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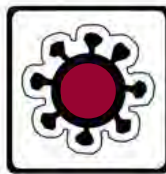
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Valentine's Day Anthology 2015

Edited and with a foreword by
Emma Shercliff and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf



ANKARA PRESS
A New Kind of Romance

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Foreword

Welcome to this very special Valentine's Day Anthology of African romance stories.

Since the launch of Ankara Press in December 2014, we have been overwhelmed by the positive response of readers to its vision of 'a new kind of romance', with African settings, storylines and characters. One of the key reasons for establishing the imprint was to counter the one-dimensional view of life as portrayed in many romance novels. As we know, modern romance does not always revolve around a dominant male hero, a submissive heroine and a happily ever after.

We wanted to harness some of this excitement to focus attention on a wider issue this Valentine's Day. African literature is sometimes accused of presenting a rather depressing portrayal of life across the continent. Whilst we acknowledge that it would be disingenuous for African writers not to engage with the serious issues that frame daily life - issues such as corruption, insecurity, violence, poverty, unemployment and civil unrest, all of which have been highlighted by Nigeria's current election campaign - we feel it is important, as publishers, to do what we can to provide African writing with the space to reflect the stimulating, vibrant, quirky, joyous complexities of life here.

Our motivations for commissioning this anthology were very clear: to provide a Valentine's Day 'treat' for readers, particularly those based in Nigeria who may need respite from the election fever sweeping the nation by 14th February, and to invite literary writers to see if they can invert the romance genre and make it meaningful for themselves. We also wanted to show that romance can be empowering, entertaining, and elegantly written, by men as well as women.

Thus, this Valentine's Day Anthology contains pieces by authors based in Liberia, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya, writing not about Ebola, poverty and terrorism, but about the joy of the everyday: the love, laughter and heartbreak that forms part of a universal experience. The stories also recognise that romance can occur at the most unexpected times (although, admittedly, rarely in as unexpected a situation as that explored by crime writer Hawa Jande Golakai) and between any two individuals. We are therefore particularly proud to include Binyavanga Wainaina's beautiful portrayal of same-sex romance within this collection, underlining that desire and intimacy are a very real part of life in Africa, as they are elsewhere in the world.

Moreover, romance in Africa takes place in multiple languages and we wanted to reflect that in this collection. Each story has been translated into a language spoken by one of the authors and an audio version of each text recorded. This anthology therefore becomes a much truer representation of romance in Africa as we can hear and see what romancing in different languages might sound like and mean.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone who has worked so hard, and often to unfeasibly short deadlines, to enable us to produce this anthology. One of the most exciting aspects of the project is that it has been a truly collaborative effort, bringing together writers, publishers, translators, readers and photographers from across Africa, all of whom have shown an incredible amount of goodwill by donating their time and talents for free. We believe the generous response we received indicates how strongly the writing and publishing community feels about the issues we are trying to highlight. It also goes to prove that the near impossible can be achieved, despite seemingly insurmountable technical and editorial issues, with a healthy dose of determination, good humour and mutual support.

Thus, we present our selection of sensuous stories from across the continent. We do hope you enjoy them. And please feel free to share the love – and the Anthology - with your wives, husbands, civil partners, friends and lovers.

Happy Valentine's Day!

Emma Shercliff, Valentine's Day Anthology Coordinator
Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, Publisher, Ankara Press

Fish

By Chuma Nwokolo



He smiled at her, and waited.

It was his usual grin – a laconic amusement wired into his steel-gray moustache. It was often there but today, suddenly, Nkemdilim wondered if he was laughing at her.

What if he had been play-acting that night when they first met? She was the one laughing at him then: ‘This is 2014!’ she had shouted, to be heard above the club music, ‘nobody says Excuse me Dance, any more!’

His spectacled brows had risen in embarrassment. She had started to feel bad about laughing, especially with her best friend, Taiye, joining in.

‘I am sorry,’ he had shouted back. ‘I just returned – unexpectedly – to the dating scene.’

He had straightened up, about to walk away, and then almost as an afterthought, leaned into her ear: ‘What do people say, these days?’

Her nostrils had picked up the restrained suggestion of a man who knew his perfumes, and she shrugged, holding back another bout of laughter: this would be something for the girls at the office! She was teaching a man at least twenty years her elder modern pick-up lines – and on a dance floor at that!

‘I don’t know! Anything except Excuse me dance! God!’ He was still looking at her, with those guileless eyes of his. This sort of man would be hard work! If you wanted him you would have to do all the work! She added, ‘Say something funny, or do something confident...’ ‘Like?’

She shrugged again. ‘Like take her hand and lead her to the dance floor or something...’

He had taken her hand then.

There was a lighter circle on his ring finger. As though he had pulled off a habituated wedding band the minute before, as he walked into the club, or the month before, as he walked out of a divorce court...

‘Like this?’ he had asked, pulling her gently into his half-smile.

She had exchanged wide-eyed, rolling-eye glances with Taiye and they had laughed again, this time, with him. ‘You are funny!’ She had said, meaning that he was anything but. Yet, she had risen all the same – not really to dance, merely to have yielded to the cultured strength of that arm, and to give him a few more lessons on the 2014 dating scene...

Beside her, Taiye coughed discreetly, in maid mode.

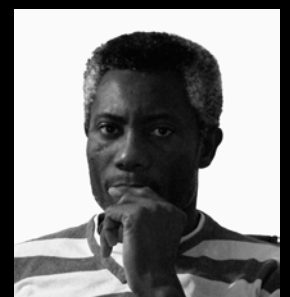
He was still waiting. Nkemdilim studied him as he stood in his black and whites. He did look too wise, far too experienced to have honestly said Excuse me dance on a dance floor, barely six months earlier. Perhaps the pretended incompetence was an elaborate pick-up ruse... Perhaps it was mere bait, and she had bitten. She replayed the scene as he lifted her up to the dance floor with that masterly angler’s arm. She let the sharp thought of that realisation sink into the soft palate of her feminine pride. She let it raise a pout so pained, so organic it seemed to rise from a deep, excavating memory of a Chastity Vow remembered, or an Old Love rekindled... something deep and cataclysmic enough to abort the present solemn proceedings... She let the devastation of that thought cloud her features, so that from her peripheral vision she could see his easy grin slip into a moue of concern. A cord of concentration tautened his brows, tightening his gloved grip of her fingers – as though it were the desperate grip of some fisherman at the end of an epic fight with a prized marlin who felt her slipping away from his hook at the very lip of his boat.

Then she smiled sweetly, and said, ‘I do.’

Listen to the audio version read by Chuma Nwokolo



Chuma Nwokolo is a lawyer and writer. (*Fish* is a short story from the final volume of *How to Spell Naija in 100 Short Stories*, due in print this year, but also under weekly release via <http://www.okadabooks.com>). His ten books include *How to Spell Naija in 100 Short Stories* (Vol. 1), *Diaries of a Dead African*, *The Ghost of Sani Abacha* and *One More Tale for the Road*. His latest poetry collection is *The Final Testament of a Minor God*. His candidate in Nigeria’s controversial 2015 elections is a new Bribe Code (<http://bribe.org>) which should ensure that whoever is crowned, Nigeria wins. Blog: <http://www.nwokolo.com/blogs>. Twitter handle: @chumanwokolo



Fish

Translation by Victor Ehikhamenor



He smile, look her, come wait.

Na so the man dey smile, tey, tey: that kain small smile wey be like say dem wire am join im grey bia-bia. but today Nkemdlim come dey wonder whether na im the man dey laugh sef.

Abi the man just dey play that night wey dem first meet? Na she dey laugh am then o; 'This na 2014!', she holla well well sotay she loud pass the club music, 'Man nor dey yarn babe 'Excuse me dance' again na!'

The see-finish answer wey Nkemdlim give am just weak the man. Im face embarrass. She come dey feel bad small, because her best friend, Taiye, come join hand dey laugh the man.

'Abeg nor vex o' the man holla back, 'e don tey when I enter club sef.'

He arrange imself like say e wan waka go, but e change im mind, come put mouth near her ear 'How dem dey talk am these days?'

As the man near her like that, her nose come smell scent wey tell am say the man sabi better perfume, she come hold herself make she nor laugh the man, as im take ask am the question - how babe like her go dey teach bobo wey take like twenty years senior am as im go take toast babes - and for inside club for that matter! Her office girls must to hear dis tori! 'I nor know o! Anything sha, but nor be Excuse me dance, God!'

The man still dey look am, with those im innocentie eyes. This kain man na work o! Babe wey want this kain bobo, na she go chase tire! 'You suppose make the girl laugh, you suppose gather better swagger...'

'Like how na?'

She raise her shoulder. 'Like, you fit just carry the babe hand waka go dance floor na, or something like that sha...'

Na so the man take carry her hand o.

The man ring-finger white small, like say im just comot im wedding ring before e enter the club, or like say e remove am as e waka comot for court where im and im wife go tear paper, before before.

'Like so?' the man ask, as im laugh, take style draw her near body.

She come look her friend Taiye. They open eye, roll eye, come begin laugh again but dis time nor be say dem they laugh the man. Na dem with the man dey laugh. 'You funny o!', she talk, although nor be say the man really funny sha, but she sha follow am. Nor be say she wan dance o, but the man gather one kain strong hand, that type wey dey weak woman. And she dey think whether make she teach am small how dem dey take toast babe for 2014.

Taiye nor forget say na she be chief bridesmaid, she come cough small.

The man still dey wait her. Nkemdlim look the man as e tanda for im black-and-white.

He be like who get korrek sense. E nor be like mugu wey fit dey yarn Excuse me dance for club only six months ago.

Abi na sense the man take play am? Abi all that excuse me dance yarn na the worm wey im take hook her like fish! And he don hook her well well! She come remember as the man take carry her go dance floor with im ogbonge fisherman hand. Kai. She just open eye dey remember. The shame of the matter come enter her body well well so tay e reach the side wey her woman yanga dey sleep jeje. She come let that vex full her belle, come dey comot for her face small small. Person wey look her face go think say she just remember say she don swear before before say she go never marry lai lai, or say she just remember the original bobo we she bin wan marry and that love don catch fire again. That vex come full her face, like say some serious katakata don gas wey fit dabaru the big show wey dey for ground... She come take corner eye see as the man smile just dey wash, as im swagger just dey melt, sotay the hand wey im take hold her come tight her finger - like say the man be fisherman wey hook one kain ogbonge fish, wey don drag am, drag am, struggle, struggle, sotay im don draw the fish reach for the very doormouth of im boat... and the fish wan comot for hook!

She come smile one kain sweet smile like dat, come say 'I do'.

Listen to the audio version read in Nigerian pidgin by Eghosa Imasuen



Victor E. Ehikhamenor was born in Nigeria. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared or are forthcoming in *The New York Times*, *Agni*, *The Washington Post*, *Wasafiri*, *The Literary Magazine*, *Per Contra* and elsewhere. He is the author of *Excuse Me!*, published by Parrésia Publishers. He is also a painter and a photographer whose art has been widely exhibited and collected worldwide, and used for notable book and journal covers. Ehikhamenor holds an MSc in Technology Management from University of Maryland, University College, and an MFA in fiction from University of Maryland, College Park. He lives and works from Lagos.



Candy



Girl

By Hawa Jande Golakai

“Grab her legs.”

“I should do whetin? Haaaay, mah pipo lookah troubo. You nah serious for true.”

Shaking my head, I try to prop Leonora up by the shoulders, making sure her head's turned away because that clotted spit oozing over the peeling red lipstick and onto her chin is no wet dream. Then I crouch low and heave; my wife is no small woman. Once I've lifted her torso off the floor, I look up.

“Ciatta! Really?” Was she serious? I'm breaking my back and my so-called lover is over there with her arms crossed looking on like I'm a psycho, like I just asked her to kill somebody. Okay, poor choice of words, considering the situation. I jerk my head wildly in the direction of Leonora's feet, urging her to jump in anytime. Ciatta still doesn't budge, instead draws her arms tighter and juts a hip. “Cia, come on!”

I lose it, then “Dammit!”

when my back loses it,

popping a tendon

or something

else that isn't

supposed to

pop. Grinding pain

between my teeth, I

drop Leonora, who does

quite an impressive face-plant

into the carpet.

“Fineboy chill, I beg you, befo'

somebody come bust inside heah and find out what we doin'.”

“We?” I rotate my spine, trying to unclench. “More like what I'm doing. If you're not interested in saving my neck, I don't see why you're here.”

“Mtssshw. P'hn blame you. I came, dah why you tellin' me nonsense.”

