyenas.

The rumour mill had it that the Brotherhood of the Hyenas sought to avenge the ridicule their members had suffered at Alfa Aluta's hands. From a different campus, they set up a strike force of six and went after the unionist. One Friday afternoon, as he left the mosque after juma'at, Alfa Aluta was shot dead. Two quick-

*He got up from  
the recliner  
and peered  
down the  
length of the  
swimming pool.  
There was no  
soul in sight.  
But he knew he  
was not alone.  
He could smell  
death, like  
the smell of a  
decaying rat in  
a stuffy room.*

fire shots to the chest brought him down.

The riots that followed his murder were unprecedented in the University's history. Property belonging to suspects were vandalized and or looted. Cars were set on fire. The halls thought to be housing the culprits were burnt down. Those believed to be girlfriends of the cultists were publicly assaulted. Anarchy was set loose.

To arrest the tension, the Vice Chancellor announced an indefinite closure of the campus. And everyone went home.

Days later, it was announced that the 6 suspects had been rounded up across four different campuses and taken into police custody. Five of them died while in custody. Only one escaped. Word got around that he was escorted out of the country by a team of police officers. It turned out he was the only son of the State's Commissioner of Police.

It didn't take long for the Hyenas to gather that it was the boy who ratted them out.

The Brotherhood declared him persona non grata amongst the rank and file of confraternities and a pledge was made to ensure the renegade paid for the breach of trust with his life.

The editor rubbed his eyes as the familiarity of the story hit home. Memories flooded him with astonishing clarity. He got up from the recliner and

peered down the length of the swimming pool. There was no soul in sight. But he knew he was not alone. He could smell death, like the smell of a decaying rat in a stuffy room.

"Hi, Davo," a voice came out of the gloom.

The editor froze and peered into the darkness. No one had called him Davo since he had been smuggled out of the country years ago. And no one had, since he returned some 8 months back.

"It's been a while, brother," the voice said. Six silhouettes stepped out of the shadows. Five of them held small axes, while the sixth was armed with a sawed-off shotgun. David could barely make out the bandanas on their heads.

Hyenas!

"Guys, please. Don't do this. Please my brothers..."

The eerie slide of metal over metal stopped him as the one with the pump action readied his weapon. Ignoring his growing panic, they began to recite the Creed.

"...to do as told, to defend as needed, to fight, to die, to kill, to protect, whatever it may cost me..."

He had forgotten all about the finality of the Creed. In that instant, he broke into a run. The pump action went to work. The bullet carved a fist-sized hole through his spine and slammed his fleeing form

forward against the tiled floor.

The shooter stepped close to the fallen man. Ignoring the feverish twitches of his victim's body, he pulled back the barrel, chambered the next cartridge and pumped another round of shots into the editor's forehead, splattering his brains all over the floor. Satisfied, they faded into the shadows. They had earned their legend.

The text message had just one word: DONE. Fourteen years of pain and vengeance had been finally put to rest.

Rasheedah rose from bed, and did ablution. She then threw her hijab around her head and rolled out her prayer mat. She would make prayers for the repose of her dear brother's soul, the one they called Alfa Aluta, the one who first called her Ray.

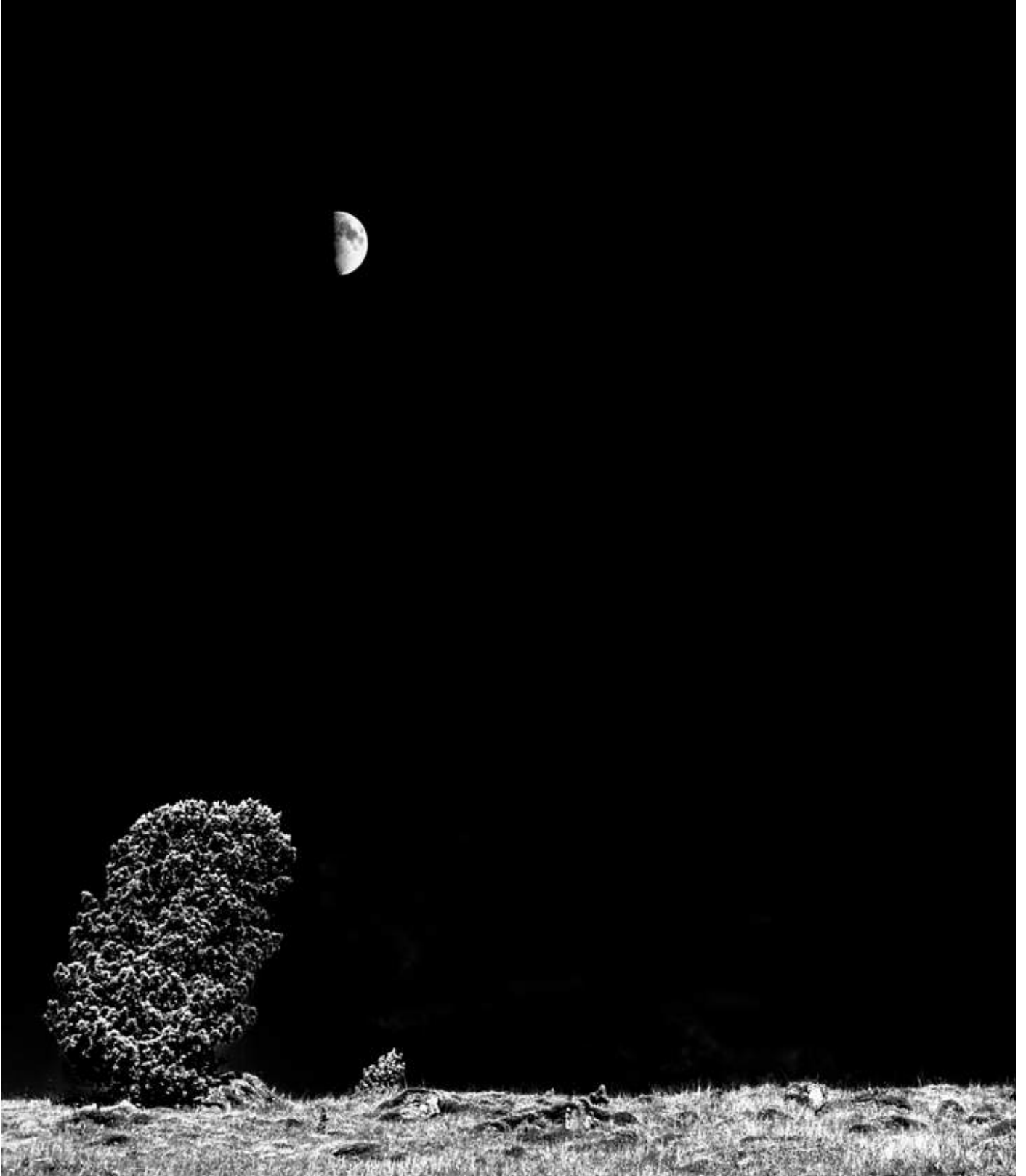
"Inna Lillahi wainnailaihiraji'un," she began. A dam of grief bursts giving way to streams of tears.



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# Full Moon, Natural Causes

*By Ikechukwu Nwaogu*



*Ikechukwu Nwaogu is a writer, occasional poet, and playwright who lives and hustles in Lagos. A member of the mainland book cafe, he is an avid lover of books, reading, and poetry. He blogs at [www.inkspilla.wordpress.com](http://www.inkspilla.wordpress.com).*

*twitter: @eyekaywizard*

6:25 pm, Oasis Lounge and Bar. Ikpomwosa dropped the bottle of whisky and the glass in front of the man on table 12, who barely acknowledged, scribbling on the sheet of paper in front of him. Ten minutes later, on his way to serve another table, he stole a glance over the man's shoulder. It was a drawing, and a very good one too. The face was handsome, with bushy brows and a keen expression. The guy was quite good, to have drawn this in such a short time. Talent really did come in different shapes and sizes, he mused, as he headed to table 17 with the tray of drinks

Two hours later, the bottle of whiskey was less than half full, the glass with a little liquor beside it. The man sat there, his face creased into a frown, scribbling intently. Having exhausted the napkins on his table, had filched some from neighbouring tables and was sketching, oblivious to time or the happenings around him. Ikpomwosa was curious. Usually he did not stop work to engage a patron or customer in chitchat, but something about the man's haggard features drew him. Besides, as

part owner, he waited tables and served drinks because he wanted to, not because he had to. Stepping behind the bar, he took off the waiters' apron he was wearing, signaled to the barman, and grabbed a bottle of Fayrouz from the fridge. Satisfied that his absence was not going to be missed, he headed for table 12.

My foot is itching again. More than any chart or almanac, more than any calendar, my itching phantom foot tells me there will be a full moon tonight. It's something that has not failed in seven years. Five of those years have been spent at my new job as a police sketch artist. It's funny how I still think of it as my new job, but then, once you've been a cop, everything else seems like a new job. On nights like this, my foot begins to itch, and the only thing that can cure it is a bottle of whiskey, or two, or three. My colleagues have come to expect my absence from work, every month, for a couple of days, and they cover for me, as I do for them, whenever someone has to take a day off.

Today, however, the itching has begun, but the feeling is different. I've been feeling

funny around my stump, and I've been to the restroom twice to check. My stump is bleeding. There is also that sickly sweet smell of rotting flesh, and the tissue under my right knee is showing signs of necrosis.

It's been seven years now. Seven years since I got bitten by something the doctors won't admit exists. All known antivenin treatments failed, gangrene and necrosis set in, and yet the doctors refused to admit it. And even when they had to cut the leg off, they simply cited gangrene and blood poisoning, but they didn't mention the cause. Well, that's past, but I'm not giving up on this. My leg didn't go so I'd give up. I was bitten by a demon, a freak, something that shouldn't exist. I was in therapy for almost two years, and every now and then Chika, the police psychologist, gets in touch to discuss, and discuss what he thinks are periodic psychological evaluations. I'm not mad, never have been. In fact, weaned as I am now of the painkillers and other drugs they pumped me full of during therapy, I've never been saner. What most people, even within the department, do not know, is that with the disability payoff, and the money I make from paintings and such, plus a couple of wise investments, I'm set for life. I have no wife, not anymore, and no kids, so the only real expenses I have are a couple of aged uncles in the village, and nephews and nieces whose parents are so well off that a package or present from Uncle Ken is not a big deal, just icing on the cake.

Police departments in other, more civilized countries use the Identikit software, and they have sketch artists and forensic sculptors and such, but sometimes I get the feeling the term 'sketch artist' or 'forensic consultant' was coined as a lifeline of sorts for me, so as to make it seem like the police has a vibrant CSR policy, to give me a lifeline out of the despair and despondency they imagine my life has sunk into, but personally I couldn't care less. There's Identikit, and they can actually have someone else conduct the training in Crime Scene Investigations. The best thing is, it gives me the chance to be in on police business

without appearing to be nosey. And despite all the problems, what with the attack, and Angela's walking out on the marriage, and the months in intensive care, and the amputation, then the months of post operative therapy.

