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A F R I C A

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WSA



MARYHILDA IBE

**Winner of the 2018 African Writers Award
for Flash Fiction**

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EDITORIAL

A healthy Nation is a wealthy Nation.

Food, a compulsory subject as my mother puts it, is what we bring you this month.

Africa is a food basket. Agriculture is our backbone. We've always had variety and variety is what we bring you.

Food is unifying and the ink masters of contemporary Africa have joined hands to serve you mouth watering delicacies. You are spoilt for choice. Wash your hands, the table is set and you are our special guest.

We bite together, drink together. Cheers!

Keep it WSA!

Wakini Kuria,
Chief Editor,
Kenya

FLASH FICTION





LINAMARIN

Kilibwa Kanyangi - Kenya

“They say Githeri is a mean meal. A jumble of personalities; an unhealthy relationship at best.” I watched my girlfriend, Bibi carefully chew on her delicacy, an almost pensive look on her face. “You know, if I did not know better, I would think you are almost sad the food is getting depleted...”

She swallowed then smiled.

“I am. Parting is always a sad place. No matter what one is parting from.”

“I could order you some more but you know, you will whistle...”

“Like I was saying, Githeri is the only food with a bad heart. Red beans, black beans, green beans, bad beans... you know,”

She shrugged.

“Bwana, then they say the dry maize is what causes problems for people with ulcers. She may be hypocritical, alright, smearing herself with the blood of beans yet she is still white deep inside. But the beans, the beans is what produces the gas. What causes the whistling from down under?”

She burst into boisterous laughter and I chuckled at her crudeness.

I pointed to her meal,

“What of cassava, pink cassava?”

“You may hate pink, my love, but it is the color of love. The color of the fight against breast cancer. And all cassavas, whether wearing pink or brown skin, are white, pure and sweet.”

Bibi continued feasting.

“Kibibi makes one whistle.”

“I’d love to whistle for you, babe.”

I sipped my chai and winked. I was not used to eating heavily in the evenings.

It would be much later in the night when I would wake up to someone whistling in my ear, trying to shake me awake. She would try to speak but only whistling left her mouth. Her stomach would be as hard as a basketball ball. And as inflated.

That was what bitter cassava did.

POETRY



TONIGHT

Tonight, the gleaming chandelier will
sprinkle its rays on the cafeteria
Illuminating the golden pearl platters and
decanters with stars,
For the stars are the food and the bellies
are the firmaments
Tonight, as we bond, the stars will kiss the
firmament and lodge there.

Cynthia K Matala
Botswana

FOODGASM



I will never forget your last words
before you walked out of the room this
morning

“Honey, I’ll always love your cream,
but I think we should start seeing other
sauces.”

And here I am, in the middle of a brick
room,
at a table for two, alone.

Listening to forks making twists
against spoons

Wetting my lips, waiting

A snowy napkin lays helplessly on my
lap,

in case messes are to be made,

You know? You feel me?

Ah, no you don’t, of course not,

Had you felt me, you wouldn’t have
craved for another sauce

I see a gentleman approaching me,

“The usual?” He says

I smile, moments pass by,

And he comes with what he knows I
love

“There you go, enjoy” he walks away

I take a deep breath at the sight

Pull my hair into a bun

Take my fork, twist a strand and take a
mouthful

I feel the warmth down my throat,

I close my eyes, “Ahhh, my creamy car-
bonara spaghetti”

I take my napkin and wipe the cream
that I feel

warm at the corner of my lips

My phone rings,

“You were right, there is no better
sauce

without your cream on top” you say

“I miss your cream, can I join you?”

you sound so desperate

“Oh honey, but I just finished.” I hesi-
tate a bit.

“Well, we can always start over,”

And here we are, on a table for two, the
two of us

With a second round of carbonara dish.

Kalkidan Getnet

Ethiopia



DINNER

On one cold evening,
The wife serves her husband dinner.

The husband looks at the table,
All he sees, is a bowl of porridge with no milk,
And probably not enough sugar,
With a broken smile, he sighs
and shyly says,
“It’s all we have,
it’s all we can feed on.”

The wife looks at the table,
All she sees, is a bowl
full of disappointments,
A million dreams and promises
that went down the drain,
A million sacrifices she made
for her dear husband
She sees every face, of every mistress
that stole her joy
until she cared no more,
She sees the face of her previous lover,
And how his character too was just as sickening.

She has spent enough hungry nights,
To know it’s time to leave,
It’s time to live.
She sees her body holding hands
with his love for her,
As they both slowly fade away,
She sees a broken home.

So she too, with a broken smile, sighs,
Looks at that bowl of disappointment once more and says,
“It’s all we have, it’s all we can feed on.”

Christina H Lwendo
Tanzania

FOOD IS LIKE FIRE

It's really funny that it is food that has caused my illness.

I have chronic constipation.

A disorder - so to clarify

It has made me go through three operations

And a serious brain weird rare disorder

Hard food stuffs make me bedridden

Yet I can't survive on soft ones alone

Lest I'll go malnourished.

It is really funny that what I can't live without

is what I should avoid

That contradiction, to be a daily hustle is problematic.

So food, I love super delicious meals

My appetite is just on the average

But I'd like to explore all types without hesitations

Or fear if illness

So food,

I love it, but again I have to be careful with it

It is like fire to me

Essential and dangerous!

Ignatius Bambaiha

Uganda



Food For Thought

Young lad
In despair is all he's clad
Dying light in his eyes
And forced smiles that quickly fade
His sire no longer sighs
His mother could not stand the father any further
So she went further
It's dusk and the father is not yet back
The thought of yester night makes him murky
His father came in drank at midnight
Amid insults gave him a beating not slight
It made the boy wonder
Whether it was safer to far away wander
That was food for thought
Today he might also have thoughts for food
Or is it food for thought?

Kamau Ngumbu
Kenya



HOME OF AGRICULTURE AND TRADITION


The forest not only hides man's enemies
It covers the beautiful fibers in it
The land of Africa
is a kind hub of agriculture
like mama always says to my ears

Beautiful nutritional delicacies
Give healthy touch to the people
when consumed with proper mix
Her natural spices reduce
the menaces of sugar

There is an inulectable tradition
in this home
The nutriments serve as means
of averting illness
A traditional home where gods
are forbidden to hunger

Olaseni Kehinde Precious
Nigeria

Ugali Mtindi



Mother Africa home of the finest
Home of the hero and world's mightiest
When a fellow asked the secret behind
Only the pot of natural food was shown
When you take in cautious must be
If not so down your tongue will be
When you take in cautious must be
If not so even your fingers bitten will be
Welcome home the home of Energetic
Get in with smile ugali and yams to take
On the bowl mtindi invites appetite
While diverse of fruits call your sight
Welcome to eat what we always eat
'cause I know you've never what we eat
This is what makes us fit
And never wish to move our feet.

Gift Samwel Ngamanja
Tanzania

*Ugali- cornmeal/ stiff porridge normally eaten with stew in East and Central Africa.
Mtindi- yogurt

The Last Supper

Normal day it had been
They'd spent the day hungry
Waiting for it;
Their most important meal;
Supper.

Super day; beef on the menu
Eat! Add soup! She encouraged.

Then hell broke lose
Diarrhoea! Diarrhoea!
Pitched camp by the latrine
And everyone was vomiting
They became weak; weaker and weaker

One, two ...
All the three poor kids
Breathed their last
Their stepmother lived.

Nehemiah Omukhonya
Kenya



WAR ZONE

A war zone is an arena of peace
Invaded by hatred
With marching song of division
He builds an altar
Worshipped by blood of belligerents

A war zone is a realm of life
Laid in the tomb of death
Death becomes a norm
And killing, a tradition
In war man is a beast
A god commanding life out of others

If war was a festival
Guns will be spoons
Wailings will be stews
And life a food
Served on the plate of loss

Isreal Winlad
Nigeria



FOR MARIA

Maria,
My warm bowl of pumpkin soup,
The sweet smell of cinnamon in my morning tea,
I want to write a ballad but my throat is dry,
Will you make some of your ginger for me?

Daughter of the earth,
With a body shaped as the gourds in grandmother's farm,
Hands as soft as the mashed potatoes with skimmed milk,
Do I write about your coconut skin?
Or should I stick to describing your strawberry lips?

Mother to my future children,
Like the corn bread from Auntie,
You are my greatest weakness,
My cocoa bean precious gem,
The only plantain that makes my mouth water.

Love of my life,
Words don't describe you,
You never are out of season like the paddy rice,
You complete my being as rock bun is to soup,
In another life you I would still choose.

Joy Ng'ethe
Kenya



KILL YOUR ANXIETY

My son, satiate your appetite!
Gladden your heart and rejoice,
Worried of obesity or good feeding?
What do you crave for?
Banana and pork or bread and fish?
Desist from gluttony and share;
In moderation you'll be fair,
But take heed to my words:
Kill your anxiety for spiced food;
Food, like fire burns.
Fillet once teased my mouth;
And my tongue tasted a charm:
From then, sharing grew in me.
Visit a gourmet restaurant today;
Go to Darfur, offer a meal there,
And save a soul unknown.
Set alight your troubled heart:
Behold; hunger's no more.
My son, give thanks for providence;
For many have coiled yawning.

Omadang Yowasi,
Uganda



FOOD FOUND ME

I was that girl that would awake, work and play,
And only eat to avoid my mama shouting all day.
I was a picky eater and I loved no food but just taste.
I grunted at the grains, trifled with the tubers, ruffled the roots,
And I scorned honey, hated bitter leaf and kola.
I only saw the kitchen as a sweaty and odorous prison.
Then came the time when I became a lady living alone;
I needed energy, freshness and sustenance,
And I sought them in good food as I sought them in my God.
Then, I realized that mama really knows and professor understands
That food is a vehicle for the body
when driven by a peaceful mind and healthy living,
That food is a medicine that keeps sickness away.
So, I began to appreciate the art of cooking,
The beauty of culinary and the wonder of the kitchen.
For it cheers my days and makes living worthwhile,
Even when I smart and sneeze or chew and lick.
And I picked the spoon, fork and knife,
To create, to explore, to present dishes from plants and animals.
Now, when asked “What caused the change in you?”
I reply with a smile, “Food found me.”

Oluwagbenga Ayomide Ruth
Nigeria



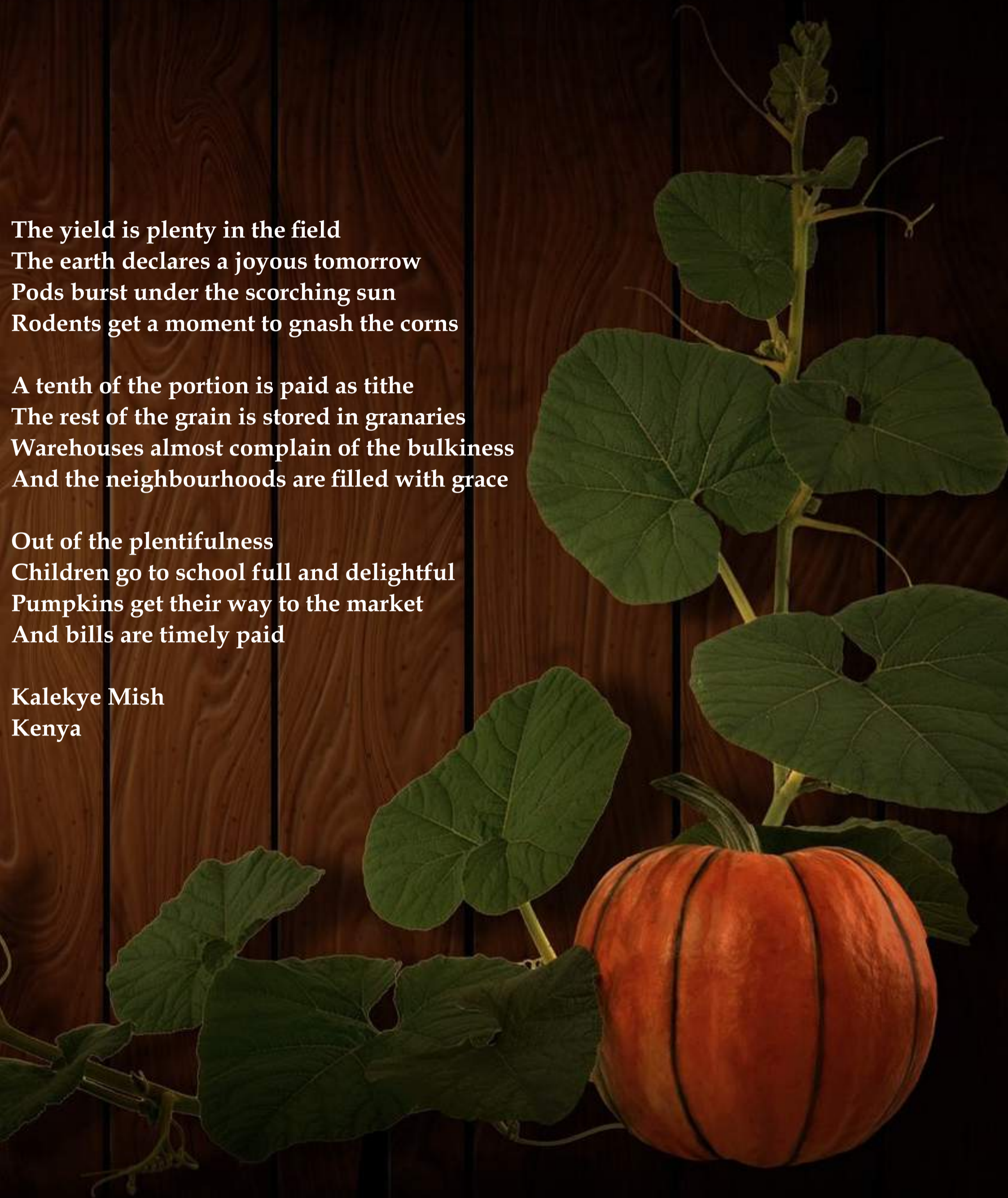
A MOMENT OF DELIGHT

The yield is plenty in the field
The earth declares a joyous tomorrow
Pods burst under the scorching sun
Rodents get a moment to gnash the corns

