

TAMPERED

**Braided
Quilt**

Nº 2

Editor's Note



This issue is a pattern of originality set in different voices, forms and stories. Being our official public call out for submissions, it was a loose assemblage of content, with no restrictions on imagination or ideas. To see it all come together and fit in a striking motif is further proof that we are the change we have been waiting for.

From a claiming of space with pidgin stories, to stark, relentless, audacious feminine voices via both the male and female gaze, issue 002 is a worthy gift for both creator and reader.

Thank you to Kwabena Opoku Agyemang, for being generous with your time and your eagle – editing.

Thank you to Ephraim Kono, for multiplying yourself enough times to manage the concrete bits.

Thank you to all the writers and artists, for your constant leap of faith and trusting *Tampered* with your work.

And thank you reader, for wandering this way, may this offer a promise and affirm a reality.

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2019. No. 2

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Thief

Fui Can Tamakloe

Every time them catch thief for Osu, Danny no dey mong of the people wey dey beat am. If e dey there as them catch am, e just go lef. If e see sey I dey beat the thief some, e go come pull me make we lef. Danny no dey like beat thief. This be something I no dey understand sekof Danny dey love fight. E no be some of them boys wey get gym strength. Danny ein own them take born am. As we dey Salem Primary then Danny be the only student e fit take Monsieur Avudjivi ein lashes wey e no go mov one sef. More people dey talk sey as e be kiddie ein mommee bof am plus herbs. E no fit be ein poppee sekof that man go sea wey e no come back.

Some time I ask Danny why sey e no dey make we all beat thief as we catch am. He watch my face small tell me sey thief be the one wey dem catch. We all dey steal. Oko dey steal. Thunder dey steal. Memuna sef if she come bed wona room we dey hide everything from phone charger to jot. Thief be the one wey them catch.

The day them almost catch Danny then I dey there. Me, Oko then Thunder dey the cemetery inside dey smoke heavy wey we see sey Danny jump the wall. First we figure sey ebi koti so Oko swallow the wee make e burn ein tongue sef. But as e come close we rec sey ebi Danny. Your man dey sweat.

Wassop? We ask am wey e start laugh. Some people dey chase am. E go buy for provision store wey e do like sey e pay already. That thing me then Thunder we get luck for am waa. If you target store wey make busy them fit forget dema body give you balance as you no pay sef. You just for hold the money as if you dey come pay, then you go pocket am as them no dey watch. E no be something wey them for catch you.

Oko start dey cough wey we kai sey e swallow the wee. Thunder dey diss am wey we dey laugh. We dey laugh nor all we hear be kpa! Gunshot. Come see speed. Danny already get fire for ein system so ebe ein dey lead. Thunder dey my front wey me too I dey Oko ein front. We dey run like the people dem dey jump jump bench for Olympics. Only sey ebi graves we dey jump. We hear another kpa! wey Oko fall down dey shout. We no turn watch am sef. Every man for himself. For back I hear as somebody shout Amo le!
Them catch am.

Oh Oko. I sure sey like we no dey smoke ebi ein go dey lead. We see sey nobody dey follow we again wey Thunder, Danny then me turn dey watch. Plenty people gather for the place where then we dey smoke for. All of them dey hold sticks wey some dey hold torchlight. Them nab Oko. Ebi there wey I understand Danny. For here, them no dey ask you what you steal sef. If them catch you that be all. You die be that.

What dey pain be sey them all dey steal for some side too. The fitters wey dey mong dey steal from dema shop masters. If you no kai the kenkey seller sey your change dey ein there, you lose be that. Everybody dey steal.
Thief just be the one wey them catch.

Flashback

Sena Cobblah

I wish I could go back
To her year of firsts
When she wore puffs
when she first liked a boy

Or coated her lips with shea butter
The very first turban she tied

How happy she was with her friends
How the heat from firewood singed every single hair
on her legs
How the red hot wood left black burn marks

I yearn to see how her dad was potty in her hands
because she was the last baby
The fights she picked with boys
The baths she took outside in the gravel

the first time she lined her eyelids
with coal
The first meal she cooked

I want to know my mother before she was my mother
Innocent, fearless and free
Before society broke her
Before religion crippled her
Trying to make her the watered down version of the "African Woman"

Devoid of strength and a fighting spirit
Eager to make her what 'they' wanted her to be

I want to know my mother before she was my mother
Innocent, fearless and free.

The Bed-Table

Nikitta Adjirakor

It begins with your back inching further up the bed that is inexplicably called a table. The examination table. The bed-table.

There you are half naked, shivering, tense and staring fearfully at the doctor as he approaches you. His hands are cold, startlingly, like the metal instruments he uses to prod your vagina. When he grips your foot and pulls you towards him, you scream a loud piercing cry that echoes through the room and advances past the door where your mother sits waiting for you. It makes a mockery of that flimsy curtain meant to give you an inkling of privacy like a container for your trauma. A nurse rushes in, the one who walked you into the office reassuring you of a painless procedure.

It continues with your eyes shut attempting to use the darkness as a comforting cloak. Even though you can't see, you feel a cold bluntness press into skin and attempt to push your thighs apart and with each movement, your back begins to slide upwards on the bed-table. Your body remembers the moment before as his fingers and his other instruments forced a path through your vagina attempting to find your womb.

Your womb that he calls diseased.

Your womb that is nesting tumors and not babies.

His entry is excruciating and as your womb tries to expel him, your body moves farther away. Except this time, the nurse is behind you and eases your back downwards.

"Isn't this what you do with the small boys?"

The words of the doctor shatter the cloak and you open your eyes to stare at him. In disbelief.

The small boys. The boys. Boys.

The question of what boys lays on the tip of your tongue, but your mouth is silenced by his stare. Challenging. Unrepentant. It is then that you feel the weight of the nurse's hand on your shoulder holding you down and in place for his onslaught.

"Aren't you one of the university girls?"

His tone is mocking and audacious, daring you to answer. You know he knows you're an undergraduate student, because the nurse made it a point to ask you that question. You thought it odd. What does a question about your education have to do with the doctor's hands about to rummage through your vagina? Now you realise the intent for it was not a randomly placed question but rather one that set the tone for your examination.

You are a university girl, so your sexuality is an open book to be flipped through, read and consumed by all.

You are a university girl, so you do 'it' with the small boys.

