

BEAR ME HENCE

Raymond Klevator (Ghana)



“When you leave your home, carry some of its soil with you, so that when you are gone, your heart remains at home,” I was told.

Ntchou did just that.

When Ntchou proposed, my only condition was that he take me away from here. We tied the knot and first thing on his agenda, he brought me to Tsikor. I brought some soil from my home with me. But Ntchou would soon leave for a faraway land with the promise to return. He said he'd take me to some better place. A little after he left, I woke up one day feeling sick. My head turned. I vomited and felt exhausted. I'd soon realise it was rather health than sickness. I was pregnant. Twins were on their way. But their father had just left.

Now, sixty years later here we are. You sit there before me. You ask me to tell you a story. You say Lorlor was our father. Children, you ask me much; you ask me to pour out my sould after I've poured out the soil of my home over the tomb of my son. I am old. I was given life and I gave life back. I brought forth two boys, without their father to hold my shoulder. I bore them in my hands. I had to be strong because they needed my strength. Then they grew. And left.

Gbor and Gbor-gbor were one piece. They blessed my days until they too decided that they had to leave. They say the son always has in him more of his father than the father has of himself. The boys took off one day. I had implored them not to leave. They'd not listen. Why would they? I was already old, too old to them – I still had my sight then.

When we were young, there was a song we'd sing each time we saw someone blind. I don't hear it these days. Well – when was the last time I ventured out the door, anyway? But you children should know the song:

*I spend my days in the hoary shadows,
My eyes closed to the world around
Not for want of desire to, through narrow
Lenses, see the world and return to the ground.
Oh know, oh know you who see
Know that in shadows are shades to see.
Oh know, oh know you who see
Though I see not as you see me.*

Alas, you children!

Alas! My Llorlor!

You know when I was a child – my mother had died bringing forth to me – God rest her soul. My father – the man was what a man should be: compassionate, persevering and upright. I can remember walking by his side as he took me to school. I was full of innocence. The world was not bare to me then. The man broke his back to be a father, sacrificed comfort just to give me what I needed. I'd realise this only in retrospect, much after his poor soul departed, and I had to say adieu. I've always had his picture in my mind. Now, even more. I cannot see the world now, I cannot see your faces. It seems in the nature of things that we are allowed only a few faces in a limited time on earth. And when the time is over, nature shuts

our eyes, and that portal to the soul remains locked until the Grand Opening. They say that until one's final day on earth, the door only lets others in. But on that final day, the door opens to let you out into the world. I have consumed my time of sight on earth. Now, I commune with the faces I've seen over these years behind this bleak curtain of blindness. But you cannot understand these things. You've not seen what my eyes have seen.

When the twins were born, I had to sell our belongings to survive. I had no one. I waited endlessly for my husband... And, I'm waiting still. Look at me, why am I here? Look at my body, battered and broken by the stripes of time. Have I not had enough of pain and loss? Have I not had enough of the world? But they say, one soul belongs to each sole. Here I am, alone: you cannot understand me. You see me sigh and you wonder why. Some have asked why I did not go for a second husband. Because I had one, and still do. And if in the will of things, I slip out of this wakeful sleep before he returns, then I hope – I hope to see him as he is. But I fear that just when I've walked out the door, he appears just in time to see me leave. Children, I'm still in love – madly in love! As from the day I first saw that radiant smile of a man who knew to prostrate in his own strength, to hold in his own weakness, to help in his own desperation. He had dreams – we had dreams. He promised to take me away from here. That's why I'm here. That's why I wait. I've borne children. I've groomed men. And that's why you're here today.

When the twins reached the age of knowledge, I told them about their father. But I made them understand that their place was here. I told them they had to stay upon this earth that is ours. I know! I know! We change. We change time as time changes us. Gbor and Gbor-gbor were all I had left. I'd put the two in school and ensured they got their basic needs. I was their mother, I had to whisper a

dream into their soul. That's what mothers are for. At first, Gbor said he'd be a doctor. His brother said he'd be a pilot. Gbor promised to take care of me and give me all the medicine I needed. His brother promised to take me to the land in the skies. I was proud. Which mother wouldn't be?

It feels like yesterday. The boys would run around playing. I would go out in search of jobs. I did some sewing, some baking, some serving, some farming... anything to keep alive. I'd tell the boys that it was alright. That one day, things would be alright. "It shall be well." One day, they'd be doctor and pilot – my doctor and my pilot. They'd return home from school lamenting the harsh comments of their mates. They wore old, tattered clothes. Their shoes had holes through the soles. They returned home with bruises and blisters. I tended to their wounds with warm water and shea butter. I put them to bed. I watched them sleep. Two angels. Their sleep was my dream. At times, Gbor would turn and fling an arm at his brother in sleep. Gbor-gbor would swing his leg at him in return. This went on through the night. In the morning, the twins woke up arms tied around each other in the embracement of oneness, as though in the denouement of events, Armageddon was resolved, and the two discovered that they were brothers made from the same substance. Those two were a gift of peace for my soul.

