

Blood in the Hands of a god

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Dust, and more dust. Romoke leaned on the wall, feeling uncomfortable. It was late, and the dry chill of harmattan was snaking up her skin.

Had Deolu forgotten they were to meet? She thought.

It was not likely as he rarely came late to the rendezvous, especially not when he knew she would be traveling. For some minutes, she watched the sunset. The purpling sky had spread itself in front of her like a flamboyant art piece. She smiled as the birds flew by, knowing that she too would fly away soon into a faraway place. Yes, she was travelling abroad in a few days time. For some reason, she felt a disconnection, a dissonance with the basic realities of the situation. Leaving home had its perks, but there are too many people on the losing side.

When he finally arrived that evening, Deolu was far from who he used to be. From a distance, the strong smell of alcohol seems to precede him like an ominous envoy. He had cried too, because in his eyes was the transcript of words unsaid. He walked with an odd swagger of a tired man. And he was indeed tired.

"So, you're finally leaving me, uh?", he dragged out in a raspy and unusually harsh voice that should have given her a hint of what was to come.

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"It's not like that, Deolu." She said, almost pleadingly. He was her lover after all, and he of all people should understand.

"Explain to me, then."

"I'm not leaving you. It's just a travel.", she looked away.

"That's funny, you know. You call it travel. Travel. What does that mean? That you aren't leaving after all? No. I can't allow that." His voice rose as he let out the last sentence. Romoke looked at him straight in the face, her eyes questioning him, questions that in a few weeks, she would have the answer to.

"What do you mean you can't allow that? Don't make bad jokes."

His eyes blackened. And in those two fountains where she once drank bliss, there was the vivid imprint of monstrous imagination. He reached towards her in a flash, grabbing her by the arm whilst his other hand reached for the waistband of her skirt. The sound of her screams as he struggled with her echoed in the darkness.

Darkness . . . Years later.

The night he met his waterloo, Joseph was home alone. At 18, he had a firm build with a shaggy face that could pass him off as a much older man. It must have been the tremor of consciousness, or the jarring freedom that comes with it. There were many questions, and he wanted answers. This time he would get them himself. He was sure. He knew he lived in a house full of secrets. A house full of terrifying things.

At first, he did not believe it—the confession of the old diaries in the wardrobe, His mother, Romoke kept them neatly packed. He, at first knew that at least, there was a border he shouldn't cross, a wall of privacy he shouldn't

climb. Then there was a burning part of him that only truth could soothe, there was the final striking resolution to keep going, he was already neck deep in the quest, anyway. The adrenaline that charged the invasion had a deep source inside of him and he couldn't resist. And somehow, he knew where to start from. The beginning. But there were two beginnings: one of birth, the other of consciousness. And while he knew the latter, the former was like a danger behind a rhino, he had to make a complete turn to ward it off.

Everywhere you look, you saw him looking back at you with the eyes of a lamb. Like the Pleading eyes of a lamb anticipating a slaughter. A lamb held back by unseen hands, in whose eyes there lay a secret, desperate longing to be free. The first time Joseph took a shape, he was a circle, a circle that never fits into the tight corners of existence. A circle rolled from one end to another in silence. All at once he is there, here, everywhere, not as a body blessed with the breath of God like everyone else, but like a silhouette that only makes august appearances at dusk. One could argue that he is something liquid: you can feel, touch, but never hold him tight in the hollow of your palms like the sands of the beach in their salted fineness. He is something silent, something coated in a frame of unknown things and you can see a reflection of yourself in his moving stillness because often something repels you from knowing too much, seeing too much and you always end up by yourself. His silence harbours things you may never be able to describe. Perhaps he is a river; a flowing river of molten weirdness.

Being a boy is first a struggle, then a burden. A struggle that sometimes stretches itself into the latter years of becoming, and a burden that really isn't meant to be borne! It is a burden that oftentimes swallows up every form of light from one's psychic-cosmos like the black hole. They

begin early and end late, but they always leave indelible footprints in the soul of those who have carried them. For some, pain is the equivalent of joy, and for others joy is only a mirage. But oftentimes in the metamorphosis of boys, little things matter most.