She cocks her chin away from me, classic move when she's trying to control that spittfire temper. She's not pissed, not really, I can tell. Anger runs a whole different tier, in spectral shades, with her. She looks round the room, deciding if she approves, if I chose well despite the shitstorm this has turned into. From t h e

tiny smile that crooks up the

edge of her mouth,

I did good. Clean

and respectable

but not high-end,

romantic but

seedy enough for

debauchery. A tough combo

in this nosy Monrovia. She

beckons with the crook of her

finger; I notice for the first

time a French manicure with

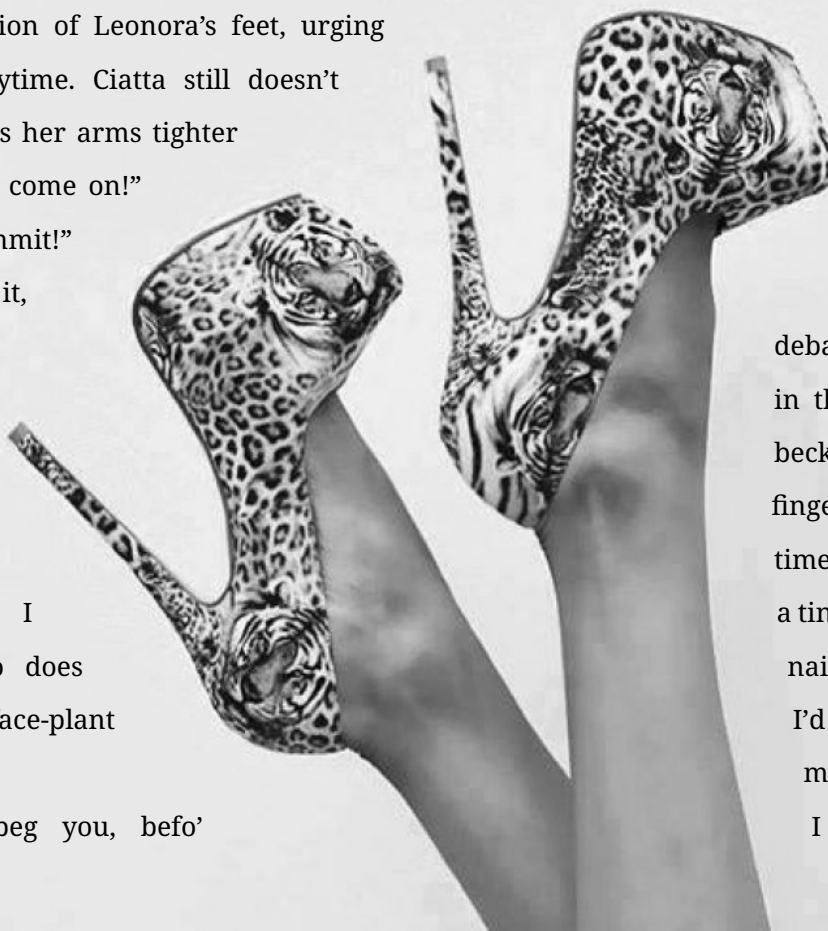
a tiny red heart stuck to each

nail. Why would something

I'd normally find so cheesy

make me want her more?

I go to her like a little boy.



“Dah wha’ happin’?” she coos, massaging me. Tiny knots dissolve like sugar to caramel.

“You see what happened – my wife’s dead!” I point to the body, which I’m past the point hoping will wake up, stagger to its feet and cuss my ass out.

Ciatta huffs. “Aay mehn, my eyeball dem nah bust. Whetin happin exactly, tell me it,” she flaps a hand, “articulate it, in dah yor fine-fine white pipo book.”

I ignore the gibe. She’s no trash but playing up our differences (many) is her thing and though I protest, that edge of forbidden frisson it adds ... hot damn. Who knew I knew how to mess around. In looks my jue is so like my wife I shouldn’t have bothered. Night and

day though. Take for instance their outfits: Leonora, champion at making pretty love and eye contact, straight out of a corny rom-com with her red trenchcoat, fancy black frills underneath no doubt; Cia in the very lappa I tore off her the first time we ravaged, with those hideous tiger-print heels that slaughter me every time they’re up in the air.

“She was sitting on the bed when I walked in. I don’t know how but she found out about your surprise and genuinely thought it was for her. What could I say?” I gulp. “Then she

opened the box of chocolates ...” My head slumps into my palms. “Once the reaction starts, it’s unstoppable. She’s so sensitive. She’s always careful about carrying her epi pen but clearly dressing like a hooker to surprise me took precedence.”

“De geh didn’t tink her husband was gon kill her on Valentine’s Day.” “I didn’t –” I choke on a sob and she kisses me, silences me. “We ... we need to get rid of the body.”

“No. Now’days you can’t try dah one deh. You’hn do nuttin wrong but let’s get yor story straight.” She looms over my wife, unblinking.

“From the tiny smile that crooks up the edge of her mouth, I did good. Clean and respectable but not high-end, romantic but seedy enough for debauchery.”

When she looks up her eyes glitter so dark and sultry in the twilight, like oil dancing on top of ink, that I know I’ll wreck it all for her, now and always. “Nobody saw me since I came by the back way, so dah part okay. Jes pretend dis was like last year but one smuh sumtin’ went wrong.”

“How will that...” The clouds part. “Yes, yes! I always order candy for you, my Ma and a special box for her. In my hurry to get here I grabbed the wrong box and that’s how this catastrophe happened.

Thank God the other boxes are safe

at home. I’ll destroy the extra one meant for Ma and use the custom candy as proof of the mix-up.”

“Ehn-heeehnn, palaver fini. Dah was mistake. Dey say when bad luck call your name, ripe banana will break your teeth.” She laughs at my awe. “O-o-o you jek! You lookin’ inside my mouf like my teeth made o’ diamond. I nah only good for one ting.” She crosses to the bed and I drink in every muscle shifting under her thin wrapper. I shouldn’t be tingling right now ... why am I tingling?

“It been how long?”

I check my watch. “Twenty, twenty-five minutes.”

“Good. More than one hour and it look bad. After I leave be ready to give de performance of your life. After you give

me de performance of your life.” She drops the colourful lappa. Her body is heaven turned on its head. She picks a truffle from the box and runs it over her lips.

“Don’t,” I rasp.

“Why not? I nah de one who got nut allergy. Had,” she smiles.

“Why you make me buy it? You always say it’s too sweet.”

Ciatta shrugs. “Which geh can ever be too sweet?” The finger with the little red heart crooks at me again. I’m going to hell a thousand times over.

Listen to the audio version read by Helene Cooper



Born in Frankfurt, Germany, Hawa Jande Golakai spent a vibrant childhood in her homeland Liberia. Her 2011 crime debut *The Lazarus Effect*, published by Kwela Books/NB Publishers, was nominated for the Sunday Times Fiction Prize, the University of Johannesburg Debut Prize and the Wole Soyinka Prize. Her forthcoming novel is due for publication in 2015 and she is at work on the third. She loves doing autopsies and is bored stiff by romantic gestures, except when they involve intrigue and food. When she isn't moonlighting as a crime author, she works as a medical immunologist and health consultant. She lives between Monrovia and anywhere else she finds herself.



Nénii Néé

Translation by Yarkpai Keller

“Goo soñ”
“Yé nga lekè?” Haaay, ñganua ñgaa
Ménikètè kaawè . Ménèfe í ñgei a tɔɔyè”
ñga ñgun kpélín. ñga noi kpanan, agèè
ñga Leonoraup soñ a galan. ñga duan
été. ñga bene āgèé fè nayai kaa, gèyeñ
nagbɔñ kpólíi timéí, gèyén ñèn mu, veyè
a sèí wèlì mèmíí Gè múlí múlí pumā. ñga
mayéñ, ñga gbalòñ. Mamu fe a nèníí
loñ. ñga naa musíé tí, ñgè ñgwèlèma
kaa.

“Ciatta! Ciatta bèití? Ménéka ñgei
a tɔɔyè? ñgè ñyamā yalé bè, díè ñga
wèlìkèma nèníí ... gatóní a ñyèé pu gííla
gè ñgaa yíè bonuu? Ekèti. Nawoo fakèti
a yélé kèèñ. Yè da nuu malékè a gèè é
nuu paa. Nga ñgun pèné ñgèí é púlan
Leonora kɔɔmu. Nyíé ma púlíbè, íkpon-
ma tèémɔ. Kè vé tumon, e yea sukpanañ
gègèí, é ñgobéí kànañ zu. “ Cia, pa kulí!
Ááááá Nyama ké kula zu, “Daaméy!”
ñzu nanaí, ñgè ñgala, gè solí zu. Ngè
ñyin ñga míí, gè solí su, Leonora ékula
yéí é too gālāíma a ñgèí.

“Sulon loñ lèlèí kwèlè pu úliima, ñgaí
kpélai fèi. í mèi saa. Nuuda falaa pa é
mèníí kaa kwagèí pèlèí mu.”

“Kwaya?” ñga ñyama soñ, ñga
kpúlan zu. ñgawo su é tɔɔ a nèlèé. “Da
nɔbè
ñgagèí. Aní ífè ñwèlì í ñgɔn soñ, fè
mèníí kɔɔn í kabè mèníímaí.”

“Nèni, yafèi ñyabè. ñga pabé
ipɔnaa íkè mèníí boma ñgun fèma.”

E nèèñ kula polu gbonoma,

agèè níí ñga é yèñ. Ganɔ yé níí ñgwanaí,
kè vèti, ñga gɔɔñ. ñgo líí ñgwanaí kayè a
wèlìkèma líí ñgwana. A té a gèté, ma é
yèñ a nèlèé a gèè ígaa. é lumuí sukaa. A
ní nāa wèlì kama, bèlèmañ kwaa naa bè
kèla yufu yufu. ñga gaa gè nagbèñ kpólí
lèlèéí tí mu síé. ñga gɔɔñ a gèè

ñga tíí lèlèéí kè. Wèlìkèmaa mawaa
zɔɔ fè kètèní. Kè bakèma kagu a nèlèé.
ñgílí kè sía wèlìkèmaa lèlèéí mènííma da
Ducɔɔ mèníí tamaaí, ñga naa ñyèé gbua
pèlè fèlèí tíñ mèníí. é gèno tí agèè ñga
gaa. ñyèé ñgaléñ pèlè kèlèé kpètèé yè
bèlèí Fríñ ñgaí

da dí wèlì kpètèlai. Lebegè señ yíi nèè
fezu ñga ñwèlì a dama? ñgèli bɔnaa yè
loloñ?

“lebekè?” E mèi saa, gè ñyee sia ma a
nèlèé. Saa pèlèé díké seeñ yè nèè señ.

“Meni kèi ya gaa. ñga nènii a saa. ñga
ñgee kpuwa lèma, ñga kiliñga siai
kèné a pai musie saa yei, e tɔɔ gè nalañ.
Kè tèn a tèè.

Ciatta kèlwo a mafila. Eemhn,
fe kwa kai a nèlèé. ñgèi kèyè e wolo.

Lebekè? Boma. E yea laa gieñ polu,
ñga kaa I kɔɔ laa kwelei su. ñga ñgili
kula naa. Ve a kala. Kè, kwa pele kèno
a kukemèni a tamaiti. ñga nii ñwana.
Kè ve lèlèñ. Gbèè be gɔɔñ a gèè ñyak-
piñ ñga sia aia kè a damaa. Kwakaa,
ñga gambèlei kayè mamu, vakè a mèníí.

Akè a kpiñ a kpini da folo. Dimayili see
dikelee da doi, Lenora ñgɔi tèèí. A kpela

kula a nèlèé.

“ñga lo pèlèi mu, gèwo seeñ
gbiñ ñga. Fe gɔɔñ, kè e gili kɔɔñ agèè
zamaseñ ka a pɔɔ. Lebeñga polí moi?”
E naa chukíle bai labo. ñga ñguñ mayeñ
yeeñga. Kpèniñfè nii nèèí ti kɔɔ a pilan,
va kpela. Daliyèa. ñgo kɔɔ pūū señ
kanɔma. Gèmayili yè señ soñ señ. E ñgɔi
kètuwè agèè mèníí kula a ñyāā.

“Nèèñ noi ti fekèni gɔɔni ani
ñgo suloñ a pai baai ñwèlìkèma yele
ñgíma.”

“Vekèni a gɔɔñ ñgɔɔ. E nagbèñ sei ñgɔi
ma , na ekè mu. Fèè ku saai kula bè.”

“Kpa.” I fagèti a tèèí ñgi. Ife mèníí
ñgɔmɔ kèni. Fèè ku mèníí mèníí ila a zāā.
E mapélé ñga nènii mbèi. E yelei su kaa,
ñgai gao tèi kèpiliñ pepe ... yè ya ñga
wulo. “Nuuda fe ñgaani ñgèkula pèlèi
polu pele.”

“ñyiti lèlèi.” Gèèno yè golañ polɔi
sumèni. Kè mènííloñ kamu.”

A pai kèi líñ? ñgele kɔɔñ su e bela?
“Owei, owei. ñgapai señ néé téi ipɔ, ka

mama. ñga katuñ da kpèni sie ñgèé pai
a mafilai. ñgabe gè mèníí ñgɔmɔi kèkèti.

Yala zèè. Gālā kpeli kanaa, ñyii kanaa
mi, ñga pai ganai. ñga pai nèlèéti léi
ñga ñga kiliñga pui méi pèlé.

“Aaaa heee mèníí saai akpéé.
Pɔlama kati. Dia mèníí ñgɔmɔ a itoli,
gèni goi kpolu a í ñgin ñgale.” E yélé

ma. Ooo, Ya kpèliñ! Ya nakai yé nuu be
ñgiñ kayè koni kweleñ. “ñèlèèí nɔ mèníí
tɔɔnɔ ma.”

E tinañ gbiñ ñga. Nanai kelekè sāā zu

see feŋ feŋ mu. Mafe kpèliŋ naa.

Lemènima?

Aa kè a gukoya?

Owei. ŋga wasi su kaa. “Mini buufelè ...

buufelè kaololu.” Nèlèi. Akè a awa tɔɔ

ŋgɔmɔi. I kriŋ kpètè, ŋga lèè pai kula bè.

I eenia sumèni tètè mbo. E ŋgɔ seewaŋ “Lemènima?

labo ŋgèi, eteema. ŋgɔ kponoiti kéfolo

yè da yalataa labo.

E ŋyee lo gālā su e kiane tɔɔ

zu e gia nagbèŋ tima.

“Ife gèti”

“Ve a nuu ŋgii togo ŋgun ka a diye” Gè
yèlè mɔlɔŋ.

I gè ŋga ŋya lemènima? “Yakè moi ma a
gèè nèi a damaa.”



Listen to the audio version read in Kpelle by Yarkpai Keller



Yarkpai J.C Keller was born in Handii, Bong County in Liberia in 1959. He received his diploma in information technology studies in 2003 and currently works as computer technician with the Liberian Observer in Liberia and as a freelance translator. He is married with children and dependents.

THE IDEA IS TO BE SEALED IN

By Binyavanga Wainaina

The idea is to be sealed in.

