



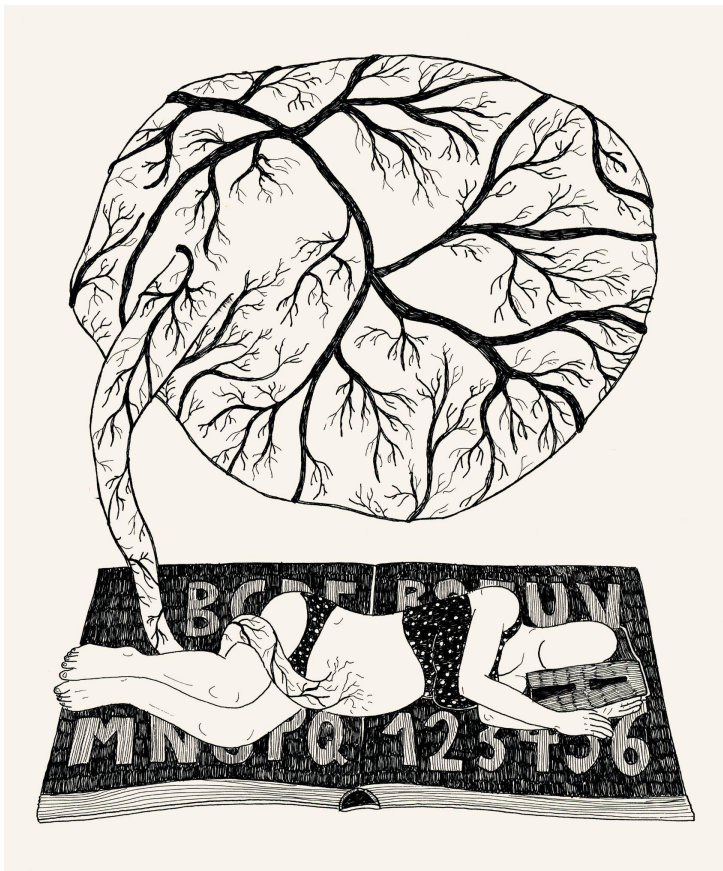
Wotá

By Chika Unigwe

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Translated into Nigerian Pidgin by *Jerry Chiemeké*.

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The day wey dem born the pikin, rain fall for street sotay motor wey been dey carry Mmuofunanya no come dey work again. Mmuofunanya come gats enter another bus wey get small step, make water no kuku carry am go where she no know. The bus no just dey move as go-slow dey, and as she carry belle so, she come dey fear say she go born for back of motor wey dey smell like fowl shit. She later tell people for hospital say she for nearly born inside that fowl shit so, because e no reach ten minutes wey she enter labour room, naim the pikin come out, red like atarodo with plenty-plenty wrinkle for body. Eze, wey be Mmuofunanya husband, been dey play golf before rain start, and before e reach hospital, him wife don already born. By the time wey e reach there, dem don dey baff the pikin, wear the pikin cloth, give the

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pikin name sef. Pikin just dey sleep, dey spread hand like say e wan fly.

“Only you no fit carry give pikin name, no be so dem dey do something,” Eze start to para give Mmuofunanya. “Which kain yeye name sef? Which kain person go born pikin, see the pikin, just decide say na ‘water’ e wan dey call the pikin?”

Rain wey been dey fall outside carry weight pass Eze voice. Mmuofunanya come dey reason for her mind make the rain enter where dem dey, clear Eze comot, leave only her and the pikin. She been wan tell am make e get out, but to talk dey heavy am for throat like dry yam. She cough make throat clear small, for where, e no work. Eze face be like who life don show shege. Him come talk say him never chop since morning. The voice wey him use take talk am, e come be like say him dey either vex say Mmuofunanya choose to born pikin that day, or him dey vex say the pikin come out when time never reach.

“Make I enter buka go chop one. How many days dem talk say you go dey here?”

“Four days,” Mmuofunanya answer give am.