A tenth of the portion is paid as tithe
The rest of the grain is stored in granaries
Warehouses almost complain of the bulkiness
And the neighbourhoods are filled with grace

Out of the plentifulness
Children go to school full and delightful
Pumpkins get their way to the market
And bills are timely paid

Kalekye Mish
Kenya



EFO ONIGBESE

When I got back from work today
my wife served me a plate of eba and efo riro
garnished with smoked fish, dried fish, cow skin, liver and snail
just when I thought that was all
I saw some crayfish
hiding among the leaves with locust beans

She told me how much effort she put into it
but in my mind I thought effort
is when you go to the farm to uproot yam tubers
walk the long distance home carrying them
fetch firewood from the forest
then come home to boil and pound it

All I see is an expensive plate of soup
I ate like a prodigal son as if it was my birth right
I had to eat in a haste before my creditors walked in on me

She asked how it tasted I smiled and said
“it was the most complete meal I’ve ever had”
even though I couldn’t tell her what I truly thought
if you want to live long as a man
you cannot tell your wife everything on your mind
only the things she wants to hear.

Adetoyese Odekunbi,
Nigeria



Image source: <https://www.tribuneonlineng.com/176057/>

FOOD

Journeys line up our paths, in struggling waves quaking for desires in our dear bellies. Journey on quests for success adorn our vases sucking in the thorny thrones of Aloe Vera stuck to the sides of our struggle.

But how do we proceed on these journeys when our bellies had taken course? How do we think of strategies to mould our lanes to success when our intestines quake in their enclaves, craving for the grains to tread their slippery lanes? How does a wise man ponder about the worldly souls when the soles of our stomachs lay loose without screws to tighten its nuts?

We consume the swellings of the soil, quenching our hunger as we satisfy the craving desires of our roaring bellies. It leaves me in wild thoughts on how possible humans would journey through spheres in the actualization of our selves on empty stomachs devoid of food.

Adedimeji Quayyim Abdul – Hafeez
Nigeria



Fool's Food

Go tell them!

They serve a meal on our table
And lie in lairs to self-seek thereafter

We poured, they fetch
We dug, they fill
They dined as we hunt

Tell them!
We see their wisdom in bold
But a hazy reflection of their shadow

Tell Kwame
His sacrificial lambs at St. Barbara were imperfect
They kneel and pray,
'Hail Madiba' before ethnic bouts
That the oil-rich villa awaits a second coming
Tell them!
About the failed operation in Somalia

Because some things we already know
About the Greek alphabets,
Wellington, Spring Temple of Buddha
Oh Yes! We know
We know
Harare, Lusaka, Kampala, Mbabane,
Lilongwe, Maseru and all.

But one thing we do not know
Why those who lead us
Should also be lead

So tell us!

If this food
Really is worth our hunger

Markham Marcus Kafui
Ghana



FOOD

I've seen heartache
I've seen pain
I've seen true love and
I've seen lost love
Never to be regained

I have witnessed the sun
The heat, the rain above
The Harmattan and the
Fire below

Seasons come and go
Drop by drop our understanding
Grows, when the crop of life
Is matured, full and complete
We display for your
Consumption day by day

And when the tree is old
And has no life again it
Dies and sinks under the
Ground, from where it came.

And I will finally meet the earth
That has always been beneath My feet.

Onwuegbuna Nneka Lisa
Nigeria





Ugly Birthday Dinner

Chop! Chop! Chop!

**We all knew her style as we relaxed as couch potatoes.
She was a cucumber with eyes fixed on the pot.
No wonder they say a watched pot never boils,
The tick tock sound of the hanging wall clock gave us hope.**

**With dripping saliva and a growling stomach,
we still loved her cooking.
Colourful peppers sizzling in the oil gave a savoury smell.
Like peppers so was his attitude green, red and yellow.
The chopped pieces of chicken swimming inside
made it all scrumptious.**

**Even though it was the best meal mama had ever made,
He still was going to hold on to his unappreciative behavior.**

**The red-blooded tomatoes gave her red flags,
As the chili powder agitated feelings
of rage and streams of tears.
In silence she waited with her phone pressed against her ear,
“The number you have dialed is not reachable.”
the lady on the phone kept on annoying her.
She mastered the savoury,
Yet knew that the sinistery was appalling.**

**It’s his birthday! And pleasing him was her intention.
It’s already ten o’clock, still she waited.
Still she couldn’t stop dreaming of the horror that awaited her.
Suddenly, in his drunken shrill voice he shouts from the kitchen,
“Hey, ugly woman where is my food?”
He was back,
And it all turned out bitter sweet!**

**Tanyaradzwa Nonhlanhla Lisa Mtema
Zimbabwe**

Chickened

Squinting both ends for a better view.
Unable to move he struggles.
Blood spattering on all sides as his strength leaves his body.
Such is an honorable end. Death by knife, not dog or illness.

As his feathers are pulled out of his very bone,
He can hear nothing and nothing hears him.

Eyes on either side squinting to see the afterlife
But there's gutting and shaving
And intestine flushing.

Memories of his snatched mates coming to mind.
Their exit to a better life. Of milk and honey as heard before.
Or unfathomed fear and blackness.

Drops of Sweat dripping from his once hairy skin now browning
Smooth feet where scales once were.
A worthy Sacrifice to the gods.

Skin sprinkled in spice and herbs, of kings and queens in lands he's only heard.
Accompaniment for the king's cup.

Much to say has he, of stories and legends of recent past.
Of the honor of Christmas throat cutting.
And the curses of dogs hunting
But now he lies there silent
Unable to speak.
No cock - a - doodle - doo or quack
Just empty nothingness.

As he lays there naked awaiting dilapidation.
The legends and stories now gone in quiet,
Carry only a promise of a meal

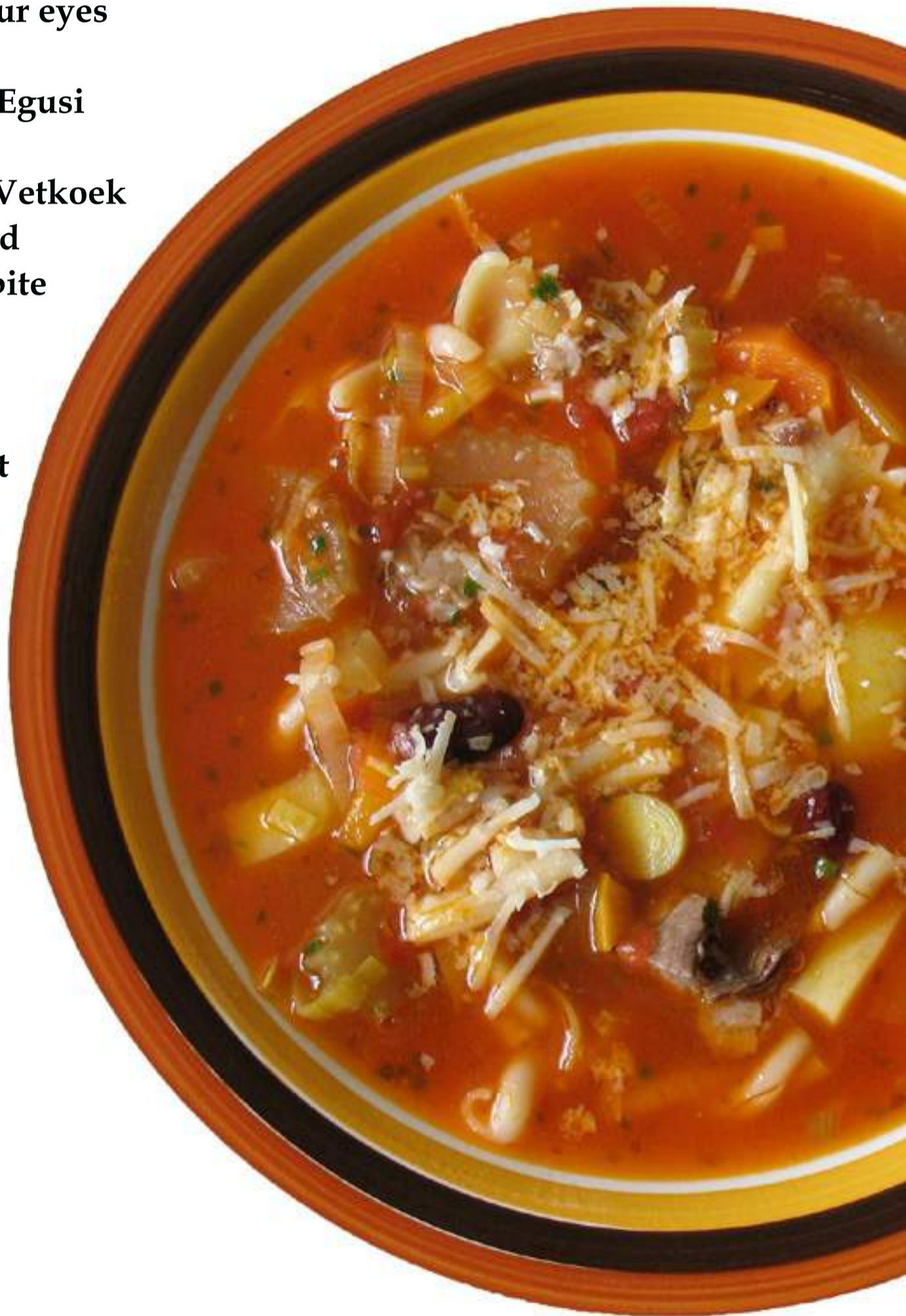
Rehema kasanga
Zambia



Flusoup

We want to know
The richness of black
To savour heart with liquid myth
and heat tongue with divine delicacy
The eyes yet to see Apples of Africa
For when you come to my hut
To learn the dishes that entice your eyes
Your mouth will it smooth
Have you come so close with the Egusi
dancing with a plate of Semolina
and the tantalizing Amagwinya' Vetkoek
that groove the shaft of mouth and
make you wet your tongue with bite
if you got a call from the famous
ugali and Sukuma wiki
That attract the spirit man
to make him forget what time is it
Then you know Githeri
that makes the intestine smile
all in one accord
I did not leave the sick behind
as we all welcomed Kitfo who
made granny looked
sixteen and gave long life
You are precious.

Daniel Ajayi
Nigeria



AFRICAN LITERARY JOURNAL

Call for submission of academic abstracts under the theme: ***Cultural Stereotypes in African Literature: Rewriting the Narratives***

The AWDT in collaboration with the Kenyan Writers Guild will host the 2019 African Writers Conference this September in Nairobi, Kenya.

Academics, literary enthusiasts and the general public are invited to submit academic abstracts for compilation. Those whose abstracts are accepted will be contacted to send in their papers.

