

103 FOLDS (EXCERPTS)

Gloria Kiconco

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Conditions for Nostalgia

low sun, high colour. the music
is low is light- In the basement
of our neighbours' house, the kids
smile when they nail all the moves in
all the single ladies - pose for
a vinyl cover, a stage lit with
flashing smiles. Christmas and we dance
around the car booming stereo system, a mess
of steps to Koffi Olomide. To Oliver N'goma. Pick a parent
any parent, all playlists lead to Shauri Yako. we reminisce,
we did this once did you too yes we all did and the best
dancer had coins pressed into their palm we can hear
them clink over the years, over the skewed bass line
There is an end to this
day to this week to this work.
There isn't a taxi
to catch to get to a place to a time
to meet to plan
to meet again.
don't miss what's missing.
Make light come in.
don't miss the moment to see
the polaroid darken.

Attempt 1: winning the game ≠ playing the game

Or it's like this:

You are this tree that: dismisses its leaves; rejects the sun so the fire in you is not stoked: reaches its roots into the trauma of others to become a martyr.

Level completed means you are dead. Congratulations? But you are dead.

A star was planted in your centre. In folklore it is a fire mushroom, growing in spite of because of neglect. Because the tree of life is the tree of death. We are counting down the dying boobabs. Because living for others is dying for others.

The day you start to live for yourself, you will be reborn. False.

If you are resisting living in this day, then you are resisting breathing. If the black women you admire aren't enough, then you do not admire yourself you are enough. If five good black men are gathered in a room, then you have seen a rare constellation.

What is enough?

Attempt 2: Aborted

Have to take this life seriously

Have this life

take this life

seriously

refuse

seriously

this life

Have refused

Have refused

Have refused

Input error diagnosis: device not connected

User: Insert "I"

User: Resolve

I have refused to take this life seriously

Attempt 3: a hail mary

Do men think women
pray
to the same god(s)?
to a masochist messiah?
To three days, three beings?
Three masculinities,
in a closed-door meeting?

Anything is possible (if you put your mind to it)

is the worst advice you have given
to date.

I have taken

I put my mind to it that's the problem I put my mind to everything and I can't move a muscle
in this wide-awake sleep paralysis and I think of what I do.

should

I should eat nap

another cup of coffee stretch more

write this story

write to my editor and tell her, forget it,

this story is not happening

buy

herbal supplements

open a bank account in

a different country

in case this one falls apart get back to work but these tweets are funnier than
my bank account is empty.

Sometimes I drink wine perched on a dry bathtub.

That's the almost life of a middle-aged, white TV

mom. What separates us is bath salts and privilege

and passports and race and actually,

this is a chasm.

I don't have time for drama in my boring and routine life.

I've put my identity crisis on hold to sort my career crisis.

I've put my career crisis on hold to sort my depression.

I take a break to clear my head. When I turn around most of my friends are gone.

the middle-aged white TV mom
can
afford therapy and antidepressants and if that fails,
can
buy a gun or the precise assortment of pills for a lethal dose
or, if that fails,
can
afford the kind of brunch where they
serve mimosas but the table isn't sticky after.
I make it out, under the sun, I promise
to make mimosas on weekdays, new nectar
in celebration
in offering
to myself
that I may make
all things
possible

Reasons to run

1. i'm down to 11,000 shillings
2. i'm waiting for the house to empty out
3. a stream of gin slithers through a tiny bottle of sprite
4. the tiled floor, newly cleaned, is sweating
5. everything is neat, I'm still holding my breath
6. "you deserve all the good things"
7. there's so much I want to leave in the month of May
8. I need to create new rituals, read like it's my religion
9. A reminder that this is not about me chimes into my messages
10. the end of the page has become my daily goal
11. "It's not enough to leave him, you must leave his country"
12. I dream of an entire city poisoned. The antidote results in constant vomiting.
13. There is no right way to end things.

Not a portrait, no longer named

I'm sorry I keep trying to wrap you
in a word so beautiful it eclipses
the graveyard spreading across your palms
you tell me – “say it as it is.”

But if I tell this story right, it will
be a riot.

I'm a paragraph in and I can already
see the glow of a burning city
in the distance.