His question does the trick the nurse's hands cannot accomplish. It fastens you to the bed-table as you sink, carrying the imagined shame of yourself and the women who defied everything to get an education.

It continues with that instrument called a speculum, a cold, clicking, metal device that reminds you of a plier meant to pry apart your vagina for the doctor's prodding. Later, you read about its history. Invented by a man, experimented on enslaved black women, it suddenly makes sense that it is this torturous looking device that is inserted into you.

You try to stay still so as not to prolong this session of pain. Your legs, quivering and trembling from fear, carrying the weight of your gender and your sexuality refuse to part.

"Stop pretending you don't like this. I'm preparing you for your husband"

The comment slices through you and you shudder, wondering how this moment, this practical moment that should be painless and normal, concerns a yet-to-be-met person.

The doctor's figure clouds over you, pushing you farther unto the bed-table. But your legs are closed, he cannot perform the pelvic exam and even when he angrily shouts at you to leave his examination room, they are unable to comply. You stay on the bed-table, half naked, with your legs and private parts exposed to the room and to the nurse. To him. When he drops the speculum next to you, you see yourself in it. In that moment, you feel discarded, useless and without purpose.

The nurse moves to walk you to the changing room.

"I'm sorry. It should not have been painful. It's your fibroids. Find a boy to marry you soon."

You gather your things and you walk out thinking of your diseased and discarded self.

Later, you find out your scream travelled along the corridors of the hospital and stayed, for a longer time in front of the door of the examination room you were in. It landed next to your mother, long enough to clothe her in your misery and when you walk out, her tears mirror your own.

. To The Double 'U' .

Kwame Abrantepa

Women shouldn't read this poem.

She;
Shouldn't breathe
Shouldn't sigh
Shouldn't ask why
Shouldn't smile
Shouldn't kiss a woman
Shouldn't found a religion
or want sex
or invent anything her husband can't take credit for
and should be mad only at herself for it.

Women;
Should be breakable
She should be her tears
and find God in her terror

She should feel and not be felt
She should form man, birth man, nurture him
then have to listen to 'man' say 'woman' was made from 'man'
and have to watch 'man' deny his maker.

She should be smooth and worship the sandpaper bruises
Should need a man
Should be perfect, her only flaw should be that she's a woman

Women should cover up
Cover up her thighs, her breasts, her hair, her back,
her face (with make-up), her feet (in heels),
her words (with a silence that will not stop scratching at the walls of an asylum cell),
her pain, her standards (with scripture),
her husband's transgressions with a smile,
her identity (with marriage) and her eyes (from the truth)

A woman is her God's
then her parent's
then her husband's
and never her own

Men draw strength from what women are not
because they won't match up to what women are.

Woman shouldn't say the above
or read this poem.

. C h a r .

Don't ask me about pain.

To speak of my pain is to stare into a never-ending pit
in whose belly I have received too many burials
Too many last words echoing into an earthquake,
too many tears that burns skin like fire does
It is to tell you, that pain is a power without peers.

I will have to tell you pain is the ringing in your ears after the song is done
and pleasure could not conquer time
and "sorry" feels like childbirth
and love takes its mask off to show you its charred face

I'll have to write every one of my scars into funeral songs
so I can muffle them with melody and chorus for hearts torn down
and the tombstones that stand in their stead.
I'll have to exhume dead bodies, stir up the stench of rotten flesh,
tell truths that cannot be unheard, say words that aren't ready,
confess sins nobody's God knows to forgive without the scorch of punishment.

So please
don't ask me about pain
if you cannot stomach charred babies.

Whisperers of Life

Nana Bayin Asaam

My ears have a story to tell
They have heard and fed from the well of words
My eyes have sucked in the smoke of images
And overwhelmed by the multitude it consumes.
I rise to the sound of blasting radios across the compound
Singing out loud the melodies taught by the last sunset
And humming the tunes of the new moon
The doings of the Whisperers of Life.

As the sun crawls along the skies, so shall they rise to their call
Digging out the stories untold like the sacred duty of the early hen in a muddy haven.
They lead the fight to scavenge for answers;
Answers to the questions plaguing our innocent minds
Answers to riddles only the "fairest" know.
Whispering them into the laid down ears
As we ready our spears to pierce our fears.
The doings of the Whisperer.

Come and carry my musings away
Whisper to the lawmakers, my heart bleeds from injustice
Tell the church; my soul is worth saving
Tell the rich; my sweat overflows in their pockets.
Sing to the protectors; my breath is being looted
Whisper to the unborn; I dream of a better world for them.
Oh whisperers of life, the mouth of the unsung
I beseech you.

The Wind in My Mother's Scarred Chest

Claudia Owusu

We were all "Baby A". Every. Single. One of us.

At first, it began as a small joke, leaving namelessness a place in the family house. But then it kept on stretching through longer periods of time with each sibling until it just...stuck.

Between the early months when Ma's belly swelled like a passionfruit, to when she was bursting at the seams, pee trickling in her panties with every sneeze, Ma went to God with prayers about our names. Her voice would rise like a polythene bag in a violent wind, thundering the same tongues grandma used to shout around the house. It was a time, just a mere whisper away from the months grandma kept throwing her slippers away and started walking around barefoot—way before the harmattan she lied down on the outdoor bench and never got back up.

Ma always sought counsel from both the ancestors and God—chewing on names; "A" names. And so, my sister Alma was born, and then Abigail, and then Amina, and then Alexandra, and then me, Agnes. I stayed "Baby A" the longest, my birth certificate, the most quieted; the months that passed, the most questioned; and in June, just around when all the other babies were being dedicated at the Crusader's Church in Taifa, the Pastor asked about me in Ma's arms, and his eyes lay discontent at the answer Ma gave, so funny that she laughed right there, right there in front of the altar, her kind of coughing, sneezing

laughter that relegated everyone in the room into a space of childlike embarrassment. It wasn't like any of the men Ma got with had names that began with A. Or even that their holy grandmammies had "A" names to be sentimental over, but Ma got real inside herself after my second oldest sister Abigail's daddy left. Real early in the morning before the chickens had even come up with their cry to the barely visible moon, creeping off just softly enough for only the crickets to sing goodbye in his wake. Ma being the Asante woman she was didn't cry, maybe she suspected as much. With her hair locked all over her head and her eyes the color of corn husk, she took both my sisters in her arms and took to the Makola market streets to find work. Abigail, who wasn't Abigail then, but only Baby A, would man the front kiosk whenever Ma had clients that she needed to take to the back. Alma would find herself in the cartons of sugar and milo that the store had, and she would spend the afternoons eating herself elbow deep until her loose front teeth matched her mahogany complexion and her sugar high widened her eyes into heavy oaks.

