

THE SCENT OF RAIN

by Audrey Obuobisa-Darko

Hers is the scent of rain, that heavenly essence *nananom* gift us with when it falls on the thirsty earth. My nose has known the scents of all sorts of people - sweet, saccharine smells of the kind and gentle, babies the musk of milk nearly bad, some people the smell of spices, or burnt timber, or *dawadawa*, or nothing at all - but this, I have not sensed on a person before. Her hair is drawn back in serpentine cornrows that stop short where her broad, firm shoulders begin. My heart cuts loose as more of her pulls me in; the slight bulge of her chest, short fingers that fiddle with her bag one too many times, her face a canvas of glory, and more glory, her aroma of petrichor that swallows me whole.

I crouch lower at the window when Ma walks in to meet her. They're slow to let go of their hug, the stuff of long-lost friends. They talk about their secondary school days, nothing more worthy of note than my spectacle of this woman. My mother looks good, better than I've

seen her in a while. She's let her locs loose, cascading down her back, a soft touch of makeup on her cheeks and lips. Her usual fragrance of wild flowers waxes stronger today, as it does in times when she's happy. She throws her head back, laughing easily, gently slapping her thigh. When they say their goodbyes, the woman nods her head and disappears, into a billow of wind the scent of rain.

I bury my face in the couch where she sat, inhaling all of her till her image forms clear in my *ahwehwe*, the mirror of my mind. I follow her, watch her every step. She arrives home just as the full moon breaks into the black expanse of sky. I take a deep breath in and let go of her scent, her image fading into the darkness of my mindscape as I drift into sleep.

What is it that fascinates me so much about you?

She's at the waterfall this morning, swimming under the nascent light of the sun. She unravels her cornrows, her afro thinning and sticking to her skin under the water. When she takes her clothes off to bathe, her scent surges up my nose and chokes me. The image glitches and fades as I cough.

"Adowa, are you okay?" My mother's voice comes from behind my door. "Come eat?"

"I'm fine," I whisper, the sting in my throat dissipating with the last of the vision. "I'm coming."

The table is silent, save for the melody of clinking spoons in our bowls of *kooko*. Ma leaves and comes back with a Bolga basket covered with white lace cloth. "Adowa, will you be a darling and send this to Auntie Kanea for me? Afrifa Street No. 4."

I grip the basket handle like it carries my life in its belly, my feet a bag of lead. My legs know where to go; I've been on this path more times in my *ahwehwe* than I have physically been anywhere else. Rain pours down on the farms on the left side of the road. I walk close to the right, where the sun shines like it's Onyankopon's happy day. Children are out to play, some disappearing and reappearing between sunshine and rain, others showing off as they stand under the downpour but do not get wet.

A medley of smells hits me when she opens the door; fresh clothes, spicy food from the night before, the subtle biblichor of old books, and rain-

"My mother- my mother said to bring you this." My cheeks are warm, eyes to the ground.

"Oh, Aba?" There's a lightness in her voice. Her house seems old, furniture fairly dusty and untouched. She only just moved back in after long travels, she says, offering me water and a clean seat.

"What's your name?"

"Adowa." I can't look at her face this up close.

She lets out a soft laugh. "Like the dance?"

"Yeah." I smile, lifting my eyes slowly to meet hers. There's a tender kindness in her eyes. "Your name is Kanea?"

"Yes."

"Like, light?"

She laughs again. "Yes."

In the mirror of my mind, I did not see the diastema between her teeth, nor the wrinkles that form in the corners of her eyes when she laughs; not half the perfection I do now in her presence. She sets the basket on the table and uncovers it, her face stretching into a smile.

“Are you also a Tumi Wura, like your parents?”

“No- no, I’m from the Ahwehwefo. Like my nana. I- I can find people.”

She nods her head. “Ah, I see.”

She invites me to eat with her, but I cannot answer, for my voice takes leave of me, and my heart beats a second too fast. I get up to take the bowls out of the basket. Her fingers brush against mine, sending shock waves rippling under my skin, threatening to tear me apart.