There's an artist who did it better. In that
print you are a mechanical infantry,
marching through noxious golden fumes under
an orange moon. The artist, after she made
this painting for you, lost her sight.

I was two paragraphs into your story when
the artist kissed me and now she can
no longer taste.

Tomorrow I'm going to burn my notes
and burn this book.

I'll spread the ashes over your palms.

I'll wrap you in a word so banal
it will plant laughter in your throat.

I'll kiss your neck and together
we will watch the fire wither.

I promise, you will find a forest in its place
when we wake.

body temple house

You move bloodless through the corridors,
making right everything that was
blown askew. You still believe it's possible
to arrange rage. You dust
the books, plant flowers, dress the walls
with every delicate thing you own.
Nothing can slither in if you close
every door. But there's blood
in the air. Yellow bile
seeping through the stones.
Rancid memories crawl through you
a wildfire itching along your skin
you pull your veins out
thread them through the stone walls
of your house. It hums your pulse
out to the empty evening.
There are clouds pulling across the sky.
The roof creaks and stretches. Every door
flung open is a gun shot.
You can't sleep. Not when the walls
are blooming with tender, tiny
red petals. Not when they're whispering
secrets you never even told yourself.

Trigger days

It rains fat, calamitous drops.
It rains every day now
as soon as you step out of the house
the front door a trigger
for every anxiety to pour
and it does, washes
of emotions
each an equation a tangled knot a formula
to break down into basic elements
it may be easier to understand
if you lay out all the pieces.
I wait for Wednesday
the day that saves or breaks me
the peak where the week pitches
into a solution of memories, dreams
into the sticky wax of melted crayons
on the floor or
into the clean ink lines
of a promised path
It gets harder to write, harder
to draw, knuckles cringe
You text me that you're looking for a fight
Well, I'm dying to burn something down
meet me outside

Dispatch: MX to SA

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How does it feel when wounds brush up against wounds?

...

*My hands don't shake any more. I've set
aside black lines and divides.*

You trace the streets of a country divided/ sub-divided / fragmented
honey combs/ and plant the thin lines of delicate trees that take root
on both sides/ of a cut.

Your hands are always warmer and more open
than I expect, certain, as they work through my hair,
rub my back, hold my little hand in theirs, your
nails perfectly shaped.

...

How do your shaking hands pick up thin black lines
and use them to suture a breathing gap?

...

*I use skin grafts to heal. The cells speak
to each other. make an accord. meet in the middle.*

This month is celibate. It scooped me from the clamour of my corner flat (and the corner bed in the corner room I occupy) to deposit me in an open city. The heat spills from the sky's clumsy fingers. I've never seen if the sky is blue. To look up is to go blind. I look down. I follow the ventricles of an unfolding town. Every edge turns over another trading center, another market, another petrol station, another mosque to meet me. This month is jabbing elbows into the sides of anyone that draws close to me. I concede. Not defeat. A time to wait.

My old skin wants time and I'm reluctant to hand it over. I love to count minutes, hours, days. calculate all the time I have left. open my time account to look at all the shiny hours I have to spend. This month wants my time. This month wants me to be frugal with my time. It suspects most people are stealing my time. If they are, it's because I let them. I can't complain because this too is a demand of this celibate month. No words to waste. Today, this celibate month asks me not to drink. It tells me to read. To rest. To write. I still count. The numbers are soothing. Even formulas I can't decipher give me peace.

...

You learn the rules so you know where to bend them.
But you're still working on the writing. It's not enough. It's never enough. You keep buying notebooks hoping words will recognise their need to be filled. You receive no epiphanies.

One day, you just get out of bed. You shower and you work. This matters most. Months pass but you still don't have all the feeling back in your organs. Primarily:
the burst of excitement in your stomach
the stretch in your cheeks of a real smile
the ability to fully open your eyes

You are most concerned with your tears. You haven't felt them in months.

When the tears finally come, you're hunched over a fresh hot burger at 4am in a reggae bar. They come in hot and fast and you think this is pretty good.
burger

Everyone in your life says you're soft.

What's the prize for being hard?

Not everyone can be a cliffside. Someone has to be the water
and someone else, the cave
where the water comes to rest.