When I came around, Ma was married to my Daddy who was a mixed-race preacher from Savannah, Georgia. The day she met him, Ma said he stood proud and tall with a head full of curly hair at the front of the altar, his Southern English dripping as thick as fresh marmalade. She had only heard English like that in the film "Daughters of the Dust", a story of suffering women, which she caught bits and pieces of in between house work during the weekdays.

After church that Sunday in 1995, Ma and Daddy spoke briefly and arranged a date, and had me a year later. And despite people turning their noses up at Ma, being the haggard woman she was to snatch up one of the last really good missionaries, Daddy did right by her. Stood by her side long enough. Even Grandma said so. Sang her hymnals on Sunday morning, taught her how to grow corn in the front yard, and took her on horse rides at the Labadi Beach when the money coming in from the church was real good. And best of all, he didn't have no problem with Ma's unnamng. Said that a woman like her only needed time, needed some thinking through in order to settle herself and be sure of what kind of spirit she was inviting into her house. God forbid she named one of us wrongly. And at first, I liked Baby A. It felt like something sweet to hang onto, a trinket of Ma's love for me, but then the times got longer, harmattan came and went, Grandma broke her back in the farm, Daddy quit the church and left back to Georgia, and my namelessness stood out like bad crop.

Staring at my budding breasts, moments before fetching the pail from the aged metal bucket full of bath water, I was no longer a baby, and "Ayyy" was a hollow sound I felt worlds away from, like something cheap you'd say to drive a nosy goat away, or to get a hawker's attention in a crowded market.

Before Daddy left, the house had gotten so empty that it felt heavier. Ma kept receiving letters from God knows where, Daddy kept drinking, and Grandma anointed all of us

more than once a day, her memory a butterfly's wings melting away between forefinger and thumb. In those days, Ma would sit at the dining table with a photo album and cry. A thunderstorm wavering in her chest and a desert smoke in her mouth. Alma would return home from work and find me on the steps, creeping behind the curtains and pinch me between the shoulders. Daddy never hit Ma, not like the others. And most of all, Daddy bought Ma flowers and things around the market. Abigail said sometimes physical objects ain't good for showing love, that it doesn't necessarily mean a person is going to stay, and a couple of months later, when all of Daddy's things had left the house, and all my older sisters watched, waiting for my questions, holding alms for my hurts, I kept mute. I snuck out in the night to the well on our compound and tried to find my own name. It had been almost 10 years, and Baby A, or B, or Bya when you say it real fast enough, was what took up the space; was what kept like a stone holding down a stack of papers in the wind. It took another year or two for her to find my name, and by then I had exhausted myself with waiting—being addressed by an American last name at school, my piercing dirty blonde ringlets standing out so severely that not even yomo could quiet it down

Daddy had been calling less and less until less turned into nothing, and then nothing turned to wondering if he was alive, safe, and then nothing again. When Ma discovered my name, she was sitting at an open fire over the crock pot, fanning away in her absent mind, a ravine in her eyes. The sun had just about put itself to rest, and my older sisters were just getting home from their apprenticeships, one after the other, carrying a half-braided doll head or a web of sewing needles and thread, suckling at a thumb or dipping fingers into a cold cup of ice water. The wind whistled all on its own, in the eerie way that makes Grandmothers warn grandchildren about dwarfs coming in the night to take them away. As Ma's hair swept across her face, and the fire dimmed down to the lowest whisper, Ma rolled over the wooden stool she was seated on and lunged towards me, "The voices...I mean the ancestors...I can hear them again," she said. The apaapa she used to fan the fire now crackled in the charcoal flames, sending sparks like flies through the night. I shuddered as her black fingers bit into my arm, drawing up red marks. "They right here with me. They been. And I think they saying they want me to name you Agnes. It sounds Israeli, doesn't it? Greek? I think they've forgiven me. Can't smell another man on me anymore, maybe. I heard them loud and clear in the fire: Your name is going to be Agnes." My sisters stood around, each grabbing onto something for solid ground, mouths opening and closing, as I sat in the middle of the verandah, the corridor behind me a long line of things only Ma could see with her opened eyes. "Now, Ma. I know how and where it is you are coming from, but isn't it a bit too late for that? The girl will be 10 next month. And besides, everybody around here is getting used to calling her Richardson instead of Baby. It's not always that something has to be precisely named—" But Ma's eyes only grew in absence, flying far from the conversation, as she looked into the fire and kept whispering, "Agnes. Agnes. Agnes"

I remember going to sleep that night, wondering if it was me or the fire she was calling.

Some Days

Jay Kophy

you're allowed to have days when you
feel like dust is the only thing you inhale
when you draw breath.

when you feel like you've been carrying
a cemetery on your tongue.
because
that is where you always bury your voice.

and your eyes are filled with more tears
than dreams.

when you feel like your voice
has taken a vacation because
it's tired of screaming at a mountain
that doesn't seem to move.

when you feel like you've forgotten
how to be alive. and your body
has become an abandoned building
people seek shelter in when it rains.

remember.
you're allowed to have days like this.

because even the sky has to get dark
before you can see the beauty of the stars.

Whenever You Ask Me If You Look Beautiful

I want to say this in the softest
language. I have learnt how to speak.

whenever you ask me
if you look beautiful, I want to tell
your heart that beauty is an element
present in everything. within the universe.

I want to show your eyes that the days
it sees something as ugly are days
it is truly blind.

I want to carry that question
off your tongue, so it can have
more room for words that sound
the same way honey tastes: pure.
without fear to speak for itself.

I have to say this in the softest
language. poetry has taught me how to speak.

whenever you ask me
if you look beautiful. I want to swallow my voice,
point you to the stars. and tell you
how they shine despite the color of the sky.

how they still glow in the day. because they don't
need to wait for the night to tell how beautiful they are.