- Abstracts should not be longer than 300 words.
- When accepted, papers should be typed double in Times New Roman, double spaced, font size 12.
- Papers should not exceed 12 pages including references.
- All references should conform to latest APA referencing style.
- Deadline for submission of abstracts is April 30.
- Entries should be sent to alj@writerstrust.org
- For more, please contact Kelvin: +254 790 026060 or Namse: +234 706 574 1425

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MARYHILDA IBE

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About Maryhilda Ibe

Ibe Maryhilda Ben is a final year major of Literature in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar. She is a profound lover of arts and literature. She is also a liberal Feminist, writer, and blogger. She chronicles in her literature contemporary issues affecting social order in the society while centering on Streetism, Abuse and African literature. She has won third prize in Aisha Osori's writing competition and has also been shortlisted for Linda Ayade's Literary competition. She is a lover of the African narrative, its cosmology and sensibilities.

Please enjoy her winning entry in the Flash Fiction category.

FRAGMENTS

by
Maryhilda Ibe

When you think of memories, you think of a brown teethed broken little thing. You try to go back to before, yet you find nothing. You stare at the clouds in confusion intensified – the only feeling you now understand.

The Preacher man says God does miracles; you need one tonight. He prays; you do too. But when you close your eyes to pray, they would either steal your slippers or money under your mat. So you lied down when you prayed, clutching your slippers and money tightly. You prayed that your space was bigger, like the girl's at the other end. But you knew her space was bigger because her 'Sharebody' who use to sleep beside her was found dead yesterday with all her hair shaved. You still wanted it. You prayed for the dogs to be slower so when the seller threw the three days old meat, you and your 'Sharebody' would get there before them. You also prayed against the boys. You didn't like when either of them touched your breast, making fun of how they were growing.

'Ode,' you cursed one yesterday.

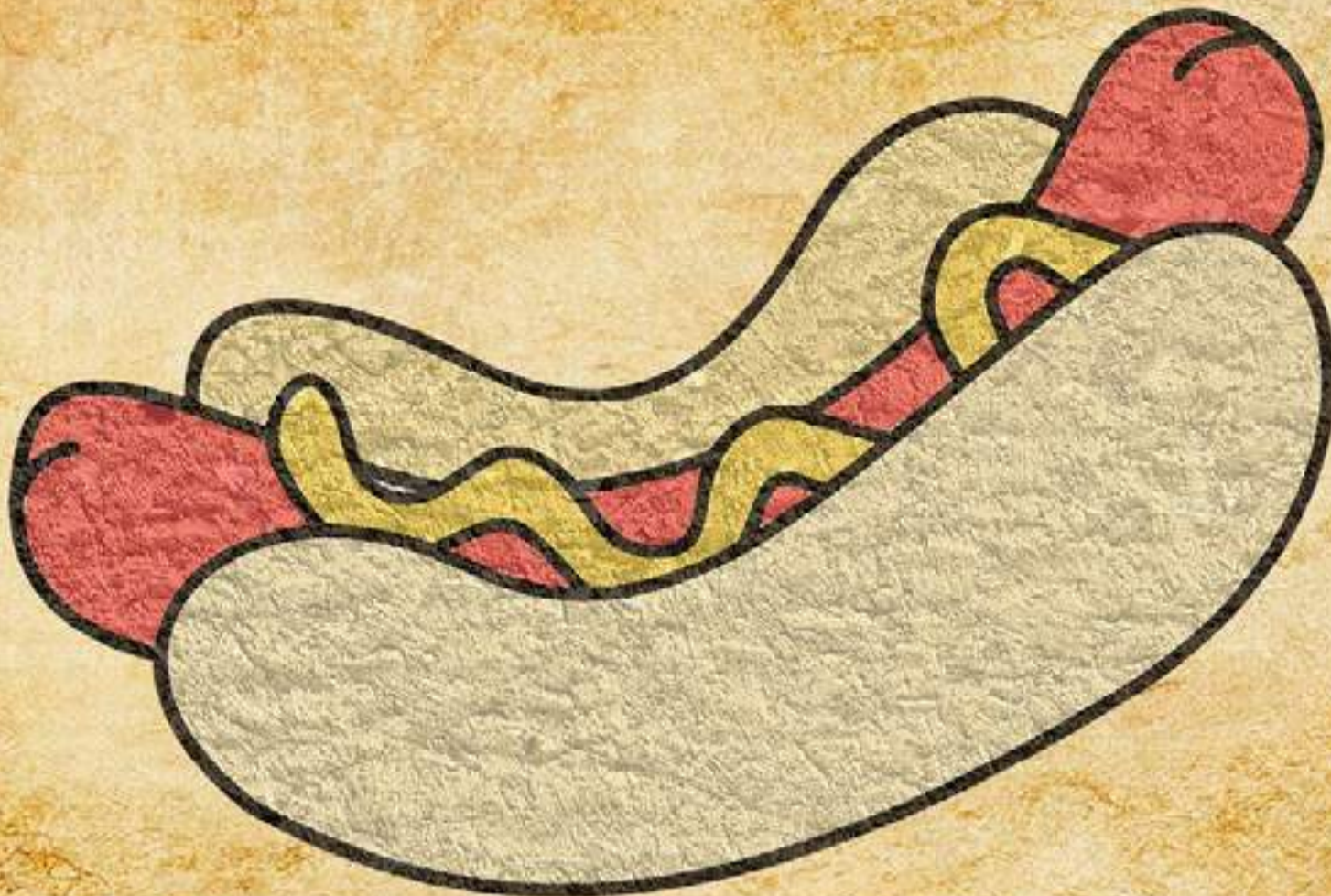
'You say?' He replied as he flung his hand across your cheek.

'Nothing,' you say instantly.

Tonight, your twelve year old self prayed for that miracle. You knew Anti's son would surely come. Two nights ago, he took the girl whose space you liked. You saw when she returned in tears but you pretended not to, everyone did too. Yesterday, it was the girl beside you and tonight, it would be you. So you prayed, sweating profusely like the preacher. Then you slept. You heard the steps and your screams but you willed yourself to think it wasn't real. It's a dream, you kept whispering, but you knew it wasn't simply a dream.



Children's Literature



The Little Brown Bean Who Wished He Was a Hotdog

by
Ogbu Eme – Nigeria

There was a little brown bean who wished he was a hotdog. Every day, he sat on a log in the farm, thinking about what he could do to become a hotdog.

One day, just as the farmer's wife was going to cook some hotdogs for breakfast, the little brown bean tucked himself among the beef and spices. Then he said to himself, "Now, the farmer's children will think I'm a hotdog and eat me for breakfast."

But the farmer's children could not be fooled so easily. The youngest, who was a real picky eater, was the first to discover this clever trick. "A bean!" he cried. "What's a frothy, weenie bean doing in my food?"

His sister came to have a look, and there, hiding among the beef and spices was the little brown bean. The farmer's children were mad that a bean had tried to fool them. So, they dug him out like he was some worthless thing and flicked him out the window.

The little brown bean was hurt, and he cried. He sat on the log in the farm and thought very hard about what he could do to become a hotdog.

Then, he decided to ask the farmer's cow and pig. First, he went to the cow, who was having a nap in his shed. "Tell me, Moo Cow," he said, "what can I do to become a hotdog?"

But the cow was mad that a bean had disturbed his nap, so he stamped his hooves and mooed so loudly that the little brown bean bumped out of the shed in fright.

However, this prickly cow affair didn't stop the bean. "The pig will be nice to me," he said to himself when he was far away from the cowshed. So, off he ran to see the pig, who was swimming in a large puddle. "Tell me, Porky Pig," he said, "what can I do to become a hotdog?"

The pig was twice as mad as the cow. Grunt! Grunt! Grunt! He grumbled and almost snorted the little brown bean with his powerful snout.

The little brown bean was lucky again. He'd scurried outside the pigsty before the piggy madness. But he was hurt, and he cried. He really wanted to become a hotdog.

One day, while he was sitting on the log and worrying as always, an old tortoise crawled by. The tortoise was surprised to find a lovely little bean sitting all by himself and looking so sad. "Why do you look sad?" asked the tortoise.

"I want to become a hotdog," moaned the little brown bean.

"And why do you want to become a hotdog?" the tortoise asked, rolling his eyes.

"The farmer's children won't eat me," he replied.

The tortoise thought for a while. "Well, I can make you become a hotdog," he said.

The little brown bean couldn't believe his luck! "I'm going to become a hotdog!" he sang.

Now, the tortoise was very clever. He crawled around the farm, plucking all the beans he could find. Next he asked the farmer's hen for some eggs. Then he picked some onion and pepper. He even got some bread crumbs from the baker.

Then, he mashed the beans. He cracked the eggs. He chopped the onion and pepper, and he made a fine mixture from all of them. He worked really hard, stirring the mixture.

Meanwhile the little brown bean was watching eagerly.

Soon, an enticing smell of bean burger was sizzling over a fire the tortoise had made. The smell wafted over the farm to the farmer's kitchen where the children were going to eat hotdogs for lunch. However, the mouth-watering smell of beans filled the kitchen and was too much for their noses. Quickly, they abandoned their meal and raced to the farm. They arrived just in time to find the tortoise serving hot patties of bean burger. Very soon, the children were chomping on this freshly-baked recipe.

The little brown bean was delighted, and from that day on he was happy being a bean.

ESSAYS





Tihlo

by

Meaza Aklilu, Ethiopia

Tihlo was my favorite food growing up. I was too little to know that this delicious and amazing food only existed in my region back then. Tihlo is a dish from Agame province in Tigray that consists of barley dough balls with meat and chili peppers called “berbere” based sauce. Tihlo is commonly served for special occasions such as weddings, cultural holidays or for respected guests.

Though I still don’t know how to prepare tihlo, I remember how my grandmother used to do it. She would pound and mill the barley grain then moisten and roast the barley flour which she kneaded to a uniform consistency. She then prepared barley flour in a bowl; by pouring room temperature water in a container bit by bit until the water was equally distributed. This mixing procedure needed skill as she could only use 2 or 3 of her fingers while mixing. Afterwards, she would roll up pieces of the dough the size of a meat ball and put it in a large plate and serve with bowl of spicy meat stew in the middle of the large plate. She would use a two-pronged wooden fork or stick to spear the ball and dip it into the hot sauce.

I have not been able to find out yet why only 2 or 3 fingers is used while mixing but I know to serve this dish, 8 people have to be gathered round one plate. And traditionally, the woman who is making the tihlo is not allowed to eat from what she has prepared.



FOOD: SUBSTANCE FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

by

Adeyemi Okediran - Nigeria

“The secret of success in life is to eat what you wish and let the food fight it out inside.” Food is a vital part of everyone’s lives. It offers us the energy and nutrients to grow and develop, be healthy and active, to move, work, play, assume and learn. The emergence and development of the life sciences have led to change in our understanding of nature and so conjointly of food. The food we eat offers our bodies the “information” and materials they need to operate properly. If we don’t get the correct information, our metabolic processes suffer and our health declines.

The seven major categories of nutrients are carbohydrates, fats, fiber, minerals, proteins, vitamins, and water. These nutrient categories are classified as either macro nutrients or micro nutrients (needed in little quantities), which all of them have their quality as they oscillate between one another to relinquish us a much better life. It is doubtless that body desires a range of the subsequent five nutrients; carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals to remain healthy and productive.

Protein is required to build, maintain and repair muscle, blood, skin, bones, different

tissues and organs within the body. Foods rich in macro molecule embody meat, eggs, dairy farm and fish contain proteins. Carbohydrates provide the body with its main supply of energy. Carbohydrates are often classified into two kinds; starches and sugars. Food rich in starches embody rice, maize, wheat and potatoes and food wealthy in sugars embody fruit, honey, and sweets. Fat is the body's secondary supply of energy. Fat truly provides additional energy/calories per gram than the other nutrient, but is harder to burn. Foods wealthy in fats are oils, butter, lard, milk, cheese and a few meats. Vitamins and Minerals are required in little amounts and are typically known as micro nutrients, but are essential for good health. They control several functions and processes within the body, and in the case of minerals additionally help to build body's tissue like bones (calcium) and blood (iron).

To stay healthy we not solely need all the higher than five nutrients in our diet, but we additionally need them within the correct quantities (this is what we mean by a balanced diet). There are varied consequences of not having a balanced diet (I.e. sensible measure of every variety nutrients). Many people within the developed world eat an excessive amount of some varieties of food, for instance plenty of saturated fats, and become overweight. Obesity is changing into an enormous downside within the developed world. One third of all Americans are corpulent. Being corpulent has serious health implications together with increasing your possibilities of heart condition, diabetes, high blood pressure, having a stroke or obtaining a number of types of cancer.