Then the day came when they had to leave. Further education, they called it. University. And then it dawned on me that I had one fear in life: I feared the quiet of solitude, the silence of an empty room. I implored the boys. I pleaded with them to stay. I needed them to remain here with the knowledge they had from here. To be doctor and pilot here. I was crazy then. You know what I mean. Tsikor makes neither doctors nor pilots. And what was more, the boys said they wanted to become other things. I didn't understand

them. They'd made up their minds and I knew it was no longer in my hands to will. Indeed, time is a forger of will, wielding the hammer of fate upon the anvil of destiny. So wish took its place, and the two departed...

*Here, I stand at the source
The stream dwindles
down the hasty
hill into the vague
vale
Now, I can hardly make it out – there
Child, you're gone away
so far from me*

Please, do not weep for me. No, no! I've lived a full life, though I've lived it shattered on the floor like a broken pottery dropped by feeble hands. But the hands that made me, and that made you – you know full well – are no feeble hands. Therefore, I say that this shattered soul lies a prestidigitation for you children. I lie ridden, to be read. Maybe, there are signs for your days. Maybe, I portend things to come.

My sons have not returned. No words from those foreign shores. Years! Years! Years! Here I am alone, neither doctor nor pilot to grace my laboured loins. Agonising day and night, waiting in vain to see them. But alas! The winds have business elsewhere – who then will return my sons to me?

But we sit here today because if ever I was a widow, if ever barren, if ever bereaved, it is now. We sit today because we have returned from the fields. We do not return with our hands full, we bring nothing into the barns. There's no harvest for us. Only loss.

Lorlor!

It was one of the worst times herein Tsikor. Right before the eyes of Gbor and Gbor-gbor. I don't know if that changed something in them but it certainly struck a chord within me that since has left a haunting echo in my heart.

It was around the Christmas season and life took on a new air. The rising odorance of hope was gradually engulfing the stench of despair in those days. So much had been going wrong and no one knew why. It felt like it was the time of a plague of all evils. I remember in those days sessions and sessions of prayer and fasting going on. I had my little boys by my side, and watched them closely. Rumour after rumour paralysed us. No one could go out without a whiff of dread. An accident, a murder, some strange sickness... In those days, I worked as a servant for a man I knew only as the Boss. He'd come from far away and looked nothing like us. He was a man of knowledge and had come to do philanthropic work in Tsikor. He was surrounded by men and women from the big city and some others from Tsikor. They wanted to help the farmers grow better crops and raise healthier animals. They wanted to teach the people of Tsikor how to live healthy lives. They wanted to teach us how to be more like the Boss. But Tsikor has its own ways. So they left. And then, I began lending my hand in deliveries to make a living.

One day, I was called upon to deliver a child urgently. I rushed to the house where the woman laboured. My two sons had come along because it was night and they were scared to be alone at home. The tide of the plague had been slowly ebbing and it seemed the Christmas spirit itself was the source of the force that purged the plague. By the time I was on my way to deliver the child, Christmas was only a week away. The scenery of Tsikor had changed and it seemed that most of us had forgotten the agony of the months before.

When I got to the house, the head of the baby was almost visible. The mother screamed in agony. What followed lasted less than three minutes. The baby was out, screaming and kicking. But the mother had suddenly gone silent. Then cold. And that was it for her. The poor husband was devastated. His heart was broken. He couldn't endure the sight of the child. That very night, the man walked into the cold silent night, and since, roamed the haunted streets of Tsikor until he was crashed by a car in his delirium. And so, I took the boy and named him Lorlor – love – because in a world so cruel, a child deserves his fair share of love. Lorlor has since been my son.

I'm still haunted by that night, holding the innocent Lorlor in my arms as his mother lay cold, the poor husband squeezing and imploring her idle body in vain.

I remember one of our poets:

*You lived a youth
You died in your prime
You were covered with earth
Therefore
I'll shed tears upon this earth that holds you in its bosom
Until the seed you are sprouts green
And blossoms again.*

Lorlor, you are my son. Lorlor, you are my son! Lorlor! That is why I have spread the soil of my heart over the specter of your grave. Ah, world! You thief! Nifty thief you are. I should have been laid down beneath the earth. Why do you keep me waiting while I have no eyes to see the sons and daughters of my son, and their own sons and daughters also? I gaze but dimly into the dark vale. In my vision, no light shines, only specters of the bleak night. But such is life. And I have lived it.

Ntchou has not returned. But he was a man, and men can hold on their own. Gbor has not returned, and I feel nothing in the wind of Gbor-gbor's coming. Now, you are the children of love do not leave. Do not leave me alone here.