Prayer Mongers

Nana Yaa Asante Darko

Today is not a disappointing Wednesday. The market has woken up to a pleasant sunny day. It rained heavily the night before so the sky lies clear and sharp, like a whistle. Slowly, the heat in the market builds up on many dimensions. A group of men in wellington boots and dirty nose masks stand ankle deep in the perpetually open gutters. They shovel up and heap by the side of the road mounds and mounds of dark silt and rubbish. This is an after-rain ritual. The sun slowly cooks this collection of night-soil, black and white polythene bags, water sachets and coconut husks, and their stench wafts and assaults the noses of everyone in the market. But only visitors to the place would pinch their noses. Just a short distance away from the men in the gutter, there is an amelia setting out her pans to sell her morning waakye. Her shelved shed straddles the gutter confidently. Lined up on the first shelf are transparent bowls; one with oiled talia, another with wet, salted and oiled gari, then chopped cabbage, spring onions, and shredded lettuce which pass for salad. She also has baskets of hard-boiled unshelled eggs, fried fish, fried ripe plantain and ripe avocados. On the next shelf above that, she has on display full and empty cans of Heinz baked beans, yellow bottles of Roma mayonnaise and Maggi ketchup bottles filled with red-coloured water. The waakye itself sits like a dark brown majestic mountain in a large aluminum pan. By the side is the famous waakye stew, with all kinds of protein in it. Then there, in another see-through bowl, is the shit which is sometimes so spicy that it transcends

comprehension. As she lights her mosquito coil to ward off the houseflies from the gutter, a man approaches her.

"Good morning, amelia, the peace of the Lord be with you".

Her head snaps up and she looks him over. He is wearing a navy blue second-hand shirt buttoned up all the way to the top. Stuck to his neck is what should look like a white clergy collar. His hair is permed and slicked back, and his skin screams of bleaching cream. In his sweat-marked armpit is a weathered bible. She knows his kind very well, he and his overweening brethren. They call themselves men of God. She blows out her match stick as a curl of smoke starts rising from the coil.

"Yes, morning" she finally responds.

He plasters on a smile. "Amelia, give me waakye 2 cedis, gari, talia, and salad 1 cedi. Please how much is the pear? You it's ok. I want one fish, one egg and two wele."

"And what else?" she asks.

"Please add one sachet of water, my good woman."

"Will you eat it here?"

"Yes, my gracious woman."

He moves behind her to the eating area. It is four benches, arranged to look like two tables with two benches. Four stakes of wood about 6 feet high form a border around it - drawing a square, and draped over them is about 5 yards of flavescent lace which had once upon a time, boasted of purity. He sets the bible down on one and sits on the edge of the bench facing it. The other end goes up like a see-saw.

"Kai! The devil is a liar!" he shouts, throwing his hands up in the air as he jumps up from the bench. He goes to sit on it again, this time, moving to the centre. It tells tales of loose nails and creaks under his weight.

The waakye seller pushes away the lace curtain and enters with his meal. She sets it in front of him and goes back to bring him the water. She leaves immediately to her shed, the market is swelling and people are hungry.

As she attends to the other buyers who have made a small crowd around her, the man-of-God-looking man swishes some water in his mouth, parts the lace and spews the water against the side of the gutter. Some of it splatter on the buyers and they start to murmur. He doesn't seem to mind.

He spreads out his hand over his food and starts to pray loudly.

"Jehovah Lord, Adonai, Elohim, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, I bless your matchless, holy, magnificent, name. Oh father in heaven, I thank you for my life and my stomach that is coming to eat this food. Jehovah Jireh, I send angel Gabriel to deliver to you an invitation card to this my humble feast. God Almighty, dress up in all your blinding splendour and come down. Come down in glory and multiply this food, because, kai, you know grown man like me, 2 cedis of waakye is small. If you don't, it will not be good. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!" he ends with the sign of the cross done in the wrong order.

A little while later, he emerges and walks towards the amelia.

"Madam, how much will you collect?"

"The food, 7 cedis, water 20 pesewas" she answers, stretching out her hand to take the money from him.

He laughs ebulliently and shouts "You want to cheat a man of God?! Kai!! You don't fear God. Here, take 5 cedis." He reaches into his breast pocket and brings out his hand empty. He puts on a frantic aura and goes through all his pockets.

"Hmm" he exclaims in an exaggerated manner. "They have done it again oo, they have done it again. The sons of rats have picked my pockets again oo."

The amelia begins to realize that she is being duped. The buyers around her start to complain that she is keeping long in serving them and she turns her attention back to them. He places his hand on her shoulder and she shrugs him off.

"Take your hands off me, are you my brother?" She is clearly peeved and demands her money again. She tightens her head scarf.

"Oh sorry, sorry, madam. You see, right now, I don't have any money on me. You can see I have been robbed, heh. So you I'll pass by again and give you the money. All the 7 cedis."

"It is 7 cedis, 20 pesewas. And I'm collecting my thing now now." She barks at him.

"Oh my good woman, take your time. You should not disgrace the man of God in front of all these people. I will come back. I swear by this Bible", he begs, raising the Bible. A leaf of it falls out. He tries to catch it but it floats down into the gutter. He sighs.

"Amelia, don't worry, I will come back. You, if I don't come, just ask anybody in the market for Pastor Two-Touch. Everybody knows me. I will come and pay, I won't disgrace my God like that."

The waakye seller flips him off as he pleads and he begins to walk away deeper into the market. She raises her clenched fists towards him and points her thumbs out at him, her voice following him with well-aimed insults.

"Madam, leave this pastor and serve us", says a man in the crowd in a husky voice, evidently tired of all the show.

"Hoh, what pastor? He sells prayers. He is one of the many prayer mongers in this market", a woman with a baby strapped to her back retorts and there is a ripple of laughter in the small crowd.

Pastor Two-Touch turns around when he gets to a curb and notes where the waakye seller is. He would not pass there until about a month goes by.

"Hey, Oteng!" a voice calls out. He turns around uneasily. He cannot make out from the building crowd who had called him, by his real name.

"Kai! This cannot be good", he thinks. He passes his hand over his slick hair and releases his breath slowly. He tries to weave away through the crowd when he feels a tap on his shoulder. He spins around on his heel and comes face to chest with one of the people in his trade. Kwasi is much taller than him and has a more polished look about him. He is as smooth as he looks.