It is not hard. He is a soft, mild dreamy child, content to follow others. His rituals are simple. They exist only to carry himself (always (within) enchantment). He is ten years old, and in his slow, dreamy way, he has marked out all the go-to graph points that awaken his inner joys. He has learnt to open his tap of enchant at will: to save it up for carrying to school, that naked screech of encounters he loves, but which turbulents his soul.

He knows to softly bypass; to avoid trouble; to never demand; to not make claim; to fight for no territory; to never snitch (better to confess first, even if you are innocent); to avoid all confrontation without seeming to. To put on a blank easy face when mum or Auntie Njenga sit eye to eye with him, frowning in concern; determined to solution: to put their curiosity right inside his intestines, shift them around, seeking his secrets. He

is too naked to them. Too opaque. In plain sight. But unseen. When they do, he smiles innocently, cries even, when really pressed, allowing tears.

He has some private contempt for his sisters, his cousin Ochieng. They seem unable to control their impulses to act.

**"But his face and lower arms,
are a dark dark copper, busy
with veins, nerves, tendons and
muscles."**

To try. To trip. To say no! Their faces are often swollen with desire and vulnerability: tears, anger insistence. They confuse him. Why? Surely the world is only a fridge. To open briefly? To take some food out for his soul, and slowly stuff it into the stretchy stomach-giant world inside himself? In car trips, he has learnt to train his ears to remain blocked; to vague out his siblings. His interface is in agreement to be with

them: nodding, approving, agreeing, copying, frowning knowingly. Because he never insists, he is always the one to share: bedrooms, sweets. He prefers to offer first. George Waruiru Odera did conquer one piece of ground for himself. His three sisters hate using the outside toilet. His mum and Auntie Njenga hate it too. He loved it. It was those old long drops with a pull down chain for flushing. At night, it rumbled with the thick sounds of crickets, which to him was the stadium cheer of stars. He had his own

key. It had a crude shower, which was not used. He brought in an old couch. Here under a naked 60 watt bulb, he could sit for hours, and let his insides loose, let the flow of dreaming roll over him. Grow stories, and dreams over days so they created thicker feelings. Many times he arrived agitated, banging the door behind him after walking fast, away from the rest. There was something about the nakedness of tangling

with people: their words and contentiousness. Their hard unselfconscious sunlight brought him often to the edge of panic. He hated crying.

This toilet was always dark, built for African servants in colonial days, with a tiny window so high he had to stand on a chair on the couch with a stick to pull it open. It was full of shadows, light was only soft angles and flutters, sounds were always muffled. There was mould, rust and moods.

It was here he brought his first short novel, aged seven, and his second the next day, and through his childhood, hundreds. It was here that he first masturbated, and soon enough, several times daily. The idea of being sexually vulnerable left him uncomfortable. That somebody would see his availability from sweat on his nose. He liked to leave his toilet into the world refreshed, neutered, and with enough enchant and novels in his bag to carry him through the day.

So, this way, he cruises through to fifteen,

to boarding school in Njoro. One day, a Sunday, after church, free from school to walk into Njoro town, his bag full of novels, he avoids the crowds of friends all going to look for chips, cheap booze, in the popular places where school girls like to go for the same.

He has seen this tree many times before. It reminds him of his toilet. Full of moods and dappled shadows. A huge gnarled old eucalyptus rising high above the middle of an open air nyama choma joint. He walks in, the place is packed with Sunday Lunchtime treats. Most people choose to avoid the tree, to sit under the mabati shades with linoleum covered tables. That is fine. The noise of strangers is the best silence. There is a crude table nailed to the tree, with a bench below it. He sits in the shade of the tree, faces away from the crowd, opens his bag and piles three novels on the table. One remains in his hands. Alistair MacLean. The Golden Rendezvous. He puts his fingers

into the folded page mark and heads for the butchery. He orders a quarter kilo of goat ribs, chips, some slices of mutura, and a bitter-lemon, the short cloudy one. They give him a receipt for the food. He takes the receipt into the kitchen, which is hot with charcoal. There is a huge pot of boiling goat-head soup.

And the wide sweat soaked back of a man. Facing away from him.

Avoid direct eye contact. Narrow your eyes a little. Vague your face and look dreamy. Smile/frown a bit.

He turns.

There are bits of bone on the man's face, and sweat. The man's torn white apron jacket is folded to the elbows. The man's skin above the halfway mark between the wrist and the elbow is shockingly soft and creamy-skinned. Pale tea. But his face and lower arms, are a dark dark copper, busy with veins, nerves, tendons and muscles.

He wants to lock the door to the toilet. A



slow creamy feeling tingles through his belly. The man's voice crackles into him, like fat on fire. There is a sawn off-log and a machete by its side where meat is hacked.

The man turns. And his arm rises. It is most certainly headed for the receipt between George's finger. It is not. Thick work-grimy fingers full of calluses brush his upper arm, for the briefest moment they linger so close they tickle, then they curve into a fist and grab him gently and he turns to find the man's breath flutter past his cheeks. Something wrapped up and muffled shivers, then runs around his solar system. A big glowing full moon groans. The smell of fresh sweat fills him, burning meat.

He turns, smoothly, determined not to allow his screen to freeze, to expose him. Raises an eyebrow ruefully. The man is undeterred. His face moves closer. Large white sooty teeth, a giant open child's smile in that battered matatu of a face full of crinkles, angles and a busy jawbone. George looks at the pipes of life gulping at the man's neck, the open overall ridged with bone and gristle. The hand is so gentle on his upper arm. It strokes down his arm, and pulls the receipt out gently, and a laugh tickles out of the man's belly and climbs up from George's toes, his testicles fist, and the laugh growls like the school tractor, finds the simmering acid of shame pooling in his belly.

The man laughs in his face, so free and open, eyes almost shut, pupils clear, with no shadow. With joy he says, "Umepotea

chews bones. In the late afternoon, people clear the butchery, the drinkers move to the neighboring bar.

The other hand reaches behind his shoulder and smoothly pulls the book from George's hand. All the diners are gone.

wapi?"

The thick hand leaves his fingers tingling, and returns to give George a mild slap on the back. The man turns away and says, "Nuthu Thaa."

The lunchtime sun is overhead and there are no shadows. One foot ahead of the other, fingers working frenziedly inside the

"He reaches into the mood of the novel and is lost."

pages of the novel. He allows himself to enjoy the uncurling of this strange itchy joy. George gathers the moistures of feeling around his neck and earlobes and brings them to the front of his mind near his eyes. He reaches into the mood of the novel and is lost.

The meat comes. He eats. Another waiter. Not the man. The man who now occupies the hairs on the back of his neck. Little flows of feeling trickle down his spine. He reads and reads. Lost in that ship. He

In the cool of seven PM, the hand lands on his shoulder. This time he can hear the smile's sunlight. Already, the mabati roof is crackling like fat, like stars about to burst out from blackness, and bristle sharply out the

back of his neck. The other hand reaches behind his shoulder and smoothly pulls the book from George's hand. All the diners are gone.

"Leave that book. I want to show you something."

Elbow is gripped, tearing the cobwebs of shy from behind his face. He is naked. They walk past the little wooden kitchen. One arm leans across his shoulders in confident brotherliness. A little corridor. A small golden padlock. A safari bed. A little shocking pink basin. Apron drops, trousers, underwear. Scoops of tea coloured buttocks. A dirty yellow jerrycan fills the shocking pink basin. Soap. Vigorous splashes. Ahh, a stretch. Wipes. Underwear. Jeans. T shirt. The man sits down. George's fingers are thrust into the grey blanket. The hand moves across his shoulders, turns his head to face him. The voice finds his ear, wet with droplets of man, raspy from late night shouts.

"Pass me those cigarettes on the headboard. You can leave when you want."

Listen to the audio version read by Billy Kahora



Binyavanga Wainaina is an African writer. He lives in Nairobi.



Ni Wazo la Kufunika

Translation by Elieshi Lema

Siyo vigumu. Yeye ni mnyamazifu na mpole, mwenye kuridhika kufuata wengine. Matendo yake ni mepesi, hayana madoido, nayo huyabeba na kuyatumia yampe furaha, kwani kila mara hupenda awe katika furaha. Ana miaka kumi. Kwa njia yake ya unyamazifu isiyo na haraka, ameviwekea alama vitu vyote vinavyoamsha furaha rohoni mwake. Na amejifunza kufungua, kama bomba, yale yanayofurahisha wengine. Na huviweka awe navyo anapokwenda shule, avitumie katika matukio yanayomchangamsha, lakini ambayo humfanya

kuona kama siri zake zimedhihirika. Yu muwazi sana kwao. Hawawezi kupenya. Anaonekana wazi. Haonekani. Na wanapomuona, anajua kutabasamu kama asiye na hatia, kulia, kama akilazimishwa sana, lakini kulia polepole. Anajua jinsi ya kuruhusu machozi tu, na siyo kububujikwa. Binafsi, anayo dharau ya chinichini kwa dada zake na binamu yake Ochieng. Wanashindwa kabisa kudhibiti mihemko yao. Kutenda. Kujaribu. Kufanya makosa. Kukataa. Mara nyingi nyuso zao huvimba kwa

vitamu. Hupenda kutoa kwanza.

Lakini George Waruiru Odero alipata ushindi kwenye jambo moja. Dada zake walichukia sana kutumia choo cha nje. Mama yake na Shangazi Njenga nao hawakutaka. Yeye alipenda kukitumia. Choo chenyewe kilikuwa ni vile vilivyokuwa na cheni ndefu ya kuvutia maji. Usiku kilipiga kelele nzito kama za nyenje, sauti ambayo kwake ilisikika kama kelele za nyota wanaoshangilia uwanjani. Alikuwa na ufunguo wake. Kulikuwa na bomba la mvua, lilikuwa halitumiki. Aliongeza kochi

"Lakini uso wake na mikono sehemu ya chini ni rangi ya shaba iliyokolea, imetapakaa mishipa, vena, mikano na misuli."

asononeke. Anafahamu vitu vya kukwepa ili asiingie kwenye matatizo, vitu vya kutokudai, vya kutomiliki, kutopigania umaarufu bila sababu, katu kutoiba (ni afadhali kukiri kwanza, hata kama huna hatia), kukwepa ugomvi. Anajua wakati wa kuwa na sura iliyo tupu, isiyosema chochote, hasa wakati mama au Shangazi Njenga anapoketi naye, ana kwa ana, uso amekunja kwa wasiwasi, akiazimia kupata suluhisho kutoka kwake. Anajua jinsi ya kuuweka udadisi wao ndani huko kwenye utumbo na kisha kuupekuapekua

matamano na udhaifu: machozi, hasira, kung'ang'ania. Wanamshangaza. Kwa nini? Hakika dunia ni kama jokofu tu. Si hufunguliwa kwa muda mfupi? Kuchukua chakula cha kulisha roho yake na kisha kuvilundika ndani ya dunia kubwa ya tumbo lake. Katika safari zake kwa gari, amejifunza kuziba masikio yake ili kuffifisha maongezi ya ndugu zake. Amekubali kuwa nao kwa juujuu tu, akitingisha kichwa, akiridhia, akikubali na kuiga. Kwa vile halazimishi chochote, yeye ndiye anatakiwa kushirikiana: vyumba vya kulala, vitu

kuukuu. Na hapa ndipo alipoweza kukaa kwa saa nyingi, akimulikwa na balbu ya wati 60 wakati akiachia tumbo lake lifunguke, akiruhusu ndoto zake ziufunike mwili wake, akirutubisha hadithi zake alizobuni siku nyingi ili zijenge hisia nene. Alitumia saa nyingi akitafuta sehemu zenye utata. Mara nyingi alifika akiwa na mashaka, na kufunga mlango kwa nguvu baada ya kuwakimbia wenzake. Alipobishana na watu alihisi kama anabaki mtupu, maneno yao na ubishi na uwazi uliojitokeza kwenye mwanga ulimfanya afike kwenye ukingo

wa hofu. Hakupenda kulia.

Hiki choo kilikuwa na giza mara zote. Kilijengwa kutumika na Waafrika wakati wa ukoloni. Kilikuwa na dirisha moja, dogo, lililokuwa juu kiasi kwamba ilibidi asimame juu ya kiti, kilichokuwa juu ya kochi, kisha atumie fimbo ili aweze kulifungua. Choo kilijaa vivuli, mwanga wake hafifu ulichezacheza, kila siku sauti zilififishwa. Kulikuwa na kuvu, uchakavu, kutu na sununu.

Ndani humu, akiwa na miaka saba, ndipo alipoleta kitabu chake cha kwanza cha fasihi.

Na kingine siku iliyofuata, na katika maisha yake ya utoto, alileta na kusoma mamia ya vitabu vya fasihi humu. Ni humu ndani ndipo alipojichua kwa mara ya kwanza, na kisha kufanya hivyo mara kadhaa kwa siku. Alichukia kuonyesha udhaifu wa ujinsia wake. Kwamba mtu angeweza kuona jasho kwenye pua yake na kutambua tamaa yake. Alipenda kuondoka chooni na kuingia katika dunia akiwa safi na mwenye furaha ya kutosha, fasihi zake kwenye begi zilizomtosha kwa siku nzima.

Kwa njia hii, ndivyo alivyoishi na kutimiza

miaka kumi na tano na kuingia shule ya bweni huko Njoro. Kwa siku moja, Jumapili baada ya kusali, alikuwa huru kwenda mjini Njoro. Begi lake likiwa limejaa vitabu vya fasihi, aliwakwepa makundi ya rafiki zake, na wanafunzi wasichana, wote wakienda kutafuta chips na pombe rahisi katika baa pendwa zilizojaa watu.

