
Journey of Impulses

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This book is dedicated to the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goals and all the unsung heroes fighting for each one.

Prologue

My name is Malaika and I have been through it all. I come from southern Nigeria. A state with many rivers called 'Rivers State'. My hometown is one you might not know about. The grass is green; the earthen soil is rich black; the trees split the skyline with their elegance; the birds embrace the cold winds and you can tell my hometown from any other just by the smell of the mangrove swamps.

The children love to swim close to shore and hunt for crabs. The grownups love to fish in carved canoes come nighttime.

Somewhere in a mother's kitchen, the young ones are picking periwinkles out of shells or you hear the steady rhythm of the mortar and pestle. You may see smoke rising from the low burning cinders of the firewood; you may see a child on her knees slightly blowing at the flames and then you may hear a call from an elder pointing to the cut zinc sheet which would aid in fanning the flames.

Somewhere in the compound, you may see a three-year old on a sand heap holding a strange object in his hand. You can tell his bare body has

had a more than fair share of sunlight but you can barely tell the color of his pant. He speaks to himself in a language only he understands and replies with a smile. He bathes the object in sand and rubs it on his protruded belly.

Somewhere in the farm beside the house, you may see the elder children pick out weeds with a frown. The intense heat of the sun has crested their foreheads with ripples of sweat. It suddenly starts to rain and they race each other to the nearest mango tree to find shade. They all laugh because the last to arrive slipped and fell in the moistened mud. He also laughs and opens his palms out to the rains to wash them free of mud. That rich black earthen soil.

You may hear calls that breakfast is ready and the you may see the children race themselves to answer their mother's call. You may see the plates of food arranged on the floor and the second born arguing with the first that he or she arrived first and already picked the largest portion. You may hear an insult and see a fight on some days; you may hear a word of caution on other days.

My hometown like any other has customs and traditions. They still tell moonlight tales in some parts and in others, the family sits in front of a television set. I could go on and on but this is not a story about my dear hometown.

My name is Malaika and I have been through it all.

I come from a family of Five. My father, mother, two elder sisters and I.

My father died when I was very young. I saw really old pictures of him but that is all I can remember. A face. It is a good thing though as it gives me the chance to paint him as the perfect father, but was he?

The eldest of my sisters is also late. She died during childbirth giving birth to a boy who also did not survive. My family of five is now a family of three: My mother, elder sister and I.

How did it come to this? A southerner roaming the streets of a busy city.

I miss my hometown but I believe it is lost to me forever.

Part One: Hunger

I really did not know what it felt like to be hungry... like really hungry.

For the past week, I could not boast of a proper meal and sincerely I was at my breaking point.

It was a Saturday night or rather a Sunday morning. 12: 25 a.m. read the time from my phone's display. The pangs of hunger somehow sharpened all my senses. I felt numbness in my toes and fingers like the blood in my body was slowly flowing towards my centre.

I heard every single creak and clang. Those damn rats. I hated them but couldn't really hate them now. I sympathized with them. At this point in time, we weren't too different. I had become a hunter. An animal driven by pure instinct. Only difference was that I laid on my bed consciously aware of every single worm in my intestines and the rats were on the hunt. A sacred search for food.

I could hear them (or it) nibbling on something that sounded like a bean. And then I could hear even farther in the stillness of the night or morning.

The sounds were strangely familiar but I never really knew the creatures that made them. The sounds pierced the vagueness of the night and I could recall my hometown.

I listened intently and wondered if they were edible. These creatures. I imagined myself creeping and hunting them down. It sounded like croaking but I was perfectly sure they were not frogs.

I wondered if hunger could lead to insanity. If it would be my body's last survival mechanism to ensure I could eat anything that my pride, morality or consciousness would not let me eat.

If I was mad, I could steal I thought, or eat in the garbage and not even know it.

And then a thought crossed my mind. Could a person become so hungry that they fed on themselves? So gross was the thought that I let it slip away as quickly as it came. That was the last thing I wanted to imagine right now.

I was drifted back to reality by the clang of my empty metal pot. Good luck to that, I thought to the rat in my kitchen.

Some days ago, lying with my stomach to the bed relieved the hunger a little but right now, nothing was working. I was restless like a person straight out of an appendix operation.

My mother always said 'Hunger makes you wiser'... 'more aware; more conscious'.

I now truly understood her. Just some days ago, I broke the record on my game of tetris. Something I had not been able to do since my friend and neighbor put up a high score.

My hunger alienated her. She was partially the cause of my predicament. Or was she?

I blamed myself more. I never really blamed anyone else for anything. It was how I was wired. 100% responsibility. 100% independence. 100% blame acceptance, even unto death.

This was the reason I had not yet boarded a taxi to my hometown. To a welcoming mother. Oh how I missed her.

So many things are crossing my mind at the same time. Time seems very slow. The next time I pressed a button on my phone, I expected it to be past two but it was only 1:25 a.m. I now wondered if I would make it through the night.

I imagined my neighbors waking up Sunday morning and finding my corpse. Lost to a primary need: Hunger.

I then remembered that I bolted the door before I slept. Finding my corpse would take a lot longer being that the door was a heavy metal one and I was not a really social being.

I somehow now understood all the things that I was missing. I really wasn't living life the way I ought to but then life wasn't helping either.

Sometimes I opened my eyes wide and looked around just to make sure I was still alive. My eyes were watery but were now clouded and heavy. I couldn't control the yawning either.

I guess when hungry, your sight is dulled and other senses heightened. It took a great deal of effort to see objects clearly. My joints felt weaker and my bones were tired of being together.

I now noticed that just like the boss of a big company who didn't notice his low level staff, I was alive and alive, not noticing the little work being done in my body... in holding my joints together; in pushing my blood around. Blood because all my nerves, veins and arteries were now visible on my thin body.