"Oh thank you for your advice the last time", he begins to say. "I got a new child, this one's kwashiorkor is very big. He looks sicker when I plaster the tubes on his bulging stomach,

like he is about to die. Now, I don't go home with less than 70 cedis a day, the people give like something", he says amidst uncontrolled laughter. He doubles over and slaps his left thigh three times.

Oteng snickers, "Didn't I tell you? You, for your style, appeal for funds for sick children, the 'stra' is to get a very malnourished child and plaster his stomach. A cannula koraa plastered on his hand would work miracles."

"Oh my man, you be the boss! Now I'm going to get a megaphone. You remember, you said that one too adds something eh?", he ends, his full set of teeth on display.

He pulls Oteng's hand from his side to himself and shakes it vigorously. He pushes his Ray Bans up his nose and picks his way off.

Oteng raises his right hand to eye level and reads the time from his gilt watch. He picks up pace. After 9:00am there would be almost no office workers passing through the market, and it is they who give the 5 cedi notes, then he blesses them with promotion at their offices and prays for the death of their wicked bosses. He has to hurry to his spot and set up. Market days like this are very profitable. He adjusts his collar.

But first, he makes a stop at a large provision shop in one of the rented stores along the main road. He enters with his hands clasped together and pulls on a solemn face.

"The peace of the Lord be with you!" he says, raising his right hand sanctimoniously. He does not wait for a response from Aunty Philo. He never does. Aunty Philo is a slow woman, short and obese. Once she gets behind the counter on her long chair, there is no going anywhere until she closes the shop at 3:00 pm. Oteng struts into the shop wearing a sure smile and asks her how she is managing her BP.

"Oh I'm managing, Pastor" she responds, shifting from one large buttock to the other. She grabs the counter with her stubby fingers and pulls herself forward.

She leans towards Oteng, who is now standing in front of the wooden counter, and whispers, "Pastor, business is slow nowadays oo, hmm. The things I brought from Makola are still here. Nothing is moving. Next week, I have to go and pay the creditors oo, hmm." Worry etches itself in her crow's feet. She grabs a cup of moringa health tea from the counter and leans back in her chair. She takes a sip and continues "Hmm, and Pastor, you see that shop over there, the one by Hajia's dashiki store, ehee that one," she points and continues, "that woman just came and now she has started selling my provisions too oo. Hmm, that witch of a woman."

Oteng raises his right index finger and shuts his eyes, then knits his brows and shakes his head as he says, "No, no, no, this cannot continue. Kai! We must bind her."

Aunty Philo nods in agreement, and her double chin wobbles like jelly. He walks past the counter, deeper into the store and he turns to face the shelves. He starts to touch the items one by one and stops abruptly.

"Water, I need some water. Kai! We must quench certain things in this shop."

Aunty Philo calls the shop help. She is measuring out an olonka of sugar for a customer but she stops and goes to Aunty Philo at the counter, leaving the customer to wait.

Aunty Philo gives the help a cedi and asks her to go get a bottle of water for Pastor Two-

Touch. She returns shortly with a sweating bottle of Voltic and hands it to her madam who gives it to the pastor.

He swipes the beads of condensed water on the bottle with his thumb and breaks the seal. He takes a long drink. He pours some into his right palm and sprinkles favour and liberation around the shop, as he explains to Aunty Philo later. He spins around dramatically and walks to the entrance of the shop. He bends and traces a line across the front with the last of the water. He rises to full height, satisfied and expectant. Aunty Philo is also satisfied, that the man of God has prayed a powerful theatrical prayer and expectant, that her business will recover from its bad times.

Oteng starts to leave when he sees Aunty Philo whisper into the help's ear. He lingers and breaks into a popular Twi song which talks about sowing and reaping. The help hurriedly peels away one black polythene bag and harvests from the shelves, a tin of Milo, some sardines, a pack of Good Morning oats and some tins of Ideal milk. She hands the carrier bag over to her madam and goes back to the sugar. But the customer has already crossed over to the other shop. The help shrugs and puckers her lips.

"Err, Pastor Two-Touch, please take this small offering oo. And use this one too for transport", Aunty Philo says, handing him a 20 cedi note. She beams when he sprays her with blessing and saliva and shakes her hand. He slips the money into his breast pocket and saunters out, swinging the bag of provisions and whistling the Twi song.

He turns left from the main street and plunges into the bubbling activity of the market. He passes by half-empty bookshops, salons in kiosks, boutiques in shipping containers, table-top pharmacies, money changers and thieves. He raises his hand in greeting as he passes by and nods when someone acknowledges him. He stops by a music shop between a kiosk of herbal medicine and a display of woollen and linoleum carpets. He is here to pick up his megaphone and his offertory bucket.

"Amidu, good morning oo, how are you?" He asks, peering into the shop. He does not listen for a response. He darts his eyes about the small kiosk, in search of his work tools. Lined along the walls are CDs and DVDs of pirated movies and music. On an orange oil-cloth covered table, there is a large yellowed Compaq desktop that has enriched a repairer across the street. A tall loudspeaker is set outside and Daddy Lumba's Ye ne wo sere kwa, blasts away, unsettling the peaceful minds of all who pass by.

"Err, Amidu, I can't see my things. Where are they? Get them for me ok. I'm a little late today." He keeps the megaphone that he is buying from Amidu on hire purchase here. For five months, he has put off making the last two instalments of 15 cedis each, oblivious to Amidu's threats to "show him something".

"Massa, clear off, buyers see then buy. You're blocking my display standing there at the entrance", he responds instead. He acts as if Oteng is a stranger and merely glances at him when he speaks. Amidu is the owner of the illegal music shop. He started off on a 3x4 foot table at Kantamanto and now he has a whole kiosk, he is proud of himself. He does not waste time or money.

"Oh boss, why you dey do me so? I biz you say where ma megaphone dey, wey you dey do

like you no sabi me, like I be some pest bi." Oteng asks.

"Abeg, where ma megaphone dey?" He asks again, growing impatient now. He has never had to ask this long for his megaphone and this begins to irk him. He tries to keep his calm, remembering that you do not knock someone on the head when your hand is in their mouth.

"Ashoot am." Amidu flipantly responds with a smirk on his tribal marked face. "Some bro come plus in pikin wey he tell me say he dey search megaphone buy. Ashoot give am sake of he say he go double price give me."

Oteng does not believe what he hears. He passes his hand over his slick hair once again and asks again for his things.

