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### **Riziki**

The bold fishermen set out at twilight  
With old paraffin lamps and boats of hope,  
They brave the cold and the howling of night,  
The colic sea and her ship - wrecking mop.  
The fishermen with shooting stars for kith  
Sing somber songs and can't pitiable chants,  
As the poor stars fall to their drowning death  
And the irascible sea growls and rants.  
On good nights the brave fishermen behold  
The lovely sight of enchanting mermaids  
Whose serenading crooning bears the cold  
Till when dawn heralds the end of the raids.  
They seek you, Fortune, fair cousin of mine,  
They seek you, animating vintage wine.

*Riziki – (Kiswahili) fortune, livelihood*

### **A Double Lesson on Castles**

Mr Khamadi droned in the sleepiness and heaviness  
Of the aftermath of the truce of lunch,  
In the stuffy 7 West at Nasianda. About  
Ouagadougou and the winds of Mombasa,  
About flags painted with dreams and ideals.  
“You Kenyans are building castles in the air!”  
He remarked and drew me out of my stupor with his lofty English  
And despite my sweaty armpits and thuddy heart beats,  
I'd built quite a tidy castle complete with a fine flag of red, black, white and green,  
I was in fact  
Out shopping for windows of perfect constitution.  
“How far along is your castle?” She comments  
On the poetry acceptance celebration, I post on my status  
And I still marvel that she remembers,  
That she used to speak such fine English in class 7.  
And amidst a crowd of teary smileys, hysterical with laughter, I tell her it  
Soon became a gothic temple with crows in the ceiling.  
I say, “We walked barefoot onto cold tiles

And were made to wait upon appointments,  
 In houses where strange weeds were guests, then hosts,  
 And dust settled on consciences once pure.  
 We waited till the marrow in our legs  
 Died. The white walls had their skin peeling  
 And bleeding out in silent, spilling rills;  
 And we sat and waited, unbelieving  
 For what else is there for a man to do  
 When his banner's rags drift, fall like brown leaves?  
 Plenty was sure found within our borders,  
 We haven't tired of talking about right  
 For countrymen must seek to dream, to hope  
 Else will these castles glitter in darkness?"

Dust, life, pain and peace ...

Mr. Khamadi droned and the only thing keeping me awake  
 Was Musavi, my tremor-invoking, Nairobi-born-town-drawling crush from 7 East pressed next  
 to me  
 Like a very willing sardine in a suffocating can, canned.

### **A Place of Forgetfulness**

I walked down a lane, a mid-morning of uncertain  
 sun and timid dilute mist  
 In the first heaviness of day, when her canter is a trot then a jog, then a trudge.

The seconds would not come of age, morph into  
 minutes in time.

A bell rung and a woman in red gown  
 slid into a cafe for a glass of cool peace,  
 Her ankles starting to swell in her shackled heels. She sat and sighed, and as if she felt her eyes  
 on me  
 She looked up and out through the glass, and into me  
 And back into her glass of contemplation.

A pastor, hoarse and parched, bellowed at  
 the stop sign  
 Before a shop that sold gold and diamonds, and other worldly things. He dipped into his pocket,  
 Pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his face with dust  
 And swallowed dry musty air.

A cloud of dust flew after a trailer  
 Into hair and nostrils, eyes, I cried muddy tears.

The screaming of children could be heard, a gate to a school talked to me  
 Of tardiness and missed appointments, consequences demanding, unyielding.  
 If only I'd walk the street all day, miss such a prison-like place,  
 If only I'd find a shade to sleep this heavy drifting away!

A pot turned upside down sulked in a corner, it  
 looked like a man whose torso was buried  
 And the stoners had left in haste before  
 granting him justice, raising a monument, a hill of ballast and gore, boulders, bolden rocks  
 In his (dis)respect.

I walked into a place, a world long gone,  
 It is a room labeled 'store.'

Corruption and decay had crawled from the garbage can  
 to the table, where files lay yellowed by the urine,  
 Defiled by the droppings of rodents.  
 Algae crawled her walls, choked her pores like a flood,  
 a colony of dermatitis on neglected skin.

Backless seats moaned in silence of broken spines  
 and toil gone unappreciated, taken advantage of  
 A few bricks meant for nation building wondered what would become of them  
 as they stared up at the ladders under the rafters -  
 a beam of sorts.

I walked into a country with torn, unwashed shawl,  
 Shriveled breasts, the black glory of her hair thinned.

With lightning to light my path and thunder to dispel the sleep of distraction  
 I contemplated my past.

### **Drifting**

Shut-downs are extended in bundled gifts of 21 days each, the world might stand still, but the  
 clock ticks off, tocks on, obstinate. Could time be the death of beauty?

Time surely is an untiring tide. Unfazed, time being but a count of beats of a dispensation that is  
 ever existing whether time halts or not, it clings onto relevance - ever resilient; and ever insisting  
 on the mime of its counting.

Days blur into an oblivion, past and future, the present lulling in the mundane, yet the tide defies  
 tardiness. Loved ones fade into memories fuzzier and fainter, tears of months make years, and it  
 is 'Thank You For The Memories, Wakini!' before you know it.

It couldn't be. Because beauty is eternal. Time is but beauty's garment, worn and tattered;  
 yet new days are new jewels, new moments, new gowns.

Despite the aches we encounter in our times, we too are stubborn to leave our etches on this  
 canvas. The tide might apparently succeed to carry us away from the places we've made homes,  
 but our souls are left carved in the alcoves of moments.

We stop looking for signs in stars  
 We gaze inside for strength and we find it in dreams.

**Often**

often after a whim I went  
to find reprieve for restless words  
and found only questions more doubt  
deeper indulgence of my ache

often after a page I tried  
to shroud my nakedness in rhyme  
but not until when these rags peeled  
I stood in the hairless unskin

glared at the red touch of feeling  
did this lair growl for those stubborn  
who left for literary streets  
who often went to find a home

often after a bloom I cried  
and sulked with swollen lips, soft eyes  
tender to child's uncertain touch  
and the flutter of a bee's wings

I was the why in family  
fleeting on the fringes of warmth,  
questions sometimes sometimes reason  
often than not a homely poem.