Ameshauona mti huu mara nyingi siku zilizopita. Unamkumbusha choo chake kwa jinsi ulivyojaa sununu na vivuli vyake hafifu vinachezacheza. Mkaratusi mkubwa sana, wa miaka mingi, wenye makovu, ulionyooka



hadi juu, katikati ya baa ya wazi ya nyama choma. Anaingia ndani na kukuta pamejaa. Watu waliokwepa mti walikaa chini ya kivuli cha mabati kilichokuwa na meza zilizotandikwa vitambaa vya plastiki. Sawa tu. Kelele za watu asiowajua ndizo huwa na ukimya. Anaona meza ya ovyo iliyopigiliwa kwenye mti ikiwa na benchi.

Anakaa chini ya kivuli cha mti akiwa amewapa watu mgongo, kisha anafungua begi na kutoa vitabu na kuweka vitatu juu ya meza. Kimoja kinabaki mkononi, mwandishi, Alistair MacLean, jina, The

Golden Rendezvous. Anafungua ukurasa uliowekwa alama ya kukunjwa na kuweka kidole chake pale na akiwa nacho, anaelekea kwenye kibanda cha nyama. Anatoa oda, nyama ya mbuzi, robo kilo ya mbavu, chips, vipande vya mutura na soda, bitter lemon, ile ndogo ambayo siyo angavu. Wanampa risiti. Anachukua risiti na kueleka jikoni. Kuna joto kali la moto wa mkaa, supu ya kichwa cha mbuzi inachemka kwenye sufuria kubwa.

Kuna mgongo wa mwanamume uliofunikwa na jasho. Ameangalia mbele.

Anajiambia, usimtazame machoni, finya macho kidogo, ficha uso na urembue. Tabasamu au nuna kidogo.

Mwanamume anageuka.

Kuna vipande vidogo vya mifupa usoni mwake, na jasho. Aproni yake nyeupe iliyoraruka imekunjwa hadi kwenye kiwiko. Ngozi yake, kati ya kiwiko na kifundo cha mkono ni laini ajabu, ni rangi ya krimu kama chai nyepesi. Lakini uso wake na mikono sehemu ya chini ni rangi ya shaba iliyokolea, imetapakaa mishipa, vena, mikano na misuli.

Anataka kufunga mlango uendao chooni. Msisimko wa hisia laini unampita mwilini. Sauti ya mwanamume inapasukia ndani mwake, kama mafuta yanayoungua. Wanapokatia nyama kuna gogo dogo na panga kando yake.

Mwanamume anageuka, mkono wake unainuka. Bila shaka kuchukua risiti George aliyoiweka katikati ya vidole vyake. La hasha. Vidole vyake vichafu, vyenye sugu kutokana na kazi, vinapangusa mkono wa George, vinasita hapo kwa muda kidogo tu, karibu mno, hadi vinasisimua. Halafu vidole vinajifunga kama vile ngumi na kumshika kwa utulivu, na mara George anapoinua uso, pumzi ya mwanamume inampita mashavuni. Mtetemo wa kitu kilichofungwa na kuffishwa kinazunguka katika mfumo wake wa jua. Mwezi pevu unaguna. Harufu ya jasho changa inamjaa, ya nyama inayoiva. Hali ya afya fulani, uhalisia fulani.

Anageuka polepole, akiwa amezimbia kuwa sura yake ile isigande na kuonyesha ukweli wake. Anainua jicho kwa huzuni. Hilo halimzuii mwanamume. Uso wake unazidi kusogea. Meno, rangi ya moshi mweupe, tabasamu kubwa la kitoto kwenye uso uliojaa makunyanzi, kama matatu chakavu. Taya linatafuna. George anatazama koromeo linavyogugumia shingoni mwa mwanamume, tuta wazi la mfupa na gegedu. Kiganja cha mwanamume kimetulia sehemu ya juu ya mkono wake, karibu na bega. Anapapasa mkono kuelekea chini na kuivuta risiti polepole. Kicheko

cha mwanamume kinatokea tumboni, na kumtekenya George kuanzia vidole vya miguu na kupanda kuelekea juu, korodani linajikunja na kukaza. Kicheko kinanguruma kama trekta la shule na kukuta aibu chachu, kali, inayochemka polepole na kukusanyika tumboni.

Mwanamume anacheka waziwazi mbele yangu, kicheko huru, kisicho na kificho. Macho amefunga nusu, mboni zake ni ang'avu, hazina kivuli. Akiwa amejawa na furaha, anasema, "Umepotea wapi?"

Kiganja chake kinene kinaacha vidole vyake vikisisimka. Anampiga George kibao kwa utani mgongoni. Anapoondoka anasema, "Nuthu Thaa."

Jua lamchana liko utosini na hakuna vivuli. Mguu mmoja mbele ya mwingine, vidole vyake vinahangaika ndani ya kurasa za hadithi. Anajiruhusu kukumbatia furaha hii, kuona inavyofunguka, ni ngeni, inatekenya. George anakusanya hisia nyevunyevu iliyo shingoni na kwenye ndewe la sikio na kuivuta mbele akilini mwake, karibu na macho. Anazama katika sununu ya hadithi na kupotea.

Nyama inakuja. Anakula. Ni mhudumu mwingine. Siyo yule mwanamume. Mwanamume ambaye sasa ameteka hisia zake. Anahisi michirizi myembamba ya hisia ikitiririka kwenye uti wa mgongo. Anasoma kwa bidii. Amepotea katika jahazi hili. Anatafuna mifupa. Baadaye, mchana, watu wanasafisha kibanda cha nyama na wanywaji wanahamia

baa nyingine jirani.

Katika ubaridi wa jua la magharibi, mkono unatua begani. Wakati huu anasikia mwanga wa tabasamu lake. Tayari mabati yanalia kama mafuta yanayoungua, kama nyota zilizo karibu kulipuka kutoka kwenye giza tororo na kufanya nywele zimsimame shingoni. Mkono wa pili unapita nyuma ya bega na kwa utulivu, unachukua kitabu kilicho mkononi mwa George. Wateja wote wameondoka.

"Acha hicho kitabu. Nataka kukuonyesha kitu."

Anamshika kwenye kiwiko cha mkono, akipangusa buibui la aibu usoni mwake. Wanaonekana wazi. Wanatembea na kupita jiko dogo la mbao. Mkono mmoja umeegemea bega lake katika undugu imara. Wanapita kwenye kibaraza kidogo, kofuli ndogo ya dhahabu, kitanda kidogo cha safari, beseni ndogo sana ya rangi ya waridi, matone, matako rangi ya chai, dumu chafu la manjano linajaza beseni ndogo sana ya waridi. Sabuni. Rushia maji kwa nguvu. Aaah. Jinyooshe. Jikaushe. Chupi. Jeans. T-Shirt. Mwanamume anaketi. George anapitishapitisha vidole kwenye blanketi. Mkono unazunguka bega na kugeuza kichwa. Sauti inapata sikio lake, imeloa vitone vya mwanamume, inakwaruza kutokana na kelele za usiku.

"Nipe hizo sigara juu ya kitanda. Unaweza kuondoka wakati wowote unapotaka."

Listen to the audio version read in Kiswahili by Mukoma wa Ngugi



Elieshi Lema, author and publisher, has authored two novels - *Parched Earth* and *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* - and a good number of children's books. She is co-founder of E & D Vision Publishing, which publishes textbooks, children's books and general fiction. She actively promotes reading through various projects initiated to support readership in indigenous languages. In her writing, Lema has an explicit gender perspective. She addresses topics such as patriarchy, gender and children's rights, and HIV/Aids. She writes in Kiswahili and English.



Woman in the Orange Dress

By Sarah Ladipo-Manyika



She came into the restaurant on crutches, so I looked to see what was wrong. Broken foot? Broken leg? Torn Achilles tendon? There was no cast. No plaster or boot. No, not even from the side view was there a leg bent back. There was no leg. At least none that came beneath the hemline of her simple cotton dress of pale, orange lace. Cantaloupe orange, with short puff sleeves, scooped neckline and hem hovering just beneath the knee. Could it be then that the limb ended at the knee, or somewhere even higher? All that could be seen was just the one leg with its dainty black shoe the colour of her hair. She was smiling, smiling so broadly that it made me wonder what she and her companion were celebrating. He wore a grey suit and tie and stood no taller than her, but slimmer and balding in the back. She had an afro which was wrapped in a long scarf of bright blue silk. And as if that were not frame enough for her dark, honey glowing face, the window behind her head was decked in tinsel and twinkling yellow lights. All

through dinner she kept smiling and flirting with those large brown eyes as though giddy with some secret excitement. From time to time she would lean across the table to share a private joke and as she did so, her pendant, a miniature Benin bronze, swung ever so gently, suspended from the tiny chain around her neck. Apparently mesmerized, the man brought his chair closer and closer until it went no further and it seemed that he might disappear into those liquid, amber eyes. Twice, she threw back her head with such loud laughter and clapping of hands that people turned to stare, but she didn't care. All she noticed was he. And when the restaurant turned up the music and dimmed the lights, I caught a glimpse of her shiny black shoe tapping a dance between the wooden legs of their chairs. And that was when my partner reached across our table.

"Everything will be okay," he said, dispelling the silence that had fallen between us.

"Yes," I nodded, squeezing his hand. "Yes, I think so."

Listen to the audio version read by Sarah Ladipo-Manyika



Sarah Ladipo Manyika was raised in Nigeria and has lived in Kenya, France, and England. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, and teaches literature at San Francisco State University. Her writing includes essays, academic papers, reviews and short stories. *In Dependence* is her first novel published by Legend Press, London; Cassava Republic Press, Abuja; and Weaver Press, Harare. Sarah sits on the boards of Hedgebrook and San Francisco's Museum of the African Diaspora and she is this year's Chair of Judges for the Etisalat Prize for Literature.



Arábinrin Inú **Aso** Ọlọsàn

Tí Kola Tubosun túmọ



Ó wọ'nú ilé ounjẹ náà pẹ́lú ọpá; èyí sì jẹ kí n wòó láti mọ oun tó se. Sé eṣe kíkán ni? Tàbí eṣe yíyẹ? Ishan tó fàya? Kò sí èdídí egbò níbẹ, beṣeni kò sí bàtà. Rárá, bí mo se n wòó láti eṣe kò tilẹ fi eṣe kankan hàn tó rọ seyin. Kò sí eṣe kankan níbẹ. Kò sá sí ikankan tó jade lábẹ asọ léésì olówúú aláwọ ọsan tó wọ. Àwọ ọsàn nlá, pẹ́lú ọwọ pémpé wíwú, ọrùn tó gé kúrú àti isàlẹ rẹ tó n fò pémpé ní orí orúnkún rẹ. Njẹ ó lè jẹ pé eṣe rẹ parí sí orúnkún ni bí, tàbí ibòmírán lókè síí? Oun kan péré tí a le rí ni eṣe kan yíi pẹ́lú bàtà tó dúdú mirinmirin bí irun rẹ. Ó n rẹrín múse; ẹrín tó loyàyà gidi dé'bi wipe mo bere sí s'asàrò oun tí òun àti ẹnikẹjì rẹ n sàjọyọ rẹ. Òun wọ asọ isẹ aláwọ aláwọ eérú pẹ́lú tái ọrùn. Kò sì ga ju arábinrin lọ rárá. Ó kàn tínrín díẹ, ó sì pá lórí leyìn. Irun arábinrin yíi gùn, ò sì pọ púpọ bí ti àwọn eléré. Ó kóo pọ pẹ́lú iborùn fẹlẹfẹlẹ aláwọ ojú ọrun. Àfi bíi wipe kò tii mú ojú rẹ (tó n tàn rederede bí oyin) dàbí èyí tó wà leyìn àwòrán fọtò, fèrèsé tó wà leyìn orí rẹ n tan yanranyanran pẹ́lú ina kékèké mirinmirin. Títí

tí wọn fi jẹun tán, ó sá n rẹrín, ó sì n f'ojú nlá rẹ tó dúdú mininjọ sọrọ, bíi pé inú rẹ n dùn fún nkan àsírí ikọkọ kan tó lárinrin. Ní igbà dé igbà, yòò tẹ síwájú lóríi tàbí láti sọ eṣe kan. Bó se n se beṣe, eṣe ọrun rẹ, tí ó jẹ ère kékeré láti ilú Bini, yòò máa mì jolojolo bí ó se rọ láti ara seèni kékeré tó fi sọrùn. Bó se dùn mọ nínú tó, ọkúnrin náà gbé àga rẹ súnmọ títí tí kò fi le lọ síwájú mọ, tí ó sì dàbí wipe ó lè pòórà sínú àwọn ojú olómi olówó iyebíye obinrin rẹ. Lẹmẹjì, ó sọ orí rẹ seyin pẹ́lú ẹrín nlá àti ipàtẹwọ aláriwo tí àwọn èniyan fi kojú síbẹ láti wòó. Kò tiẹ kọbiara sí wọn. Nkan ẹyọkan tó rí ni ọmọkúnrin rẹ. Nígbà tí ilé ounjẹ sì yí orin sókè tí wọn yí iná sílẹ, mo rí bàtà rẹ dúdú tó n tàn yanranyanran tó sì n jó díedíẹ láàrín igi eṣe àga. Igbà yíi ni ẹnikẹjì mi na ọwọ mú mi láti orí tàbí.

Ó ni, “Gbogbo nkan ni yòò dára nígbeyin.” Ó sì lé gbogbo idákejẹ tó ti dúró sààrín wa lọ.

“Beṣeni,” mo fèsì pẹ́lú orí mi, mo sì di ọwọ rẹ mú dáadáa. “Beṣeni, mo rò beṣe.”

Listen to the audio version read in Yoruba by Yemisi Aribisala



Kola Tubosun is a linguist, teacher, and writer. With an MA in TESL/ Linguistics from the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, he has worked in translation, language teaching and documentation. He has worked at the International Institute in St. Louis, and is currently involved in building a multimedia dictionary of Yoruba names and also in translating Twitter into Yoruba. His work has appeared in the International Literary Quarterly, The Moth, Farafina, Sentinel Poetry and Saraba, among others. He blogs at KTravula.com, and he can be found on Twitter at @baroka.