Amidu reaches behind him angrily, takes the blue bucket Oteng uses for collection and throws it at him. He really cannot stand him anymore.

"Kai! This is not good." Oteng says to himself, feeling his permed hair again.

He is distraught. A man with a child; it has to be Kwasi. He cannot imagine how of all the places Kwasi could go to buy a megaphone, it had to be here. Now he cannot work today when the market is brimming with people. He does not have a voice loud enough to be heard over the market's laborious singing. He takes the alley between the carpet stand and the blue kiosk and heads home, with an empty offertory bucket.

He consoles himself, "Tomorrow, business will be good."

Glass

Kofi Konadu Berko

Once upon a time. My uncle told me to pick
Tears from my auntie's left eye
It smelled
like
soot

Just behind
the tears
I found
a rusted piece of glass

The jagged edges of the glass
Matched each slash on

her face,

her chest,

her arm,

her thighs

But what could I do? My mother says I'm a child
That all I can do is suck big bREASTs.
I couldn't tell her. I couldn't tell her that.
The cuts on my auntie's body
Were made by glass
From my uncle's
dressing
mirror.

My Sister-In-Law's Body Is A Cemetery

for years we called her barren

my brother wanted kids

i wanted nephews

but years came and years went

ma died

pa passed

my kids grew old.

yet my sister in law's body remained

bland. Un-blooming. Unchanging.

then the goddess from the temple on the Mountain

came and told us that my sister in laws body was

the un-Living body

The body where all half-dead souls went to rest

The body that held so much life that

It died

Mother's Tribute

For mothers born of white earth and black grass
Trapped in skins that threaten to fall
With smiles that reacts to only fireworks
Twiiiiiew pop pop pop

For mothers whose brassieres are cornucopias of freedom
Women whose heartbeats have killed and created
With collar bones that stretches for miles
Sinking and rising with tiredly sung lullabies

For mothers carved from steel coated in Black pepper
Hot Hard beautiful
With dresses that swirl up up into the throes of the sky
Women's whose moans sounds like the first breaths of Adam

For mothers dressed like saints, built like hospitals
With breaths as rosy as dettol
And fingers, long nimble bony,
Carved in the Cs of carex-es and soaps

For mothers black as stains that scourge the earth

For mothers invisible as wind, tasteless as salt

For mothers as soft as dough
Bodies foldable like blankets
With tears that litter the streets of Accra
Leaving behind glowing silvery lines of hidden rebellion
As they disappear into crevices of tarred roads made of blind faith

For mothers who are goddesses
Accepting only the bloody tears of men
Those whose voices slashes through the thickest of foolish skulls
And penetrates the annals of a history covered in a pot

For mothers whose black skins
who have long been turned to books
Each pain and pleasure and moment
Carefully and carelessly carved into their flesh

For mothers whose spirits have long departed
Bodies rotting away in glass
coffins
in the center of the earth's backyard

To mothers whose lives linger on, breathless

Blessings

March 1986 (Date Behind a Photograph)

Korley-Adjaottor

In this memory,
We will always be sitting behind a pile of logs
At Abeka - Lapaz,
Bursting with joy; full grins,
Shouldering one another,
For the best spot in front of the camera.
The motorway will remain, a dusty stretch,
And my right hand, still stretched to wave you goodbye.

The mango tree, the corn mill in the distance,
The puff of smoke that will forever be escaping from its chimney,
Caught against red evening skies,
Will forever be in this memory.

I can hear the corn mill clapping,
Screech briefly, and clap away.
In this memory,
There is laughter, there are tears,

There are uncles, and aunts, cousins, sisters, brothers.
You were leaving that evening.

This place no longer holds any memories of you.
We have moved on.

This place has long since moved on.

We do not sell firewood by the motorway anymore;

The motorway is now tarred, with traffic lights and railings.

Very little remains of this memory in this place.

Time has long since fled,

And most of these memories lie dead,

Till we see these photos

Of times once shared,

And wake ghosts.

So when you call and tell those stories;

Those cold, hard, immigrant stories,

I wish I could just say to you,

"Come back home brother,

Come back home, where your blackness has never,

And will never be a stain in any memory."

There Are Horny Cats Everywhere

There are horny cats everywhere,
Some hanging around late nights on my back wall,

Others stirring the bush in my backyard at dawn,
Making eerie cat calls like a baby crying.

Instantly chilling the dawn silence
And dotting me over, stiff with goosebumps.

When first I heard that shrill love cry.
I am horny too and I long for love.

I look out my window
And there are horny cats everywhere,

Calling, hissing viciously, scratching and chasing,
Raging cat love everywhere.
And perhaps I, alone,
Am awake on Bamboo Street, Dansoman,

Horny and missing you
And watching and listening to cats

Loving fiercely behind my window.
And perhaps I, alone,

Will wake you at this time,
Wanting some,

With the excuse that
There are horny cats everywhere

And they are getting some,
And you will laugh and sleep.

And perhaps you alone,
Will call me savagely later in the day

When you remember,
That a cool and horny cat by cat standards;

Bushy tail, and big balls, and fine coat,
poised, ready to pounce,

Hissed wildly at you this dawn
Because there were horny cats everywhere.

An Encounter

It was past midnight
And his stomach grumbled and ached.
Having convinced himself
That the night was safe,
Dumping all fears,
Uplifting much courage
As would be found,

He dashed out to the dumps,
Slipped out of his shorts,

Bent into a squat
And eased himself in loud and quick spurts.

Sputtering still,
He caught sight of
A lone figure -
Such as a man's -
Hunched just by,
Maybe easing himself too
By the dump

Where the town kids did.

What struck the young boy was:
The moon shone bare.
Could he, he would,

Rewind time to prove
None came later,
And there was absolutely no soul there
When he half running, half walking came,
Holding his raging bowels.

He had overeaten Fufu earlier
And he couldn't just let the thing gush into his pants.
Jesus! The smell,
The squishy – squashy thing
spilled all over his thighs,
Till morning?
In the room shared with his siblings?
Never!
And now, here he was
Rooted in fear beside
Something or someone dreadful.

He held still as the night.

He wished for a sign

Maybe a cough or a sigh
From the stranger,
To assure him
This was no infernal spirit,
That he had come

Blinded by unease,
That he just hadn't noticed.