Oh, these drawings I'm doing? Hahahaha, they're of my nemesis, the fiend from hell, the freak, the demon who did this to me. There seems to be a connection of sorts between us. Whether I'm high as a kite or stone cold sober, I can still draw every line, every furrow, and I have found, over time, that my drawings of him are, well, age appropriate. I mean, it's been close to seven years I set my eyes on the monster, yet his image remains etched in my brain. And with the passage of time, I have, at intervals, been pushed to draw in a little crease here, a wrinkle there, and I know, same as any pregnant woman knows she has a life within her, that the alterations I have made to his face in my drawings over time are very real, and reflect the way he looks now.

He looked at Ikpomwosa, smiled, and took a large gulp from the glass in front of him.

"It was long ago, but I remember it like yesterday. I was young, and fresh, and whole. I was a good policeman, and what I lacked in skill, I more than made up for in zeal. The case involved a woman who had been kidnapped and when the kidnappers made contact and gave instructions for dropping off the ransom, we were deployed to the area to monitor developments, possibly catch the suspects while picking up the money, and trail them back to their den, so we could rescue the woman. When a slim lightskinned guy of about average height arrived on a bike near the drop zone, we knew the game was on. We spread out and kept him in sight as he walked through the bush. The area around Ugwuaji was thickly forested, and known to be home to ritualists, kidnappers and all such unsavoury elements.

As the man moved off with the money, we followed discreetly, cautiously, so as not to alert him, and we had been following for close to fifteen minutes when he suddenly started

*As he walked  
to the restroom,  
the door  
opened, and a  
familiar man  
stepped out.  
Even with just  
a glance, he  
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at the subject  
from the man's  
drawing.*

running, snapping twigs and breaking branches, and making a lot of a noise. We knew the game was up. With weapons drawn, we crashed through the trees and underbrush, hoping to catch up with him in an open area.

'Stop or I'll shoot!'

He turned around, slowly, allowing the small briefcase stacked with currency notes drop from his hand. I was first in the clearing, being a bit younger, and in far better shape, than the rest of my colleagues. I had a clear shot at him, either head or heart, and I kept the gun trained on him as my colleagues, huffing and puffing from the exertion, caught up with us in the clearing.

He looked around, looking for anything, hoping to distract us and make his escape. I just cocked the gun, keeping it trained on him, to let him know I was not going to let him try anything foolish.

'Don't shoot him, he has to take us to their hideout first', my colleague said.

I still wake up every morning, reliving those memories. I wish I had shot him then, straight to the head, yes sir, no body shots for something when you're not sure what it is. I wish I hadn't listened, I wish I had fired first. It is standard police procedure to open fire on a suspect if the suspect is deemed to be armed and dangerous, and that's what he was, we just didn't realize it. I was still

holding the gun trained on him, and wondering what to do, when he unclenched his fist, and a bunch of keys clattered to the ground. I wish I had fired then, put a bullet straight through his thick skull, and let him die. This world would have been a safer place, I would still be a cop with two legs, and I would still be married, maybe with children.

The man, smiling, started bending down, and I told him not to move. One of my colleagues patted my shoulder. 'It's okay, it's just his keys.'

As he bent down, my initial thought was that he had vanished. There was a blur of motion, and I saw this huge black snake. It was big, bigger than anything I have ever seen, outside of the movies. I staggered back in shock, and put out one hand against a tree trunk to steady myself. Then everything I have ever read, ever heard, ever seen, ever learnt about pain vanished, in the face of a pain so intense, so blinding, and all encompassing. It felt like my nerves were burning. I had a vision of open jaws and glittering teeth, and my world went blank.

I woke up fifteen days later in the hospital, in the intensive care unit. I don't know why I survived. Maybe because I was wearing boots while others were wearing shoes. Maybe it didn't get enough poison in me in that first bite. Maybe it was my immune system. Maybe it just wasn't my time to die. Maybe we can only theorize.

But I woke up, over two weeks later, exhibiting multiple symptoms of poisoning and infections. Headache, high fever, chills, arrhythmia. The doctors had me on life support. The police force lost three men that day. We had been discovered, in the clearing where we had been attacked, by a palm wine tapper, who raised an alarm and got villagers to carry us out to the road. The three officers died before we could make it to the hospital.

For five months, the doctors battled strange and unnatural symptoms of unknown infections, pumping me full of every known antibiotic, trying to stabilize me. All the while, my leg was swollen to ten times its normal size, infected by God knew what. At last, the doctors said the leg would have to go, to increase the chances of saving my life. Two weeks later, I was an amputee. Nine further operations were performed, to determine the extent and severity of the tissue necrosis, and to further clean out pieces of bone and prepare me for a prosthesis."

He looked at Ikpomwosa, and smiled.

"I'm drunk, I know, but somehow, in a deep, dark part of my head, I'm still sober. It's just the---" He winced and stuck his hand under the table. It came away bloody.

"I'll be with you soon." He pushed himself to his feet.

Ikpomwosa watched as he walked slowly and unsteadily towards the conveniences. He looked from the napkins on the table, with the pictures on them, to the man weaving through the restroom doors. With some dismay he noticed the blood-stained sheet the man had been drawing on before he left. On an impulse he pulled the paper around and studied the drawing.

It was an intelligent face, openly curious, with a mocking set to the nose and mouth. He studied the eyes, noting the set of the brows and the way they arched over perceptive, discerning eyes. He imagined himself looking at a real person, and smiled to himself.

Artists! Always highlighting the best features and making light of the worst. He wondered whether the man's forehead was this high, the nose this fine and pointed, the brows this thick, or whether it was the artist's trick. He was staring at the misshapen mouth, when it struck him that what was protruding out of the man's mouth was a snake's tongue.

He sat back and glanced at his watch. The man had been gone for nearly twenty minutes.

He got up. The bottle of whiskey had a glass or two left in it, and he gathered the napkins and placed the bottle on them as a paperweight. He knew the man was drunk, but not so drunk as to pass out in the toilet. As he walked to the restroom, the door opened, and a familiar man stepped out. Even with just a glance, he could tell he was looking at the subject from the man's drawing. The man came out, closed the door, and on seeing Ikpomwosa's open-mouthed stare, asked, "Something wrong?" Only then did Ikpomwosa realize he had been staring. The man excused himself and walked past, and Ikpomwosa imagined he could smell something stale, like a fart from someone with a stomach infection, or the air in a room where someone recently died, as the man walked past. He opened the door.

Ikpomwosa gasped as he saw his customer lying face down on the floor. There was blood around his head, and around the knee of his left leg the jeans he wore were stained with blood. He rushed over and dropped to his knees beside the man. As the man flopped limply onto his back, he recoiled in shock. He took one look at the glazed-over eyes, the bleeding from the nose and mouth, and knew it was futile. He rushed to the door and called for help.

The bar was cleared out. The majority of the patrons, not willing to be quizzed by the police or worse, picked up, had hastily finished their drinks and faded away. Ikpomwosa and other staff were outside, watching the police and emergency medical personnel load the man's corpse into the ambulance. As they wheeled the gurney towards the rear doors, one of

his hands flopped lifelessly, and one of the orderlies placed it back on the dead man's chest. Suddenly remembering the drawings, Ikpomwosa rushed into the bar, and found the table empty of papers, pen, and drawings. None of the staff admitted to having removed the things from the table.

The paramedic had given his verdict: cardiac failure, helped along by consumption of massive amounts of alcohol. As Ikpomwosa tried to explain to the bored paramedic that the man may have been poisoned. The doctor, struggling to hide his indifference, replied, "Mr Ikpomwosa, don't bother yourself, the man died of natural causes. So you and your bar are not in any way responsible for his demise. Don't bother with the story, the man was an adult, and he bought the alcohol himself, you're not being incriminated in any way.

With mixed feelings, Ikpomwosa watched as the ambulance moved off. And as he jammed his hands in his pockets and turned to walk back in, he realised what he was touching. Gently, he brought out the bloodstained sheet of paper the man had been drawing on. Heart thumping in his chest, he looked up.

The full moon, round and elegant, shone brightly down.



# Karma

*By Precious Egbo*



*Egbo Precious Nzubechukwu was born on 3rd August 1996 in Enugu State Nigeria. She is from Umuagwu-Obeagwu Ozalla in Nkanu West LGA in Enugu State. She is the last of five children. She completed her secondary education at Federal Government College Enugu in 2014 and is currently a university aspirant who wants to study Medical Rehabilitation. She lives in Enugu state. She loves writing, reading, singing and listening to music.*

*Present day - 17/5/2008.*

**I**t's your birthday today and you are 25 years old. It's a Saturday but you woke up trying to remember what day it is. You don't easily remember because you are weird. You are weird because you don't like birthdays. You don't like birthdays because your life has been a sour one for the past 15 years.

Your life has been sour because you always lose something so dear to you, on your birthdays. "Today won't be an exception", you say to yourself. You are about to walk to the bathroom when you hear it, that familiar knock which you always hear on your birthdays. That knock which belongs to nobody and to somebody. Knock... Knock... Knock...

You walk apprehensively to the door and open it but see nobody. You quickly step back in and close the door with a bang. Then you hear that tiny voice, tiny but very clear, "I told you I would come back, didn't I?". You then realise that it's about to happen again. You are going to lose a part of you so dear to you, again. It has been like this with you

for the past 15 years. You fall to the floor with your back to the door and cry yourself to stupor.

*16 years ago - 13/9/1992.*

It's your best friend's birthday today and she is 9 years old, same age as you. Excitement is in the air as the birthday party has begun. Everything is in order; the food, drinks, and the cake. Your friend looks so beautiful in her knee length pink dress with a white bow tied to her hair and her white flat shoe with pink dots on it. She walks around with smiles on her face, greeting her friends. Music is playing and everyone is showering the birthday girl with gifts and birthday wishes.

The MC invites her to come and dance. She is not shy at all as she steps on the dance floor. You stand at a distance and watch. You are supposed to be happy for her but you are not. Because, jealousy. Because, anger. "Why should she have all the good things?", you ask yourself. "What is so special about her?". Impulsively, you walk into the house to "deal with her". Everybody is outside

*Everything is in order; the food, drinks, and the cake. Your friend looks so beautiful in her knee length pink dress with a white bow tied to her hair and her white flat shoe with pink dots on it.*

dancing, so the house is empty. All the gifts that she had collected earlier on are sitting on the floor of the sitting room.

You go into the kitchen, get a box of matches and a gallon of kerosine, come out to the sitting room, pour the kerosine on the gifts and set it on fire. You quickly run out of the house to join the others outside. Moments later, the shouts of "Fire! Fire! Fire!" rend the air. Your friend's house is on fire. Everyone is running around trying to put off the fire. You spot your friend in a corner crying and you smile with satisfaction. Her birthday has been ruined. The house was not completely burnt but the gifts were.

It became obvious to everyone that someone set fire to the gifts. Your friend is shattered and inconsolable. You are there pretending to console her when she says, "Whoever it is that set my gifts on fire and ruined my birthday will always lose something he/she loves dearly on his/her birthdays until the day he/she dies". You knew not that her words were serious and that bad karma would come after you.

*Present day.*

Those words have been your undoing until today. You have tried so much not to love anyone or anything for some years now because you don't want to lose them to the cold hands of death.