Cotyledons

By Toni Kan



The air was taut, like a string pulled too tight, the day I finally gave in and stepped into his room.

Everyone said I started late and then the first man that came along made me his wife.

That was my luck but it was not for want of trying.

Back at secondary school in Isi-Enu, I was wanted but not the way other girls were wanted. The boys wanted me because I could not be had. They did not want me the way they wanted Tina, the one they all called 9 to 9 because she followed five boys into their room and was raped from 9am to 9pm.

Or the way they wanted Ifeoma Okeke who all the boys had used to gba set.

I was wanted because none of the boys had ever seen my pant and it was something that made me proud.

“You will marry one day and one man will use your thing to play football,” Georgie, my friend said.

Georgie was tall and light skinned with long hair and nose that looked like a Fulani. She was not like the other girls but every year she would fall in love with one or two boys.

“If you don’t service this thing, one day it will close up o,” she would say every time I rolled my eyes at her

I did not service the thing even though I was tempted to. Once, on a trip to Nsukka, Gideon, one of the senior boys in our school had slipped me a note: “Your breasts are like cotyledons.” “Ke kwa nu nke bu cotyledon?” Georgie snorted as she let the paper fly out the window to be interred in the red earth.

In my first term of form three I did not

“Me, I am going to the university,” Georgie said. “I will not sell bags for any bagger.”

know what cotyledons meant but I was so impressed that I let him touch my breasts some nights as we went home from prep.

Izu was tall and different from any boy I had played with before including Gideon.

“How can he be like Gideon when he is an old man,” Georgie who did not

know how to bite her tongue said.

He was thirty two and I was just turning nineteen when he came to ask for my hand. He lived in Lagos and had two shops in Idumota where he sold bags.

“Business is moving well and after we enter matrimony, you will help me in the shop,” Izu said to me in English because he said he wanted our children to speak English first and not Igbo.

“Me, I am going to the university,” Georgie said. “I will not sell bags for any bagger.”

Then she took my hand and asked me how it was.

“Did you enjoy it?”

I told her I did. I told her how Izu filled me up the way a big bowl of fufu

fills up a hungry man. His thing, I told Georgie amidst giggles, was so big and long I feared it would come out of my mouth.

I never got the chance to work with Izu in the shop because I was pregnant two months after I joined him in Lagos and by the time my second child was born, fire had gutted the building housing his

“He would wait for me by the staircase as I came down to fetch water. “Come with me and I will make you happy,””

shops and turned his wealth to ashes. He sold one car first and then the other before he took to staying at home and drinking all day and beating me.

Things had gone bad between us the way a pot of egusi soup goes bad if you forget to warm it. We had forgotten how to keep things warm between us.

That was when he began to whisper to me; Osas, the Bini boy who lived down stairs. He would wait for me by the staircase as I came down to fetch water.

“Come with me and I will make you happy,” he’d say, his tongue sweet like ekwensu, my skin breaking out in goose bumps.

“I have a husband,” I’d tell him but his answer was always the same.

“He will not know until we have gone far away.”

“And my children?”

“We will take care of them.”

Osas did not work but he had two cars and always seemed to have money to

spend.

One day, Izu found me talking to him. He did not say a word as he walked past us but when he got home that night he beat me so much my period came ten days early and I could not go out for three days.

Osas sent me money and medicine and when Izu travelled to Kano to see a cousin, Osas brought me cake while the kids were in school.

I had not eaten cake in a long time. So, I sat in the living room and ate it all until I was as full as a python that had swallowed an antelope.

Izu’s cousin gave him money to start a new shop and the new business seemed to consume him. He left early and came back late as if he was on a quest to recover all he had lost at once. Izu stopped beating me and even though I was thankful, I missed being touched; the love we made when he wanted to make up.

That was when I started allowing Osas to touch me.

“Let’s do this thing,” he would whisper, his hands running like ants all over my cotyledons.

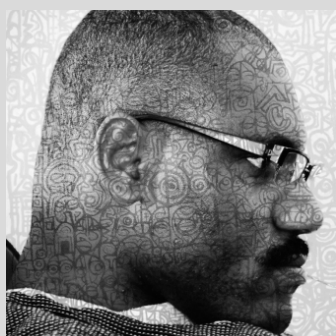
I would hold them and tell him to stop. “The neighbours will see, they will hear,” but he would laugh and push my hands away.

The air was taut, like a string pulled too tight, the day I finally gave in and stepped into his room. Osas took off my clothes as if they were made of glass and when I was naked, he laid me on his bed and covered my body with kisses from my lips to my cotyledons and in between my legs.

I was trembling when he finally spread my legs and our bodies became one but then before I could open wide enough to take him in, he cried out and collapsed on top of me.

I lay there still very hungry and thinking of fufu, while Osas snored beside me.

Listen to the audio version read by Dike Chukwumerije



Toni Kan holds both M.A and B.A degrees in English Literature. He worked as a journalist for 5 years and rose to the position of editor at the age of 26 years, before moving on into banking and telecoms. Author of 4 critically acclaimed works of fiction and poetry including *Nights of the Creaking Bed* and *When A Dream Lingers Too Long*. Toni Kan was, until recently, editor of the Sunday Sun’s literary supplement, *Revue*. Toni is the publisher of *sabinews.com* and a managing partner at *Radi8*. He is at work on two books: *Infidelity* and *The Carnivorous City*; a collection of short stories forthcoming from Cassava Republic Press.

Cotyledons

Translation by Chikodili Emelumadu

Otutu ndi mmadu siri na chi eforoolu m gboo, ya mere njiri kwenyere nwoke izizi gafetere nu.

Obu otu akaraka m siri di, obughi na mu agbaghi mbo.

Mgbe m n'agu akwukwo sekondari n'isi-enu, umu nwoke n'achu m nke ukwu. Mana obughi otu ha siri achu umu nwanyi ndi ozo ka ha siri chu munwa. Umu ikorobia n'eso mu n'ike n'ike bu makana m ekwero ha nchuta. Okwa mu kariri nke Tina, onye umu nwoke buru '9 to 9' site n'otu osiri soro okorobia ise n'ime ha baa n'ulo ha wee raa ya n'ike, bido na elekere itenani nke ututu ruo na elekere itenani nke abani. Ma obukwa Ifeoma Okeke nke ha ncha n'ile jiri gba set.

Ihe m guru ha aguu makana onweghi onye n'ime ha huru mpeteri m anya. Obu ihe njiri turu ugo.

Enyi m nwanyi Joji siri m "Okwa imegide ihe a, mgbe inuoro di, ojiri gi baa bolu."

Enyi m nwanyi a bu Joji toro ogologo, n'enwu ocha. Imi ya piri onu ka nke ndi n'achi efi. Onaghi eme ka ndi umu nwanyi ndi ibe anyi kamana kwa

aro, o ga enwenata otu nwoke ma obu abuo oga ahu n'aya.

"Nodu ebe ahu. Oburu na imesapughi aru, mee ka ndi ibe gi siri eme, nekwa ka itachiri atachi."

Eyerodi m ya onu, kama na ihe o kwuru guru m a guu. Otu ubochi, mbge ndi ulo akwukwo anyi jere Nsukka, Gideonnu no na klaasi umu nwoke totasiri n'ulo akwukwo anyi kpanyere m leta n'aka nke odere 'Mkpuru ara gi di ka cotyledon?'

Joji chiri ochi. "Kekwa nke bu cotyledons?" o rapuru mpempe akwukwo ahu Gideon dere ihe na ya o wee fepu na window, danye n'ime aja uzuzu.

Mgbe anyi bidoro klasi nke ato, amaghi m ihe 'Cotyledon' bu, mana otu osiri da mu uda na nti soro m uso, ya mere njiri kwere ka Gideon kpatu m obere aka na anyasi mgbe anyi na anachigha n'ebe anyi no n'akwado akwukwo anyi ga agu echi ya n'ile.

Izu toro ogologo bia di iche n'ime umu nwoke n'ile mu na ha megasiri ihe egwuriegwu, ma nyanwa bu Gideon n'onwe ya.

Joji n'amaro otu esiri ata okwu eze,

si m "Kedu ka osiri di gi ka agadi nwoke a aga eyi Gideon?"

Izu di aro iri ato n'abuo, mu n'onwe m n'acho ime aro iri na itenani, mgbe ojiri bia okwu nwanyi m. Obi Lagos mbge ahu, nwee shop n'abo n'Idumota ebe ona ere akpa.

"Afa n'aga nno ofuma, kamana mgbe anyi gbasiri akwukwo, aga m acho ka itinyere m aka na shop." Otua ka osiri gwam ya na bekee n'ih na ocholu ka umu n'ile anyi ga amu buru uzo suo bekee rapu asusu Igbo.

Joji si m "Hmmm, munwa agam eje ya bu mahadum. Onwerokwa onye m n'enyelu aka ire akpa n'afia." Owere jide m aka n'aka m, juo m otu nmekorita anyi siri di oge izizi ahu.

"Onyere gi obi anuri?"

Asiri m ya 'Ee'. Agwara m ya etu Izu siri juu m afo, ka nni onuno siri juu nwoke aguu n'anyu ikpakwu. Ochi ka m n'achi mgbe ngwara Joji na ihe ya toro ogologo, gbaa agbaa, obere ihe ka osi m n'onu puta.

Enwerozi m ike iso Izu wee ree ihe n'afia; ka onwa n'abo gasiri njiri bia ya bu Lagos, ntuta ime. Tupu njesia ije ime nke ibuo, oku gbaa ulo ebe



shop Izu di, aku n'ile okpara wee ghoru ntu.

O buulu uzo ree otu ugboala, reekwa nke ozo, wee bido noba n'ulo, nwuba mmanya kwadaa, wee n'ebi m aka.

Anu m di na nwunye anyi biara gba uka, ka ofe egusi siri agba uka ma oburu na adaghi ya n'oku. Anyi chezosiri otu esiri edobe ihe oku n'etiti anyi n'abo.

Obu mgbe ahu ha Osas, nwoke Bini bi n'ala jiri bido takwuiba m umu obere ihe na nti.

O siri m, "Bia ka m mporo gi si ebea puo, aga m eme ka obi di gi polina-polina," ire ya n'ato uto ka nke ekwensu. Akpata oyi wurukasiri m n'aru m n'ile.

Ana magwa ya si "Imana mbu nwunye mmadu," mana ngwachakwaa ya, o ka na ako ihe o na ako.

O siri m, "Mgbe o ga eji wee mara n'anyi apugo, anyi eruola ebe anyi n'eje."

"Umu m aa?"

"Anyi ga enedo ha anya."

Osas enweghi ihe m furu ona aru, kama na onwelu moto abuo, jide ego ofuma ofuma.

Otu mbochi, Izu jidere anyi ebe anyi n'akpa nkata. Oyero di anyi onu, ghara anyi gafee. Mana oge onarutere n'anyasi ahu, otiri m ihe ee, nso nwanyi n'erubeghi eru m jiri oso-osobia bido m. Enweghi m ibinyi oto si n'ulo puo iro ubochi n'ato gaa.

Osas nyere m obere ego, goro m ogwu. Mgbe Izu jere ugwu awusa ihu nwanne ya, Osas zutara m achicha oyibo wetere m oge umuaka m n' n'ulo akwukwo.

Oteena aka mgbe m tara achicha

oyibo, n wee noro n'iru ulo be m, wee tajuo ya afo, dorozie ka eke noro ene. Nwanne Izu ahu ojere ihu na ugwu awusa nyere ya ego ka o were bido zuba ahia ozo. Di m tinyere onwe ya n'ile na azum-ahia ya. Onu ututu ka ojiri apu, lota n'ime ndeli, ka ochoro iji osiso kpaaku n'uba ya nke gbara oku. Izu kwusi kwuru iti m ihe. Obi di nma n'ihina okwusiri iji arum melu igba, kamana ahu m choro aka ona adi emetukebe m ma ocho ka anyi dozie.

N'oge a ka njiri kwenyere Osas.

"Ngwanu ka anyi mee ifea," aka ya noro n'awukasi m ka aruru na cotyledons mu.

Ejidere m ya aka, si ya kwusi, na ndi agbata obi anyi ga ahu anyi, ma nu kwa ihe anyi n'eme. O chiri ochi, were aka m wepu n'ara m.

Ikuku di n'ime ulo ya bia sie ike di ka eriri adoro aka ubochi nkwenyere ya. Osas yipuru m akwa ka obu ihe na akuwa akuwa, dinaba m ala n'elu akwa ya mgbe ogbara m oto. Ojiri nsusu were

gbaa m arum n'ile okiririki, ma na etiti mpata m. Aru bidoro maba mu lilili mgbe o jayere m ukwu, dinakwasi m, anyi ewee buru otu anu aru. Mana tupu nwee ike idozi

onwe m ka o wee nodu n'ime m ofuma, otie mkpu akwa, dakwasi m n'elu aru. Osas dinara n'akuku m n'agwo ura, mu onwe m nodu n'eche uche nri olulo.

Listen to the audio version read in Igbo by Chikodili Emelumadu



Chikodili Emelumadu is a writer, journalist and broadcaster living in London. She started a career in print journalism at the age of fourteen, working on school publications. She left her job at the BBC World Service to dedicate her time to writing fiction. Her work has appeared in Eclectica and Apex magazines and Luna Station Quarterly. She speaks and writes two languages fluently and two others rather badly. She can be found ranting about life, Igboness and whatever else seizes her fancy on Igbophilia.wordpress.com.



SOLITAIRE

By Edwige-Renée Dro

“She’d gone up to her library to find a document when someone had put his hand on her mouth. The terrified sound she made died instantly in her mouth, as she heard him whisper in her ear.”

