

CASCADES



HURLING, hurtling, hurtling down the road, the rain picks up speed. The rain is insolent. It has the wind in its grip. Behold a jealous rain, it will not let go. The papers try to scamper for cover, the dust had no hide-out. All is beaten, all is trampled.

Ka, ka, ka, ka, the tin roofs are dancing in the wind. Their frilled skirts are having a conga. The skirts rise from the roofs, right up....

And London bridge is falling down, London bridge is falling down. Hey, Hey, I've got a hungry woman in my house. London bridge is falling down, my fair Lady! In the corridors of the mind, the rhyme battles the cobwebs, springing out with lucid steps. It is the song of crisis, for a very bad day. He hopes he is not going crazy.

Inside in the bedroom, she stands on the threshold of life. She is the gateway. Like a doll figure, she's got a bell inside. It

is ringing inside. She's swimming in pain, she is wallowing in hunger, woman of the empty kitchen and jobless husband. She is several hours hungry, she's got a baby in her womb, she cannot put her swollen breasts to the mouth and suck.

Toyin
Adewale-Nduka

She is glad that the weather is clearing. She is whistling under her breath as she cuts the piece of yam into cubes

Where is the Lord God of Elijah who bears bread and water in the wilderness?

The rain is still falling hard, cloaking the windows like a starched bedsheet ironed with spit and zeal and the dust bin gives up nothing retrievable. The air speaks terrifyingly. Dear disturbed man. Dear hungry woman, and a landscape desolate of miracles.

Tunji enters the bedroom, with trembling hands, he lifts her into his arms.

'Sweetheart, let me run down to the Kunles, I think they'll be able to give us some food. The rain isn't stopping..... please drink a little from this warm water. May be it'll reduce the hunger.'

that 'government will look into it and do something as soon as funds were available', what had happened to all the money made from the railways? All around the country, trains were lying down like dead rats in the streets. The rail lines were weeping for maintenance. New trains were lacking and the staff were without training facilities. But first, man must eat to live.

Her salary had been feeding them most of the time but it was a mere pittance. There were baby's things to be bought and hospital bills to settle. He had borrowed and borrowed until there was no where else to turn.

The rain is slowing down. She gives him a weak smile as he turns to leave. Twice, he looks back at her. He does not want to leave her alone in the house. He is too afraid....

From the window of her flat across the road, Yetunde looks out. Her walkman is plugged into her ears. She is glad that the weather is clearing. She is whistling under her breath as she cuts the piece of yam into cubes. Soon Dapo will be back from work. Her movements are eager. It will be a good evening to pray with their bodies. The weather was right. She's sure he will bring her something curious. He always did. Every pay day.

She takes a look round her kitchen. The larders are all agape. Thank God, today is Dapo's pay day. She takes the second half of yam. As she is about to peel, someone says 'Take the other half to the Adebayos' across the road.'

'Dapo, don't frighten me', when did you...

She turns to leap into his arms. There is nobody. Oh, Oh, who spoke to her?

'O my God, there's an intruder in my house!'

In a panic, she races to every room in the house, standing back to fling the doors open, ready to fly like the wind. She finds no one. As she picks up the walkman from where it had fallen, the voice comes again.

'Yetunde, take down the yam. She is hungry.'

the Railway Corporation was in trouble again. He and his colleagues had not been paid for the past six months. Their families were all in beggared situations. Most had farmed out their children to family and friends. Nearly all had quit notices to worry about. They had protested and cried to the government to no avail. They were only told that 'government will look into it and do something as soon as funds were available'. What had happened to all the money made from the railways? All around the country, trains were lying down like dead rats in the streets

He rains on the inside as she drinks the water. Her stomach moves to the tune of want. He is cut to the bone. Was this the elephant tusks he promised for the feet of this beautiful woman carrying his daughter?

The gale sighs in the room. He lifts the cup from her hands and lays her back gently on the bed.

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She is scared. She knows there is no one else in the house. Like a plop in the water with corresponding ripples, it dawns on her that God might be talking to her. She's heard the preacher say in Church that God still speaks to people. Then she had dismissed it as a whole lot of Pentecostal rubbish completely out of step with this Technicolor age - these preachers ought to wake up man! What was happening to her?

Tentatively, she tries out her tongue.

'God, are you speaking to me'? Doubts filled her mind.

'Even if you are, surely, you know Dapo has a huge appetite.

'He'll come home so hungry how can I spare a whole half.

'Come on, you know charity begins at home.'

Suddenly, the story of the window of Zarepath floods her mind, a woman like her, called to give and share the little she had.

'I am caught now.... I'm even better off. Afterall,

I've got Dapo.

O well, it's a late yam. I expect this other half

will swell in the pot.

...But, but, we don't even greet each other.

How can I just walk up to them and give them a piece of yam. I mean, they might even slap me. They'll most likely feel insulted. They haven't come begging me for food, you know.'

From within her belly, something urges her strongly to go.

'Alright, Alright....'

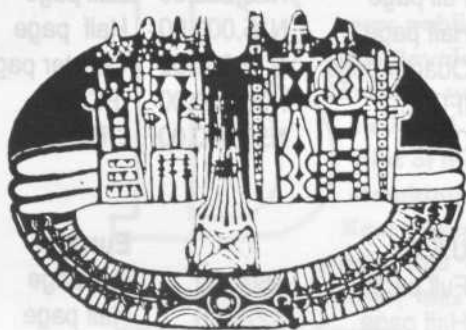
Deftly, she wraps up the yam in a piece of newspaper and puts it in a black carrier bag. She races across the road and walks into the house where the Adebayos live. The corridor is so dark even though it's bright noon outside. There are half-naked kids racing up and down the corridors. Their protruding bellies are glistening. She stops one and asks for the Adebayos' door. He points at a door with a torn curtain over-hanging it. She's about to knock a third time. She loses her nerve. Yetunde hangs the black carrier bag on the door handle and flees.

Tunji is wearing his left shoe when he hears the knock. He hopes whoever is there will not detain him. He walks to the door, turns the lock and opens the door. A black carrier bag falls on the ground. He rotates three hundred and sixty degrees on the earth's axis. What new enemies had they made? He thought he had only hunger to battle. Why would anyone leave a black bag at his door? He dies a little, dashes into the house and brings out a long stick. He starts thrashing the bag from a calculated distance. There are no explosions. The bag tears apart, revealing bits of newspaper and a slightly bruised piece of yam.

Tunji tenderly lifts the yam. He gently removes the layers of paper. There is a new rhythm on the wind. There is a sonorous gig to dance. He breaks loose. **GR**

The Palette

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