You've lost everything. Last year, on your birthday, your house mysteriously caught fire and you managed to escape from it unscathed. Everything got burnt including your younger brother. Karma has really dealt with you. You lie on the floor pondering on the words you just heard, "I told you I would come back, didn't i?". This is strange, because for the past 14 years the words had always been, "I told you i would come back, didn't i? Well see you again, same time, next year".

Today, why doesn't it say "See you again next year". Maybe, because there is nothing to lose this time. Happiness which has eluded you all these years begin to fill your heart. "I have lost everything. I have nothing else to lose. I am free!". You get up from the floor with agility ready to go about your daily business. You enter the bathroom to take your bath but in the twinkle of an eye, you step on water, slip and fall hitting your head hard on the tiles. You hear it again before you finally welcome the darkness, "I told you i would come back, didn't i?". Little did you know that today, you'll lose one last thing which you love so much - your life.

# Ojuelegba

*By Mystique-Syn Osuchukwu*



*Mystique-Syn is a creative writer and entrepreneur. She is an ardent lover of Agege bread, ice-cream, music, movies and a social media enthusiast. When she is not dreaming of success, a house full of ice-cream and chocolate; she contributes to several blogs. Her poems, short stories and articles are also featured on various Nigerian and International websites and journals.*

*IF YOU LIKE, NO SHINE YOUR EYES.*

'Ojuelegba! Ojuelegba!'

The conductor's voice rang out. Good, Eric thought. Some things were still the same.

'Hold your likes o!'

Likes? Was that the new word for money now? Perhaps prison had addled his brains. It had been too long. He walked closer to the conductor. He was tearing a page from a calendar. It read:

'Thanks for liking us- January 2040'.

'Please sir, how much is your fare to Ojuelegba?' Eric asked.

'You be learner? Na 50 likes. Data don cost,' the conductor replied.

'50 likes? 50 naira?'

'E be like say you don dey mad. Abeg commot for my motor make I carry my passenger.' Eric moved to the side of the loading bus. His eyes darted to the nearby surroundings. Lagos still smelled the same, like hustle and survival. Posters still adorned its walls despite the

*'DO NOT PASTE POSTERS HERE'* signs.

Several politicians' posters were showing the aspirants in different poses with promises of different kinds.

One had *'VOTE FOR ME AND EVERY CHILD WILL HAVE 50 LIKES EVERY WEEK'*. Another read, *'VOTE FOR ME AND I WILL ACCEPT ALL YOUR FRIEND REQUESTS'*.

Eric wondered what it all meant. He noticed the queue on the other side of the bus. Passengers were pressing their phones. The conductor would look at their screens, nod his head and point them to the vehicle. There was no currency exchanged. Just a look, a nod and a point.

Just then, a young man approached him.

"Oga, you fit borrow me likes? Or like my status? My likes no complete and I wan reach Ojuelegba'.

'I have no idea of what you are talking about. I have been away for a long while.'

'Ah, JJC. Welcome to Lagos!'

'Thank you. How do I get to

Ojuelegba?’

‘You will need 50 facebook likes as a pass to board the bus but for any interstate trip, you will need 100 likes and 50 comments on your posts.’

‘What has facebook got to do with our currency? It was just a budding company when I--- left.’

‘Oh, it’s big now. The owner came to West Africa and implemented the policy a year ago. Welcome to 2040, the peak of technology. Getting to any West African country will cost you just 1000 friends and to join at least 20 groups. Going abroad will not only cost you that, but getting to the limit of Candy Crush game as well. Where’s your phone? I can do it for you.’

‘I do not have one now. I have some money from the private place I was staying. Are phones sold around here?’

‘Yes’.

Eric was directed to a cyber café.

‘This is not a store’.

‘Of course not! Stores are extinct. We do everything online now.’ Turning to the attendant, he said, ‘Give me 30 minutes of facebook likes.’

‘That’s two hundred naira sir.’

Eric brought out his wallet and paid. Within minutes, the young man had opened a fake facebook account with a fake picture, sent friend requests,

joined groups and uploaded nudes. Before they logged out, Eric’s account had generated 10 likes.

‘Just like that?’ Eric asked

;Just like that.’

‘Thanks. How do I repay you?’

‘Just give me 500 naira.’

‘500 naira? That’s too much. All I have on me is just 800 naira and I still need to buy data to generate more likes for my movement before I get a job. Please take 300 naira.’

‘Ok. Thanks. Let’s go to the park.’

Eric stayed for a while admiring the nudes before he grudgingly logged out and put his phone and wallet in his back pocket. He got in line and his young friend stayed behind him. When it got to his turn, he placed his hand at his back pocket but couldn’t find the phone. His wallet was also missing. He turned to ask his friend if he saw the wallet but the man was nowhere to be found. He rushed back to the café but nothing was there. The red-rimmed eyes of the conductor warned him to steer clear.

He put his hands on his head and his eyes caught a poster:

*‘WELCOME TO LAGOS. IF YOU LIKE, NO SHINE YOUR EYES’.*

*Welcome to  
2040, the peak  
of technology.  
Getting to any  
West African  
country will  
cost you just  
1000 friends  
and to join at  
least 20 groups.*



# Taking What I Get

*By Joy Mamudu*



*Joy Mamudu writes in her spare time and whenever she is not too worn out from her day job. She blogs on [missmeddle.wordpress.com](http://missmeddle.wordpress.com).*

*twitter: @msmeddle*

It is a warm night in Kano. I am lying in my hotel bed, black lacy panties and matching black bra the only things separating parts of my skin from the crisp white sheets. My mind goes to him. It always goes to him. I have deleted his number from my phonebook so many times. But how do you delete a part of yourself? Teach me, how does one excise one's own DNA? My fingers have punched in the numbers independently of my brain and I am holding the phone to my ear with a shaky hand, eyes wide, wondering if he will pick up.

He does.

Hey.

Hey.

What's up?

His tone suggests he knows there is a reason for this call, and entreats me to get to it.

Um... nothing... I'm in Kano, I have a meeting tomorrow, and all that.

Oh, okay

After an uncomfortable pause, we are back on track, talking, joking, like nothing ever

happened. Like no blood or vascular organs were shed in the making of this call.

So if you're up for it, we can meet up in Abuja one of these weekends.

I pause, intoxicated by the loud drumming of blood in my ears. I am a deer caught in headlights. I know this won't end well for me, but I am powerless to stop it.

What about---

I volunteer this tentatively, hesitant to give life to this thing that has eaten out sleep and peace of mind from my heart for so long.

She's in Lagos, it's not going to be a problem.

Um---okay---maybe.

But I just feel I should say this, we are meeting just for sex, nothing more. I told you I really see myself settling down with my girlfriend so I do not want to mess that up.

My entire face flushes with a kind of heat I have never experienced. My synapses are genuinely crossed, because I cannot function for a few minutes. From somewhere

deep inside the boiling emotions housed in my chest, I hear what must be my voice reaching out to shriek:

I won't do it. I can't just be your fucking booty call, not after everything you did to me!

I hang up and fling the phone to the far side of the bed. I briefly wonder if I should rally, call up my Kano acquaintances, go out and do foolish things. Almost immediately, I reject the idea, knowing that it won't work; I will only break down in the middle of a club, blubbing to the entertainment of total strangers. I am determined that no more tears will be shed over this man. I stalk the tiny perimeter of the room, like an angered hyena with no means of relieving tension. Naturally, I cannot find anything captivating enough on the telly. My laptop stares at me from atop the table, but I ignore it. I go into the bathroom and have a quick shower. I get back into the room, towel off and once again clamber into the black bra and panties. Somehow it seems they are "keeping me together". I don't quite want to be alone, so the undies keep me company. I push my phone under the bed, dim the lights, turn on the AC, and assume sleeping position. Thirty minutes of tossing and turning, and the sheets and duvet are on the floor, but I am still not comfortable.

It takes mere seconds to spring off the bed, get down on all fours and reach blindly about until my hand makes contact with the phone. This time we do not exchange pleasantries.

I don't even want us to meet up anymore. If this is how you're going to behave, I really don't want to deal with it. I'm sorry.

You keep saying all that in this polite way, but-- you're really not sorry! How could you say these things to me? Me! Why did you lie to me--- Just tell me the truth, you started seeing her before we broke up, didn't you?

I start crying.

The call dissolves into insults, accusations, more tears on my part and more steely cold answers from him. I flash back to all the times I'd scoffed at girls in such a position as I hear myself plead:

Don't leave me. Please, don't leave me. I'll meet you wherever you want, I'll take whatever you offer, I just can't be without you, please.

The injustice of it all strikes me as I sit crumpled on the tiled hotel floor, cry heaving as I wait for his response.

Well, fine. We'll meet. But I must warn you, she will call me when we are together and I am going to pick up. If you can't handle that, let me know.

I wonder if this is the same man I was happy with for four years, the same person I wanted to spend my life with, the same person my friends and family loved. My face trembles a little, but I'm crying anymore.

Yes, it's fine. Thank you.

I hang up and stare at the ceiling. I wonder if I'll remember any of the figures I had crammed for my meeting in mere hours.

It is 2 a.m and I know that I can do nothing but wait, and take whatever I get.

A strangely unusual story of two people caught in a web of love that wasn't meant to be. 'Always and Forever' details the pain and frustration of love denied.