I pull my hand away and step back. "I'm sorry. Ma- Ma needs me to- needs me ho- home right now."

Snatching the basket from the table, I avoid her eyes and rush out the door. The smell of rain on dust clings onto me the farther away I walk, choking me. I cough all the way home.

“Ma, how do you know you’re in love with someone?”

She drops the necklace of beads she's making and looks at me with a glint in her eyes.

"Wonim a, wonim."

"If you know, you know?" I frown and turn a finished bracelet around in my hands, the green glass beads gleaming against the light. I slip it in my pocket when she's not looking.

She leaves to the kitchen and brings back a food basket. "Auntie Kanea."

My little composure crumbles at my feet when she comes to the door. She's more spellbinding than I can remember, the aroma of fresh, fresh rain.

"Ma said- Ma said I should gi- give this to you," I lie, handing her the bracelet I made.

"She said it'll complement your skin." My heart rate mounts, my tongue sour.

"Come in." She takes the basket from my hand, her fingertips soft on my skin. My arm tingles-

"No!" I leap back, and run all the way home, never stopping until I'm in my room, under the shelter of my covers until my heartbeat slows.

I see her in my *ahwehwe*. She stands at her door, basket in hand, brow knitted in confusion. She's still outside when I go back.

"I'm sorry, Ka- Auntie Kanea," I mutter, looking down at my feet, "I'm so- ever so nervous sometimes."

She laughs her feathery laugh again, the one like the first morning breeze with the music of birds in its waves. It tickles my ears, but I pinch myself to keep steady.

"You said you have an *ahwehwe*?" She taps the seat next to her. "Come show me."

I hold my breath and sit a safe distance away, keeping my nose from clouding over with the scent of her. "If I know the smell of someone, I- I can find them."

She smiles and nods her head, and asks if I can find Ma. I do not know how to say no to her. The sweet fragrance of wild flowers surges through my nose as I draw it from olfactory memory. My mother is hunched over a small, old box, sifting through some papers; letters, pictures maybe. My father barges in.

What's that? What did you just hide?

Nothing. It's nothing important.

Aba, do not lie to me.

I said it's nothing!

Do you think I'm a fool, Aba?

No.

Am I a fool? You think I haven't been seeing you? I know you're hiding something.

No, I-

He strikes her across her face. My throat constricts, my heart slamming against my chest.

A cloud the odour of decayed flowers seizes me. I cannot breathe.

"I can't- I can't come out." My eyes are squeezed shut, my hands grappling in the air around me. "I can't step out of the vision."

Kanea's voice floats towards me from a distance. She places a hand on my shoulder, cooing a comfort song. Tears spring out my eyes as the song draws closer. It reaches me and pulls me out. My eyes flutter open, my vision blurred. She opens her arms and I fall into them, crying, crying, crying into the night.

How do you know you're in love with someone, when you've never fallen in love before? What about them makes you so besotted? Is it their face, the shape of things you long for, their laugh, the lightness of it strumming on your heartstrings? Is it their scent, the aroma of pure, crystalline rain? How do you know it's okay to love someone when it feels so wrong? How do you know it's love?

"You're always inside your head these days, *me ba*. Can't even hear me when I call you." Ma says. Her attempt to break the silence goes round the table and comes back to her untouched.

My father eats his dinner slowly, his jaw set hard. I pick at my *fufu* with a spoon and set it back down.

“So,” Ma clears her throat, “you’ve been going out a lot lately, eh?” There’s a small smile on her face, but it does not shield the sadness in her eyes. I sigh and say yes.

She squeals and draws closer. “Someone you like?”

The hairs on my arms rise, a strong gust the aroma of rain washing over me. My face flushes warm, a smile tugging at my lips. I pick at my food again. “Yes, maybe.”

“What’s their name?”

My heart flutters and I giggle. “I can’t tell you her na-”

Da slams his hands on the table. He looks at us for the first time since dinner began. “Her name? *Her* name?!”

