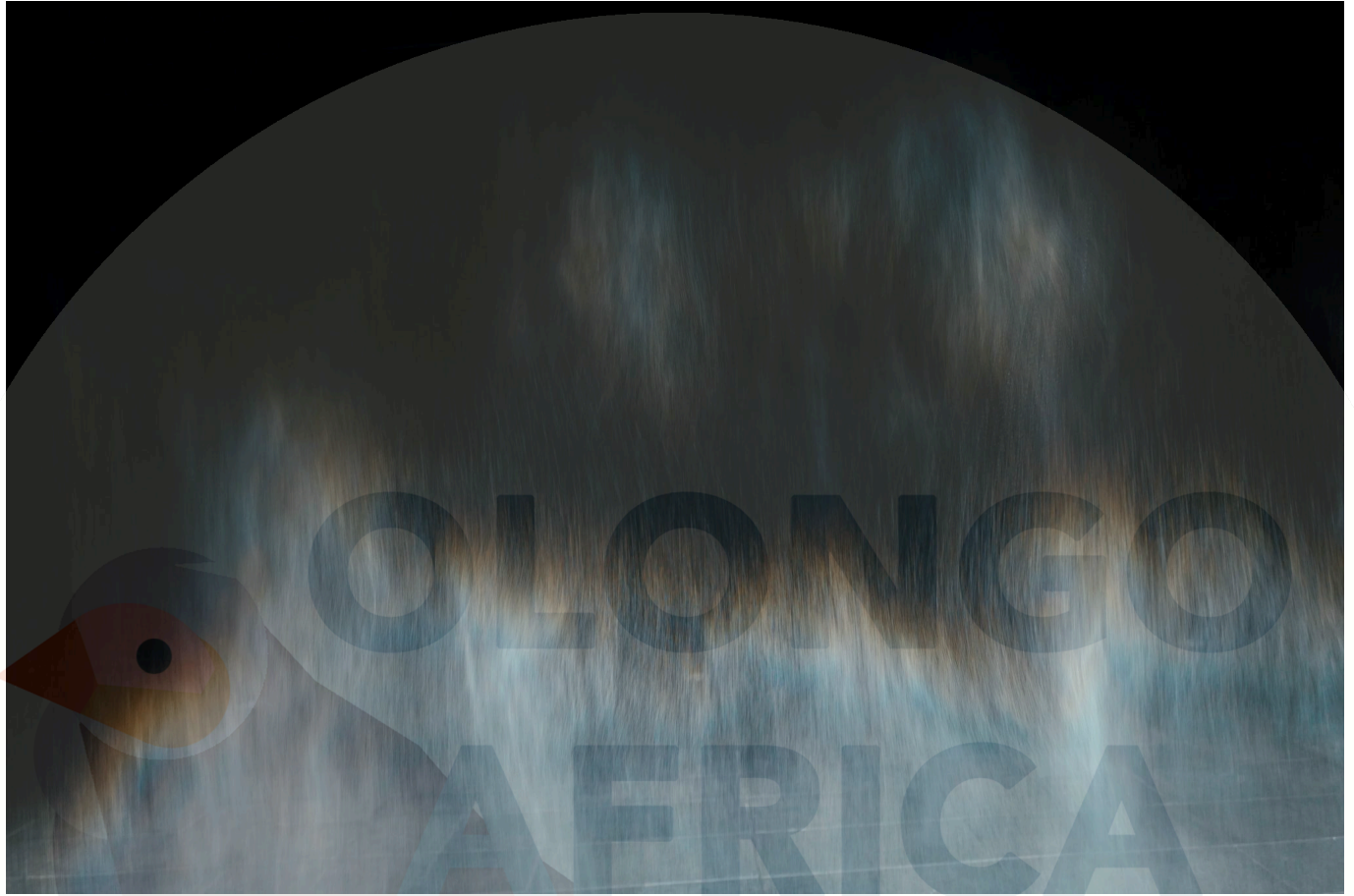


Born to Die

Salawu Olajide

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They will ask me when I know, I'll sigh and say not so long ago. It happened in fragments—piece by piece you came and filled up the empty space—and in a matter of time, you became my world. They will be surprised when I say you are the only man I have ever truly loved. They will look at Akin with pity and whisper to him, “She has lost it.”

They will ask me if I ever told you I loved you, my heart will break a little as I mouth the word—No. But you knew, we were connected. You to me and I to you. You felt my pain and I fed on your strength, I needed you to keep living and you never for once complained. You knew I loved you those times I wrote you letters —during my darkest hour, the thought of you was enough to bring a smile on my face. How is it that what once brought me joy now fills me with endless misery? You knew on days I'd cry and wish for death, you saw all the shades of me and you loved me even more. I never said it, but you felt my love for you deep in your bones. You gave me a reason to keep living, now that you are no more, I have lost my will to live.

The first time I felt you kick, Iya Akin was around. She came with a young lady who was younger than I was, the firmness of her breasts made me cover mine in shame. They are reminders of how much time had passed since I lost Eniola, Rotimi, Durojaye Malomo.

“This is Abike, and soon enough she will be your Iyawo,” she eyed me and continued, “since you've refused to give my son a living child, I have decided to take matters into my hands”.

“How many of my Grandchildren have you given your coven as an annual contribution? Four? Five?

Akin has refused to send you out, but he agreed to marry Abike so I'll have grandchildren". I just stood in a trance, shutting Iya Akin's words out of my head, wondering why the spirit of my mother can sleep peacefully through all the things happening to me. Shouldn't she try to pacify Eledua who is up there watching me, or was Bola right when she said that death is final and we only exist in the memories of those we leave behind. You kicked and you brought me out of my head and back to reality. Almost as if you were trying to say "I exist here and now".

"Mama! He just kicked". I screamed in excitement.

"Who?"

"The baby, Ayomide just kicked". I smiled

" For the last time, you are not pregnant you this mad woman".

I named you Ayomide, because you brought back the joy that left with your siblings. You were a peaceful child, I never suffered from morning sickness or fatigue throughout the time I carried you, that was why I wasn't quick to realize you had crossed to the other world. By the time I realized, the blood pouring down my legs was enough to know that it was too late. I rushed to the hospital to try to save your life. I arrived at the hospital screaming frantically for the doctors to save your life, when I was finally attended to, the doctor gave me a look I've gotten used to. So I begged the doctor. I got on my knees and begged for your life to be saved. I swear on my mother's grave Ayomide, I begged. I told him I'd give him anything he asked for, if only you come back to me. But with a bored expression, he said "I am sorry, but there is nothing in your womb". He spoke like he had said those words before, a thousand times or even more. And I wondered how many women he made deny their reality. I left the hospital knowing I had lost all connection to you.

They don't ask me why I look sick with grief. They now shake their heads in pity when they find me muttering to myself. They even read the letters I wrote to you when you were in me. I hear the 'ehyas' and 'omashe o' when I walk down the streets. They don't know. They can't know what it feels like to love someone who was born to die.

H.T Jagiri is a writer, and sometimes she is a poet. Her works have been published in *Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper* and elsewhere. She writes from Lagos, Nigeria.