In the developing world, on the opposite hand, many of us suffer from: Hunger, or under nutrition, whereby they do not have enough food or deficiency disease which implies 'badly nourished' and is the maximum amount regarding what you eat as what proportion. In short, what we eat is central to our health. "Nutrients are the alimentary substances in food that are essential for the expansion, development and maintenance of body functions."

The exact ingredients of a healthy diet will rely on various factors like how old and how active we are, as well as the types of foods that are obtainable within the communities wherever we live. But across cultures, there are some common food tips for helping us lead healthier, longer lives.

Our bodies are implausibly advanced, and (with the exception of breast milk for babies) no single food contains all the nutrients we'd like for them to work at their best. Our diets must therefore contain a large form of contemporary and alimentary foods to stay us going sturdy.



INSIDE AFRICA

by

Tega Greats – Nigeria

Come; let me take you on a journey; to an old home, a land of warm air, where green, red, yellow and orange colors paint the fabrics. The continent where you see friendly faces, everyone is family, a beautiful blend of diverse cultures and cuisines, bonded by similar skin tones and values; we're talking about Africa people!

My journey through each region of Africa has made me appreciate the beauty of diversity in unity. It all starts with the land of the sunset; North Africa, The beauty of culture is depicted here where sight of the djellaba, draped on the men with the ladies adorned with the henna and saris decorates the places like Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia. Walking through the market square you see the best place to see the blend of rich colorful culture, people bargaining for pigeons, rabbits, chicken and ducks at the meat stands, most of them spoke swift fluent Arabic, and smiled after getting a good price for their meat.

At night you walk into the food stands street, the smell of turmeric, ginger, cumin, cinnamon and other spices welcome you to a different world of food. The a host of kebab makers of various kinds of meat, the special delicacy over there was pigeons and rabbits, the lines slowly merged with the Shawerma stand, where they made their own pita bread, they had stands that sold Mesa'a'ah- a dish made with sliced eggplant that are lightly grilled placed in a flat plate with green and chili peppers, dressed in tomato sauce and left to bake in the oven- the drinks served alongside are usually non-alcoholic since it is predominantly Muslim.

Running down to the eastern part of the continent; the oldest human inhabited places in the world. Consisting of countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Tanzania, Kenya and a lot more, it is the home of Mount Kilimanjaro, and Mount Kenya, and have been known for their concentrations of wild animals such as the "big five": elephant, buffalo, lion, black rhinoceros and mountain gorillas although the population of them has reduced drastically because of environmental factors.

Surprisingly the region is cool and dry, and some parts of it can go years without rainfall. Based on this majority of their meals are made from cereal crops, vegetables and meat. It is just as colorful if not more as its northern neighbor, when they adorn themselves in the Khanga material, at the moment it is worn on important occasions like weddings and festivals.

The best way to experience the vibe of the region is going to a typical Ethiopian home where they still cook the traditional sauces that are often made with yoghurt, milk, or berbere sauce, vegetables and meat. They eat it with the injara- a staple diet made out of teff, wheat, barley sorghum or corn, it looks like dried pancake- that is used as a utensil to scoop up the sauce. Dishes like the Halva is very popular cuisine served on special occasions, like the Eid and wedding celebrations, it is made from cornstarch, sugar, nutmeg and ghee. They still speak Bantu and blend it with English sometimes and most of the time they eat from plate as a show love and in some parts of the region the house is perfumed with incense after every meal.

Around the lower parts of the continent is Southern Africa, its dominant country is South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe. The Drakensberg (the mountains of the dragon) is a sight to behold as it cuts across the region from the Eastern Cape through Lesotho. Due to the English colonial masters English has become their lingua franca, not with-standing their roots still stand firm as a large number of them

speak the native language, such as Bantu, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu and some other languages as well.

There is a higher concentration of immigrants from the western part of the world which largely influenced the cuisine of the people. The indigenous food such as the pap, - a stiff fluffy porridge of maize meal with flavorful stewed meat gravy- is eaten alongside with vegetables in the typical South African, Bantu speaking home. Most meals are very meaty and have lots of potatoes. Apart from the pap, bobotie has come to stay, with its layers of cooked meat and pine nuts seasoned with pepper celery seeds and asafetida and finished up with an egg-based topping, it isn't a wonder why they didn't let this one go. Most of the time they wear beautiful Dashikis or Kente that has its origins in West Africa. Blend of colors on the clothes, beats of the drums and afro-centric dancing especially during festivals and weddings truly depict the richness of the African culture.

Moving over to the last but definitely not the least part of Africa, West Africa! It houses the biggest country in the entire continent, Nigeria, along with other prominent countries like Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Togo and the likes. This part has both Anglophone and francophone speaking countries within its territory. The western part of Africa have closely related cultures and practices especially in their cooking pattern, ninety percent of their sauces and soups are made with their special trinity of tomato, pepper and onions, which is usually taken with what is commonly known as swallow most of which is starch based, such as eba, pounded yam, amala, fufu and the likes. It is used to scoop up the soup. Their meal is usually vegetable dominant like the famous egusi soup, groundnut soup, pumpkin leaves soup apart from these they still eat rice in so many different way the most popular which is the jollof rice that has its origins in Senegal but is mostly eaten in Nigeria and Ghana now. They have over six hundred different ethnicities just in this region, but they share common dressing styles like the Ankara material, kente, Dashilki, as well as the common love for beads.

With this sort of diversity, Africa truly has made an inspiring way of showing how unified one can be, and though Africa may have its flaws, just like any other continent does, She also has an abundance of treasures and gifts that are indispensable and unsurpassable for she is a land of discovery and opportunity. Indeed, Africa is a home to me, for I am blessed and I am Proudly African.

This is Africa, home to all.



Image source: <http://www.pikachakula.com/recipe-view/classic-kenyan-beef-stew-ugali/>

ONCE UPON UGALI

by

EDITH OSIRO ADHIAMBO – Kenya

Once upon a time, there was a land called Kenya. People loved eating and eating maize at that. They ate maize on the cob (boiled it in salty water, roasted on a charcoal grill and rubbed red with a lemonhead dipped in achari), yellow maize as popcorns, maize seeds mixed with beans to become the energy-dense githeri etc. They adored cassava, ground into fine flour by the adept fists of a belle sweating tirelessly on a grinding stone. The sorghum and millet...don't even get me started on what a bowl of porridge blended from these two can do to you. Add a tang of lemon and you can detain me wherever, just give me that porridge.

But the best kind of maize was that which was ground into flour then systematically worked into a paste under heat. That was not maize, it was ugali. The heavenly blend between cassava and maize flour made the most nutritious ugali our ancestors ever

tasted. Ugali went well with everything, except the things that did not sit well with ugali. Ugali fish, ugali beef, ugali terere, ugali matumbo-golden rule is to never mix your ugali with another starch form. Some liked it so soft, but never the mash form cooked south of Africa. Some liked it so hard that you could be charged with assault for hitting someone with a piece of ugali.

A good wife knows how to cook your ugali right. It was the litmus test if you were not a born-town boy who absconded the blade by the river for that of the clinician. It has been postulated, though not empirically proven, that the quality of ugali is to blame for marital strife (a quote borrowed and modified to edify the urban pizza hunters & gatherers). There is a whole galaxy of Michelin stars for the cook who can get the right gummy texture for your maize-millet-cassava blend- Then another Andromeda of honors for those pros who can twist and turn over thirty kilograms of flour into a banquet for mourners or revelers at a mass gathering.

To those people who are trying to “modernize” our ugali, our pap, our posho, our sima, our sadza, our ncima, our funge ; by frying it into fritters, blending it with margarine or butter, adding all manner of crazy condiments to color it...be ye warned. You can reduce the starch out of the ugali but that is no longer ugali-you will only manage to reduce the size. Call it polenta balls; cornmeal or cornbread...ugali by any other name should remain ugali. Man (in the strict sense of gender) shall not thrive on rice or cereals at breakfast; he shall thrive on ugali the whole day. Unless you work in a construction site, ugali at lunchtime is a sedative that renders you unconscious as the enteric brain revs on this carb spike.

Back to the land Kenya, here ugali used to be harvested from one’s subsistence sweat at the backyard. Then came a population spurt that moved us to the factory from the farm. Millers and their mills, government silos and their gunny bags-maize became a cash crop. This spiked the demand for maize so high that it became the staple food of Kenya as it was readily available. To qualify as a breadbasket, acres and acres of Zea mays made billionaires of hardworking farmers.

Then it happened. Greed superseded need; the farmer was replaced by bureaucratic procedures that made briefcase millers thrive on the perennial apathy of famine.

There was talk of famine, there was talk of drought-silos had no cereals to sell. The price of maize flour scaled to Yego heights and it became unaffordable to cook ugali. Can you imagine serving 3 packets of spaghetti to attain the satisfying value of 1 packet of ugali? People talked and grumbled, it was 2017, an election year in Kenya. Ugali was heavily politicized, you could tell by the news headlines that made a tourist in Kenya marvel at the strange hunger pangs in the most fertile of seasons. The Government & opposition ping-ponged the issue, their armies on the ground did likewise.

Then the Government subsidized the price and the consumption as well. 1 packet per household? might as well serve tea for dessert too, sugar and milk prices also high? Eish, they have finished us. The end is here. If you thought things were worse, brace yourself. Soon there was no maize flour at all...the government or baller's version. My child we ate chapatis until we developed an allergy. We formed cartels with supermarket attendants; as soon as a new shipment arrived we were in the know before it ran out of stock in 15 mins. Each family member bought their separate two kilogram packets at 90/= Kshs each (0.9 US dollars) and we had secured enough for the week. Those were hard times that brought out the worst in us. Imagine some supermarkets had funny rules like "spend 500/= to get 1 packet of flour" or "buy 2 packets at 80/= and we will ship it to you at a cost of 400/=".

If I were to tell you that this is the last you will ever hear of such foolishness, then maybe all humanity can be saved. That is the myth of ugali, our long lost friend. Now ugali is just a reason to survive, to get it by all means. By the time the dust of corruption had died down, we found out we had enemies from borders beyond, those who served us their poison as meat. Farmers and fake millers from beyond borders drove acres of maize to stuff our silos when our own farmers had enough to spare. But who cared that someone's greed to hoard was thwarted by the better devil that imported at a ridiculously cheaper price than the local farmer? The aflatoxins cannot kill us before the bile gets to the outwitted. There is talk of switching to avocado but we here now it is only a matter of time before that too is strangled like coffee, sugarcane, tea, macadamia, cashew nuts etc. But we still eat ugali...



FOOD AND EVERYTHING RELATED

by

Haruna Dahiru Alhassan - Nigeria

First things first, we all know that food is an essential part of our lives right? I mean we can't live through a day without having something to eat. The general idea is that an average person is supposed to have at least three balanced square meals a day, but this doesn't exist in my world. I am a Jeun ki oku and a proud one at that - it's what a glutton is called in the western parts of Nigeria.

My love for food is beyond what words can express; at least that's what my mother says. I have always loved eating for as long as I can remember and this has always been my problem. My share of every meal in the house was always doubled if not tripled, and it never bothered me to watch my eating habit. I have grown so addicted to it that if I eat nothing within four hours, I will literally lose my mind.

My mother told me that I had always been like that since I was a baby. At just five months old, I had consumed eight tins of large milk because her breast milk was not sufficient for me every time. I would always cry and give her sleepless nights. At eight months, I was weighing 10 kg and this worried everyone in the house. My father would always scold my mother whenever he found me eating way too much food. I don't

know how to explain this, but there is this phenomenal sensation I get when eating. I feel the urge to want to eat more and I just go for it, I sometimes thought I was cursed or possessed - I don't know.

At school, my classmates would always mock me and make funny gestures when I walked past them or wanted to make a point. Maybe it was because I was the biggest boy in school or because I had a scary face. I remember a boy once told me "Please don't eat me! I'm sorry!!" I mean how is that sensible? But I have never been the one to be angry. I have never been so angry at anyone before, and the only thing you could do to make me feel happy when offended is to give me a little something to keep my mouth busy.