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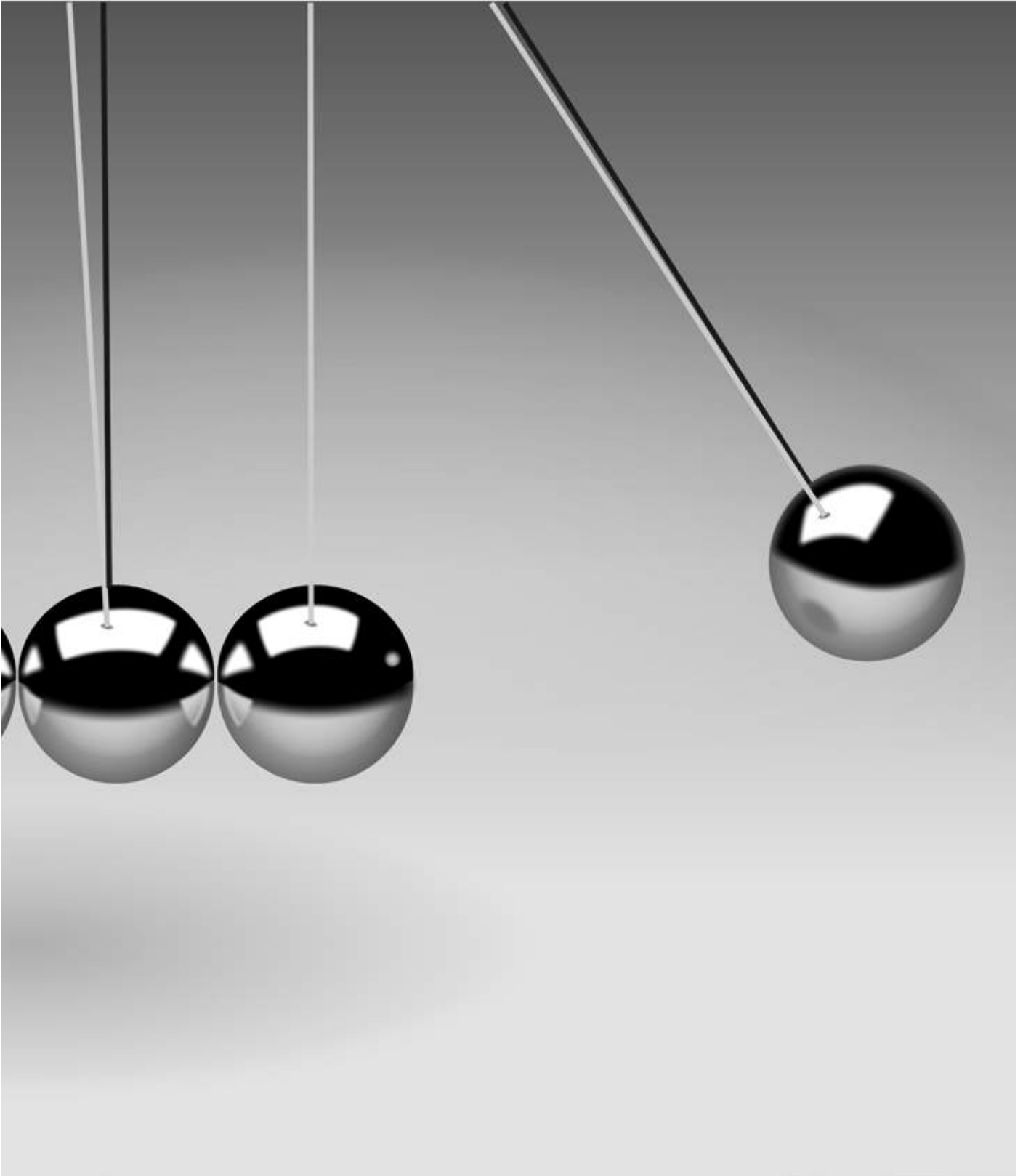
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OKADABOOKS

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# The Surrogate

*By Abiodun Awodele*



*Abiodun Awodele daily juggles the Lagos hustle with running his personal blog and trying to stay sane in an increasingly insane world. Prose (fiction) and poetry roll off his pen as the spirit directs and his collection of short stories "Always and Forever" and "As In A Day" are out on Okada Books and Amazon.*

*He blogs at [www.versesbybeordoon.com](http://www.versesbybeordoon.com).*

*twitter: @maskuraid*

He swaggers in my direction as if he's Lord of the manor and I'm one of his subjects trying to shirk his attention. I can smell his sweaty cockiness from my corner, but I focus my attention on my plate, telling myself he is not the reason I'm here.

"Hi," he drawls in a pseudo American accent with his right hand outstretched when he arrives at my table. "My name's Daniel, but my good friends call me Diesel. You should too actually, 'cos we're gonna be really good friends. That I'm sure of."

I refuse to look up from my untouched plate of steaming fried rice.

Ordering the food had been for show, and to blend in. The horde in my belly won't let me eat anything until I'm rid of them. Ever since he came into the restaurant some fifteen minutes ago all his actions have been screams for attention, like a flashy roadside billboard.

True to type, my refusal to acknowledge his presence does nothing to dampen his bothersome enthusiasm. Next

thing he does is drag a chair from the nearest table and sit down uninvited, right in front of me.

"Okay, okay. I get it. I guess I shoulda been more polite, right? Pardon my intrusion ma'am, but I couldn't help but notice you're the brightest light in this here place. Your glow was all up in my eye, so I just had to come over and pay homage to the queen. Diesel doesn't see queens and hide or just walk on by without at least acknowledging their presence you know."

Good for Diesel, the brash bastard.

I smile at that, and he smiles back.

Gosh. Doesn't he know he is being a nuisance, an unwanted distraction? Can somebody please tell this loud mouth that I have eggs to incubate? Maybe if I return his greeting, he'll take his mouth somewhere else.

"Hi Daniel. You can call me Martha, but I really don't want to be disturbed right now. Thank you."

"Wow," he says. "Your voice is so damn sexy, and up close,

I see your face is even more beautiful than it looks from across the room. There's something about your eyes too, something I can't find words to explain right now. Are you by any means wearing contacts?"

Urgh!

I avoid the question, hoping he'll take the hint and leave me be. In response he picks up my glass and takes a sip from it, then drops it and smiles unapologetically.

"There, he says. Sorry but now I've gone and kissed you. All that's left to do is for us to properly follow up and consummate this union. Call me forward, but I like to spit my mind straight up. Ain't nobody got time for all that runaround twist and turn to mask your real intentions you know?"

I burst into laughter, but sober up almost immediately as I remember the reason I'm here, and that I can't afford him disrupting my plans.

"You really are something Daniel, you know that don't you?"

He grabs my hand off the table and gently raises it to his lips.

"So they say mami, so they say."

He is too caught up in his preening to notice the distaste in my eyes.

At that moment, my target breezes past us on her way out. She must have finished her meal while I was occupied with my meddlesome interloper. Instinct instantly pushes me off my seat to follow her out, but Daniel blocks my way.

"No mami, nooo. You can't do that to me princess. You wanna leave me sitting here by my lonesome? Please. You just won the lottery boo. Diesel is your man for tonight and imma be sticking to you like glue."

I allow him push me back into my seat without much fuss, fuming inside at the

lost opportunity, at all the hours of stalking undone, but keeping my face expressionless. From the corner of my eye, I see the target driving off in her car, and I hear my babies wail in agony.

There's a flutter in my belly, and that makes up my mind. The hour is near.

For the first time, I look at Daniel from head to toe. He looks a good specimen, tall, athletic looking body and all.

He'll have to do, there's no time for choice.

"You're cute," I say out loud.

"Thank you princess, now you're talking."

I smile again.

"Thing is, I spit straight myself, and I kind of like your persistence and attitude." He beams, springs up from his seat at the compliment and executes an elaborate bow.

"I told you mami, Diesel is your man."

"Are you sure?" I ask in a teasing voice. "I need some warmth tonight and maybe for days afterwards. Are you capable? Are you that body I'm looking for?"

"I am more than sure mami, and do you know the best part? You can do with me as you wish, I go hard. They don't call me Diesel for nothing."

"Good. Now, seeing that we understand each other perfectly, do you want to sit here and waste time talking all night or do you want to go somewhere quiet for something more fun?"

Daniel isn't surprised at the change in her behavior. It's not the first time he's seen such. They all act hard at first, until Diesel works his magic. Then they become like jelly in his hands, ready to bend to his whims.

He jumps out of his seat again, like a jack in the box.



"My place or yours?" he asks with a straight face.

"Mine of course. It's just around the corner."

See his eyes shine with the light of victory. If only he knows who is winning.

He whoops in delight.

"That's just great. Lead me to temptation mami, and I will obediently follow."

I grab my bag and head towards the door. He follows just like he promised, obediently.

I can smell his excitement, and I can certainly taste mine.

I'm finicky about where I live and abhor dirt in any form, so cleaning the house is my first chore of the day. There is a happy song playing on the stereo and it mirrors my mood. My soul is light and my body feels unburdened, as it is usually does after evacuation.

Breakfast is three slices of toast, a tin of baked beans, two sausages and one glass of full cream milk. Normally that would be just a slice of toast and a small glass of skimmed milk, but I'm still in recovery, so the extra calories are a necessity.

Thirty minutes after the meal, I'm done resting. It's time to check on our houseguest.

The room is warmer than the rest of the house, courtesy of two permanently locked windows and an air tight door.

The walls are painted white, same color as the ceiling, and the marble floors. The room is bare save for a bed covered with rubber sheets, and a fluid delivery system hooked up alongside. A plastic bucket and a wooden mop are in the far corner.

He is on the bed sleeping, as he has been for the past four days. Regular injections of propofol keep him snoring all day long, while the total nutrient admixture is delivered directly to his veins to keep him fed. Food must never be in short supply.

I'm anxious to find out if the operation is a success. Two months feels like too long a time to wait for outcomes, but I have no choice in the matter. By the end of today, it is one less.

I switch off the overhead lights and exit the room, wondering if he's dreaming about me.

I check the calendar again to be sure I'm not mistaken. No I'm not, delivery is today.

I spend a lot of time in front of the mirror after my bath making sure my makeup is flawless, and select a colorful outfit to wear. I always like to look my best when meeting the kids for the first time. They say first impressions last forever.

I hope there are kids today, and I hope they like how I look.

Our friend doesn't look any

*There, he says.  
Sorry but now  
I've gone and  
kissed you.  
All that's left  
to do is for us  
to properly  
follow up and  
consummate  
this union. Call  
me forward, but  
I like to spit my  
mind straight  
up.*

different from the first day he entered the incubation room, except for a slight loss of weight, which is normal. Diesel looks as if he has come through the process in good form, like the real trooper he promised to be. I feel a little sad that by the end of today he'll be nothing but a jar of ash on the store room shelf. The crematorium in the basement shows no mercy to flesh or bones.

I sit down patiently to wait.

The first head appears around noon. Initially it is tentative, the change in temperature and bright light must be quite a shock I'm sure, then curiosity gets the better of it and it digs itself out further. Soon others follow suit, burrowing their way out of Daniel's motionless body, mostly from the abdominal region.

I stop counting at fifty, but they continue emerging, all little shiny green bodies and huge black eyes. Their tiny forked tongues taste the air, searching for clues and savoring the sensory stimulations of their new environment.

The last one leaves the safety of their cocoon at a quarter past two.

His breathing is faint but still there, despite the numerous holes seeping blood. I know he's proud of his achievement even if sleep won't let him say anything. What should have been a woman's role, Daniel has filled without fuss. He's been such a good mother, something I hadn't been too sure he would be capable of when I vomited my eggs down his throat on the evening of our first meeting.

Life always finds a way as they say, and I'm glad.

I need to get that bucket and get to work. It's time to gather up the little ones squirming everywhere and put them to rest in the nursery. His disposal will come much later.

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# To Be A Man

*By Chukwuemeka Ofoegbu*



*Emeka Ofoegbu is a retiring bibliophile and a blue-moon writer. His hobbies include reading books as research material on how to write and daydreaming about actually writing. He enjoys good music and poetry. He also studies medicine.*

The bright colored beetle settled on my nose and I crossed my eyes to baring it into focus. My nose itched where its feather light legs rested against my skin but I dared not move to brush it off. I wrinkled my nose in a futile attempt to drive it away.

I could feel the urge to sneeze rising to the surface. Desperate, I bit hard on my lower lip and offered silent supplication to whomever was out there listening; I prayed that the sneeze would not escape my lips.

When a few seconds passed in silence, I allowed myself a smile releasing my lip. The beetle was still perched on the tip of my nose, but now I wasn't feeling its tickling movements anymore. Certain, today would be different from the countless others, I returned my gaze to my father.

