

The Boy Who Climbed His Mother into Heaven

I will climb my mother into Heaven he screamed at the headless man climbing a flagpole
I will climb my mother into Heaven he catcalled nested between thin brown breasts as
great branches above wept sap onto his mother's jutting hips year after year until she
grew majestic enough to carry the weight of the harmattan and hide boys sleeping in the
crooks of her long, lovely, graceful arms and he wondered if any jewel was beautiful
enough for a mother who drank clean water from the earth unlike her headless husband's
parched lips briefly stuck on the last syllable of the last word he ever spoke, a horrified -o
drowning in dry air between his tongue and teeth and lips before the ants found his head
resting in a broken chicken basket and ate *me you us them him her yes no mine yours arm*
leg mouth rice go eat hot sleep walk do see kill leave cry take lie cold laugh want knife
god from his mouth until ants owned all the words the headless man ever spoke and they
colonized his ears and heard *obey* for the first time and *tomorrow* and *mother* and *father*
and *son* and *death* and they colonized his eyes and saw a crowd of ragged boys surround
his wife and his young son, his only surviving child hold a rifle bigger than himself to her
head and pull the trigger and pull the trigger and pull the trigger until nothing remained
but pain the ants could not feel since his body had not stopped running past the sergeant
standing at the door chewing marijuana holding a machete chasing him chopping his

neck once grunting twice kicking his head into the chicken basket no one fixed because there was nothing to keep, no chickens, no eggs, nothing worth claiming and the ants would never understand how he walked backwards in his heart, back to days before his wife when young men paid the village whore in cane juice until she turned her children into thieves by feeding them chicken eggs before they turned eight and they threw rocks and forced the family into the bush where evil spirits would curse her for trading stolen iron instead of her body, a shame because he remembered wrestling with her on the floor of her sweaty home, and further back to the day his grandfather told him the story about carrying luggage for the famous American Marcus Garvey who never returned and back to the days when he attended bush school and became a man and he felt lighter and his son screamed something without sense but his eyes and ears and tongue were all taken by warring factions of ants arisen from illiteracy and arranged into brigades strictly for defensive purposes, strictly for me and mine, strictly for independence, strictly for the patriotic front, strictly against shit-eating rat-fucking traitor refugee ants fleeing the violence along the trail of bloody tears leading to the headless man's heart barely pumping, seeping, slumped against lungs slumped against ribs slumped against skin against the flagpole following the headless man's last thought *run* captured and flagged by the national independent front of ants as soon as they killed the front of independent national ants who would exterminate them after the rebellious independent national independent ant front paid money owed for weapons and the great branches above called to the headless man's son nested between his mother's breasts *climb fool before ants eat his heart and find sorrow.*

I will climb my mother into Heaven he told his wife between thrusts as she squealed and grunted like a sow chased from her sty with her stinking belly still covered in mud so foul starving mothers would not even ask their husbands to hunt it because they would never feed an abomination to their children but he saw worse during the war, saw women cut strips of meat from black backs squealing *He Kill My Ma, He Kill My Pa, I Vote for Him*, cry mercy, cry forgiveness, cry church on Clay Street in Monrovia he found when Taylor took over, a church roofed with flattened tin cans where the people sang and walked in slow circles, each whipping the man ahead hoping their pain could win forgiveness while the pastor held a baby and shouted *why God make hate why God make war* and the answer was so simple and clear to the boy he thought he could climb his mother to Heaven and shout *because we need it* so clear and perfect as he passed the church in a truck with four other boys and girls, those girls, not even girls, each carried a plastic full of her woman's blood to curse attackers with worse than death, cowardice beyond death like the headless man he saw run up a pole, his father, a coward, an old tuskless boar running before they cooked his balls, his father who would not look his son in the eye after the smallest boy said *kill the bitch or I will* and he cried and wailed but his mother rooted her toes into the hard dirt floor she swept clean every morning with a kpan broom and whispered *I na vex-o* knowing her other babies had already died from all the things that kill small babies when no one's looking and Taylor's boys would kill her last weeping child *Please Jesus I na-vex-o Please Jesus na-vex-o* she murmured just after a neighbor risked his life running to her husband's farm calling *kill boys at you house* and her husband ran praying they would go and not harm his wife and praying that they would stay so he could kill them all with his machete, strike them down, smite them like

the kings from the old days and save his wife and the people would praise him and make him the new district chief, the new paramount chief, the new warlord, the new President of Liberia because she had married a dreamer and fool too lost in past glories and old stories to feel the ground quiver beneath his feet like a beehive buried in termite mud behind the village next to the farm he cut for the birth of their first child and again for their second and not far from where they buried those children as he cried hot tears and the women sang for her while she sat stricken by the memory of a song that ached and cried under the weight of

Every woman likes to have a child walk beside them

how can I lie down and my side reach the mat pallet

When my only child is in deep slumber

You lying down, the pepperbird is crying and you cannot get up

I am up most of the night, thinking of my child

So is life, anything can happen in this world

I do not know why God did this to me

sung to the boy in her belly at the funeral of a brother he would never know.