Truth be say, doctor been tell am say she fit go house if she wan go, say nothing been do her body at all as she born. She no even too push like that before the pikin come out, doctor sef come yarn say the pikin dey do like who wan quick enter world, say she never see that kain thing before o.

Doctor come look the pikin, talk say “my pikin, prepare for disappointment o. You go see say this world, no be am at all.” She come dey laugh herself.

Mmuofunanya been no like wetin the doctor talk at all. Why dem go just born pikin, na that kain talk e go first hear? As doctor put the pikin for Mmuofunanya chest, Mmuofunanya come dey talk sweet-sweet things for inside the pikin ear, dey talk say na enjoyment go get the pikin for this life. She come tell doctor say she no fit go back house, say head still dey pain am. Doctor code, come smile give am.

“Okay na. You go dey here extra three days, make I fit observe as body dey do you.”

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As Eze comot the labour room, Mmuofunanya body come balance. Even Mmiri come open her two eye, dey shine am like say she been dey wait make her papa comot. Mmuofunanya come comot for bed, carry the pikin go up one time, like say she don born before. She come dey ask herself, why e be say she been dey fear to born pikin? She come reason am, tell herself say no be to born pikin been dey make am fear, but na Eze naim she been no wan born for.

Before she know say she don carry belle, e get the day wey she see text message for Eze phone, and the person wey send am, him store her name as “Queen.” Mmuofunanya been no wan look the phone o, but him been dey baff when the phone ring, and she come dey reason say maybe na person from office naim wan talk to am. As she pick the phone, naim text message from the same person start to enter back to back.

According to the text, Queen get belle for Eze, and she dey miss Eze die. She come dey ask Eze why him dey blank her text message, whether him no happy say she born pikin for am. Next thing, naim one last text enter the phone:

Eze, go die! I go born my pikin. I no need you.

Eze know say him no try as him do Mmuofunanya like that, but she sef, why she dey look him phone? Ijuta isi nkita, iwelu agba ya mee gini? No be say e even gbadu the Queen babe like that. Wetin consign am consign her bastard pikin?

Mmuofunanya been wan talk plenty things that day, but home training no gree let am talk. She just enter room go cry. As she cry finish, she carry her load comot for house, come go her best friend Ify side go stay. She been don cross mind say lai lai, she no go ever go back Eze house.

After like three weeks wey she dey vomit for morning steady, Mmuofunanya do test, come see say true-true, she get belle. As Ify come back from work, Mmuofunanya show am test result.

Mmuofunanya come dey tell Ify, “Ehen, even if I don get belle, wetin come happen?”.

Naim Ify talk say, “You no get job o. Who go feed you and the pikin?”

Mmuofunanya come talk say she go run am.

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“You know how many women dey pray to dey where you dey?” Ify come dey tell am as she dey rub her leg. “If I see man wey get money like Eze, biko, I go leave this sufferhead work wey I dey do.”

As Ify dey talk, Mmuofunanya come dey feel ungrateful. Her monthly allowance pass Ify own times three.

“But ...”

Ify come ask am, “You go born the pikin abi you no go born am?”.

Mmuofunanya talk say she wan born am.

Ify come talk say, “you no get choice for the matter be that.”

Mmuofunanya know say na truth Ify talk. Even if say she get better work, how she go raise pikin, only am? She no be the kind woman wey go fit raise pikin without papa. People like Queen, na dem dey fit snatch people husband, na dem fit be okpo, na dem fit be side chick. But she, her mama train am well.

Mmuofunanya come dey reason the day wey she carry her leg go back her husband house. Body been dey heavy am, and chest been dey pain am.

She call Ify that night, come dey ask am, “If na better choice I dey make, why e dey do me like say make I cry?”.

Ify come tell am, “Just focus on the pikin, you hear?”

When Mmuofunanya complain say Eze never tell am sorry for wetin him do, Ify come ask am whether she no happy as Eze allow am enter house back.

“Assuming say him tell Queen make she enter house nko? Imagine say him come tell you say make you dey go back where you from come? They you know say all these men fit do that kain thing.”