Many colours make the life of a man. Colours could be green, amber, black, red, white . . . Colours that translate severally as tenderness, withering, pain, loss, emptiness . . . Colours which hold no happy meanings. To him, there is only one colour, and that is pain. Every colour meant pain. Every colour has a touch of pain. One could really not tell when pain became a colour or when colours become pain, but it was an early consciousness. Green, for instance, green of living things like leaves, like moss, or even things that have no life, like dresses or the dull theme of old phones, seem to irk him. Life was a battle, and he wasn't ready. He sometimes wished he wasn't born at all. Being born was not a choice he made at least not consciously, and that was why he hated the idea that during reproduction, millions of sperm cells are released and only one gets fertilized. He often wondered how he managed to win that race to his mother's egg only to come out as a weakling. He hated birth. He hated origin. He hated green. And red too, means only death. Not love. Death that seems to be too cowardly to come for him! Death which once when invited into the limited space of his body looked him in the face and said 'Not today!

Being effeminate in Nigeria means a lot. It meant rejection. It meant questioning. It meant loneliness. And it wasn't the loneliness that he wasn't able to endure, it was the spite. The dark humour that comes and goes like a passing violent wind, always hitting him in the face. He goes through it all alone most times when the torrents of pain hit him like shockwaves. Other times, his mother was there to share the meal of

his sad truth. He listens to Michael Rosenberg. It is music that makes him feel at home, much more than anything else. And when Passenger said 'I am helpless and I'm hopeless like a feather on the Clyde', he felt that. Music often expanded the space around him, making him spread out his folded tentacles. There was first, in the beginning of this consciousness, the curious, then the restless spring of things he would later regret ever knowing or ever thinking. For no reason he could discern, his presence was an emblem of strange things. There is always a difference a difference he never appreciated because he wants to be treated as every normal human. He was a normal human. Maybe not a normal male, because in place of a bold face with the sprouting specks of beards or the emergence of a deep baritone, there was a suppleness to his body, and a voice so sonorous, a voice that can't be traced to a boy in the dark.

He had raised a hand to answer a question in a church group study one day.

Yes, you! The coordinator beckoned.

Halfway into his answer, the suave young man in front stopped him.

'Sorry, what is your name again?'

'Joseph', He had replied and laughter escaped from some lips he wouldn't want to know. He knew there was a difference. He knew he was not welcomed into the circle of these set of humans. There was a rejection. Yet this rejection from outside did not bother him as much as the one from inside: the one from his father. They do not cross happy lines of memories and for that, he was neither at peace nor sustain a smile. There was always a striking 'why?' that races down each moment of disappointments down the alley of time. He lived in a tunnel, of course.

"Mum, is there anything wrong with me?" He had asked one evening. She took a minute of silence, as though serenity just died and tension was born.

"Why do you ask?", his mother, though now old, still had a youthful gait and stature.

"I just want to know.", he replied without batting his eyes.

"Is anything the matter?", the worry lines burrowed into her forehead.

"Nothing" he said as he bent to pick the fallen colander on the kitchen floor.

"Well, nothing is wrong with you, Joseph."

"Why then does it feel like I am an inconvenience everywhere? My presence itself seems to be ungodly."

"You're all shades of wonderful, Joseph." She intercepted.

"I'm tired of all this"

"You're not an inconvenience." She paused "at least not to me"

"But you're not everywhere I go. You're not in the school or in the church, or on the street or in the barbershop. You're not everywhere."

"You are my child" There was a silence.

"I don't know what you mean by that, but I'm sure I am not here so you could remind me that." He looked away "It's not like I have another person to talk to anyways."

"I carried you in my womb for nine months and eight days. When I gave birth to you, you took a part of me into yourself."

"Okay. Okay!"

"Wherever you go, I am with you."

"And I do love you", she paused

"Your father loves you as well." She added as an afterthought.

"You know what, you can stop right there.", he was instantly annoyed.

"But I don't think I really should."