I was always ready for sentences and yells like: "see this fat boy", "see orobo", "nawao, na this boy be obesity", "wetin this boy dey chop like this?" but I paid little or no attention to them. My siblings at home would always be angry when they get home and heard that I ate the last pot of food, and my mother would always take me away from their rain of insults and maybe a fruit or two. They knew at home that I always joked a lot with some things but when it came to my food, not even that arch angel will even dare.

At seventeen years old, I was already bigger than my mum, dad and siblings combined, literally. I was always finding it hard to walk far distance and also sleep for horrible long hours. My father became concerned and recommended a doctor but I refused to go. When he insisted, I cried all through the night and my mother came to my room with a freshly baked Bundt cake - oh God! My favorite - and told me not to worry that nothing was going to happen. She was able to convince him on not allowing me go to the hospital although it took a lot of effort.

I kept being like that, because as the age numbers added up, my eating habit also increased. I never cared about watching my weight when at my age I should have been attracted to a girl. I tried working it out but I just couldn't let go the ravishing sight of food. I just hoped that someday somehow, I would be with someone who would love me and my gluttony. One day, I woke up and couldn't move myself from the body. I felt stuck in my bed and was only able to lift my body with my imaginations. I called out for help but my voice was only within the range of my little bedroom. I felt swollen and felt like my guts were going to come right out of my mouth. I tried to ward off the thoughts that I was paralyzed or dead. I felt my tummy rumbling

and that was a sign that I needed food. I kept pushing myself forward and hoping that the squeaking sound from my bed would call to the attention of my family. I kept pushing hard until I fell heavily on the floor of my room, am sure the thump was loud enough because my parents came running to my room. I couldn't see their faces clearly and I could hear their conversations echoing in my head right before I passed out.

Now here I am lying down on the couch with my head on my mother's soft laps. We have just come back from the hospital. The doctor told me that I had a severe case of obesity and if not controlled could lead to a dangerous heart disease. I have been advised to stay away from eating too much food and my darling beloved food had been replaced with pills that control my appetite. Every now and then I want to eat something heavy but I can't. I feel like this is hell already, because if this is not hell, then I fear how it's going to be. I have been divided with my soul mate, FOOD and everything related.

The poster features a dark background with a faint, colorful geometric pattern. On the left and right sides, there are stylized orange line art designs that resemble abstract architectural structures or book spines. The text is centered and uses a mix of white and orange colors for emphasis.

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Short Stories



CHOP! CHOP!

By

Praise Uyioghosa Osawaru - Nigeria



Life's a mess. Nobody tells anyone - you find out yourself. I was never really good at anything, and I wasn't smart either. When I turned thirteen, my dad lost his job. I knew then that all my dreams had gone down the drain. And I wasn't lying. I wasn't.

I couldn't go to a private school anymore like dad said I would, and mum had to move her shop to the house when she couldn't afford the rent. I don't blame her, landlords charge exorbitantly for a small shop in Lagos. In retrospect, I think it was going to mum's shop and watching her chop frozen fish and chicken, a two-edged mini-machete in her right hand, which made me grow a liking to being in the kitchen.

When I turned eighteen, I'd just finished my secondary school education and I was also working full-time with mum in the cold room. As a novice, I wore a cardigan and gloves. I couldn't handle the cold. It always made my bladder run. The first time I tried to chop fish is a story to tell. As I held the frozen fish in my left hand and set it atop the hard-wooden table. I grabbed the mini-machete and drew a thin line

to mark where I intended to cut. I measured the distance between the fish and the machete in my arm with my eyes. Then I struck. I felt a spasm in my left arm. The machete fell, and I stared at the table in shock. The fish got chopped but so did an inch of my left thumb.

I watched it ooze blood onto the table and all over the fish. I didn't scream. I just couldn't, but the customer who had been watching the whole thing yelled, "Jesus!" Mum sprinted into the shop. One would think that a loving mother would instantly grab a cloth to stop the bleeding. But no, the first thing she did was daze me with a resounding slap on my left cheek. In the cold environment, you can bet my cheeks didn't take this well. Mum apologized to the customer, chopped another fish and sold that instead. It was after the money was in her hand that she remembered I was bleeding.

"Chioma, what did I tell you? Don't put your hand when you want to chop the fish." These words took a permanent spot in my head. The injury reminded me to chop the fish and chicken safely from then on. I did this until I made enough money to get myself back to school. But my life didn't stop sinking. At least, not until Auntie Amarachi showed at our doorstep. She came visiting on a Sunday, bringing with her some used clothes for me. After greeting her, I disappeared into my room to try out the clothes in front of the full-length mirror in my room. The clothes didn't really fit. I was too slender.

I headed to the living room to show everyone how the outfit looked on me. As I parted the curtains leading into the room, everyone suddenly kept quiet. I could hear the sound of the wind rustling outside, and how it blew fiercely against the windows.

Mum coughed, then said, "Chioma, come. Auntie has some good news for you." I slowly walked towards her and sat down on the chair next to her.

"Chioma, how would you like to attend a cooking school?" Auntie Amarachi asked me.

"Cooking school?" I was perturbed.

"Yeah. A school where you learn how to cook different kinds of food, and someday, you may open your own restaurant. You know, become your own boss." Auntie Amarachi said.

“Mummy.” I stared into my mother’s eyes searching for disapproval, waiting for her to say something, but she didn’t.

“Amara, what about the fees for this cooking school?” Mum had a worried face.

“No don’t worry. My friend owns the school, it’s nothing. You won’t spend a dime.”

That made my mum smile. Finally, she gets to have a little peace, she must have thought.

“Chioma, go and pack your clothes. You are going with Auntie Amara.” Mum concluded.

We arrived at Auntie Amarachi’s place in Maryland in no time. Who knew going from Okota to Maryland was like travelling out of Nigeria. Auntie Amarachi lived in an apartment with a friend, Timileyin. Timileyin was a bulky, busty, dark-skinned and sassy lady. I saw hate all over the face of my Auntie’s roommate. Sooner, I would come to realize Timileyin was the complete opposite of my aunt. Auntie was cool, Timileyin wasn’t.

“You start tomorrow morning,” Auntie Amarachi said. “You must behave yourself there and better don’t disgrace me o.”

“Yes, Auntie.”

“Er, Amara, there are some dirty plates in the kitchen. Let your girl wash them for me.” Timileyin greeted me.

“Timi!” My Aunt exclaimed.

“What! She’s here. She might as well help us out with some chores.”

“It’s okay. I will wash them.” I assured her. I had seen this scene play out a lot in the movies. An auntie carries a village girl to the city and turns her into the house help. Was this going to be my story as well?

The following morning, Auntie Amarachi dropped me off at Tolani Cooking School, Maryland. Tolani Cooking School was a four storey building. The poster of the school featured a lady with a chef hat holding a spatula. Its banner stretched from the left side of the building to the right.

Auntie Amara introduced me to her friend, the owner - Mrs Tolani, who appeared to be the one on the banner. I was asked to have a seat in a room with two other girls. There was a television in the room, which I got lost in, watching a Nigerian drama, so much so, that I didn’t hear when my name was called.

“Who’s Chioma?! Chioma!”

My ears eventually picked it up and I quickly responded, “Hello ma, I’m sorry. I’m Chioma,” I replied apologetically.

“Follow me.”

She took me to another room. A much bigger one with windows on both sides. There were people seated at a table staring at other girls who were standing at another corner. There were five other small wooden tables before them with bowls by the foot of the table.

“Chioma! Shade! Saidat! Ejiro and Gold! Step forward,” a man from the big table yelled out.

I along with four other girls walked up and stood by the small wooden table as requested.

“It’s pretty simple. You have one minute to cut that fish in the bowl. One minute. Your time starts now!”

I gulped. I looked into the bowl and noticed the fish was moving. Oh my God, it’s a catfish. Catfish never stop moving, and their skin is so slimy. My heart began to pound. I looked at the other girls, they were having difficulty holding the fish.

Thank God I’m not the only one.

I was used to chopping frozen fish and chicken. There had never been a live one. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and dipped my hands into the bowl. At first, the antenna kept piercing my skin, but I got used to it and held the fish firmly.

My heart was still on a run in my chest, as I slammed the catfish on the table, and grabbed the knife with my right hand. I struck it without looking, and a cold shiver passed through my body. When I opened my eyes, all eyes were on me. I looked down at the table, the catfish was still intact, but there was blood.

A lady rushed to me and held my left hand. That was when I realized I was bleeding. I’d slashed open my left thumb yet again. My spirit sank as I realized this meant I’d failed the test. But a funny thing happened. After the lady dressed my wound, she said to me, “Never give up.” And I tried again, and again, again. Until I got it right. Now they call me Chef Chioma with the slushed thumb.

PARANNOYER

By Ayotunde Oyeniran - Nigeria



She increased her pace for what seemed to be the umpteenth time. The guy was walking fast. Under her breath, she cursed the very moment she decided to augment her purchase of groceries with a slender tuber of yam. It had all become too heavy to carry. They had been eating junk for a few days since their kitchen cabinets ran out of food, and even though they were broke, she just wanted real food that night. Just as she was about to leave the grocery shop for home, the rain had begun without the slightest warning. She had had to borrow a raincoat from the grocery shop owner and rubber boots to wade potholes that would surely be flooded before her arrival home. She had set out for home a few miles away, clutching her purchases to her chest under the partially protective covering of a raincoat that certainly had seen better days.

“I should have waited,” she kept muttering to herself. “Why didn’t I wait?”

She was vexed; the commercial motorcycles always ran off whenever it rained. She would have hailed one even though she was used to trekking the distance, the rain had become a heavy downpour and the items she carried were getting wet. She was afraid; not a soul was in sight and the stalker, about eighteen metres behind her, kept following with every twist and turn. She was frustrated; her arms ached and she couldn't even stop for a break.

She entered the street where her home was located down a small alley. Consumed by both fear and anger, and glancing back for a split second as she had been doing since the stalking began, she knew he would catch up with her before she could open her little gate, to say nothing of the main door. So, she quickly waded the little puddle at the alley's entrance, set down the grocery bag beside her, on the alley's muddy path, then, with the tuber of yam in her hands and her back against one of the fences lining the alley, she waited.

The stalker appeared and she charged like a mad bull, hitting him hard on the head with the tuber of yam which split in two and fell into the puddle. He lay there unconscious. She inched closer and bent over to open the hood of the wet black parka that had done a great job of concealing his face.

"Oh my God!" she cried hysterically. Despite it raining, she felt hot. She took several steps back and forth the little space in absolute confusion. The contents of the grocery bag, by then, were bathing in the mud.

How come they didn't recognise each other? But how could they? She thought amidst tears. She was clad in a borrowed raincoat and borrowed boots, he was clad in a most probably borrowed parka and it was raining heavily. Why was he back early? Why was he walking in the rain? The fog of hysteria in her head overrode the probable answers.

That night, in their little bed, slept an extremely angry and bruised husband who had his back turned to an extremely sober wife. But they had one thing in common; empty and starving stomachs.

A RECIPE'S SOUL

By Kimberly Chirodzero - Zimbabwe



Tafadzwa Chisike was nervous. Interviews always made her nervous but nowadays she could deal with the anxiety better. She stood in one of the many modern kitchens in the building checking on her dishes and their presentation. It was important that she impress the judges, especially Calvin Ives, chef extraordinaire and Tanya Hariwe, who was almost never impressed. Three years ago she had come close to a similar opportunity but her marriage had been falling apart. Brian was an insecure man who could not handle that his wife was a rising star in the culinary scene in Harare. He didn't mind her cooking, as long she was cooking for him, not getting accolades for it from the entire city and beyond. Brian had given Taffy a choice: food or their marriage.

Giving up her dream hadn't been enough to save her marriage and in the end, she lost everything. Battling deep depression, Taffy gave up her love for cooking and decided to travel the world in search of some sort of self-realization. Some dreams, however, refuse to be given up and during those years of travel, Taffy found herself constantly drawn to unusual chefs and little hidden restaurants that turned out to

be absolute heaven. She began collecting recipes from every place she visited. Now she was back home, competing with eleven other chefs for the chance to publish a recipe book and have her own cooking show on the local TV channel. Her secret weapon being that she had trapped the wildness and chaos of different cultures into her dishes.

Now the four judges walked into the room with Calvin bringing in the rear. “Taffy Chisike, now that’s a familiar name. Three years ago you were the hottest thing on the scene, and then you just disappeared,” Tanya, one of the judges said with a frown. Tanya was a notoriously hard chef to please. “I thought cooking had ruined my life and I had to go find myself or some new calling,” Taffy said honestly. The judges looked at her with interest now. “And?” Tanya pushed. “There’s nothing I love more than cooking. I am a chef,” Taffy replied. “Well, let’s see the food then,” Calvin said with a small smile. Taffy was more than relieved to let the food do the talking for her. She led the judges to the long table and uncovered the first dish.