Aurélié arrived at her TV company, sweaty. She had jogged from her home at La Riviera 3 to her office at Les Deux Plateaux.

“Stéphanie, comment va?” she greeted the receptionist.

“Any messages?” she asked.

“No, but you have a visitor.” She looked across the lobby as Stéphanie gestured in the direction of her office. To the frown on her face, the receptionist added, “It is Monsieur Sylla.”

“Oh. What time . . .” then she waved her hands, thanked the receptionist and made her way to her office.

Sylla was sitting across her desk, looking as if he’d always sat there.

“Stranger! Where were you? Or perhaps you were in Ghana all along,” she said as she stood at the entrance to her office.

“My favourite person in the whole of Côte d’Ivoire.” He got up, walked towards her and pulled her

into his arms and into the room.

“How I’ve dreamed of seeing this day, djarabi.” He kissed her, and she kissed him back. Those lips! That body. He’d put on a bit of weight, but nothing much to distract from the military physique that towered over her and always got her weak at the knees. She stayed in his arms when they broke off the kiss.

“I need to take a shower, you know,” she whispered.

“I suppose. Gyms in this country no longer have showers?”

“I ran from home to here,” she smiled at his surprised look. “I had to distract myself from you disappearing like that.” She put her hands under her chin and looked at him.

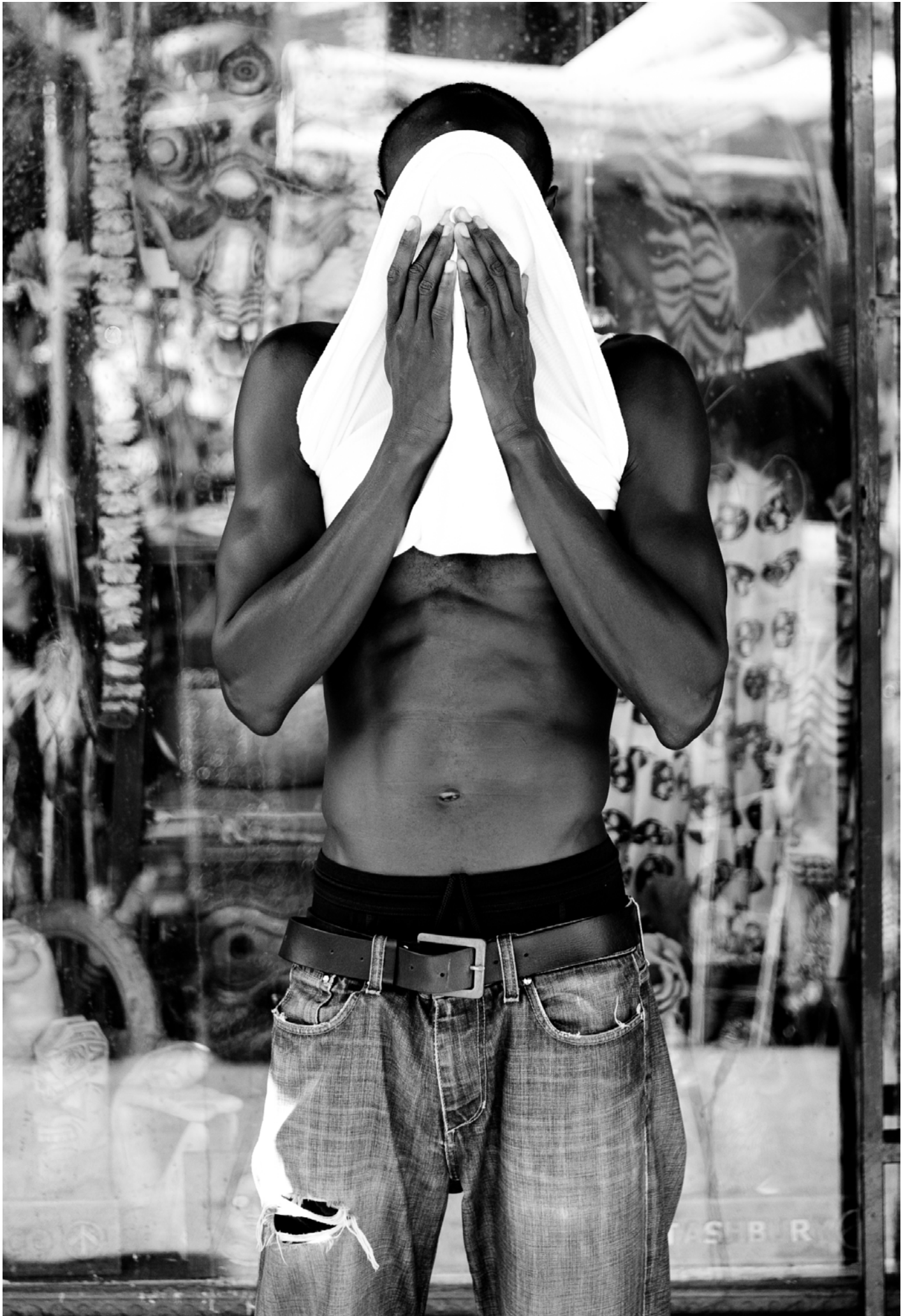
The last time she saw him, Gbagbo had finally been dragged out of his bunker. Sylla had arrived at her home late one night. How? She’d no idea. Not even her watchman

had been aware of his entrance. There had been blood on his hands. So maybe he’d climbed the huge wall with the barbed wire and the broken bottles that had been logged into the cement to deter thieves. Her living room had been the HQ of her staff. They listened to gunshots whilst talking about their relief, but sadness at Gbagbo’s departure. She’d gone up to her library to find a document when someone had put his hand on her mouth. The terrified sound she made died instantly in her mouth, as she heard him whisper in her ear. “Djarabi, c’est moi.” Darling, it’s me.

The relief had been short-lived when he’d turned on the desk lamp. He looked like he’d been through the wars. He had.

“How did you get in?”

“Am I a civilian?” he’d smiled, a sad smile. “I need money, baby. I need



to leave this country. The situation is lethal and I can't take money out of my account."

"Not a problem," she'd said. With the situation the way it had been, she made sure she always had enough money on her. Nobody knew when one would have to cross into Ghana.

"I will reimburse you."

She'd waved her hands and fetched the money from the back of one of the bookshelves.

"Will you leave immediately?"

"I'll lie low a bit, then I'll leave. Insh'Allah."

She'd given him the spare key to her bungalow in Bassam. That night, after two years of being separated, she told him she loved him. And, in her heart, said, "I wish I'd never left you."

She'd been a voracious newspaper reader after that, and had paid

attention to Abidjan's Kpakpatoya. Even though she was a media person, she took the gossips of Abidjan with a huge pinch of salt. But with Sylla leaving like that, she took every piece of kpakpatoya very seriously. Rumours of assassination or of arrests of Ivorian exiles in Ghana made her heart jump. Then Sylla rang a month later to tell her

he'd left the country.

"Trust me, I didn't mean to go incommunicado but you know, it was better like that."

Later on as they were relaxing in her bedroom, he asked her about her news, "since you're not forthcoming ..."

"What do you mean?" she carried

"How I've dreamed of seeing this day, djarabi."

on tracing circles around his belly button.

"Maybe I'm mistaken, but when I was in Sweden, the kind of ring you are wearing was commonly used as an engagement ring."

"That night, after two years of being separated, she told him she loved him. And, in her heart, said, "I wish I'd never left you."

"Oh." She twiddled with the ring. A solitaire Charles proposed with a week ago. She was still using the novelty of the engagement to explain her discomfort with the ring. But really, the thing felt like a noose around her neck, especially now that Charles has announced that they would live in Addis-Ababa after the wedding. Something to

do with a good job at the African Union. What about my career? She'd wanted to ask him but Charles would have spoken about the will of God and how he'd prayed about the thing and all that tra la la.

At the beginning, she'd been pleased. Here was a man with the same ideals as her, someone willing to live out his faith, without compromise. Bold in the Lord and all the rest. Then she realised that she wasn't like him. She wasn't as rigid as Charles for whom two glasses of wine were more than enough and a joke about Jesus' first miracle being turning water into wine would raise a theological discussion

"Indeed, my darling, I am engaged."

"And there I was thinking you were not the marrying kind. Your own words,"

he placed his hand on hers, caressing her.

"A girl can change her mind."

"Especially when it concerns a nice Christian man, hum?"

"No, not necessarily."

"So change your mind and let's get married instead."

"Are you serious?"

"You wouldn't know how much."

She smiled at him, sat up and took off the solitaire.

Listen to the audio version read by Edwige-Renée Dro



SOLITAIRE

Translation by Edwige-Renée Dro

Aurélie arriva à sa station de télé toute en sueur. Elle avait fait du footing de chez elle à la Riviera 3 à ses bureaux aux Deux-Plateaux. “Stéphanie, comment va?” elle salua la réceptionniste. “J’ai des messages?” “Non, mais vous avez un visiteur.” Elle regarda autour d’elle dans le lobby au même moment où Stéphanie gesturait dans la direction de son bureau. Au froncement de

“Ma personne préférée dans tout Côte d’Ivoire là.” Il se leva, se dirigea vers elle et la tira dans ses bras et dans la pièce. “Tu peux pas savoir combien de fois j’ai rêvé de ce jour, djarabi.” Il l’embrassa et elle l’embrassa en retour. Ces lèvres! Ce corps. Il avait pris un peu de poids, mais rien qui pouvait distraire de ce grand physique de militaire qui dominait sur le sien et qui lui donnait des jambes

sous son menton et le regarda droit dans les yeux.

La dernière fois qu’elle l’avait vu, Gbagbo avait été finalement tiré de son bunker. Sylla était arrivé chez elle tard dans la nuit. Comment? Elle n’en avait eu aucune idée. Même son gardien n’avait rien vu dedans. Il y avait du sang sur ses mains, donc peut-être qu’il avait grimpé le grand mur avec les fils de fer barbelés et les bouteilles cassées

“Cette nuit-là, deux années après leur rupture, elle lui avait dit qu’elle l’aimait encore. Et dans son coeur, elle avait ajouté,
“j’aurais jamais dû te quitter.” ”

ses sourcils, la réceptionniste ajouta, “C’est Monsieur Sylla.” “Oh. À quelle heure...” puis elle balaya la question du révers de sa main, remercia la réceptionniste et se dirigea vers son bureau. Sylla était assis dans le fauteuil réservé aux visiteurs. C’était comme s’il avait l’habitude de toujours s’asseoir là. “Hey, étranger! Tu étais passé où? Ou bien tu étais au Ghana tout près là là pendant tout ce temps,” elle s’arrêta à l’entrée de son bureau.

en coton. Elle resta dans ses bras même quand ils finirent de s’embrasser.

“J’ai besoin de prendre une douche, tu sais,” elle murmura à son oreille. “C’est ce que je vois là! Les salles de gym dans pays là n’ont plus de douches, ou bien?”

“J’ai fait du footing de la maison à ici,” elle sourit à la surprise qui se lisait sur son visage. “Hey, écoutes, je devais faire quelque chose avec la manière dont tu as disparu de la circulation.” Elle mit ses mains

mises dans le béton au-dessus du mur pour dissuader les voleurs. Son salon servait de QG à ses employés. Ils écoutaient le bruit des Kalach tout en exprimant leur soulagement mais aussi leur tristesse au départ de Gbagbo. Elle avait quitté le salon pour se rendre dans sa bibliothèque pour prendre un document quand quelqu’un lui avait mit la main sur sa bouche. Le cri effrayant qu’elle avait poussé avait été aussitôt étouffé.

Il chuchota, “djarabi, c’est moi.”

Son soulagement avait été de courte durée quand il avait allumé sa lampe de bureau. Il ressemblait à quelqu'un qui en avait livré des batailles. En effet, il avait fait cela.

“Comment tu es rentré?”

“Est-ce-que moi je suis un lambda?” il avait souri, un triste sourire. “J’ai besoin de wari, bébé. Je dois fraya d’ici. Le pays est gâté et puis je peux pas accéder à mon compte.”

“Pas de problèmes,”

elle avait dit. Avec la situation comme c’était, elle avait toujours l’argent sur elle. Personne ne savait quand la route du Ghana serait prise.

“Je vais te rembourser.”

Elle avait balayé cette proposition du revers de la main et s’était dirigée vers l’une des étagères pour prendre de l’argent.

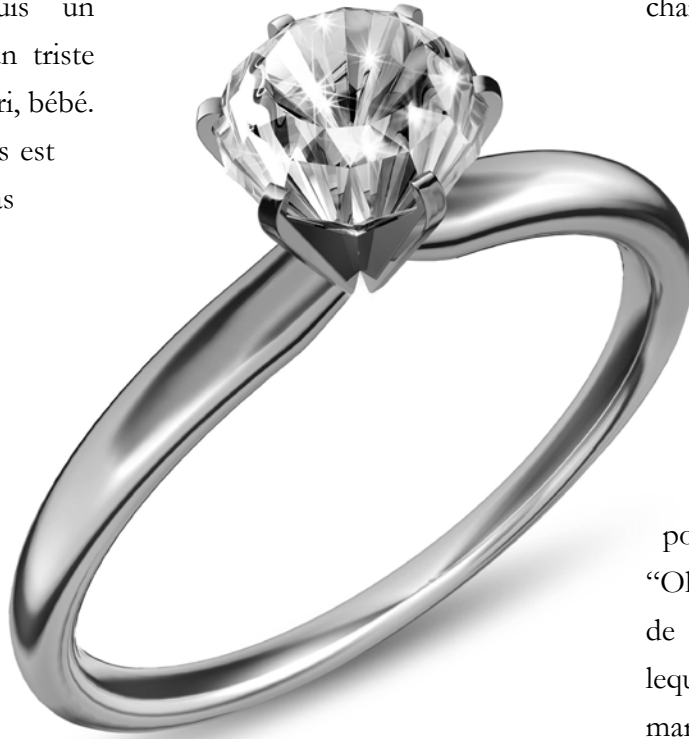
“Tu vas quitter le pays maintenant?”