I looked up just in time to catch my father's signal. He had two fingers pointed at his eyes, and then he pointed them in front of him, alternating this four times before pointing his index finger upwards and rotating it. I nodded in silence from where I hid, covered by the thick

shrubs dotting the edge of the savanna. I followed my father's gaze till I rested my eyes on the slender backside of the male lion. Hidden in the tall grass, he was almost invisible; his tawny coat blending with the golden hue of the sunbathed blades of grass which characterized the plains of the Serengeti.

For two hours, my father and I had trailed this powerful predator as it stalked its unwitting prey. We had lost it once, when a sand storm had risen blowing specks of dust in our eyes. We had had to double up to catch it, just as it disappeared within the tall grass. My father, with the skill of a master huntsman, had spotted its rich black mane long before I had a chance to with my binoculars. Then, in a hushed tone, he had given me the order to hide among the shrubs while he found a vantage position from which he could observe the lion and eventually, take aim.

My mind wandered to the countless other things I would rather be doing than hunting lions. I never allowed myself linger on these thoughts because; somehow my father could tell whenever I had them. He would say these

thoughts weaken a man and a weak man was a useless one. It was in the fashion of making a man out of me that he'd thrust a rifle into my hands at the age of five and dragged me halfway across the world to the plains of Africa where we'd gone on numerous hunting trips.

By the time I was thirteen years of age, I had felled beasts twice my size and twice his, yet it did next to nothing to quell the restless anger in my father. He longed for the moment when an African male lion would fall to the earth dead, brought down by my bullet. This was why we had exclusively begun hunting male lions.

My father and I had spent the better part of three years marking every known lion territory in Africa that by my sixteenth birthday, I had a mental image of a map of the entire Serengeti embedded in my brain. In each pride, my father would mark the strongest, most powerful male and make me study it for hours.

A wise huntsman knows everything there is to know about his prey.

Whenever my father said this, he would square his shoulders and plant his feet in the soil before taking aim. One shot, that was all it took and the powerful male would lie in a heap, reduced to nothing more than meat for the scavengers of the wild to feed off. The lion was the apex predator and each time my father killed one, I would see

his moustache twitch. This was the closest to a smile he ever got.

Two things make a man: his moustache and his hunting skill.

On the morning I turned sixteen, I remember standing in front of the bathroom mirror examining my face. First my chin then my upper lip, hoping I had somehow sprouted hairs. My disappointment had carried on into our hunt that morning, so that when I was to take aim at the lion my father had tracked and given to me to kill as a birthday present. I had missed the shot and alerted it. Unable to hide his disappointment, my father had spent most of the drive back to the hotel railing at how I seemed to be taking everything for granted.

He had tracked the lion for weeks and had observed it was short limbed in one of its hind limbs and without a pride. He couldn't understand how I had allowed such an easy target get away and the more I remained silent, the higher his voice rose. By the time he was spent, he focused on navigating the rest of the way in silence. I remember I had slouched about the hotel room the entire week, wishing my drooped shoulders would make me shrink and shrink till he could no longer see me.

A man never turns his back on his prey.

Watching him rise from his vantage position, his hunting

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face.*

rifle under his arm, I saw a man who believed, that he was in control of every outcome. He was standing now, feet apart, digging into the earth like the roots of a powerful tree. He took aim through the scope, his head in a slight tilt to the left, as I'd seen him do countless times. I knew what followed next would be the deafening crack of his gun as a single bullet would rip through the air at immeasurable velocity, then a pained roar and then the vibrations on the ground as the lion's unwitting prey would become aware of the death it had just escaped and take flight. I turned to look at the lion once more.

A man never shows fear, not even in the face of death.

This time the roar came first. And as the gunshot filled the air, I felt the vibrations. I turned just as my father was brought to the ground in a flash of sandy brown and red. Beneath its powerful forelimbs, my father looked helpless.

His rifle lay discarded somewhere in the shrubs beside him, the butt just visible. I watched, wide-eyed, as the most powerful man I knew flailed his arms in a futile attempt to fend off the wild thrashing of the heavy beast.

The lion was female and although, she was smaller than the male, she was still larger than my father. They tumbled in the dirt as my father wrestled this relentless female, his blood coloring the brown earth a sharp red. She clawed at his chest and locked her jaw around his left arm, while he brought down his right fist against her head over and over in a bid to free his almost severed arm.

All of a sudden, the ferocious female stopped mauling him, releasing his arm and retreated into the gathering of trees from where she had pounced. I was seconds from emerging from my hiding spot, too relieved to wonder why she had stopped, when I found myself staring at the familiar backside of the male lion its tail ending in a tuft of black hair.

The difference was clear, with each fall of its

powerful paw I watched as flesh left bone and joints separated. Then I heard it, louder than the thunderous roar of the male lion, louder than any rifle he had ever fired. I heard the screams escaping my father's throat. They remained with me even as the lion ripped his throat open causing him to choke on his own blood. And even after the final blow was dealt, I could still hear his screams.

I watched as the male lion dragged my father away by the ankle trailing his blood and guts behind him, all the while his eyes wide open. And as I watched, the screams still ringing in my ears, hanging suspended in the evening air, I noticed the bright colored beetle was now on my father's nose.

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# Funmi

*By Mosunmola Adejo*





*Adejo Mosunmola is a graduate of English and Literary Studies from the University of Lagos. A budding writer working on her first novel. Writing fiction is a means of escape, a warm embrace for her to run to express her feelings and let go of passions in a throbbing heart. Apart from expressing these feelings through writing, she wishes others to experience these feelings and live those ideas and weird memories she writes down.*

The previous day, when it all started had been fine, when she had gotten home and decided to tell Mama, was just fine for an evening meal, for a night out with Danladi, for the smile that caressed her lips, for the lonesome feeling she shared towards an unfeeling yet seemingly feeling man. He shared in her smile, his, a grimace that masked the feelings of revenge he harbored. You can never achieve anything without tending to get in on the inside... a childhood of endless detective cartoons had enhanced that desire to avenge his father. The source was dead, yes, but didn't the good book say that the child would partake in the sins of the father and that vengeance will be wrought by generations after? Well, he admitted, the latter was only a fabrication to conform to this burning need his heart so feverishly hunted. He tried not to seem like Hamlet yet he knew the drive was alike. Rather than an elixir of poison in the ear, his father had been tea-poisoned.

One might wonder how Funmi had gotten entangled with a man whose face was a true reflection of his heart. His eyes

seemed to search endlessly into the depths of one's heart. At first, she had feared those huge bulging eyes until three moons after when they became a part of her: having watched them on nights of passion, ecstasy and on angry days when they nearly popped out from their sockets. His frame was the same that is, had a like impression on any man. It was intimidating, his arms large enough to snap a neck into two... why hadn't he done so he sometimes asked himself. Why hadn't he wrenched hers off its root and perhaps hung it to a stake, making it a premier of a collection of ornamentals, of the heads of a family doomed to his vengeance.

'Do you know who his father was?' mama waited for no answer '... he was a pain in the neck. He had to go, had to die; for some people have to die for you to move on.' Funmi stood still as she had been when her mother relayed Danladi's history. Did he know? did he not? or if he knew, was this all a pretense in order to avenge his dead father on her? Was what they 'shared' false? The thought of it alone would make her go insane. Mama continued still waiting for no answers from her mute

listener, 'his father sucked at your father's marrow. He was a pest, a pain in the ass as you would say. But then he died, he died. Yes he did and you know what? We were happy just that I didn't know whoever it was who killed him. Otherwise, I would have thanked such a person all my life. You know why and how your father died?' she waited not any moment longer, 'he did not die as a result of cardiac arrest as DoctorBamiji told us, NO. His heart gave way to so much excitement at the death of Mustapha. He saw this world last when he got to know that a man who had tormented his life so much, that had made him smell the other side of life was dead. You know what it's like to be that happy at the death of someone?' she asked then sneered 'it's like when Abacha died. Nigerians were happy. You know it don't you? You must have read it in one of your books... but you didn't learn how to be sensitive. You never learnt from history and so you bumped into this temporary façade called love.'

All these she said to a sobbing little body. A little body that harboured a bright mind but a large heart that Mama had always known would be her undoing. She was just like her father, too soft, too open and too trustful of people. Life was hard, she, Mama was hard. To rule the world, you had to be. There was no two ways about it. Mama's philosophy had helped her train six children what with the money she had fought for after her husband's death? Relatives who had been ashamed to cross their front steps suddenly became men who ordered her out of the house her money had built its foundation. Five sessions in court and she had won the case. The race was not to the swiftest but to the diehard man ready to bite fingers that held down his legs on the ladder of success. If possible, chop them off. Mama didn't mind. And so, it was no wonder that her daughter's affluence to the son of a man, who had made life unbearable for her father and who miraculously, had been poisoned by a Good Samaritan who was possibly one of the various victims, dazed her. Thus, she said without thinking twice, 'I have trained you all and I expect good returns. I

toiled and expect good success! But if you decide to stick your head to this enterprise and refuse to heed to your mother's warnings as your children will do to you, you cease to be my daughter!' with that she left and slammed the door that still creaked from the impact.

The gramophone lay still on the dusty table. He clicked his tongue twice after tracing his fingers on the dirt that clung to his previously neat index and middle finger. Saamus had once again neglected his duty. Family, family. This was what made him help the bow-legged man in the first place. Despite the usual snare he knew he would get from his superior, he decided to help his cousin of 44 still unemployed with 10 mouths to fill. He had asked that night when Saamus had spread his awkward legs on the floor in the poise of a prostrate and had begged 'Bodami, help me please. IyaShadiat will not allow me in if I don't get a job. Please. Even if it is to be a cleaner, I am ready...' he had cut him off and asked why recently he saw his wife with a swollen belly? After nine children? Wasn't the poverty enough? Was it alright that the once blue Kaftan he bought for IyaLajeLafenwa's coronation was now off white? And that he wore it still, almost every Sunday? No reply had come from the shaking body on the floor and seeing he was tired of his condition, Major asked him to come the next morning to start the since two years job of a cleaner at the Lafenwa Barracks in Abeokuta.

Major nearly tripped on the upturned wooden chair on his way to get a duster at the other end of the office. He clicked his tongue twice then shook his head and cleaned the dusty table before going outside to dust the rag on the Verandah. He sneezed twice but amidst the cleaning of his flaring nose did not fail to notice soldiers fluttering about, getting unready things ready for the owner of the voice whose timbre everyone feared. 'Morning sir, morning sir!' hands left their vertical positions to form angled ones as Colonel Danladi walked briskly into the well swept compound. Major saluted and shouted his 'good morning Colonel permission to carry

*The banging of the door left it creaking on its hinges. Her mother had looked straight at her face and pronounced the words that left her... There impact was so intense that she was still trembling*

on!' but as always, no sign of a reply came from the tall, dark and bulky figure. Everyone assembled at the sound of the bilge, Major being at the top of the line. This practice he had frowned at but what did his opinion matter? He walked past then reversed and looked him up and down before remarking, 'your shoe could use a nice f-polishing Major. It is important we set good examples right?' then waiting for no reply said, 'you are all dismissed. Good day!' They all dispersed with smiles and laughter that had been building up since the Colonel came in with unzipped trousers. It was a sight to behold; Private Segun had first seen it.