"Just . . . Just stop!" There and then, he knew he touched a nerve. "I'm sorry."

"You don't have to be. You feel your dad doesn't love you?"

"He doesn't even like me, how can he possibly love me? Every time, he looks at me as though I am some replica of failure."

"Don't talk like that.", she raised her arm to place it lightly on his shoulder, for he was taller than she was.

"But that's what I feel."

"Feelings can be wrong."

"And they can be right." He had shouted again. "Mum, why are you defending him. You know he doesn't like me. Heck, I don't even look like him!"

"So who do you look like?"

"I don't know.", his voice now quiet.

"Are you accusing me right now?" She lifted her arm and dropped it by her side.

"I am not accusing you. I only stated the obvious."

"Which is?"

"Well . . . "

"Answer me! Who do you look like?"

By now she was standing right in front of him, her eyes not quite changing their countenance, but her body was trembling, like a loose bolt in a running engine. She turned back to the plantain sizzling in the pan.

"You may be right after all. You don't look like anyone else, you are different."

"So who is my father?"

"God."

For a reason, Joseph wanted to laugh. And for another, he wanted to cry. And in the split-second between deciding what to do and what not, his mouth moved first.

"So that's all this is about?"

"You have to stop talking back at me like that."

"But it is all ridiculous."

"It's not. You only want to believe that it is. It is all about your perception of self."

"What do you believe, Mum?"

"I believe that you are special. You don't have to look or be like anyone else. You have God's eyes, God's hands, God's voice, God's brain, God's breath. You are God and you should see yourself as such. "

"What type of god am I?"

"Psalm 82 : 6"

"Maybe God is weak then. If I look like God, if I am God, then God is weak."

"You are not weak."

"But I am."

"No, you're not."

"Convince me, then. Convince me that I'm not what I think I am."

"I don't have to do that, it's not my responsibility."

"I'm not your responsibility?"

"You're my responsibility. I never said you're not. But your confidence, your view of self and how you manage your emotions is entirely a duty you owe to yourself."

That night his sleep took longer. For a reason, he fancied the idea of being God's son. It stuck in the space for fantasies in his memory. He had picked up a Bible when he entered his room to read the portion. The vacuum of fatherhood he soon learnt was meant to be filled by God. But he discovered much more to his amazement that he is not just God's son, he is a god.

I have said, ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High

And that night became another night of transition. This time, he became a triangle. Having three sides, three directions, three things not struggling for dominance of attention. There was self, this new found love for who he was. This new realization that it wasn't his fault after all to be who he was. And then there was God, new father, the weird designer who made him that way in the first place. Then there was this sudden knack for discovery, for unraveling.

That night, Joseph was made. In his making was a knowing. And in the knowing was a brokenness.

December 26, 1992

The diary read: *I hate you, Deolu. You have punctured a hole in my fabric.*

She was three weeks pregnant. And the very dark contents of the diary, as he would come to read later on, are enough as a sea of witness to the origin of his being.

Uncertain of what to say, what to do with the tragedy of his becoming, Joseph had cried. He found the answers he needed, for the questions that plagued his mind as to why his parents rarely spoke, why they stay in separate rooms, or why they never had another child after him, or why there was rarely a moment of celebration in their home. He found the answers but not salvation. The monsters he hoped to kill have only grown stronger. More powerful than he can ever be or than he can ever control. Rape meant one thing, and that was weakness, and nothing else could describe him better. He came out faded, just a product of his father's colourless thought the night everything began and ended.

Grief breaks the souls of men. And Joseph was no exception. He was already broken anyway, broken and looking for redemption. But he came under a more powerful force of memory. So he became shapeless, moving everywhere and nowhere as the day sailed on.

Two nights after, Joseph made a peace offering. His father, Deolu's bed was enough for an altar as he severed the head from the neck with a cutlass, surprised with the strength with which he wielded his weapon, the arm from the body, the genitals from where they used to be. The full-fledged autopsy on what used to be a living body only few moments before. He scooped the blood in his hands and watched them drip back, like a waterfall on the butchered body beneath.

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