Mmuofunanya know wetin dey, but the thing still dey do am one kain for body.

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“You go gats forgive and forget o. You go really gats try forget.”

Throughout the pregnancy, na pepper just dey hungry Mmuofunanya. She go grind hot tatashe, put am inside yoghurt, put am inside bread any time wey she wan chop for morning. For afternoon, she go chop hot jollof, if her tongue never burn, she no go rest. For night, she go chop yam with palm oil wey dem pack pepper put for inside. If she chop any food wey pepper no dey, the pikin go dey turn inside belle and Mmuofunanya no go rest. As she tell doctor wetin dey happen, naim doctor tell Mmuofunanya say maybe the pikin go fit dey *see far*. She come ask Mmuofunanya whether e get any matter wey e dey keep for inside chest. Doctor smile give Mmuofunanya make she see say na play she dey play o, but e get as she talk am wey Mmuofunanya know say the doctor want make she tell am one or two things. She don already ask Mmuofunanya before why her husband no dey ever follow am come antenatal.

Mmuofunanya talk say, “Na work dey hold am.”

Doctor come talk say, “Na 21st century be this. E no get any man wey work go hold wey him no go fit come antenatal once, ah ahn” .

Mmuofunanya sing give Mmiri. She don hear other women dey talk say when you born pikin, things must change, but she no ever reason say she go gats adjust everything just because of this one pikin. Mmuofunanya know say she *go fit* give up everything so that her pikin life go better pass her own by far. She for want make her pikin grow make she no dey fear anybody. She come dey reason say she go like make her pikin dey talk her mind any time wey she vex, no be say she go dey lock up like am, or like her own mama sef. Mmuofunanya come dey reason her life, dey reason all the shit wey she gats chop just because she want make her life soft, and she know say she no go want make her daughter suffer the same thing. But wetin she really want make her pikin be for life? Make she dey work like jackie? Abi make e be say one rich man go just come marry am? Life suppose pass all these ones na, other choices suppose dey.

Mmuofunanya hold her pikin, come dey rub am. She come finally see wetin the doctor been dey try do. She come dey talk inside her pikin ear, dey tell am wetin the doctor been talk before wey she nearly vex put. Mmuofunanya tell her pikin say, “The world get as e be o, but you go make am. For this life, you go enter all the door wey fear no let me open.”

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Mmuofunanya nearly burst cry as she dey talk to her pikin.

For TV, person come dey yarn how this year rainy season carry weight pass all the rainy season wey dem don see before. She remember one tori from when she small. Her grandpapa —wey still strong that time — been come see am from village. E come dey complain say rain don scatter all the farm finish. E come talk say e be like say Ala, wey be earth goddess, dey vex because any time wey she dey vex, she go just use rain scatter everywhere, and nothing go fit grow sef.

Mmuofunanya come dey remember all the other things wey she dey try forget since, make she for no dey cry. Body start to pepper am as she dey vex. She come remember the fire wey kill her mama and her papa because trailer wey suppose off fire no get water inside. She reason Eze, as him go dey feel say she suppose happy as him gree come. She come sit up, put her pikin for lap. Mmiri look am, do like say she wan smile. Mmuofunanya come dey smile, next thing, Eze enter inside with toothpick for mouth. All the smile comot Mmuofunanya face. She come charge, start to talk as she dey provoke.

“Come dey go. Me and Mmiri, we no wan see you. Just dey go, we no wan see you again.”

Eze nearly burst laugh. He come talk say if na play, make she stop am, say when doctor clear am, make she and the pikin come house. As Eze waka comot, her heart start to beat like school drum. She been wan run follow Eze, make e be like say she dey play true-true. She waka reach door as she dey hold her pikin, she come stand there as rain dey scatter ground outside. Later she come dey talk say na the rain naim been dey confuse am. For inside her brain, e just be like say Ala dey use rain clean the full earth. She hold Mmiri put for body, dey talk plenty inside her ear, She been dey talk say, Mmiri m, make fear no ever catch us again.

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