These remarks he heard on his way into his office. But, he didn't share in the laughter. What difference would it make? Colonel Mustapha had always been a clumsy one, right from training days, when they were mates, when they had been mates at the Nigerian Depot Kaduna. He sighed the deep sigh that escaped from his nose then slipped in a record, after checking it was Obey's onto the gramophone before placing the pin on it. A scratch then the soothing song began. He eased his cap onto his face ready for an early nap. No work was coming today as usual, no files to fill, no recommendation requests to address, no documents that needed his signature. As always, they managed to fly over his head. Mustapha

wouldn't have a Yoruba man appending his signature on files of National importance in a Yoruba Town. Major shook his head again. He rubbed his cheek, rough from engraved tribal marks and readied himself to dream his favourite dream of Mustapha being posted to another Battalion.

When General Obasanjo named Ogun state, displeasing the Ijebus, which was in the 1970's, Major Ibukunoluwa was posted from Lagos to Abeokuta. Prior to this time in 1966, he had gone with the then Major General Ironsi on his tour to all the regions, to the then mid-western region of which AdekunleFaguyi was its head. Ironsi had been one of his mentors in the army and being a newly promoted Major, Ibukunoluwa had the opportunity of escorting the man who premiered military rule in Nigeria. A different plan however awaited them at the dinner house in Ibadan after the tour at Abeokuta. The news reached them in the hotel and for the first time after the death of his brother, he wept. He imagined that fair handsome man dead, dead. The man who had done all he could to please the country, according to him. So, when he was posted to the place which homed the killing of two great men; one his mentor, the other a patriot, Major accepted it with happiness hoping to get a promotion after many years under Northern Ogas to become a Lieutenant Colonel. He was in for a surprise however when

he was accosted with his usual misery of Hausa superiors, this one being perhaps the worst of all, Colonel Mustapha.

He had sometimes wondered what the problem was that Hausa soldiers had with Yoruba ones especially those in high ranks or immediate juniors. Sometimes, he smiled whenever he remembered that these men had once been 'men' who through the help of one Yoruba man became men. Benefactors, helpers, the helped, the ransomed, the poor, the rich, the gold merchant and the gold-diggers; this was his summation of the relationship. Or, it was jealousy, jealousy from the fact that these Yorubas had known what they later knew, learnt what was new to them and in later years knew the things they were in the process of learning.

'Major Major, good morning o.' 'Good morning jare ore. Sorry for the late reply. Mama...' the taxi driver shook his hands in an I-understand-wifey-problems way. Major nodded and on boarding the taxi asked him to drive him to the Barracks. While other officers had accepted living in the Barracks, our friend had because of his wife's insistent fears of warring neighbours and the negative influence of the Barracks on children, (she who vowed after prior experiences at the Ojo Barracks, never to be caught training six children at a Barrack), decided to rent a bungalow in the outskirts of the city. The taxi driver, a dark man of about 38 years who Ibukun had not deemed to ask his name became his 'drop' to office after the first day the Major boarded his taxi. 'Drop!' was what he had called him then, this being new to him, he had argued that he was a certified license holding taxi driver. On the course of the journey however, they had become friends and since the Major had called him Drop!

A different thought entirely however saturated Major's head. How was he going to tell Drop! not to bother picking him any more as he was getting one of the numerous cars released by General Babangida to all Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels, Brigadiers and General Brigadiers. He checked his wrist-watch and

seeing it was almost five in the evening, asked his friend to hasten whatever needed to be hastened as he was almost late. One could not, never be late in the army...he endured thus the jolts as the 'Ijapa' sauntered helplessly on the streets of Abeokuta.

Just in time for the ceremony, Major joined the already formed queue, seeking his place, second in line, beside Colonel. He made a slight salute which he did not bother waiting for its reply, one which would not be given any way. Colonel frowned and straightened his already stiff back. He, with others waited patiently for the Military Governor assigned to present the car keys to the newly parked cars in the field. The sun was slowly dozing off thus casting near blinding rays on his eyes. He refused to look down however, not when this man was ... short man was standing beside him. He was filled with awe at the realization that Ibukun's height was not so favourable for the army. What did it matter to them anyway, these Yorubas. He must have pulled some strings he thought. But, he knew the average height Mayor beside him had been commissioned on merit. What, had he not been the best in almost all the classes? He was even the best of their company, Company D Delta as they called it a position he had always envied. All Platoon members respected him, even the O.C of their company. It surprised him however that Ibukun had not become a Brigadier when he, he, was now a Colonel. So, guessing the motive of his unknown predecessors, he decided for Ibukun's rank to remain that way until he met his saviour. The rays finally eased and an unprepared sigh eased from all the soldiers as the General stepped onto the field with a handful of soldiers.

Private Segun eased the frown that had been on his face when he got to the door of Colonel Mustapha's office. He sucked in his cheeks and made ready to plaster a smile on his face. Carefully, he rearranged the teacup and saucer before knocking gently on the wooden door. He knocked again until the third time when he heard 'zo!' On entering the spacious office

with a set of disused radio vision in the corner and the picture of General Babangida facing whoever ventured into the office. The eyes of the smiling General always bore holes into him and made him shiver, giving him a foreboding, every morning he took tea up to his Oga's office, of the snare or smirk he would never mistake seeing on Colonel's face. Then, the Colonel said good morning. Segun, if he had not been leaning on the door to receive the order to drop the tea tray would have swooned. Gingerly, he replied, 'good morning sir.' 'How was your night?' another look of surprise 'it it was fine sir. Great.' 'Good.' He didn't for once raise his head to see who it was he greeted. Colonel knew it was his tea-serving Private from the over polished shoes that lay before his line of vision.

The silence between them thickened and except for the quaking of the feeble hands that held the shaking tray, the room remained silent. Colonel rose up his head gently and motioned for Segun to put down the already cold tea. Then, after staring for few seconds at the whirling of the tea, he picked up the cup which he grazed its contents on his nose before sipping. He made ready, after feeling what he knew was probable and spat out the now cold, mixed with spittle chai tea onto the face of the server. He mopped gently the sides of his mouth and with anger seasoning the sound of his voice said, 'HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU I HATE COLD TEA!' Segun, still recovering from the shock replied feebly, 'once sir' 'ONCE? When was that?' 'T-t-t-to-tod-day Sir.' 'get out of my office. Look at you, at your age; you do not know what is expected of you? How many years have you been serving me? Serving me tea and yet you bring a cold one today?' Private knew he had to say something, had to clear himself and perhaps make Colonel see that his argument, his unfairness rather was one without reason. However, he kept quiet, made a small salute and left the office. He didn't bother clearing the table or cleaning the mess off the floor. No. He walked out, recalling the fact that all had not been well when he woke up that morning to see the staring eyes of an owl. However,

perhaps the staring eyes were to remind him of something he had, something his grandfather had placed in his hands and had told him to use for anyone who caused him unnecessary pain. He had been nonchalant about it, he was a Christian and whatever Baba Orimoogunje had placed in his hands the night before the sage whispered his last was unholy. Yet, he refused to listen to the silent voice within him urging him to desist from a lethal enterprise. He walked briskly, into his office unnoticed by his superiors, neither he noticing them. He gave no salute to Major Ibukun his source of hope that one day; he would leave the rank of a Private he had maintained for ten years. He was going to serve Oga tea tomorrow, yes, he would. But, why did he suddenly decide to do it? Was it because of the tea, the slimy tea spat on his face? Private jogged his head vigorously to shake off any atom of humanity.

He was sure to serve Oga tea; yes he would, with smiles, genuine prophetic smiles. He would place the tea tray down and smile at Oga. It would be warm, no, hot, like Oga loved it, the type he had that always made him whistle after he was done. But, the tea would be different, the type he had not expected, the one that would make him stare in silent horror at Segun as the effect of the poison would be spontaneous. The one that would make Colonel's face twist and twist and twist until he finally let go in a relaxed sigh but still staring in horror at the face of his killer. Then, Segun would walk briskly into Major's office and tell him Colonel needed his presence urgently. He would walk, then stop and wait to hear Major scream a muffled shout before walking out of the field, before swinging his satchel onto his back and moving out of the compound, never to return until Colonel's burial.

Mama sat on the edge of the hospital bed watching her husband's still face. What could have made Ibukun swoon after seeing the dead face of the man he had complained of every night; after dinner, after they retired to bed and she would only listen, listen and listen to yet another complaint about the same man. She stared still, hoping he would wake

up and share in the jubilation at the Barracks. But, her husband lay still and days later, when the doctor came in, checked the already silent pulse and motioned for the nurses to move away the wailing woman; she knew his only victory was in death. He, Doctor Bamiji had looked at the silent man's face and was taken aback by something he saw on the dead man's face. A smile? Why a smile? No answer came so he covered the corpse's smiling face and moved towards the hallway where the wailing woman's screams rent the air to tell her that her husband had possibly gone to heaven. Why, he had a smile in his face.

At the burial, of both officers, whispers flew around that someone, out of the corpses had killed the other and later killed himself. The evidence lay there. He must have drunk in the poison he gave the colonel they said. Some recounted imaginary conversations with the doctor. Others heard it from a highly confidential source. This was normal; things were the way they should be. People would talk, always, they will. They had to show they were in the know, even if it was to blame a dead man for the death of another dead man.

This man, the man who had died with a smile was her father.

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# Cocktail of Tears & Blood

*By Ayomidotun Freeborn*





*Ayomidotun Freeborn is  
a creative designer, and a  
brand identity specialist.*

*He loves reading and  
storytelling and is a great fan  
of the Arabian Nights.*

*twitter: @IamAyomiDotun*

I fixed my gaze on the old crimson ornament dangling from the ceiling, and my face writhed at each jerking motion. Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen... I counted in mind, too afraid to speak less I angered him. I felt an ache spread out from the base of my back, a confirmation that I was uncomfortable beneath Tunde. My right leg was hooked under his knee and my left leg was almost numb, but I dared not complain. On a good day, I would have gleefully asked him to slow down, while I placed one of the pillows under my back; this would have made me more comfortable, and push my hips higher to fully receive him, driving him crazy with passion; but not tonight. Every of his movement bruised me. I hurt all over and unfortunately for me that was the least of my problem. Tunde was disinterested in this bit of conjugal routine and turned his face from left to right, looking everywhere but my face. No wonder he kept the lights on. He was as interested as a horse dragged to the river – even if you forced the horse to drink water, you cannot force the horse to enjoy it. He managed to put just about enough effort to sustain the frail pendular

sway of his waist.

On the forty sixth thrust he released, not even up to a minute. I can't even call him a one-minute-man. I had counted to keep my mind distracted from the aches and pain, though it didn't work. As Tunde was about to roll off me, I held him down with both hands.

*"Stay stay, don't withdraw yet" I said. "What?" he asked.*

"Please don't withdraw yet. You know my doctor said you shouldn't withdraw immediately after releasing" I repeated with a shaky voice. I considered the amount of persuasion it took to get him to do it in the first place, and I didn't want to trigger his volatile temper.

"So your doctor is now the one to telling me how to sleep with my wife" he said as he rolled off me. "Next time, you will go and call your doctor to come and sleep with you. Idiot!" he added with resentment in his voice. He turned his back to me and didn't say a word again.