“I call this dish playful love,” Taffy said as each of the judges took a spoonful of the rich red of her beetroot curry soup. “What did you do with this dish?” the other female judge Rumbi, asked. “I used finely chopped onions, curry paste, chopped tomatoes, green chilli, raw beetroots mixed with vegetable oil and the secret ingredients,” there was a glint in Taffy’s eyes that she didn’t even know she had. “In India, I stayed with a young couple who told me food was how they expressed their love to each other. One day as I was cooking this dish they were teaching me, the husband playfully tripped the wife and the mustard sauce she was holding accidentally tipped into the pot. I then added a dash of ground almond and this recipe was born. It’s spicy but playful.” Tanya licked her lips. “Very unconventional,” she said and waved toward the next dish.

Taffy hastily uncovered the next dish, somewhat disheartened by the judges’ reaction to her first dish. Unfortunately, every dish was unusual because Taffy had tried to infuse the spirit and culture of the lands in which she had learnt these recipes. She held her breath as the judges tasted her roasted eggplants. “And what do you call this one?” Calvin asked with a smile. “In Beirut, the locals call it baba ghanouj. I roasted some eggplants smeared with tahini paste, garlic and added a dash of vinegar and lemon juice then I ground it into a paste using that

small wooden mortar and pestle. Then I garnished it with olive oil and cool cucumbers,” Taffy replied.

“I have never added vinegar or lemon juice to baba ghanouj before,” Simba, the other male judge said, taking a second spoonful, “Tell me why mash it by mortar and pestle when you could use a food processor?” “I wanted to preserve the soul of the recipe. The Lebanese feel of colourfulness and spiciness. A woman in a small restaurant in Beirut taught me to use mortar and pestle,” Taffy replied, hoping at least one of them got it. She wanted her food to speak of its culture and preserve its local flavour. Every dish had a story to tell. Tanya waved a dismissive hand indicating the next dish. The two men’s faces gave nothing away and Rumbi had an easy smile on her face that Taffy suspected she gave all the contestants.

“In Haiti, I met people from different cultures; Africans, French and Spanish. The most amazing thing was how these different cultures blend when creating their own recipes. So this dish is a blend of Haitian culture,” Taffy said, uncovering a bowl of steamy soup. She watched as the judges all took a piece of fresh oven baked baguette and dipped it in the soup. “Oh, it’s hot!” Calvin exclaimed and instantly dipped his bread in again. Tanya actually gave a small smile. “I can almost taste Africa in this? What is in it?” she asked grudgingly. “Potatoes, yams, cabbage, butternut squash and also malanga and turnips. Black pepper, garlic and onion powder to make it piping hot. The bread is a nod to the French and the spices to the Spanish. I call it freedom because the Haitians resisted slavery,” Taffy’s heart lifted as she spoke.

The next dish she revealed was one of her favourites for its simplicity and history. “This is gnocchi and I’ve added parsley, samphire and butter to it. In Italy, I rented the back room in this old lady’s house and she taught me there’s more to Italy than pizza. She taught me how to make gnocchi and flavour it however I wanted. So I used peeled potatoes, plain flour, salt, butter, and an egg and mashed them together into dough, which I then boiled and added to the garlic, parsley, butter and shallots I had heated,” she stepped back, noting Simba’s sceptical look. He was the first to take a bite. “This one might be my favourite so far,” he told her earnestly. Calvin and Rumbi seemed to like it though they only nodded. Tanya didn’t say anything but she looked less hostile.

Taffy moved down the table to the next dish and presented it with a flourish, her confidence having risen. “In a Moroccan market, I happened upon a family of traders and was invited to tea. We became good friends and they taught me so much about food, including using dates to cook. This dish is boneless lamb with sweet potatoes, coriander, cinnamon and pitted dates,” she waited patiently as the judges each took a spoonful. Simba and Rumbi beamed, unable to hide their delight. Calvin looked at her with interest. “I see why you used boneless lamb. It just melts off the tongue and the aroma from the dates has seeped into the meat,” he said, eyeing the dish as if he wanted to finish it. It was more of a compliment than Taffy had ever expected from the chef. Tanya simply nodded along, her expression one of wonder.

“This one is all about indulgence so I’m calling it, guilty pleasure. In the South of France I met a scoundrel who loved food and teaching others how to cook,” Taffy uncovered four dark chocolate madeleines and a small bowl of blood orange. She watched as each of the judges took a muffin sized madeleine, grains of golden caster sugar flaking off the crust and dipped it into the chocolate paste. All four of them sighed and ate some more. Realising they were forgetting to ask questions, she delved right in. “I made the madeleines using plain flour, baking powder, eggs, unsalted butter and caster sugar. For the blood orange, I used zest and juice from two oranges mixed with dark chocolate and cocoa.” To her surprise, Tanya smiled at her. “Guilty pleasure indeed,” Tanya laughed as the judges filed out.

Waiting for the judges’ verdict was hard. Taffy sat with the other contestants, trying not to worry too much. When the four judges filed back into the room, they wore serious expressions. Without much ado, they called out three names, Taffy’s among them. They thanked the rest of the contestants and dismissed them. “Only one of you gets the deal but the other two get our endorsement and a chance to work at a prestigious hotel,” Rumbi reminded them. Tanya stepped forward. “The winner of the book deal and TV show is Taffy Chisike,” she announced. “Your food is highly unconventional and unusual but your recipes do have a soul. I felt like I visited all those places you did and not just because of your stories but because you managed to capture the land, culture, flavours in your recipes and that’s what good food should do. Congratulations, Taffy.”

FOOD NEARLY JILTED YOU AGAIN

By Samson Adesina Ajala - Nigeria



She shifted her gaze and fixed it innocently on you. Then she blinked her eyelids sluggishly. A faint dimple puckered her left cheek. You leaned lightly on the side rail of her cot. You held her left palm gently. It felt sweaty and cold in your warm palm. You didn't know whether you sighed, whimpered or chuckled or you made a concoction of them all. The drip formed a bead before it fell with a soft plop into the cylindrical top of the tube that channelled the fluid into her vein. You muttered a silent prayer in your heart. Your eyes felt dump. The smell from a little boy's bad wound choked you.

"Tayewo," her name squirted under your heavy tongue solemnly. "Why did you have to eat that food, why?" You steadied your eyes on her pale face as if her answer would calm the worries that surged in your head. She was too weak to say a word to you. She stretched, turned her eyes from you as if to say she was shy and sorry she hurt you.

Tears crested on your lower eyelid; mucus spurted over your lip. You untied your wrapper slightly and cleaned your lip before it dropped on the hospital floor. You sighed and snapped your fingers in bitter regret.

You had been trying to be a courageous woman since her father died. You hated to entertain the memories of his death on the cluttered table of your mind. It haunted and hurt you. It haunted you because you thought you left your home unguarded and allowed death in to lure your husband into the claws of the woman in the neighbourhood rumoured to have fed your husband a poisoned meal. They say the local cafeteria she operates is by a fetish power. That the way she attracts customers to her place is way beyond the ordinary. Some people say once she sees a rich man patronise her shop frequently, she traps them with a love charm by using the water she has used to wash her private parts to prepare bitter leaf soup for them.

Other people say she has a black spot at the tip of her tongue, that she invokes a love spell with it and that very few men had been lucky to escape from her trap. It hurts you that death clasped your husband under the shed of a strange woman. Such a disdainful death he did not deserve. These memories stung you. You stifled and dispelled your torment with a grace you didn't know you still had.

You reached for Tayewo's head. You twisted it carefully so it could face you directly. Her eyes looked awkwardly. You yelled, "Help! Nurse, help!" The nurse was suddenly jolted. She hurriedly clamped a paper she was charting some information from a patient on unto a flat metallic plate and rushed towards you, to your girl. You loosed your scarf and tied it around your waist as you cried, prayed and cried.

You were hushed out of the ward at the instance of the doctors. You writhed as you watched them press Tayewo's tiny chest and pumped air into her nose from the angle of your eye. You reluctantly walked to the side of the ward, snapping your hands from the clutch of the hospital orderly. She met your protests with maturity and words meant to serenade your pains.

You knew how it happened before death snatched Kehinde, Tayewo's twin sister, from your hands. They thudded her very tiny chest and pumped oxygen into her that ugly morning. She was just one and a half. You remembered how the doc-

tors laboured over her in vain, and that exact moment when they stopped all their pumping and pressings. You didn't wait for them to come and break anything to you, you knew the dye was cast; Kehinde is dead. You recollected the hurt vividly.

And now here you were again. You knew it won't do, Tayewo would die. You cried hope into tears and watched it wash faith from your pounding heart. Your world threatened to tear altogether. You couldn't explain why food that is meant to nourish the body and preserve it for the soul and spirit had played the irony into your miserable life. You wondered why Tayewo should eat the pounded yam that you forgot to uncover the night before this very evening. The doctors said she had food poisoning and it was acute. You were angry at the thought of losing Tayewo when it was only two days to her fifth birthday, losing her to matters that revolved around food like her Daddy. She had reminded you not to forget the cake you promised her for her birthday. You told her it was going to have five steps, each a toast to each year she had lived. She smiled and beautiful dimples dug into her cheeks. You wondered at these strings of mysteries.

You began to say some things to yourself. "Food has jilted me again. Tayewo must be dead by now. The doctors are just taking their time. It doesn't take this long, at least it didn't for Kehinde."

The doctors walked tiredly to the side of the children's ward. They wore a bored look. The kind of look death gives when it's pounced on a victim who had tried to wriggle for escape in vain. You rushed at them. You attempted to go past them to answer the sorrow that called to you before they should tell you. You doubted they can communicate it better.

They held you from doing so; the female doctor among them stared into your eyes, held your trembling hands and whispered, "She's alive. She made it. We have sedated her." You didn't believe her, although you knew you should. You dragged your legs towards your child's bed like a criminal shackled in the ankles, drifting to the witness box beside the judge on the day of the final court proceedings. You paused and bent over her cot. You watched with indescribable calm, the way her chest slowly raised and fell. You broke into joyous tears.

COLUMNS



AT A COST

What happens when tradition decides the fate of Zarah? A pretty damsel living somewhere in northern Nigeria, Zarah loses her place as princess of her father's heart to traditional principles, sojourning and scavenging until she finds her identity, but at a cost....

by
AMAMI YUSUF



EPISODE 2

Kamal had just returned that evening hungry and looking unkempt. His eyes seemed to roll in their sockets as his stomach churned within. His pale black shirt, which had faded over time revealed obvious oil patches from the palm oil rice he had for lunch earlier. He smelled of sweat and dirt. His face seemed to have aged in just a day as he looked exhausted physically and mentally. Right after school, he had gone to the market, or rather, opposite the entrance of the market where he worked. The stall was old with zinc coverings. And a rickety old door. There were a lot of people around, each going about one activity or the other. The stall directly faced the narrow path that led straight into the market. From within, one could see some of the few little shops just after the path – Malam Bello who sold live chickens; Ego and her sisters who sold vegetables; and the very large provision store. There were two slim wooden benches in the cobbler's stall. A small ceiling fan, which rotated extremely slowly, and had so much dust in it. One of the blades was bent inwards and one was missing. It always seemed to blow hot air especially when the shop was crowded. He worked as an apprentice in a cobbler's stall. Besides fixing old and worn out soles, they also made new ones.

“Kamal is catching up so fast”, the stall's owner had told his mother once. But today was different. He was distracted and made a lot of mistakes. He got scolded and lashed for his carelessness. He had knocked over the short can of glue. Thrice. He switched the designs of two very different customers' shoes. All he could think of was Zarah – his only sister and favorite sibling. His best friend. Somehow, since the evening of her confession, he hadn't seen much of her. She spent all of Saturday on the site, and the few times he had seen her on Sunday, she refused to spend longer than a minute, talk less of talk to him. She had a habit of running away from confrontations yet she always talked to him. Kamal was convinced his sister was serious. The few minutes he looked into her eyes showed just how scared she was. He had a lot of questions only she could answer.

Aunty Halima had told Zarah once, with irritation evident in her voice, how females get pregnant. Zarah had asked just to satisfy her curiosity. She summoned the courage just within the period that Faye, their neighbour, was rumoured to be pregnant.