I will climb my mother into Heaven, he said to himself, tittering, mumbling, unafraid to walk the dusty streets of Gbarnga day or night even during the riots because his mother, the woman who loved him, the woman he found years ago after coming home from the market with no chicken but the head of a cassava fish a merchant had thrown to

the dogs and found boys no older than himself, six or seven, Charles Taylor's boys singing, dirty, ransacking their house for food and clothing, chanting *He Kill My Ma, He Kill My Pa, I Vote For Him*, so small, so tiny boys, and she said *how can you do this to your mothers and fathers* and the smallest and weakest boy shot her and shouted *bitch bitch bitch* while his mother, she sang so beautifully and blood gushed from her side under the thatched roof he helped his father repair in the dry season before the winds swept in from the north and the rains hammered from the south but *the rains give us life, so we must endure*, his father told him a year before in this very spot when the creaking and groaning of giant trees frightened him during a storm and he cried out in precognition of the secret language of trees whispering in sharp sudden awareness of the great limb suspended above their tiny home, resisting, bending, staying aloft for them, for them, for love, knowing one day vines thick as a man's leg would entwine his mother as she dug her toes into the red clay earth and stretched her branches into the sky and if he her son, climbed his mother like the boy who climbed the tree in the old days, climbed because his friends bet he could not, ascended past perils, past the great flying ship caught in her fingers, ascended past cold until he arrived at the home of the gods and found them freezing and eating their meat raw and asked *why mighty gods do you have no fire* and the gods replied *what is fire* so the boy returned to Earth and brought fire to the gods, he her son rewarded would peer down from the Heavens and watch freighters unload cargo in Monrovia and sink any ship loaded with weapons, because even the smallest child knew the war had not ended, and find the family of the woman he killed on a bet, not his mother, but another woman, pretty, she might have been his mother, but no his mother was a tree and he shot his mother he didn't cut out her baby to lose the boy-girl bet with

General Saddam Hussein and he saw his mother, there at the end of the street in front of H.A. Fawaz' shop feeding the entire town with her lovely hanging fruits and the people rejoiced in her shade and blessed her and twined her pink flowers in the hair of young girls until he felt a trickle of happiness seep from the bullet he carried next to his heart made non-lethal by daily doses of herbs mixed with gunpowder, getting harder to find but *only the bullet saves you from the gun* so he followed the children, the little ones know everything and everyone and one of them might lead him to an old papay with some bullets left in his rifle but they played stupidly and ate his mother until foreign peacekeepers beat the children with the butts of their rifles and stabbed her with bayonets whispering *haram* and he knew falseness, his mother saved her best fruit just for him, his mother bled white sap covered in red termites, soft, warm, and he wanted to do forbidden things but thought *how can you do this to your mothers and fathers* until the reek of wet smoke led him to his wife lying naked in the trash heap like a dead fish on a coal pot before its eyes were poked out, his wife a general's whore until the commander killed the general and then a commander's girlfriend until the sergeant killed the commander and then a sergeant's fiancé until he killed the sergeant in a dispute over a case of Fanta soft drinks found forgotten in a shop burned and replaced by the trash heap smoking under his feet, his feet, vomit, his feet digging into heaps of old plastic and coconut husks and he was nothing like his mother and nothing like his mother and nothing like the boy who climbed to Heaven as he looked uphill at Fawaz' shop where soldiers celebrated a job well done while his mother shed layers of bark as she shrank into the earth with her willowy hand wrapped around the ankle of a gena witch expelled from Heaven for shitting in the gods' outhouse who spotted him and asked through teeth of blood rubies

what boy and even though his mother's *not now* floated along bits of hair and flower petals carried by the thick harmattan winds he said *I will climb my mother into Heaven* and ran as he had never run during the war, ran frothing at the mouth, ran uphill, ran upwind, leaving a faint trail of soot in the gasping air of Broad Street and crested the hill just in time to watch the gena witch draw fire from his wife's bed and burn his mother to ash.