The sting of his words was worse than a snake bite. After all these years, and it still hurts

so much. I felt like sinking into the bed. What have I done to deserve any of these? I didn't know I was crying until the teardrops reached my pillow. I laid there in silence as I generously soaked my pillow with more tears and reminisced on when it was all rosy between me and my husband.

"Hope I didn't hurt you?" Tunde asked as he eased himself into me. It wasn't our first time doing it, but being our wedding night, we added a little kinkiness. I was still in my wedding gown or what was left of it. The top corset had been shoved out of the way, and my breasts were at the mercy of Tunde's roving tongue. Soft moans escaped from my lips. Tunde filled my entire being with carnal pleasure that every nerve-ending in my body exploded in an emotional firework, as we both climaxed at the same time. While I was trying to catch my breath, Tunde got rid of the rest of his clothes, and was doing same to mine.

*"Ahan... me I am tired ooo" I pleaded.*

"On your wedding night? You must be joking" he smiled as he pulled at the zipper of my wedding gown.

"You want to kill me with pleasure abi?" I replied. I turned on my side and he pulled the gown completely off me.

"If I don't kill you with pleasure, who will?" he retorted and we both laughed.

This time the sweet sensation was unbearable and I cried. Tunde was completely on top of the world doing different things to me, that my body trembled under him. At the height of his orgasmic spasm, he whispered into my ears, "This is for the twins".

That was eight years ago and I am yet to give Tunde a child.

My days were filled with sadness, and the nights filled with tears. Each day brought its own parcel of shame and ridicule. How I wished my mother was here.

Mama passed away five months after my marriage to Tunde. She died heartbroken, and a part of me was glad that she wasn't around to witness my humiliation in the hands of my in-laws. Even in death I imagined her vindictive voice saying "Agwara mgiotua!" – I told you so! I could still hear her voice loud and clear in my head, fuming, "Achoghi m ka i nuonwa Yoruba a" – I don't want you to marry that Yoruba boy. I clashed with mama several times over my decision to marry Tunde. She had always wanted me to marry someone who is a native of her state, or at least a fellow tribesman.

"Manaahuru m yan'anya. Naniya bun woke m choroinu" – but I love him ma. He is the only man that I will marry, I shouted amidst tears. "You talk like a child. What do you know about love?" she replied. Mama then called the names of popular Yoruba men, and

*Please don't  
withdraw yet.  
You know my  
doctor said  
you shouldn't  
withdraw  
immediately  
after releasing*

counted the number of their wives on the fingers of her hand. "But Tunde is different" I said desperately. "Different! How do you know? Is he not the boy that you just met during your NYSC? Ehn Chiamaka, answer me?" One trait I inherited from my mother was her stubbornness, and she knew it. Once her mind was made, there was no changing it, and I wasn't changing mine either. Sensing she had lost this, mama broke into tears, sobbing "You know if you insist I will not stop you. But if you go ahead and marry that boy, your father's spirit will be disappointed in you". There I won the battle to marry Tunde, but lost my biggest fan in the process. After the wedding ceremony, I was literally on my own.

My husband's family were loving and caring at the early days of our marriage, but like every good thing in life, it lasted for a short while. Everything changed after my failure to conceive. My mother-in-law became my greatest tormentor, and I always dreaded her visits. Whenever she was around, I couldn't do anything right in the house. She seized every slight opportunity to humiliate me. To her, I was a "Male dog" that could never conceive; and a "Witch" that had sacrificed her offspring for diabolic powers and bewitched her son. I remembered the time I made a grave mistake of sending my husband's sister's son on an errand during a family get-together. My sister-in-law warned me never to send her precious son on useless errands again, and she politely added that if I was so desperate to send a child on an errand, then I should wait till I gave birth to mine. Tunde's sister insulted me in front of him, and he didn't say or do anything.

Later that night I confronted Tunde, and his response shocked me. "I am shocked that you have the effrontery to confront me" he said. "My sister insulted you! How? Because she asked you to give birth to your own child? She asked you to give me a child, and you called that an insult? Let me tell you what an insult is... Me going to visit my mother and all she talks about is her other grandchildren, that is an insult. And every time she keeps asking me to take a new wife just because you have decided to remain childless, that is an insult".

"But Tunde, how can you say such a thing? You know I didn't decide to remain childless. I didn't choose any of this for myself" I said weakly I could barely hear myself.

"See Amaka, let me tell you something. I am tired of my mother always pestering me to marry another wife. Just give me a child. Is that too much to ask? Look at my brother, Sola, even after Derin gave him 3 beautiful girls, my mother still forced him to take a mistress outside matrimony to give him a son. Just think about that next time, before you come running like a cry-baby to me!"

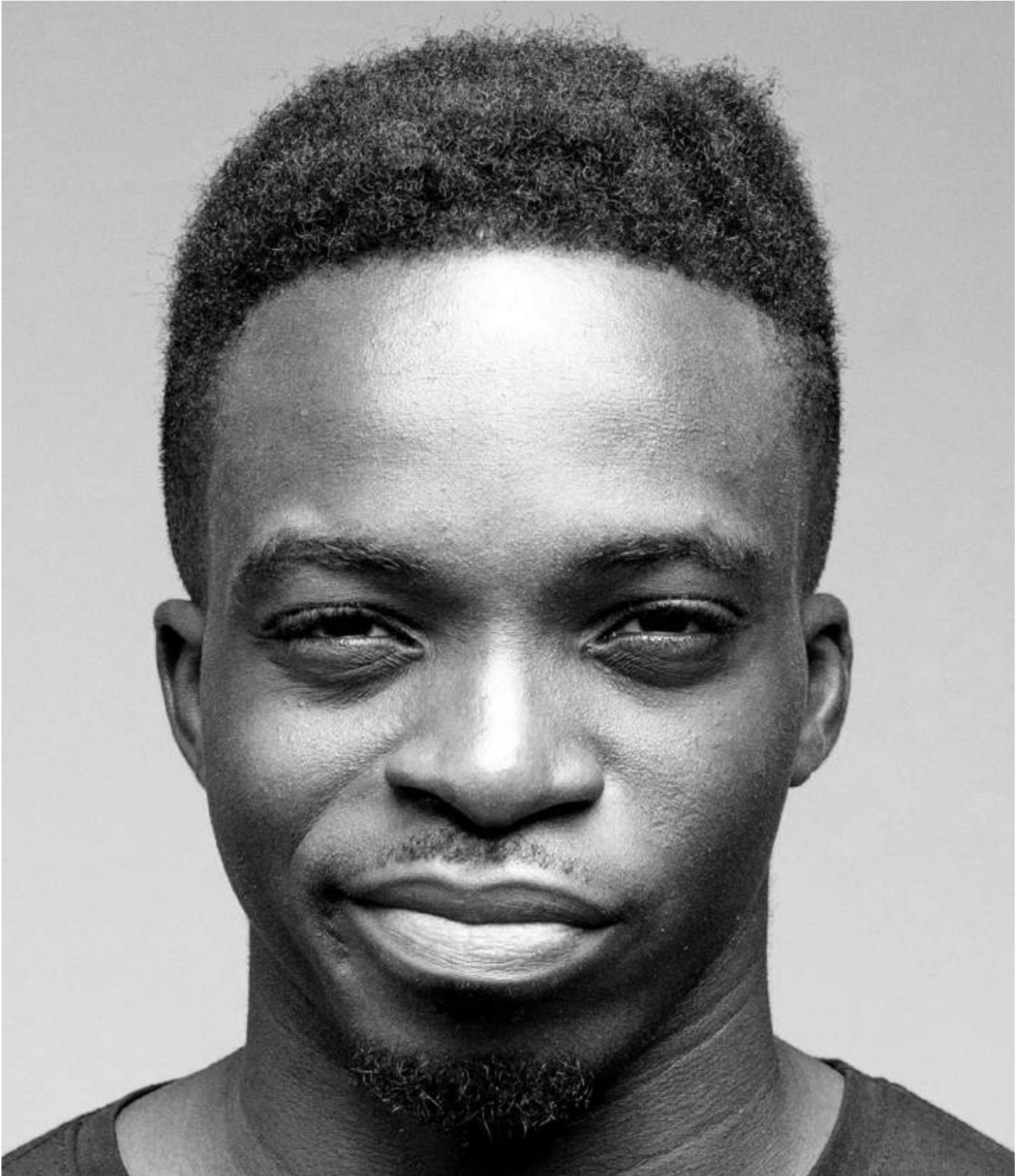
I live in a society where a woman's worth is tied to a man one way or another. If she doesn't find a man to marry, something is wrong with her or she is labeled promiscuous; if she is married and has issues giving birth, she becomes an outcast. And if she is unfortunate not to give birth to a son, then she has failed to give her husband an heir. Really! Is that all we are good for?

I have fasted and prayed to God – the spirit-filled tongue-blasting pentecostal way, the bare-footed white-garment holy-water-sprinkling way, and even the all-my-enemies-jump-up-fall-down-and-die way. Secretly without my husband's consent, I have even offered sacrifices to other gods. Let them make me pregnant even if it is just for a day, an hour, or a minute, I don't care; at least people would stop calling me barren. I don't even mind if it is a miscarriage. Every month that I bleed, I despise the blood I shed, for my own body had conspired against me and denied me conception. After awhile, I celebrated every futile month with a special cocktail made from my salty tears and thick juicy menses, I take a sip as I make a toast to another month of ridicule.

Tunde's voice jeered me back to my senses, "Can you stop all this your yhun yhun yhun! I am trying to sleep here" he shouted; and for the umpteenth time in recent years, I can't help but think that my mother had been right all along.

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# Meet The Shuta Bug



Mayowa Alabi  
Damilola (popularly  
known as Shuta Bug)  
is a Lagos-based  
illustrator, designer,  
photographer,  
motion-designer and  
a power ranger.

The political science  
graduate from  
University of Lagos,  
talks about his art  
and challenges.

**How did you get started as an  
illustrator?**

Oh yeah. I have always been  
able to draw as a kid. I have  
always been the artsy kid,  
drawing on my notes walls and  
everything. But I don't think  
I was very interested... until  
I saw one of my neighbours  
drawing. Everybody could  
draw stick figures, but he drew  
his figures a little differently –  
his stick figures had muscles,  
and hair and all. So after I saw  
that, I start hanging out with  
him more, and we would draw  
together. We would draw stuff  
after watching movies and  
create our own versions.

As I grew, I saw other artistes  
and how they created their  
works and I basically just  
jacked up their styles along  
the way, and improved on my  
own.





## How would you describe your style?

I don't know. There's this thing most artistes do where they first make a rough sketch then they proceed to put in details after. I don't do that. Though I have tried doing it that way but it doesn't work for me. My style is unique and a bit lazy.

Though I can draw normally, But I would describe myself as a vector artiste, meaning that most of my works are vector-base.

## Do you ever have creative blocks/slumps? What do you do then?

Yes I do. Truth is people see the project have done [completed], nobody sees the project I haven't done. There's a million and one project I haven't pushed out because I couldn't complete them. Maybe at some point, I lost inspiration or direction. It's been like that for me, so most times I just move on. I return to the project later to see if I can pick it up, but most times I have to start the whole project from scratch.