Even though he was done

He stayed put

Hoping the stranger would move first.
He remained
Squatting, for torturous minutes,
The figure wouldn't shift.
So he jolted up once again,
With what courage would be found
And skipped into his shorts

Without cleaning himself,
And walked stiffly off;

Away from the heaviness behind him
Acting his best to look indifferent.
By morning, he was dreadfully ill,

And till weeks after
Words could barely crawl out his lips.

“Section 278. Homeostasis”

Gabriella Rockson

“Why don’t we tell them the story of how we met. How we really met.” Kobina said to his girlfriend, as he carried his wine glass to his seat.

They were hosting a small party of close friends to celebrate their three year anniversary. Vanessa looked at the group they had over, smiled and shrugged.

“Okay, okay. But I want to sit beside you as you tell it so I can see their reactions,” Vanessa said, with a laugh, as she moved to sit on the armrest of the loveseat he was in.

“So you guys don’t know the NSFW details of the night we met. We have both never told anyone about this which is surprising because Vanessa can talk!”

“It was an eventful night,” interjected Vanessa with a rueful smile.

“Yes, a very long night that started with drinks at Cocktails with Denis...”

Kobina regretted coming to the bar alone. This was not the kind of place you could just sit down and drink by yourself. Everyone was there with someone and he felt he was sticking out like a sore thumb. The CoolVibes review of the place had said it was the perfect place to unwind from a stressful day at work. They hadn’t mentioned it would be best if you came here with someone. Or maybe that was implied. Maybe no one went out alone in Accra.

Deciding he was going to stick it out, he settled back into his chair to think about work and the case he had in court the next day.

“Excuse me is this seat taken?” A soft voice asked.

Kobina looked up to see a petite, dark-skinned woman, with corn rows that reached the small of her back, pointing to the other seat at his table. She was wearing jeans with a black string top which covered her chest with the full material, and her back with strings crisscrossing.

"No it's not, I actually came alone. I'm ...yes the seat is free" he finished with a smile and gesture that said 'take it'. He'd expected her to move the seat to a table of her friends but it looked like she was joining him at the table. Kobina didn't know whether she'd be comfortable with silence like he was or would want a conversation.

He decided to try conversation.

"I'm Kobina."

"Vanessa" she said fiddling with the straw of the drink. "I had no idea this place would be like this" she said looking around at the room packed with groups of friends laughing and having fun.

"You read the CoolVibes review eh?" he asked with a knowing smile.

"I did!" She exclaimed. "I thought it'd be like a really calm and zen with everyone just minding their own business and chilling. But it's just more people painfully reminding me what I'm missing out on. I'm doing a paediatrics residency program at Korle Bu and it is beating me paa," she said with a laugh.

"I know what that feels like. I still have the occasional nightmare from law school days."

They started talking about their work and Kobina told her about his law firm and how he was sure his boss's niece, who had trained in the UK, was getting more pay than the Ghana-trained lawyers. They talked about nepotism in Ghana, and the conversation drifted to schools they had gone to; where they even realised they had a number of mutual friends. By 11:00 pm. Vanessa felt like they'd known each other for years and the drinks she'd had had made her more bold and flirtatious .

"I have to get an Uber back. I planned to get really drunk because I have the day off tomorrow," she said, as she slowly took out her phone; mentally willing him to ask for her number or give her a sign he was interested in her.

"Oh, I can drop you off," he said.

"At Korle-Bu?" she asked. "I thought you lived at Spintex?"

"Yes but Korle-Bu isn't far from here. Plus I actually have a late morning tomorrow." He had court at 7 a.m.

"Let me drop you off Vanessa," he said with a coaxing smile.

That was all Vanessa needed. As far as she was concerned he felt what she was feeling too. They both paid for their drinks and as they were walking out the entrance she turned and grabbed his hand. All she could think about as they made their way to his car was how loud her heart was beating.

They got to his car, a sleek Ford, and got in.

"So Korle-Bu" he said programming the GPS on his phone. They both put on their seatbelts and he locked the car doors. Was it just him or was the atmosphere more charged now that they were alone together? Things felt more... real. He pulled out of the parking lot and

made his way towards Korle Bu. The only sound in the car was coming from his GPS giving him directions to Korle Bu. He didn't even need directions. He was considering whether to turn it off and whether he could reach for her hand when she spoke.

"Could you stop the car and park there," she said quietly.

He pulled into the side street she'd pointed at and shifted the gear to park. Turning to face her he reached for her left hand and gave her a quiet smile. "I'm really glad I came out tonight and met you."

She took her hand out of his and reached for his face while taking her seatbelt off with the other hand and kissed him. It took Kobina a second to recover from the shock of her making the first move, and then he kissed her back. Their kisses progressed from slow and deliberate to more urgent, she was sitting in his lap. After what seemed like 3 minutes of kissing, Kobina, bursting with desire asked if they could move to the backseat.

They got out of the car and got in the back of the car which he locked again. She bit his lower lip and plunged her tongue down his throat. The moan that escaped his mouth fuelled her more and she freed her right hand from behind him. She caressed his face, then molded her hand against his jaw, deepening the kiss. Moving her hand lower, she started to unbuckle his belt. After a few seconds of her fumbling with one hand, he reached for the belt buckle. He'd just successfully unzipped his trousers when a light was flashed into the window followed by a loud knock.

They broke apart abruptly and turned to look at the window. There were two policemen outside the window on Kobina's side. They were knocking on the window loudly, shouting for them to get out. Vanessa frantically kicked around for her shoes which had somehow come off when they moved to the backseat. Kobina zipped his trousers, took a deep breath and opened the car door. They got out and immediately one of the policemen began to take pictures of them while the other handcuffed them.

"At least let me arrange my clothes before you handcuff me," Vanessa angrily said to the shorter man who had gleefully handcuffed her before she could adjust her top.

"You want to arrange what? Eh, you are in the car with this man at this time doing God-knows-what, and now you're saying you want to adjust something? Girls of today, asha-

"Hey, hey. Boss make you no talk plus my woman like that," Kobina interrupted angrily.

"Oh your woman that eh? Oh sorry, chief," the man said with a nervous laugh. "Chief but you know what you were doing is not right eh. Public indecency. It's not right."

Kobina stared at him. Vanessa seethed internally, fighting the urge to insult the policeman. The other officer finally spoke. He seemed to be the leader of the two. "Look Counsellor, we have to take you and your madam to the station." He had seen the Ghana Bar Association sticker on Kobina's car.