“... because she let a man touch her.” Aunty Halima hissed. “And it's the same fate that will be fall on you if you let any man other than your brothers touch you.” Zarah never fully understood what “touch her, touch you” meant. But the unfriendly, tensed atmosphere between her and Aunty Halima hindered further interrogation.

A few weeks back, Malama Dahiru, her teacher changed their sitting arrangements in class.

She placed Abdul Mohammed beside Zarah as her new seat partner. Zarah was frightened and avoided him completely. Two days later when Abdul's arm brushed against hers, she knew she was doomed to Faye's fate. But then she wondered if Faye had willingly let the man touch her, or if like her case, it was an honest mistake. She feared greatly what her step mother would do to her, especially as Mohammed, her father's co-worker had pinched her tiny developing nipples. How her father would react, and how she would face custom. She thought of the hundred lashes of the cane she'd receive in the presence of people. Oh, the shame. The humiliation. The pain of it all – to see the look of disappointment in her father's eyes. The look of condemnation and contempt in her step mother's eyes. The nonchalant and distant look in the eyes of her other six brothers. And again, saddest of all, the look of pity, of concern, of affection, of...everything true in Kamal's eyes. She shut her eyes tight, and willed the moment to rewind, or at least pass by quickly.

"Please God, don't let me be truly pregnant. I'll give up stealing Aunty's meats," she prayed silently.

Her promise to God seemed to have saved her. But what she hadn't realized was that soon, she would need to make that promise again, and even much more. She could not wait for Alhaji Imran to come sit by her at night, divide her hair into cornrows and tell her the story of Queen Amina once again to ease her of the scary thoughts. He often loosened and styled her hair whenever he sat down to tell her the story of Queen Amina; he was the only man in their community that could style a female's hair into cornrows and the men sometimes perceived him as weak for that. But what they did not know was that Alhaji Imran saw Zarah's mother in her – the woman he loved dearly before she died.

Zarah giggled at his pitch and gesticulation as he told the tale; voice going high, and then, low, and then, high again with arms swinging in different directions in demonstrations. Queen Amina here...Queen Amina there... He told the tale in the simplest way Zarah could understand while:

Amina was born around 1533, daughter of King Barkwa. She began learning how to be a ruler from her grandfather, while she was still a toddler. After she turned 16, she learnt responsibilities of a Queen from her mother. She participated in the daily governmental affairs of the Kingdom. In 1576 she became the 24th habu of the emirate. During her reign, one of her goals was to expand and build the walls of the Zazzau kingdom to ensure safety for her people. It was said that after battle, Amina would take a lover for the night from the defeated army, and after the night she'd have him killed. She was remembered as Amina, one as capable as a man- the one who helped the kingdom reach its apex. She grew up in a society greatly dominated and influenced by the male gender. Yet, yet she was queen in this

sphere. She was the first of 3 children, and was only 16 years when her father took over ruling Zazzau. She was a warrior-queen- full of vigour at battle, and grace in the palace. Though Amina was older, it was male precedence to ascend the throne after their father's death. Her brother, Karama, became king in her stead. Whilst he ruled, Amina trained herself in military prowess and gained the admiration of many militants, as well as the people- and soon, she became a wealthy leader of the Zazzau kingdom. She took over as queen after the death of her brother, and continued to lead the soldiers in victorious battles. She spent the duration of her 34 year reign in military aggression, and in expanding her domain. She was brave. She had the courage to take on any battle that threatened her domain. She found no equal even amongst men. She conquered many, and found her footing by prevailing every battle...

Zarah loved whenever her father told the story of Queen Amina though he never arranged it in a particular order. The brave Queen Amina of Zazzau was Zarah's hero. Whenever she felt afraid or disheartened, she recalled his words and that gingered her on. Her father's words of the Queen were her motivation in all phases. And it was also where she got the motivation to courageously tell Kamal about the pregnancy the evening he had asked.

Zarah sometimes sat outside the house in the evenings. She enjoyed staring at everything. At everyone. At nothing, and paying no particular attention. Their house was only a little distance from the road, but it was quite shielded by trees. Though from where she sat on the verandah, she could get an almost clear view of the main road and the happenings upon it. The untarred, red sand were difficult to drive through, and even more frustrating to walk on. Cars galloped. Motorcycles swerved, and well, feet sunk in the thick red earth. The harmattan breeze made the road all the dustier. But this was quite to be preferred than when the rains came. The roads were just impossible. There were always vehicles on the main road however, as well as on the roads between the houses. She let her gaze drift from the cars to follow a little girl who was a little younger than she was. The girl, probably 7, had a large metal tray containing yam tubers on her head.

"Those yams seem heavy," Zarah whispered to herself, while keeping her gaze on the girl. The girl's short arms struggled to reach up the pile of yams on her head, in order to support them. She walked slowly and carefully, yet panting hard, and watching the ground as she proceeded. She had a shiny black skin which seemed to glow in the evening's sun. There were 4 other children hawking as well and they were all older than her. The others chatted together as they walked, but she was alone and quiet. One sold fruits, another vegetables, the third loaves of bread, and the fourth boy sold sachets of water.

With the way the girl walked, one would believe it was impossible to fall. But she did. She

stepped on a stone, and down she went, tray and all. The red oversized shoe she wore broke open at the sides. The other children laughed, save for the girl who hawked bread. She assisted the little girl in gathering her tubers. Immediately the black skinned girl noticed two tubers broken in two halves each, she began to cry. She knelt in the red sand and continued to cry refusing to rise, or to pick them up.

“Zan sha duka yau,” Zarah heard the little girl say. She understood her fluent Hausa and the accent she spoke in. With the way the girl cried, Zarah knew that indeed the little girl was going to be severely beaten when she returned. Few minutes after the incident, Kamal joined her.

“About the pregnancy, how did it happen?” he asked, his forehead creating folds, his eyes narrowing at her. She felt a surge of saliva in the sides of her mouth as he questioned her.

“It was Abdul who brushed my arm in class and Mohammed who touched my chest.” She narrated both events which got Kamal laughing.

“You’re not pregnant. That was only a touch,” he said almost exclaiming as he laughed. He explained to her how pregnancy happened and she felt relieved knowing she wasn’t. She had feared that she would be a nursing mother by the next Christmas after that year.

The Christmas holiday came by speedily, and the children at Yandaka model primary school had been elated. Zarah had come 5th in class, but her father wasn’t upset. He was rather proud “It’s a beautiful result,” he had said. Zarah had been excellent in all her subjects, save for math. Kamal had not gotten off that easy though. Imran scolded him mercilessly, and Kamal remained sullen for the rest of the day.

When it was time for the Asur prayer, there was a large procession of men, all heading to the mosque in a hurry. The mosque situated in Dutsin-ma was formerly a cinema – the Maikudi cinema which was a center for breeding notoriety. The men, young men, and even boys were mostly dressed in caftans and caps. Fridays were days of religious worship, and all the men came out in their numbers to attend prayer at the mosque. Kamal was part of the procession, holding dearly his prayer mat rolled up under his arm. He wore brown sandals, a caftan that went way past his knees, and ankle length trousers. He walked briskly one foot rapidly rising as the other landed. He walked with hilarious swagger swinging his free hand back and forth, with his shoulder slightly raised. As he walked, his black swede cap fell, but he didn’t stop or attempt bending to pick it probably because he knew it would be as good as futile trying to find it among hurrying feet. In all, Kamal was having a bad day from his father scolding him for having let a girl beat him in class, to losing his favorite cap. Imran was only upset for the fact that it was a girl; Zainab had come first in Kamal’s class, while Kamal came in second. Unknown to Kamal though, Imran was proud of him. But he would not tell

him because men were not soft and mushy like women. He believed men thrived better with hard bitter truths.

“They have to be shaped in order to grow into real men.” Those were Imran’s constant words to aunty Halima whenever she complained. “You’re treating these boys unfairly and harshly...” she would say beginning to nag. This always irked Aunty Halima, especially how he played favorites with Zarah, the unfortunate child of a dead woman.

The voice of the muezzin filled the mosque as well as the streets through the microphone as he called for the evening prayers. He talk-sang in Arabic, and Zarah always imitated him as he did. His powerful, commanding voice was always heard, summoning the faithful to pray. Kamal had returned from the mosque, looking more upset than when he left. He went straight in, refusing to talk to anyone. Zarah instantly knew he was upset. She understood him just like he understood her. They understood each other’s silence just as much as they understood their words.

Now that Zarah was on holidays, she could follow her father to the site every other day, if she felt like it. During the period, exams were ongoing. Imran didn’t let her go with him. She missed being on the site. She had missed sitting on the rocks to read or design. But more so, she had missed the pigeons which always landed around. She had formed a sort of attachment with them. Every time she was coming to the site, just like today, she stole a handful of grains and hid them in nylon. Once she got to the rocks and the birds gathered, searching for food. She reached into her tiny purse and brought out the nylon which contained the grains. She threw them towards the birds. How they scavenged through the short dried grasses, found them, and swallowed them whole always amused her. She always got lost staring at them, a smile involuntarily creeping up her face. She loved to watch their eyes. Their tiny button like eyes and how they hustled. How carefree they were, yet frightened of any human movement towards them. They were such peaceful creatures, and Zarah simply loved them.

“Today the mill workers would be working till very late. Would you still like to come along, or you’d rather stay back?”

“Oh yes please, Baba. I’d still come.”

Imran had asked Zarah that morning and she was quick to respond. She had been away from the site far too long, she couldn’t wait a day longer. She had found a haven on the site. By the rocks. And even amongst the men. Though they were perverse in their speech, and sometimes with their eyes, she felt a little safe among them, except with Mohammed. At least, her father was always there watching over her. But if she had known, if only she had known, she’d have stayed back. She was excited and at the same time a little reluctant because of the

Harmattan.

Harmattan was her favorite weather, though she was pneumonic. She wore a dark jean with pink edges and Kamal's sweater which she stole off the line. The dust rose as her father rode his bike, and that morning air made her feel like she had been put in a freezer. She wore a head warmer, a mask over her nose and mouth, stockings on her feet, and gloves on her hands. She sneezed without end.

Though the cold had come, the clouds looked grey and dull as if in mourning. The sky looked like it were ready to release that which it had been holding back for months. Or maybe they knew. Maybe the clouds were all knowing.

Just about noon, Zarah took the lunch to her father. She knew he always liked to have his lunch around that time. She didn't wait for him to summon her, she knew what to do, and did it. Mohammed was the first person she ran into when she got to the mill. She had tried avoiding him since her last encounter with him. He smiled, revealing a set of brown uneven teeth. She noticed that one of his front teeth was half chipped by the edge. She wondered if it was something recent or if it had always been there. While her mind wondered, her subconscious being concluded that it was none of her business because she found herself walking away.

Zarah stayed on the mill with her father and the other workers. Her father ensured she stayed close as the darkness began to set in. There was nothing fun or exciting about being on the mill. No pigeons to feed or stare at and she definitely couldn't read or draw. The noises from the machines were unbearable. She was bored and felt miserable. She regretted having followed her father that day and wished she could go home. She stood up, determined to take a little stroll around. It was just 6:45pm and the place wasn't really dark yet. Before finally rising, she weighed her options. What would she tell her father if he questioned where she was going? She knew for sure he wouldn't let her stroll around. She had to come up with a lie fast, because she was already on her feet, and he just asked.

"Na ce ina zaki, Zarah?" She heard her father demand again.

"Zani bayi. To ease myself," She lied, and quickly headed in the direction of the bush that housed the latrine used by the men. Before she could protest, Mohammed had dropped some tools and was rising to accompany her based on her father's instruction.

"Don't worry..." Her father had said. "He's only going to accompany you, and stand a little distance off while you relieve yourself."

Imran apologized to Mohammed for the inconvenience. He was in charge and didn't want to leave till the work was done. While Mohammed's back was turned to Imran and the other

three workers, Zarah thought she saw him smile and wink, but she quickly let the thought pass as she couldn't find a reason as to why he would. He seemed pleased, rather than offended, or uncomfortable.

The whole site was empty. No one else was on the site save for the mill workers at the extreme. While they walked almost side-by-side, Mohammed put out his hand across and touched her butt-cheeks. Zarah froze immediately his hand landed.