## Biggest challenge you have face in creating art?

I would say my biggest challenge is time. I tend not to have enough time to do the things I would like to do. Some of my artworks are a bit rushed. Time is a big factor for me.

And there's the constant challenge of being under-valued as well.

## Any current/future projects you are working on?

At the moment, I am working on artworks for my exhibition happening in December. I got a lot of buzz on social media for some of my illustrations I posted so I decided to lay low for a while and just draw; and to show my works in a more organised setting. In the

past couple of months I have been working on new materials that I will be exhibiting by December. I have about 15 new illustrations to showcase, and my old works out there.

## The last book(s) you read that inspired you?

One book that I read that inspired me a lot is **Life without Limits** by Nick Vujicic. I read that about two years ago.

## Final words

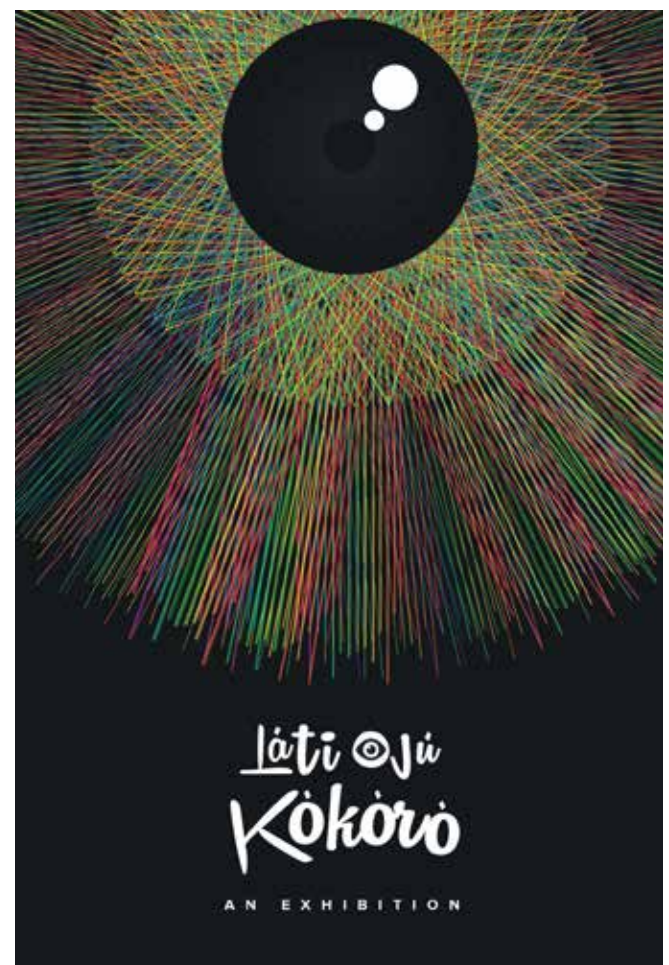
Thank you for giving the opportunity to share and talk about my arts.

Twitter: @shutabug

Insta: shutabug.me

Web: themadeeffect.com

\*Shuta Bug Exhibition tagged "Lati Oju Kokoro" - 16th Dec. 2017.





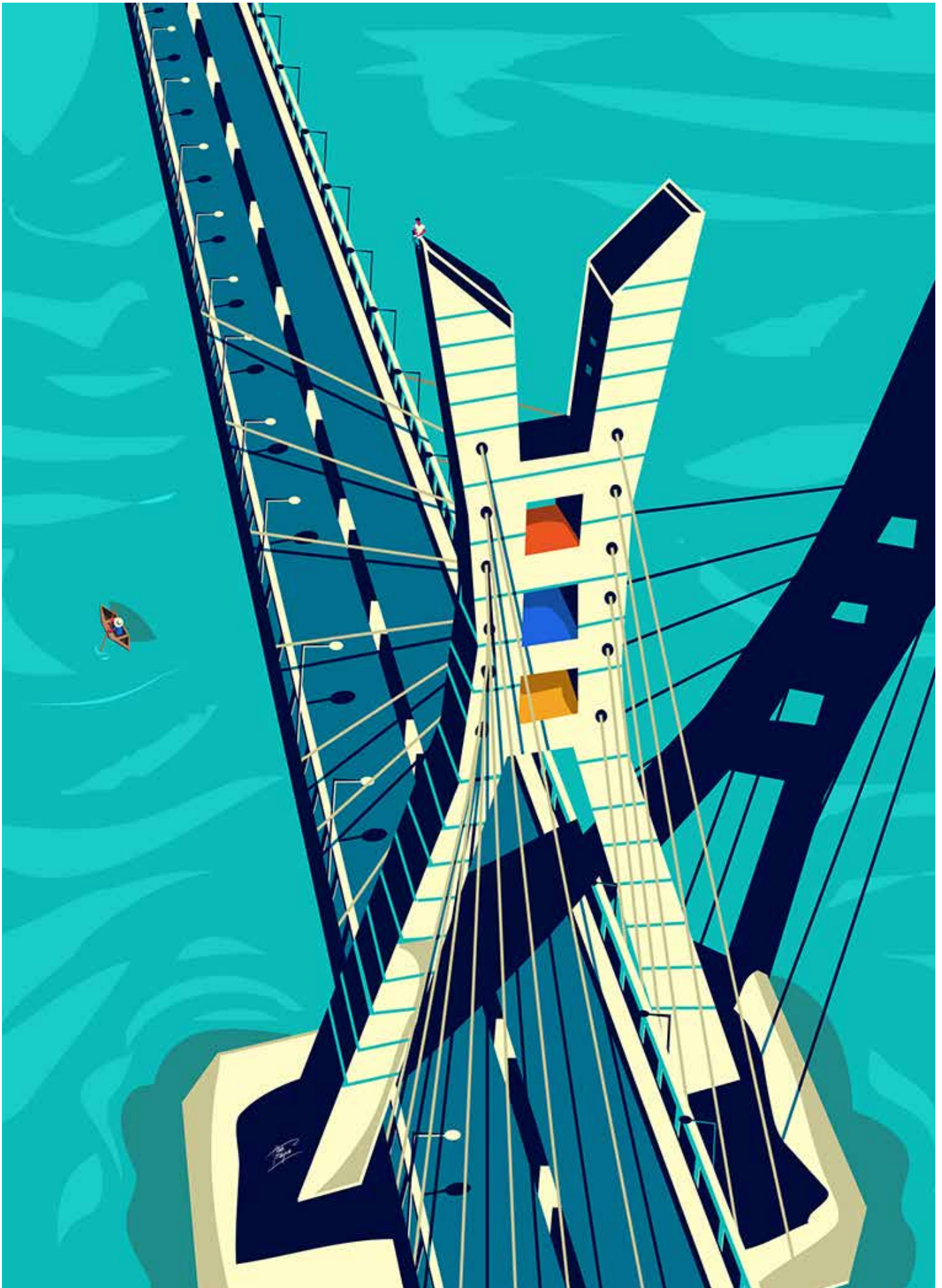




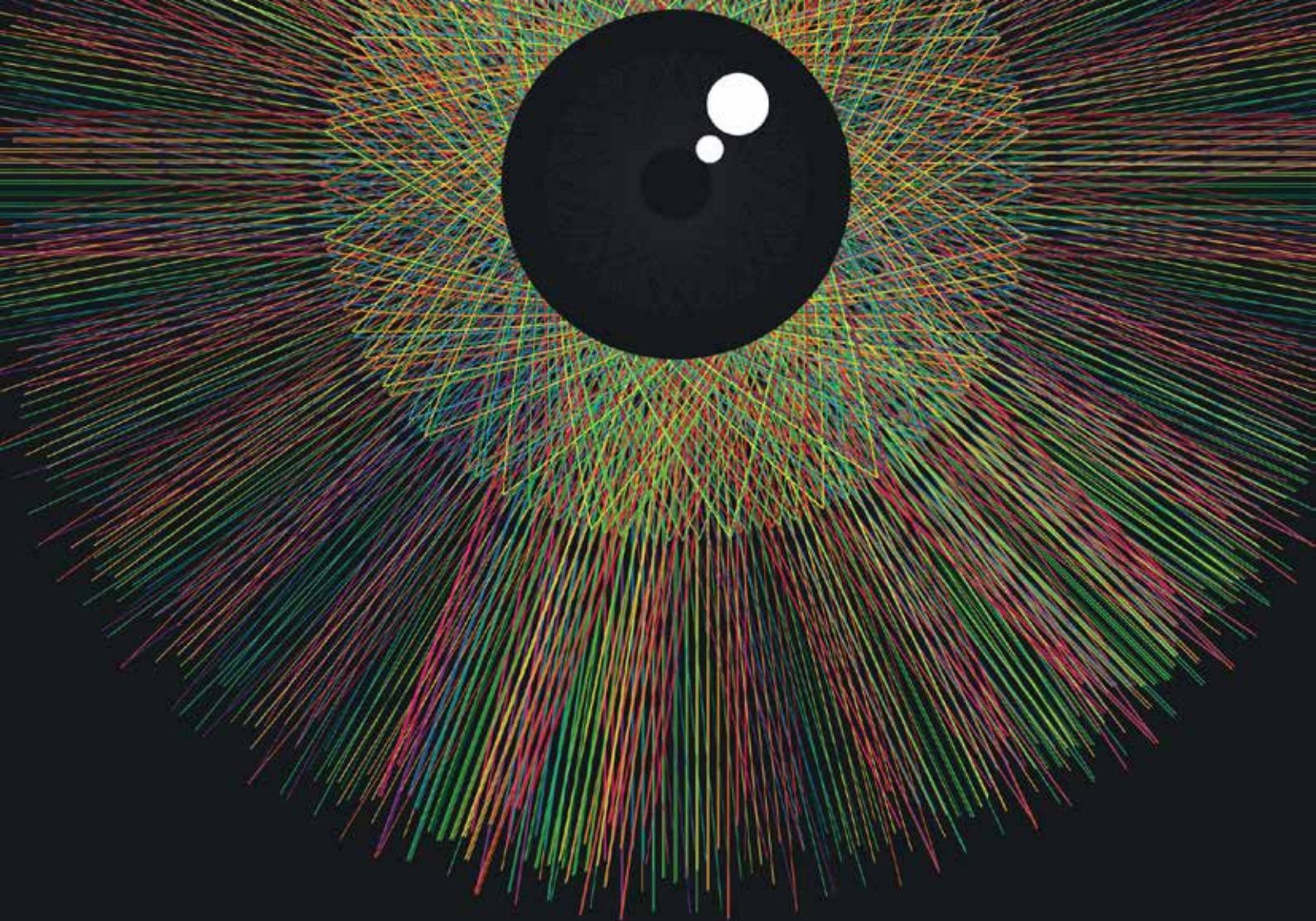












*Làti Ojú*  
*Kòkòrò*

AN EXHIBITION

*Làti Ojú*  
*Kòkòrò*

EXHIBITION OPENS

16 . 12 . 17