“Je vais attendre un peu. Après, je vais partir. Insh’Allah.”

Elle lui avait donné la clé de son pied-à-terre à Bassam. Cette nuit là, deux années après leur rupture, elle lui avait dit qu’elle l’aimait encore. Et dans son coeur, elle

avait ajouté, “j’aurais jamais dû te quitter.”

Elle avait été une avides lectrice de journaux après ça et avait même commencé à faire attention au *kpakpatoya*



d’Abidjan.

Bien qu’elle exerçait dans les médias, elle prenait les ragôts d’Abidjan avec un pincement de sel. Mais avec la manière avec laquelle Sylla était parti, elle prenait au sérieux tous les *kpakpatoya*. Les rumeurs d’assassinats et d’arrestations d’exilés Ivoiriens au Ghana faisaient sauter son coeur. Et puis un mois après, Sylla l’appela pour lui dire qu’il avait

quitté le pays.

“Pardon coco, c’est pas que je voulais faire silence-radio, mais c’était mieux comme ça.”

Quelques heures plus tard, quand ils prenaient du repos dans sa chambre, il lui avait demandé de ses nouvelles, “comme tu veux pas m’affairer là...”

“Qu’est-ce-que tu veux dire par là?” elle continua à tracer des cercles imaginaires autour de son nombril.

“Ah, peut-être que je vois mal mais quand j’étais en Suède, le genre de bague que tu portes là était pour les fiançailles.”

“Oh.” Elle tourna la bague autour de son doigt. Un solitaire avec lequel Charles lui avait demandé en mariage il y a une semaine de cela.

Elle prenait pour prétexte la courte durée des fiançailles pour justifier sa gêne avec la bague. Mais, pour dire vrai, la chose était comme un étai autour de son cou, surtout depuis que Charles lui avait annoncé qu’ils vivraient à Addis-Ababa après le mariage. Une affaire de boulot à l’Union Africaine. Et mon bara? Elle avait bien voulu lui demander mais Charles aurait dit quelque chose à-propos de la

“Tu peux pas savoir combien de fois j’ai rêvé de ce jour,
djarabi.”

volonté de Dieu et comment il avait prié pour savoir si le bara était vraiment la volonté de Dieu et tout le tralala qu'il allait verser sur elle. Au début, elle avait été heureuse de sa relation avec lui. Un homme avec les mêmes idéaux qu'elle. Quelqu'un qui voulait vivre sa foi, sans compromis. Courageux dans le Seigneur et tout le reste. Puis, elle arriva à la réalisation qu'elle n'était pas comme lui. Elle n'était pas aussi rigide comme Charles

pour qui deux verres de vin étaient plus qu'assez et une plaisanterie sur le premier miracle de Jésus – la transformation de l'eau en vin – aurait soulevé un débat théologique.

“En effet oui, mon chéri, je suis fiancée.”

“Et moi qui pensais que tu n'étais pas le genre à se marier. C'est sorti de ta propre bouche.” Il mit sa main sur la sienne et la caressa.

“Une fille peut changer d'avis.”

“Surtout quand il s'agit d'un bon Chrétien, hein?”

“Non, pas nécessairement.”

“Donc faut changer d'avis et puis on a qu'à se marier kèh?”

“Tu es au sérieux?”

“Est-ce-que mon visage ressemble à pour quelqu'un qui est entrain de s'amuser?”

Elle lui sourit, se leva et ôta le solitaire de son doigt.

Listen to the audio version read in French by Edwige-Renée Dro



Edwige-Renée Dro hails from Côte d'Ivoire and is a laureate of the Africa39 project. Her stories have been published in Prufrock magazine, Prima magazine and on africanwriter.com. She is currently editing her first novel amidst endless nappy changes and broken sleep – the joys of being a mother! Edwige-Renée blogs at laretournee.mondoblog.org, a France24 and RFI platform, and works freelance as a translator (French/English). Edwige loves reading more than writing and believes that red wine can solve every problem under the sun.



PAINTED LOVE

By Abubakar Adam Ibrahim

He fell in love with her smile when she was still a house officer who had quietly, untainted by any scandal of note, garnered the reputation of having had a thing with some of the most wealthy men in Abuja, without ever being ensnared by their promises of making her a fashionably corpulent and contented wife.

Every time Yaro thought of her, and this was often, it was her melancholic smile, like twilight shimmering through a lazy fog— a faint promise of happiness persisting through the haze, that came to his mind. It was the first thing about her that struck him the day she walked in late to his seminar on child and maternal health. She sat down and fiddled with the wooden bangle on her right arm and her cowrie necklace. He had thought her apparent eccentricity was more suitable to a writer or some other creative-minded hobo than a medical doctor.

During the coffee break, she walked up to him, shook his hand and said, “I am called Inara. Have coffee with me.”

He couldn't say no when she smiled.

It took him two more coffee dates, caught on the occasions their duties allowed, and a whole day of daydreaming to the tinkles of the half a dozen bracelets on her left arm to

convince himself that he had fallen in love with the houseman at the National Hospital.

She loved as she lived, without inhibitions, and laughed like wind chimes in the night. She dazzled his austere world with the colours of her fervour and painted the four grey walls of his bedroom canary yellow, lime green, azure and carnation.

When he walked in, she was putting the finishing touches, covering the last bit of grey with bright yellow.

“God in heaven! Inara, you crazy girl, what have you done, saboda Allah fa?”

She smiled, her face splashed with a riot of colours. “Your room looked too sterile, like your consultation room at the hospital. Now each wall has a different mood. Feel it.” She closed her eyes as if absorbing the ambience through her skin.

She loved the outrage out of him and lay in his arms, her head cushioned by his impressive biceps.

Drifting in post-coital bliss, he looked at the yellow, blue, green and pink walls, shook his head and smiled.

Two months later, after she had invaded his life with her contagious energy, she looked around at her handiwork, at the decorated gourds she had fixed on his walls, at the abstract tribal totem carved

out of a massive bull horn she had dangling from his ceiling, she sighed, “I could live here forever, you know?”

“So do.” He put his arms around her.

She looked away. “I can't. I have to go. Do you understand? I have to leave you.”

She had signed up with a field mission team of Médecins Sans Frontières and was going to Darfur to help with the humanitarian crises there. She had no idea when she would be back.

“I am not letting you go. I need you.”

“Those people need me more, darling.”

“I love you, I really do.”

She kissed him.

“Marry me, Inara.”

She looked into his eyes and finally said, “Don't be silly. That is so unromantic! Is that how you would propose to me, if you were serious?”

“But I am. I am serious. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

She smiled her sad smile, kissed him on the lips and said, “You won't marry my type, Dr. Yaro, we both know that. Besides, this is what I want to do, to help. You will be fine without me.”

Sometimes she replied to his emails weeks after he had sent them. Sometimes not at all. Because internet connection in Darfur was poor. Because she was busy helping. Because



she did not know what to tell him. Eventually she wrote to him about a boy she had tried to save, about how despite his bullet wound he had seemed more interested in his pet canary. After the boy had died, she had let the bird out of the cage so it would fly after the boy's soul, or to its salvation or doom. Whatever, it would be on its own terms. She did not believe in caging things, even if done in the name of love. That was the last email she sent to him.

His colleagues remarked on his slouching posture, about the hollowness in his eyes, in his voice, about how totally committed he seemed to the task of cutting up people and stitching

them up, about how uninterested he seemed in the things that made young people think they would live forever.

"What else are surgeons supposed to do?" he would say, his voice dry and nippy like the harmattan wind howling outside and stripping the trees of their leaves.

During his stopover at Charles De Gaulle, on his way to Ontario for a conference, she appeared out of the crowd in a departure lounge.

"Dr. Yaro. Two years and fifty-eight days," she said, "the years have been fair to you."

"And fifty-eight days?" He held her at arms-length so he could look at her face. "Have you been counting the days since you left me?"

She fiddled with the coral-bead bangle she was wearing. "You are slimmer." Her smile was even hazier.

"And you look good, Inara. You stopped writing."

"Long story," she said and turned to look at the men who were waiting for her some distance away. "My field team, from MSF. We are heading to Bangui."

"Yes, the war there."

She nodded.

"Please be careful."

"I will."

"I've missed you. I miss you still."

"I thought you had forgotten all about me and married a fine, wifely woman."

"She loved as she lived, without inhibitions, and laughed like wind chimes in the night."

"I haven't forgotten you. When I said I love you, you thought I wasn't serious."

"I have missed you too, you have no idea how much."

"Then come back to me. Let me show you that love isn't a cage."

She laughed but her eyes were misty.

"You wouldn't want me. You are a good man. And I am a crazy woman. I will paint your shoes turquoise and your car scarlet." She laughed and looked at her colleagues behind her. One of them pointed at his wrist watch. "I have to go. But we should be in touch, yes?"

She took his card and promised to contact him once she got to Central African Republic.

For the next three weeks, he checked his emails and his spam box every hour.

He kept his phone at hand. He searched for her on Facebook but couldn't find her.

A year later, while his new girlfriend, who worked in a bank, wore high heels, crispy corporate suits and wanted him to paint his bedroom white, was lying in his arms, he caught a glimpse of Inara on CNN, in a news report from a Syrian refugee camp. He envied her free spirit, her travels and convictions and her refusal to be caged by commitments and conventions, romantic or otherwise.

One sunny Saturday morning in July, thirteen months after he had seen a flash of her on TV, he answered the door and found her fiddling with the end of her braid, rubbing it against her lips, her bracelets tinkling sweetly.

"Did you meet another woman?" she asked.

"No . . . I mean, yes."

"Did you marry her?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well, she was . . . she . . . she wanted me to paint my walls white."

That was when she smiled. "Why didn't you come for me all these years?"

"I didn't know where you were or if you wanted to be found. But I was hoping you'd find your way back – to me."

"You are just a silly man," she said.

"But I am here now. Show me how love is not a cage."

Listen to the audio version read by Elnathan John



Launikan So

Na Abubakar Adam Ibrahim

Murmushinta ne ya fara kama hankalinsa, a yayin da take kwantata aikin likitanci a asibiti bayan kammala karatun jami'arta, bayan ta shahara saboda alakarta da fitattun masu kudin Abuja, ba tare da ta bari sun tirke ta da dadin bakinsu ko dukiyarsu ko kuma alkawuran da suke mata na mai da ita kasaicacciyar matar aure ba.

A duk lokacin da Dakta Yaro ya yi tunanin ta, kuma hakan ya kasance a kodayaushe ne, murmushinta mai sanyaya jiki yake fara tunawa saboda yana masa kamar wani haske ne da ke bijirowa ta cikin hazo. Lokacin da ya fara ganin ta, yana gudanar da wani taron kara wa juna sani ne a kan kula da lafiyar mata da yara. Ta shigo a makare ta

samu waje ta zauna tana dan wasa da awarwaronta da aka sassaka da icce da kuma sarkar da ke wuyanta, wacce ta duwatsun wuri ce. Da ya dube ta, sai ya yi tunanin wannan ai yanayin shigar tata ya fi dacewa da hatsaniyar marubuta ko wasu masu zane-zane, ba likitoci ba.

Da aka yi hutun rabin lokaci, sai ta karaso wurinsa, ta riki hanunsa ta ce, "Suna na Inara. Zo mu sha shayi tare mana."

Da ya kalli murmushinta, sai ya ji ba zai iya ce mata a' a ba.

Ya dauke shi ganawa da ita sau biyu,

a lokacin da aikace-aikacensu suka ba su damar haka, da kuma ganin ta da ya rika yi a tunanin zucinsa kafin ya tabbatar a ransa cewa lallai ya afka kogin soyayya da wannan ma'aikaciyar Babban Asibitin Kasa.

Tana soyayyarta ne yadda take gudanar da rayuwarta, ba tare da wani takunkumi ba, kuma tana dariya tamkar wata sarewa da ake busawa cikin dare. Ta shiga rayuwarsa da ke nan dishi-dishi, ta haskakata da irin kalar son ta da kuma hamasar ta. Kuma ta bi farin launin dakinsa ta mulka wa bangon launin ruwan dorawa da shudi

"Tana soyayyarta ne yadda take gudanar da rayuwarta, ba tare da wani takunkumi ba, kuma tana dariya tamkar wata sarewa da ake busawa cikin dare."

da kore da kuma wani nau'in ja.

Ya dawo kawai ya cin mata, a yayin da ta dukufa tana wannan aiki, tana ma cikin karasawa ke nan.

"Ina lillahi wa inna illaihi raji'un! Inara, dimautacciyar yarinayar nan, wace barna kike mun haka? Saboda Allah fa!"

Ta yi murmushi, fuskarta cike da dabbaren fenti kala-kala ta ce, "Ai dakin naka ne ya yi dilim tamkar dakin duba mara lafiya a asibiti. Amma yanzu ka ga kowane bangon yana ba da wani launi da yanayi na daban. Ba ka ji a jikinka

ba?"

Ta rufe idonta kamar yanayin da ta ambata yana ratsa jikinta gaba daya.

Ta tarairayi bacin ransa da kyakkyawar kulawa har ya kai ga ta kwanta a jikinsa, ta dora kanta a damtsensa.

Yana kwance cikin natsuwa, sai ya daga ido ya dubi dakinsa da ke da launin ruwan dorawa da shudi da kore da wani nau'in ja, ya kada kai kawai ya yi murmushi.

Bayan watanni biyu, bayan ta mamaye rayuwarsa da karfin son ta, sai ta tsaya ta dubi aikace-aikacen da ta yi a dakin, har da wata kwalliya da ta yi masa da

wasu kawatattun kwarairayi da wani kaho da aka bi shi da zane da ke rataye a silin dinsa, ta yi ajiyar zuci ta ce,

"Ni kam zan iya zama nan tsawon rayuwata?"