"I don't think I still need to go to the latrine. Let's just go back," She said turning back and walking hastily. They were just by the rocks, and far enough from the mill. Mohammed ran after her, and in short strides he caught up with her. All of a sudden, she was in the air, her feet swinging just few inches from her face, with his hands securely under her thighs and behind her neck. Mohammed took her behind the rocks. Behind the rocks she always sat. Behind the rocks she considered a haven. Zarah's screams and pleas were silenced by Mohammed's large, sweaty palm. Her tears rolled to her temples as he unzipped her trousers. She struggled and fought as he unzipped his. She found his flesh with her teeth. He yelped in pain and hit her hard. "Please..." The excruciating pain tearing at her vagina silenced her. And just as soon as he had begun, he stopped. He stood up, adjusting his shirt, pulling up his trousers. He looked at her and hissed. "Better stop crying." He commanded, and leaned against the rocks.

"Did anything happen?" He looked dangerous as he asked, putting a foot in front of him and looking down at her. For fear that the whole ordeal might be repeated, she shook her head sideways, as she cried. She was scared. She was frightened. He nodded at her as though they had just signed off a good deal. Pleased with the outcome, he pulled out a cigarette and smiled. The smile she had only just begun to loathe.

To be Continued...

AUTHOR'S BIO:

In the beautiful city of Zaria, Kaduna State, Amami Yusuf, a writer, student, hairdresser and makeup artist, writes prose-fiction and poetry when she's not busy with school work or attending to clients' hair and faces.

Her love for Literature influenced her decision in undertaking a course at the department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, for a Bachelors Degree.

As an upcoming young writer, she believes strongly in the power of the pen, addressing issues eating deep into the society and truths left untold through prose-fiction and sometimes, poetry.

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LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

With Ugbede Ataboh, Nigeria

FOOD



Lately, my desire for food has been substituted with a craving for success, money and power. It has become so bad that I can go for almost two days without eating. I am still up at 2 am wondering what exactly I can do to break through the glass ceiling and get the recognition needed for my craft in order to succeed. As I scroll through my twitter page, my thumb freezes above a post by Urban Capitalist which states in block letters BE SOMEONE WORTH KNOWING. It hits me harder than a sledge hammer, and then comes the big question- What do I need to do to be someone worth knowing? My mind flashes back to two different events. Last Sunday's sermon when the minister said the key to being successful is to sow continuously into the kingdom of God with ones time, finances and talent; and last Friday's hang-out with my girls, Chichi and Blessing when they both emphasized the importance of going out often to the "right places" and interacting with the "right people" until a "breakthrough" happens.

"Baby girl, stay away from the unfortunate and unlucky" Blessing encouraged, with a pat on my back.

“Gbam!” Chichi concluded, with her usual dramatic expression.

The good Lord knows I have tried to be useful in His house and my beloved extravagant girls know I don’t have loose cash to spend in exploring their expensive idea. This sad realization finally drives me into restless slumber.

I wake with a jolt and dash into the bathroom to carry out my daily cleansing ritual. The rhythmic movement of my toothbrush drives me into an absent minded state as I drift back in time to the Nigerian presidential election held a few weeks ago...

After standing in a long queue for about five hours because the voter’s card reader stopped working, an influential family is ushered to the polling booth by an official to cast their vote. This of course leaves the throng of us bitter and angry at the system and the world for such unfair occurrences.

“Can this country ever change?” the woman behind me laments.

All of a sudden I am consumed with a sudden craving for power, completely forgetting the need to nourish my tired and exhausted body with food after standing under the sun for so long; my craving for power suddenly serving as a new fuel for my sustenance.

I am choked back to the present by my toothbrush and I hurriedly complete what’s left of my toilette.

“All done and running late!” I scold myself as I dash out of the house and make a run for the bus stop.

On my arrival, I spot a public cab referred to as along by most pedestrians in Abuja approaching. It looks rickety but I flag it down with little or no choice and squeeze in with three people in the back seat. I check my watch and realize I am already 5 minutes late and the cab driver suddenly parks to make a phone call. Is he really doing this? “Mtchew!”

“Madam, wetin happen?” The driver asks as he suddenly ends his call.

“Oga, you have no reason to keep passengers waiting while you make a call. It is very wrong” I respond self righteously.

“See as she be, if you want make person treat you like queen go chatter private cab. You see any other passenger complain for here? If you know say you no fit chatter private cab abeg close mouth. See her mouth like catapult; if you no get money abeg hide your face. Nonsense!”

The passengers stare apologetically at me and implore me with their eyes to ignore him instead of engaging him in a battle of words. I settle for the former instead of the latter and stare blindly out of the window until we arrive at my destination. I

let out a sigh of relief as I step out of the along and begin a short trek to my office building.

I walk through my office gate and suddenly realize that I passed the snack vendor I patronize every morning without catching a whiff the delicious aroma of his confectionary treats and coffee. Indeed my sense of smell and appetite for food has been replaced yet again with an unexplainable hunger for wealth.

“For this life I go make money and I no go hide my face,” I declare painfully, without a care in the world for whoever might be within earshot.

The usual workflow takes its toll on me but the embarrassing event of this morning lingers on in my mind. I don’t even realize it is close of business until I absently look up at the clock. I clear my desk, gather my things and walk towards the exit. As I step out of my office building, I am welcomed by the cool evening breeze. I look up at the blue sky and envy the birds of the air for dwelling above mankind and flying ever so freely. Suddenly the words of a wise king who once reigned upon the earth settles in my mind.

“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?” Ecclesiastes 2:24

“For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under the heaven” Ecclesiastes 3:1

In these words, I suddenly find peace and the feeling of gratitude toward my creator emanates from my soul. I immediately change my route to a famous local food joint close to my office. On getting there, I dash for the food counter.

“Good evening ma. Abeg give me four wraps of Amala with Ewedu, Gbegiri and Cowleg,” I order rather excitedly, drawing an amused smile from the older woman on the other side of the counter.

“Abeg give me one bottle of orobo Coke too” I add.

“No wahala my dear, you dey chop for federal oh!” She teases in a friendly tone.

I laugh and carry my meal to the nearest vacant spot and as I settle into my seat. I cannot help but grin from ear to ear as I devour my meal. When I’m done, I wash it down with my bottle of coke and let out a belch for the first time in a long time.

Rest assured, life and its unfortunate circumstances will not happen to me. I will not be a nameless face in an ever-growing crowd. I will keep the fire of my faith burning and work harder with each passing day. Oh yes indeed! Good food makes life feel and look beautiful and above all, keeps the body and soul nourished.

THE OBSERVER

With Leo Muzivoreva, Zimbabwe



FOOD SECURITY: THE QUESTION

Africa as a whole is facing two major problems in the 21st century: The first problem is how to feed the growing population of the continent; the second is how to adapt to climate change. Both problems are interlinked since climate change has the potential for having severe implications on food security in Africa.

The African population is growing rapidly: From the year 2000 to date, eight of the ten countries with the highest average annual growth rate in the world are African. Arguably, countries with the highest total fertility are located in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria as an example is projected to have the third largest population growth in the world from 2000 to 2050. Already now Nigeria is in the top ten of the most populous countries on the planet and expected to climb in the top five in the course of this century. All these are indicators of the enormous ongoing population growth in Africa and they point to the most important fact: The population on the African

continent is expected to double from around one billion to almost two billion over the next 40 years (United Nations, 2004)

Food security is subject to natural and economic shocks in Zimbabwe. The El Nino phenomenon has been at its peak this past year; we have been experiencing an erratic rainfall pattern which has been the major cause of drought. 72% of our population live below the national poverty datum line (living on less than US\$1.25/day). 30% of the rural poor are considered 'food poor' 89% of children 6-23 months old receive a minimum acceptable diet. One third of children are stunted or short for their age. (Runganga 2018)

An increase in hunger and food insecurity lead to an increase in health risks which include chronic diseases related to diet, high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, depression, physical and mental problems. The escalation of these conditions will subsequently lead to an increase in health expenses, crime rates, prostitution and cannibalism.

As such, the growth in populations translates to higher food demand on the African continent. The nations in Africa will have to act to ensure that this higher food demand is met by sufficient food supply. But as elaborated subsequently, the big challenge of the 21st century for the growing number of people in Africa is finding means to meet their food demand.

Currently, Africa ensures food supply by a mix of domestic food production and overseas food imports. West Africa for example depends to 40% on imports in ensuring sufficient rice supply with Thailand as the main rice supplier (FAO, 2010). The total volume of cereal imports in Africa was around 66 million tons in 2010 (FAO, 2013a). This means that for the whole of Africa 30% of all cereals consumed were imported. (Cereals exports are negligible: Even if all exports were instead to be used for domestic consumption, 28% of cereals consumed would still be constituted of imports. One of the five largest trade flows of wheat in the world is from the US to Nigeria.)

According to FAO, despite domestic production and import efforts there were 239 million undernourished people living on the African continent in 2012, most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lately, the number of undernourished people in Africa has

increased significantly. This shows that food insecurity already now is of increasingly relevant concern. In meeting the rising food demand caused by the growth in population in Africa, there are three options of how this rising demand can theoretically be covered by sufficient food supply: raise overseas food imports, raise domestic food production, or increase both food production and food imports. Then there are countries like Zimbabwe whose economy does not allow for many imports due to the shaky fiscus.

Ultimately, ensuring food supply through increased overseas food imports will not be an option which could satisfy the increasing demand for food: The current world population could so far be sustained through the benefits of modern Africa population agriculture, which promotes the use of irrigation systems, chemical fertilizer, farm machinery, and large-scale monoculture farms for increased efficiency and yields. It is now understood that this system of modern agriculture is unsustainable at the current scale and potentially cannot even be sustained throughout this century. The main reason for this is that modern agriculture depends heavily on water, fossil fuels (for irrigation, fertilizer production, machinery, transportation) and phosphate rock (for phosphorus fertilizer). Both fossil fuels and phosphate rock are finite resources and are becoming increasingly scarce. There are estimates that phosphate rock production will peak in the course of this century and thereafter continuously decline, thereby creating a supply-demand gap.

Even the global oil company BP states that there are only 54.2 years of known crude oil reserves left and this only when assuming no growth in consumption (BP, 2012). There are other forms of unconventional oil such as tar sands but those deliver a much less favorable energy return on energy invested and therefore bear a much higher price making modern agriculture less affordable and food products more expensive. Additionally also these unconventional fuels will eventually diminish. Phosphorus on the other hand does not have any substitutes: Once the world's economically retrievable phosphate rock is completely mined there will be no alternative convenient way of obtaining phosphorus easily for the production of phosphorus fertilizer which is indispensable for efficient plant growth. While the dates stated of the end of economically producible fossil fuel and phosphate rock are issues with large vested interests and therefore significantly varying prognoses, it can definitely be expected that fertilizer and oil will become increasingly expensive leading to large increases in food prices making food imports much more costly.

A recent crisis example of that problem of agricultural dependence on external inputs was the 2008 global rice crisis which was partly caused by the rise in fuel prices. The same crisis also caused a 700% price increase in phosphate rock. Perhaps a clearer cut example is that of Zimbabwe, which in past years boasted of being Southern Africa's bread basket, but since its Fast Track Land Reform Programme which saw the ouster of white farmers and the introduction of indigenous farmers who have struggled to reach the levels set by the former land owners in terms of production. These new farmers have dismally failed to come up with decent levels of outputs even to feed the locals despite the recent government hands-on command agriculture system. People in Zimbabwe no longer have faith in farming as a way of alleviating poverty and food insecurity and have resorted to illegal cross border trading and foreign currency trading. Similar sentiments could be echoed about the West African young men and women who risk their lives riding ships to Europe in search of better lives and essentially FOOD.

Finally and probably most importantly there is an increasing lack of water available for agricultural purpose for which no substitutes exist. Generally, water is a renewable resource and therefore does not get depleted the same way that fossil fuels get depleted. However there is a maximum of water available at a certain period of time (e.g. through rainfall). If population growth trends continue, the available renewable water during a certain period of time will not be sufficient to meet the agricultural water requirements in that time frame anymore. The Colorado River in the U.S., the Huang He in China, or the Nile in Northern Africa often do not reach the sea anymore with river flows falling to zero due to extensive water withdrawals for agricultural use (Gleick & Palaniappan, 2010).

Change is additionally expected to aggravate water scarcity by causing salination of coastal freshwater sources, and through a general decline in water quality due to higher average temperatures. These are all signs which strongly indicate that water is becoming a more limited resource. With water, fossil fuels, and phosphate rock becoming increasingly scarce, efficient food production will be challenged, yields might decrease and food prices increase.

The question now is, what steps should be taken to ensure food security across the continent?

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