

The rain is unrelenting. The thunder is loud and persistent with its roar. Lightning flashes bright with every strike, doing a better a job at lighting the neighbourhood than the security lights. I observe all this from our cracked kitchen window. The crack looks like a spider's web.

I go to my bed, adjacent to the kitchen counter, with the hope that the weather keeps him from coming home tonight. For a moment, I even hope that he does not make it home ever! I slip into my blanket. I'm not sleepy but my eyes are closed so that when sleep comes it simply arrests me without threat of resistance.

When I begin dreaming of picking coin after coin on my way to school, is when I hear the front door open succeeded by a thud on the floor. My eyes open wide. I'm confused. I thought I was walking the dusty road that leads to School, marvelling at the number of coins in my hands. I hear the sound of heavy boots proceeding toward the bedroom. It is him!

His work boots make their way towards the kitchen. His steps slow and heavy. With every step my heart drums harder against my chest.

The kitchen lights are switched on. My eyes, which are but a display of fear, meet his drunken gaze. I pull the blanket over my head and feign snoring.

There is a hole on my blanket that I conveniently use to peep at him. I observe him as he struggles to uncover the dish which keeps the food warm for him until he arrives late in the night. By the time he opens it, the contents – ugali and sukuma wiki– pour all over his chest and slide down his dark blue rain coat, all the way to the kitchen floor. He places the empty dish – which only bears traces of what would have been his evening meal – on the kitchen counter and without turning off the lights, heads to the bedroom. The bedroom door shuts with a slam.

I hear his voice in a quarrelsome tone. I do not hear mama's response until she begins to let out a particularly familiar cry. The bedroom door opens. Bare feet tapping on the floor rush to the door. I hear the door being locked, at the same time I hear the heavy steps proceeding out of the bedroom.

“Give me the keys!” He says to mama with a roar.

I hear mama crying. When her cry grows louder I'm convinced that I should do something. Anything.

I behold mama bleeding from a scar carved above her left brow which is draining blood down the left side of her face in a single stream. She is in nothing but white underpants and a matching bra slightly stained with blood. The shuka she apparently had on is lying just at her feet.

Baba's right hand, wielding what used to be one of the legs of their favourite stool gifted on their wedding day, is raised with the possibility of finding a destination on mama's head. I scream out all the breath in my lungs. He shifts his menacing attention towards me. His hands lock my neck and drag me into the kitchen. My hands are keen on freeing my neck from his grip. He pushes me on to the lower decker of the bed which is set in the kitchen, next to the wall opposite the kitchen counter.

I am uncertain of his next course of action until he picks the knife placed on the sink and points it at me.

"Do you want to fight me?" These words repeatedly come out of his mouth escorted by his breath, a foul mixture of spirits and cigarettes.

I respond to his question with wordlessness and a frightened look. With anger building up on his face, I can almost feel the knife being driven through me. It causes an inexplicable feeling in my stomach, on my chest, my whole body. I begin to cry.

Mama enters into the kitchen. She has on her shuka, sparing me another glance at her nudity. The apparent sight has her hands over her head with her eyes to the ceiling, perhaps summoning Heaven's strength. Tears slide down her cheeks. Her utterance is like whispers to self. I can't hear a thing.

My father places the knife on the sink and exits the kitchen. Mama's helpless stare toward Heaven worked!

Mama's eyes find sight of my equally teary eyes. She pulls me closer. With eyes closed I rest my head on her heartbeat.

The cell door noisily opens interrupting this most recurring memory I have of my father. It has been entertaining me for the better part of the day.

Two names are called out. The two men seated on the opposite corner, talking about how they could escape from such a cell, stand and proceed to the door. When the door locks and I don't see them come back, I know they have made bail. Well...paid their way out of this dark, echoing cuboid, where a single night feels equal to a whole day.

I dream hundreds of dreams yet wake to no present light save for that which seeps in through the barred openings, close to the roof of the cell. An unfamiliar loneliness also holds me close as a mother holds her babe in her arms, only that it is as unwelcoming as it is undelightful.

The other man who is now keeping me company for the second night lies prostrate on the cold, hard floor, snoring. Clearly making himself at home.

My eyes stare at the small, square, barred opening that seems more like a ventilator than it does a window. The rays that seep through create in me a profound appreciation for light. It also reminds me of the Friday evening when I was stretched on the couch contemplating an experience of walking in the setting sun. Immediately the night fell I was staring at the entrance of a pub, the one thing I had promised to my son and wife to keep away from in the remainder of my leave days.

I hardly remember what transpired when I made my exit from the pub and entrance into the house. It was never my intention to, yet again; arouse the anger of my wife and son, so much so, that they would call the police to bring me here. Now I know, I made my son feel the same towards me as my father made me feel towards him. How is it that even after the experience with my father as a ten year old, that has stuck with me ever since and has been tormenting me, particularly throughout my two-day stay here, I still became what I promised myself never to become – a distant father and abusive husband.