

WAIT

A monologue By Oladipo Agboluaje

*A band of musicians and singers on stage, perform 'Iya ni wura'.
A woman with a gourd of palm wine enters. She moves to the middle of the stage.
She performs a libation with the palm wine. The singers respond with 'Ase' to
her prayer at the appropriate moments.*

To my ancestors, this is for you –
May I never insult your memory by belittling the names you have given
me
Ase
May you always protect me on this earth
May the skin you have shed on your lifelong journey
Guide me along the perilous path of this thorny life.
May you guide me to my destiny
To my mothers who put shoes on my feet
This is for you
May you never have cause to draw water from the wells of your eyes in
sadness over me
May the river of sweat and tears that you have shed over me carry me to
the port your prayers have ordained as my destination
Ase
The singers hum 'Iya Ni Wura'.
When I was growing up the word that held my destiny to ransom was
'Wait'
When I asked my father why it was
that my brothers were in school while I worked at home he said to me
with stern wisdom
Wait
When I asked my mother why my eldest sister had been married off be-
fore I could appreciate her and thank her for being there for me, all she
said to me with a knowing nod that looked as if it were tipping a heavy

WAIT

load from her head was

Wait

When finally my parents grudgingly sent me to primary school at an age I should have begun secondary school I didn't ask why. Times had changed and men wanted women with some education to show they had embraced modernity

Though I was years behind my male contemporaries, my anger was doused by the waters of education. I was so grateful for the opportunity to sail this boat into my future that I forgave my parents for making me

Wait

I was an excellent student. I scored the highest mark in the entrance exams to secondary school, the first girl in my village to do so

My fellow pupils, boy and girl, congratulated me, my teacher told me the sky was my limit

Awaiting me was a scholarship to attend the government college. Doors were opening wide. I could not

Wait

To hold the admission letter in my hand

It started raining heavily. People scurried and walked on the side of the road as the road became a river

And I laughed as I splashed in the river on the way to the headmaster's office, to begin the next chapter of my destiny

But the headmaster decided on this occasion that second place was higher than first place. I asked him why. He told me I was rude to question him.

He told me to

Wait

Outside his office

There he caned me and sent me home howling to my parents

At home Mother smiled with a knowing nod that looked as if it was tipping a heavy load from her head as I told Father what had happened

Father put on his shoes and followed me back to school to meet the headmaster

Oh, the pride in my heart that my father was standing up for me! I kept repeating to myself all the way to the school, Headmaster, just you

Wait

At the Headmaster's office my father bent his head in shame and grovelled an apology for my behaviour

He slapped the disbelief from my eyes and ordered me to kneel and beg the man who had blocked my destiny

He said he did not know who had put the idea in my head that I would continue my education

That I would follow my sister into early marriage

Did I need a certificate to pound yam, to sweep the floor, to get pregnant,
to cater to my husband's needs? Just you

Wait

Till we get home. I will deal with you for disgracing me – kneel!

Disbelief had ceded to anger as I crumbled to my knees

On the way home, over and above Father's insults I had resolved that no
one will ever decide my future again

I was a girl but in me beat the heart of a woman.

A woman is not a child

When we got home the silence of my mother nearly broke me.

Not a word, not one word

That afternoon I gathered my exam report and what money I could steal

All I had to do now was

Wait

For night to fall

I ran away to the city where my big sister lived with her husband and my
three nieces. Feeling how she might have felt, being robbed of an educa-
tion I did not know what to expect

I had never got the chance to thank her for being the big sister

She welcomed me with wide arms and a wider smile

I told them what had happened, why I was here

I took in their sympathy and thought if I should

Wait

To say what I really wanted from them but thought now's a time as good
as any -

I offered to look after my nieces while she worked as a tailor if she and
her husband would send me to school

They deliberated in their bedroom for what to me seemed an eternity. All
I could do was

Wait

I had no one else to turn to

If they said no...

Finally they came out

They said yes

I danced with my nieces who were too young to know why I was so hap-
py but danced anyway because children always respond to happiness

I told my nieces that all of them would be great women in future, that I
would pave the way for them and they laughed their cheeky laugh and
then asked for ice cream

On the morning of my first day at school I stood proudly in my uniform
my sister had sewn for me.

My sister looked at me, I could see she was living her dream through me.

WAIT

As I picked up my bag and headed for the door my sister called out

Wait

She could not have changed her mind, not my sister?

She blew away my worries with her smile and said, these are my words to you for now and for the future

She said to me, take every person as you see them

She said to me she was lucky she found her husband, her life partner who looked at the world in a different light. There are many men like him, she said.

When you start school never lower your voice in class, never hide your intelligence, your courage, for it will attract more boys than it will repulse, boys who will respect you

She said to me, not every girl is your sister. There will be girls who will laugh with you but inside their hearts harbour bitter thoughts towards you

Most importantly be yourself for you. Be yourself and become what you will become, do not let any person, man or woman belittle you

You did not come into this world for anyone. Others have their own path to take, you have your own path

She said on the weekend we would return to our village to explain to our parents and she would make them understand

But what if they didn't understand, I asked.

Their choice should not interrupt your journey. In time everyone will see the light, but for now

Walk into your future

I left the imprint of my body on her and walked through the door

It started raining heavily. People scurried and walked on the side of the road as the road became a river

And I laughed as I splashed in the river on the road

My song was my boat that carried me to begin the next chapter of my destiny

Just you

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