My voice clings to my throat. “No- no, Da. Tha- That’s not what I meant. I meant he- his- that’s not-”

“This is what you’re teaching your daughter now?” He stares at my mother with a fire in his eyes. The whiff of seawater from his aura intensifies, stinging my nose.

The melancholy in Ma’s eyes streams down her face. “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean!” He yanks the tablecloth, sending glass and ceramics crashing across the room.

“Yooku!” Ma screams, slowly lowering her hands from her face, revealing her skin gaping open like a big red mouth.

My legs carry me with a mind of their own. In the pitch dark of night, I run to Afrifa No. 4, my soul tearing, tearing, tearing apart. She sits on the stairs outside the porch when I arrive, her face washed blue by the night sky.

“Adowa?” She rushes to meet me.

My knees give away and I fall at her feet, my body trembling. She crouches next to me, rubbing my back, cooing that comfort song. She takes my hand in hers and holds it tight, and we disappear into the cold air of the night.

Before us lies a thousand splendid heavens. The atmosphere smells divine, like vanilla and morning dew, fresh grass and burning wood. Two moons adorn the cloudless sky, their light spilling an aureate glow over everything below. The silver water, the birds yellow, and purple, and teal, the blossoming trees, the velvety earth, they all unfurl in a burst of bright, euphoric wonder.

“Where are we?” I ask, breathless, the wind kissing my tears away.

Kanea smiles and takes my hand. “Just another beautiful world.”

We travel across space and time, through this world and the next. She shows me places from her past, the lives she once lived. We stop at the edge of a clear, azure river. Kanea kicks her shoes off and jumps in fully clothed, her laughter bouncing off the currents, calling my name. I wade to a rock a short distance away from her.

“Think of something,” she says over the gushing of water.

“Huh?”

“Think of something you want to see!”

I close my eyes and think of rain. It’s the foremost thing in my mind, always. A light shower on my face jerks my eyes open. From the boundless firmament above, a million droplets of silver rain fall on us. Kanea’s laughter reverberates on my skin, and this time, I let it wash over me.

How do you know you love someone, when you’ve never fallen in love before?

She swims closer and holds my hand again, and everything around us dissolves into deep black nothingness. We appear at the junction to my home, and I walk away from her, bite marks on my tongue from things I never could say.

“You are grounded, you hear?” Da says the next morning.

“But, Da-”

“Take it away from her,” he orders my mother.

I shake my head and back away from her. She begs me not to make it difficult. The gourd is in her hands, the hell I thought I’d never see again. She cries as she steps closer towards me, her face a patchwork of black and blue. She takes the string of beads and circles it around my head three times, singing, weeping as she strips my power away.

“It’s only for a few weeks, *me ba*. Only for a while, then you can have your visions again. I’m sorry for this. And I’m sorry for everything.”

My sobs drown in her long, doleful song. I close my eyes and step into my *ahwehwe*, holding onto the last visions of Kanea as they flow into the gourd. She’s bent over her bed, packing clothes into a suitcase. I let out a loud cry when the song ends, and all I can see is a bottomless void when I close my eyes.

That night, I wake up to the sound of wailing. My father sits on the floor in the living room, his hands on his head.

“Where is your mother?” He grips my shoulders and shakes me. “Where is she?!”

“I- I don’t know.” My knees feel weak, as if struck by a weapon only the night can see.

Da runs out of the room and comes back with the gourd in his quivering hands. “Find her,” he cries, “find her, please.”

He uncovers the gourd and sings the restoration song, circling the beads around my head. Warmth surges through my veins as my power flows back, a tingling sensation at my fingertips. I close my eyes and draw a deep breath in, the fragrance of wild flowers coursing around me.

I see Ma running, a bag in her hand, down a street I know too well. My heart stops as Kanea rushes to meet her. They drop their bags and kiss, in the middle of the street, the stuff of long-lost lovers. Da’s cries drift to me from a distance, as though he shares the vision with me.

My mother stretches her hand out, and Kanea takes it, and they disappear into a billow of wind the scent of rain, the kind that *nananom* gift us with when it falls on the flowers in the wild.