After a moment Kobina spoke. Very slowly. "Okay, let me pass by the ATM first, I have to take something."

"Oh yes, yes." The shorter man said quickly, smiling fully now. "We'll go with you to the place."

Kobina got into the car, and the taller, quiet policeman sat by him; which left Vanessa stuck

with the other man. Her handcuffs were still on. Kobina's had been removed immediately he mentioned the ATM.

"Oh boss, abeg jie my woman ein handcuffs."

"No, let them stay on," the taller man said to his colleague

"It'll give you some, eh, motivation to get to the ATM quickly."

Kobina's face tightened but he said nothing as he started the car, searching for an ATM.

At the ATM he got down and was joined by the officer who appeared to be the leader. He withdrew five hundred cedis and handed it to him.

The taller man counted the notes quickly and said "oh Lawyer, just five hundred? I'm sure that's not your withdrawal limit."

By then Kobina was visibly infuriated. The officer only had to look at his facial expression before he realised it was best not to push his luck.

"Call your friend," Kobina said quietly.

The police officer called his partner.

"Unlock your phone and give it to me," he said, his voice still deathly quiet. The shorter man who was ready to protest was quickly prodded by his senior colleague to hand over the phone.

Kobina took the phone and deleted the pictures.

"I've deleted the pictures from your phone. You don't have a recently deleted album or a cloud storage app but if I ever see those pictures anywhere I will hold you two responsible."

They walked back to the car. By then Vanessa had counted backwards from one hundred three separate times. She was reciting the Lord's Prayer, hoping she'd have better success with controlling her anger, when they opened the door.

"Can you remove the handcuffs now?" She asked the now subdued policeman who had handcuffed her.

She got out and he removed her handcuffs.

They all got in again and her seatmate decided to make conversation.

"So madam are you a student? You look like a university girl" he said with a toothy smile.

Vanessa just stared at him.

"Oh don't be like that eh, this thing happens to everyone. It's like... eh what's that word from SSS science? Eheh homeostasis! Homeostasis," he said with a laugh and smile. "We policeman have to keep the balance. We'll take small from you and provide for our families. It will also make you act better because you won't want us to be taking from you plenty eh." He said with a wide smile.

Vanessa looked ahead. They got to the place where the policemen had knocked the window and the two of them got out.

"Okay Sa! Madam. God bless you. Drive safely oh. Don't go and park anywhere again," The talkative one said laughing at his own joke.

They drove the rest of the trip in silence. Vanessa could feel the anger radiating from Kobina and she just couldn't believe how a night that had started out so great could

become so ugly.

"You can drop me off here," she said quietly once they got to the first residential block. It wasn't hers but she needed to walk and clear her mind. He turned back and gave her a small smile. "What's your number?" She gave it to him and then got down, fully expecting to never see him again.

"Ei so how long did it take you guys to start talking after such a night?" Kukua asked Vanessa with an incredulous look.

"Well, I felt really guilty because I had told him to park there. I actually started thinking what if he thought I was working with the policemen. I felt so bad. I didn't have his number to reach out to him but he actually texted me the next day apologising. He thought it was his fault for saying we should move to the backseat. I was honestly just happy he texted."

"And that's how we got here." Kobina said sharing a smile with Vanessa.

All The Reasons I Do Not Say My Own

Awo Twumwaah

My fingers will not keep bloom for too long
It is why I do not own anything.
They shiver, they sweat, they do not believe it is theirs.
Then they feel it too softly. They let it fall.

My fingers are clasped in prayer.
they hold a strange man. A strange woman.
My fingers are clasped in prayer.
Every morning. In truth
They do not believe. They do not believe in heavy words.
They say redemption. They say sanctification.
They say justification. They do not believe

In blood. My fingers are apostates. My finger goes away.
My finger thinks its thoughts. My finger believes
Nothing that comes to it must stay. Not bloom. Not answered prayer.

Serwaa

Adwoa Botchey



Becoming More

Arnold Adrian

As they called out our names onto the stage, I recalled all that had led me to this very moment. I always believed that life wasn't just a record of how we spend our time but rather a bank of moments. Moments like this very one as I stood on stage before all the cameras broadcasting live on National television, knowing over a million people were watching including all those who doubted me back in school.

The events that led me to this very moment all started with my girlfriend's pregnancy test. The moment the test turned out positive, I knew my life wouldn't be the same again. I was an unemployed high school dropout whose girlfriend had just gotten pregnant. We were both not prepared for this but I had to become a man for both of us if we were going to make it through this.

The metamorphosis was gradual; as the old me died when I saw the flyer perched in a hedge "CHEF KAY'S COOKING COMPETITION". I grinned as the universe smiled at me for the first time in a long time.

Six weeks after seeing that flyer, I stood on National TV with two other finalists waiting for

Chef Kay to announce the winner. I crossed my fingers and smiled as Chef Kay opened the envelope to mention the name of the winner.

I got home late or rather early the next morning after I won the show. As I took off my shoes and clothes, I took the masked smile off and shed tears. The tears started as silent sobs but as my emotions bubbled the more uncontrollable they became.

I just laid on the floor thinking of how I blackmailed Chef Kay instead of reporting him to the police after I learnt his secret spice was made from human parts, he believed the crushed bones of infants produced a nectar that when dried and processed gave his food a divine taste.

I had wanted to give my unborn child a better life but now, Louisa was in a coma after getting hit by a red Toyota corolla on her way to watch the TV show at Stella's. I had paid the price and made the sacrifices but now it all seemed vain and as I lay on the cold tile floor with tears running down my cheeks, my phone screen lit up and displayed a text from my mum-

" Great achievement is usually born of great sacrifice and is never out of selfishness. Congratulations my son I am so proud of you."

Beer is Communion Wine

Fui Can Tamakloe

Once

I was asked why there are more men in the bar
than in the church.

both are refuges for men who have come
to hide from trouble.

one opens once a week,

the other opens every day.

and most people have problems,

that never go on break

December Is When The City Goes Mad

Horns blare,
Tempers flare,
Passersby stare.

The traffic is mad in town today.
Everyone's going somewhere,
Even if their lives are going nowhere.
Especially if their lives are going nowhere.

Horns blare,
Tempers flare,
We're in a hurry to go nowhere.

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