My only assurance was that the bones in a body does not shrink... or does it? It was the only thing that kept me from disappearing into thin air. I wondered what would happen when all my flesh was gone and I was thin to the bone.

Would my bone marrow dry up? At times I almost gave in to the hunger. To the insanity. What kept me together was a book I just read. 'The little prince' by an author who I could not earlier recall his name but could now perfectly recall (Antoine de Saint-Exupery).

Wow... I wish I could tap into this but it was not a pleasant place to be in. I loved my mind now. The way it worked. The way it brought back archived memories and facts that I didn't know existed in the vaults of my memory.

I wish I could retrieve more memories. Memories about my father. But I was way too tired for that. The mosquitoes were now buzzing in my ears.

Oh lord! they were deafening. Before I slept, I was restless. I played songs till my battery was low and then I listened to the radio.

I can now feel my wrist ache. Every alphabet or letter I write now is exhausting. My wrist feels weightless. Like my very essence or juices were being sucked out of them. I think I had exhausted all my glucose reserves. The last good thing I ate was boiled yam and a drop of red oil. Literally a drop of palm oil. No eggs boiled or fried or anything like that. No supplements. Not even salt. Just plain boiled yam which tasted gloriously.

It was my widow's meal. The last thing I would taste if I dropped down dead this very second. I could now hear my neighbors snoring loudly and they were gentle snorers. If I was in the other room, my snoring would have sounded way worse. It was one of my genetic flaws.

This reminded me of Okonkwo in 'Things fall apart' by Chinua Achebe. He was a powerful man whose power resonated in his snoring. Why would I remember this now? I read that book ages ago.

I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my shoulders. I finally decided to tap into this by leaving a memoir behind in case I died. I wondered if it would be my last gift to the world... a parting gift.

I hoped with this, the well doing parts of the world would have a faint idea what it felt like to be hungry.

My shoulders feel slightly burning. It must have been from the writing.

My entire leg is now numb. I feel paralyzed and my toes are trembling.

I decided to lie down and write with a pillow beneath my stomach to ease the pain a little.

It was finally past two. 2:11 a.m. to be precise. How time flies now sounded ironical. The gentle raindrops now crept into my consciousness. I felt like I could hear every drop.

It sounded like notes on an ancient piano... It was beautiful.

As I slowly brushed my limits, thoughts from a different book creeped into my mind. 'Do you have the soul of a slave or the soul of a free man?' I was an avid reader and it was a book called 'The richest man in Babylon'.

I wondered who was hungrier. Him or I. In the book, he was in a desert area. His lips were cracked and bleeding. A runaway slave running through a desert with fierce winds and sand storms.

I wondered how anyone could survive that and then I remembered my city, my hometown was just a little piece in a world without bounds. I knew somewhere close to the north pole; people were dying because they could not afford heat. I also knew somewhere in northern Africa or India; people were dying of dehydration. It is a cruel world. But it is our world still.

The human will is really unbreakable... or is it? My will to survive was slowly deteriorating. If I made it till morning, I wondered what I would do.

I remembered the story of the prodigal son and I knew I wouldn't be able to make it home if I tried. It was thirty minutes' drive. I rather die here where my corpse would be easily found than in a cab on the road to my village.

What would stop the driver from throwing my corpse into the bush or worse, a river? To be feasted on by crabs and fish.

At this point, my handwriting is less visible as I just scribble words and my eyes get dimmer. The light from the rechargeable lamp seems to be fading.

My immune system was weakened as a result of my hunger. I now had terrible catarrh and blowing my nose was like many needles piercing my chest and lungs.

The rat still searches onwards and relentlessly for food in my kitchen. I didn't have the energy to pounce on it. I was like the overfed lion in my grandma's stories who watched the stubborn goat dance around it.

Ironically, I was truly the over-hungry lion who didn't have the energy to partake in one last hunt.

I was like the lion who felt even though it caught the prey miraculously, it still wouldn't have the strength to feed. To tear through the skin and bones of the prey.

[2:25 a.m.]

A few hours to daylight. Time is an enemy of man. It is quick to the joyous moments of life but annoyingly slow at the most painful moments. Moments like bleeding out from injuries sustained in a car accident or bleeding out at childbirth gone wrong.

Moments like this.

Maybe the world wants us to be more aware. Maybe this feeling is our factory reset and we can only download and install nuggets of happiness along the way.

Maybe the world wants us to settle at becoming animals driven by pure instinct. Thank God for civilization.

I wondered if life was better now or then but then each age has its advantages and disadvantages. All the sounds in my ear had reduced.

I closed my eyes shut because I could see nothing temporarily and my head spun. I focused on the writing which was successfully distracting.

Then the previous sounds were back again. Something-crackers they were called, I thought. Night crackers? I just couldn't recall and I hated it because the more I tried, the farther I drifted away from remembering.

But their calls ruled the sounds I heard. Seconded by my neighbors snoring of course.

Even the rat was silent. I wondered if it had eaten to its fill or it was dead from hunger. My kitchen was empty to a human stomach but maybe to a rat, there was something to savor. I had taken my trash out the previous night so good luck to that.

I now wrote with one eye closed or rather one eye open. My left eye had given up. One more worker quitting, I thought to myself.

I begged it come back and stay open; that I would appreciate it even more and to my surprise it did.

As this part comes to a close, I guess this was one of the purest of feelings I ever had. 'Hunger'

I close the pages of my book and turn on the bed hoping to catch some sleep.

Hoping to dream of my hometown and my favorite meal: '*Onunu*' and native fish sauce.

Knowing it is a lost course.

[2:48 a.m.]