"To ki zauna mana." Ya rungume ta.

Sai ta kawar da kanta ta ce, "Ba zan iya ba. Tafiya ta kama ni. Ka fahimce ni? Ya zaman mun dole in bar ka."

Ashe a wannan lokacin ta riga ta ba da sunanta a Kungiyar Likitocin Sa Kai ta Duniya, har sun tura ta yankin Darfur saboda kai agaji. Kuma ba ta san lokacin da za ta dawo daga wannan aikin ba.

"Ba zan taba barin ki ki tafi ba saboda ina bukarar kasancewa tare da ke."



“Ai su ma mutanen can din suna da bukatar kasancewata a can.”

“Ai ni kuma son ki nake yi, matukar so kuwa.”

Ta dangana ta sumbace shi.

“Ki yarda mu yi aure mana, Inara.”

Ta kalle shi har cikin kwayar idanunsa ta ce, “Kai kam ka fiye shiririta. Ai yadda ka yi maganar nan ma ko kama hankali babu. Yanzu haka za ka nemi aurena in da gaske kake yi?”

“Da gaske nake yi mana. Ina son in karaci sauran rayuwata tare da ke.”

Sai ta yi dan murmushinta mai sanyaya jiki, ta sumbaci lebensa ta ce, “Ai ba aurena za ka yi ba, Dakta Yaro, duk mun san haka. Ni ba irin matar da za ka aura ba ce, balle ma ni abin da nake so na yi da rayuwata ke nan; in taimaki mutanen da bala’i ya afka masu. Rayuwarka za ta ci gaba da gudana ba tare da ni ba.”

Bayan ta tafi, wani sa’in takan amsa

sakonninsa na e-mel a makare, wani lokaci ma makonni bayan ya tura su. Wani sa’in kuma ko ta tamka masa, saboda yanayin yanar gizo a Darfur babu kyau, ko saboda ayyuka suna shan kanta, ko kuma saboda rashin bayanin da za ta iya yi masa. Amma bayan wani lokaci sai ta yi masa sako da a ciki take ba shi labarin wani yaro da ta taimaka mawa. Duk da fama da yaron nan yake yi da raunin alburushi da aka yi masa, wannan yaron bai gushe ba yana tarairayar wani kanarinsa da ya sanya a keji. Bayan yaron nan ya cika, sai ta bude kejin nan, ta saki kanarin saboda ya bi ruhun yaron nan, ko ya tashi zuwa ga tsira ko halaka. Duk wanda tsuntsun ya zaba, zai kasance zabin kansa ne. Saboda ita Inara ba ta amince wa turke abu a cikin keji ba, ko da an yi haka ne saboda so da kauna. Wannan shi ne sakon karshe da ta aiko masa ke nan.

Abokan aikinsa kuwa sun kasance suna magana a kan rankwafewar da kafadarsa ta yi, tare da yadda idanunsa suka yi zuru-zuru, muryarsa ma ta dushashe da kuma yadda ya dukufa wajen tsaga marasa lafiya da kuma dinke su ba tare da damuwa da abubuwan da ke sa samari su ji kamar za su rayu har abada ba.

Yakan ce musu, “To me ke aikin likita in ba ya tsaga mutane ya dinke ba?” In ya yi magana haka, muryarsa takan zamanto a bushe ne tamkar iskar hunturu da ke bi tana tsige ganyayen bishiyoyi.

A hanyarsa ta zuwa taro a garin Ontario, inda ya yada zango a filin saukar jirgi na Charles De Gaulle a Paris, sai kawai ya ganta ta bullo daga cikin cincirindon mutane.

Suna hada ido sai ta ce masa, “Dakta Yaro, shekara biyu da kwanaki hamsin

da takwas. Lallai tsawon lokacin nan ka kasance a cikin alheri.”

“Da kwanaki hamsin da takwas?” Ya riki hannunta, ya kare wa fuskarta kallo ya ce, “Ashe kina kirga kwanakin da kika tafi kika bar ni?”

Ta sunkuyar da kanta, ta kuma kama wasa da abun hannunta da aka yi da wani irin kodi. Ta yi murmushi, tare da jin kunya ta ce, “Har kuwa ka fada.”

“Ke kuma kin kara kyau. Sai kuma kika daina rubuto mun sakonni.

“Wannan wani dogon labari ne,” ta juya ta dubi wasu mutane da ke tsaye suna jiran ta, ta ce masa, “Abokan aikina ne daga kungiyarmu ta MSF. Za mu je kai dauki ne a garin Bangui.”

“Inda ake yakin nan ko?”

Ta kada kai.

“Don Allah sai ki kula.”

“Zan kula.”

Ya ce, “Na yi ta kewar ki kuwa. Har yanzu ma ban gushe ba ina kewar ki.”

“Ni da na dauka ka manta da ni, ka samu wata hadaddiyar mata ka aura.”

“Ai kuwa ban manta ki ba. Ke da na ce son gaske nake maki, kin dauka wasa nake yi ai.”

“Kai ma ba ka san yadda na rika jin kewar ka ba.”

“To, ki dawo gare ni mana don in tabbatar maki cewar so ba keji ba ne.”

Sai ta yi dariya, amma idanunta sam ba wani haske cikinsu. “Kai kuwa me za ka yi da ni? Kai fa kamilin mutum ne, ni kuwa tamkar mahaukaciya nake. Sai in iya mulka wa takalamanka shudin fenti, motar ka kuma in mulka mata wani irin ja bau haka nan.” Ta yi dariya ta juya ga abokan tafiyarta. Daya daga cikinsu ya yi nuni zuwa ga agogon hannunsa. Ta ce, “Ya kamata in tafi yanzu. Amma ya dace mu dinga sadawa ko?”

Ta karbi katinsa da ke dauke da lambar wayarsa da adireshe e-mel dinsa, ta kuma yi masa alkawarin tuntubarsa da zaran ta kai Jamhuriyar Afrika ta Tsakiya.

A sati ukun da suka biyo bayan haduwar su sai ya kasance a kowane sa’i yana duba e-mel dinsa saboda tsumayen sakonta kuma ya kasance yana kaffa-kaffa da wayarsa ko za ta kira shi. Ya hau Facebook ya yi bincikenta amma kuma bai same ta ba.

Bayan shekara guda, a yayin da ya kasance tare da sabuwar budurwarsa, wacce take aiki a banki, ta kuma kasance tana sanya takalman kwaras-kwaras masu dogayen dundunniya da kuma tsukakkun riguna irin na kwararrun ma’aikata, sai ya hango Inara a CNN, a cikin wani rahoto na musamman da aka yi... na ’yan gudun hijirar Syria. Ya

kada kai yana mai jinjina wa himmarta da kuma ire-iren tafiyar-tafiyen da take yi da kuma kin yarda da ta yi na kange rayuwarta, ko da a dalilin so ne ko sabaninsa.

Wata rana cikin watan Yuni, watanni goma sha uku bayan ya ga wulgawarta a CNN, sai ya ji an buga masa kofar daki. Ya je ya duba kawai sai ya ga ai ita ce. Tana tsaye tana wasa da silin kitsonta, tana shafa shi a lebenta yayin da warwaronta suke wani kara mai dadi. Ta tambaye shi, “Shin ka samu wata budurwar ne?”

“A’a . . . ina nufin e.”

“Ka aure ta?”

“A’a.”

“Me ya hana?”

“Am . . . wai so ta yi in yi wa dakina farin fenti.”

Nan take fuskarta ta dau haske da murmushi. “To me ya hana ka ka nemo ni duk tsawon lokacin nan.”

“Haba, ke da ban san duniyar da kika shiga ba, ko kuma ma shin kina son a gano inda kike? Amma na kasance ina fatar za ki karkato akalarki ya zuwa gare ni.”

“Kai kam ka faye son shiririta wallahi,” ta ce masa. “Amma ga ni nan, sai ka tabbatar mun da cewa so ba keji ba ne.”

Listen to the audio version read in Hausa by Elnathan John



Abubakar Adam Ibrahim is a Nigerian writer and journalist. His debut short story collection *The Whispering Trees* was long-listed for the Etisalat Prize for Literature in 2014, with the title story shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing. Abubakar has won the BBC African Performance Prize and the Amatu Braide Prize for Prose. He is a Gabriel Garcia Marquez Fellow and was included in the Africa39 anthology of the most promising sub-Saharan African writers under the age of 40. His first novel will be published in 2015 by Parrésia Publishers.



Other Contributors

Audio Recordings

Yemisi Aribisala is a writer and a lover of good food. She has written about Nigerian food for over 7 years; for 234Next, the Chimurenga Chronic, and at her personal blog Longthroat Memoirs. Her essays on food are a lens through which the complex entity of Nigeria is observed. Nigeria has a strong culture of oral storytelling, of myth creation, of imaginative traversing of worlds. Longthroat Memoirs is a trusteeship of some of those stories to paper and ink, collated into an irresistible soup-pot, expressed in the flawless love language of appetite and nourishment. Her food stories are soon to be published by Cassava Republic Press. Her essays can be read online under the pseudonym Yemisi Ogbé.



Elnathan is a lawyer who quit his job in November 2012 to write full-time. His work has been published in Per Contra, ZAM Magazine, Evergreen Review, Le Monde Diplomatique (German) and The Chimurenga Chronic. In 2013 he was shortlisted for the Caine Prize For African Writing for his story Bayan Layi. He also writes satire for his weekly column for the Sunday Trust newspaper. He is a 2015 Civitella Ranieri Fellow. His first novel, *A Star Without a Name*, is forthcoming from Cassava Republic Press.

Billy Kahora lives and writes in Nairobi. His short fiction and creative non-fiction has appeared in Chimurenga, McSweeney's, Granta Online, Internazionale, Vanity Fair and Kwani. He has written a non-fiction novella titled The True Story Of David Munyakei and was highly commended by the 2007 Caine Prize judges for his story *Treadmill Love*, his story *Urban Zoning* was shortlisted for the prize in 2012, and *The Gorilla's Apprentice* was shortlisted in 2014. He wrote the screenplay for Soul Boy and co-wrote Nairobi Half Life. He is working on a novel titled *The Applications*.

Kahora is Managing Editor of Kwani Trust and also an Associate Editor with the Chimurenga Chronic. He was a judge of the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize and 2012 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. He was a judge for the inaugural Etisalat Prize for Literature.





Eghosa Imasuen, a Nigerian novelist and short story writer. His first novel, *To Saint Patrick*, an Alternate History and murder mystery about Nigeria's civil war, was published by Farafina in 2008. His second novel, *Fine Boys*, which chronicles the voices of Nigeria's post-Biafra generation also by Farafina. He was a facilitator at the 2013 edition of the Farafina Trust Adichie Creative Writing Workshop. He is currently the chief operations officer at Kachifo Limited, publishers of the Farafina imprint of books. He lives with his wife and twin sons.

Helene Cooper is a Pentagon correspondent with *The New York Times* and was previously *The NYT's* diplomatic correspondent. She has reported from 64 countries, from Pakistan to the Congo. For 12 years, Helene worked at the *Wall Street Journal*, where she was a foreign correspondent, reporter and editor, working in the London, Washington and Atlanta bureaus. Born in Monrovia, Liberia, Helene is the author of *The House at Sugar Beach: In Search of a Lost African Childhood* (Simon and Schuster), a *New York Times* best seller and a National Books Critics Circle finalist in autobiography in 2009.



Mukoma Wa Ngugi is an Assistant Professor of English at Cornell University and the author of the novels *Black Star Nairobi* and *Nairobi Heat* and a book of poems titled *Hurling Words at Consciousness*. A novel, *Mrs. Shaw* (Ohio University/Swallow Press) and a collection of poems, *Gifts of Love and Violence* (Africa Poetry Fund/University of Nebraska Press) are forthcoming in 2015. He is the co-founder of the Mabati-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature and co-director of the Global South Project - Cornell. In 2013, *New African* magazine named him one of the 100 most Influential Africans. In 2015 he will be a juror for the Writivism Short Story Prize and the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Dike Chukwumerije has a Law degree from the University of Abuja and a Masters degree from SOAS, University of London. He is a member of the Abuja Literary Society (ALS) – a vibrant Abuja based literary group. Dike was the winner of the 2013 Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Prize for Prose Fiction for his novel, *Urichindere*. An award winning Performance Poet, he has won several Slam Competitions in Nigeria, including the ALS Grand Slam and the maiden edition of The African Poet (Nigeria) National Slam Competition. He writes online on his Facebook page (Dike Chukwumerije) and at the following blogs: dikechukwumerije.blogspot.com and touchmeintheheart.blogspot.co.uk. His books are available on Amazon, and his performance poetry videos can be seen on YouTube.



Photographer



James Manyika grew up in Harare. Lives in San Francisco. Takes pictures. Reads Poetry. Loves Sarah. What else is there?

Designer

Jibril Lawal is a graphic and web developer. He works with Cassava Republic Press and Tapestry Consulting as a Research Analyst and Graphic Designer. He holds a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Bayero University Kano. In 2014 he became the first Impact Business Leaders Fellow from Nigeria. He has a great passion for agriculture and is the founder of the social enterprise Sahara Green Company.



Project Coordinator



Emma has worked in the publishing field for over 15 years and was formerly Managing Director of Macmillan English Campus, a global digital publishing division of Macmillan Publishers. She is based in Abuja, where she is working with Cassava Republic Press. She holds an MA in Modern Languages from Cambridge University. Her translation of award-winning children's book *Magazin Zinzin* was published by Chronicle Books (USA). Emma is a PhD candidate at the UCL Institute of Education, University of London; her research explores the role of female publishers in shaping the literary landscape in Africa. Emma is a regular contributor to *Africa in Words*. She conceived and coordinated the Valentine's Day Anthology project for Ankara Press.

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