

## Life Within

Orange dust ran over his face. Her perfume twirled up his nostrils. Ants marched in place on his eyebrows. A dry hollow sound rolled out of his open mouth to the sole baobab tree. An ache for a light spot back in time, a seed unopened, a house shuttered. Dust speaks its memories even if not gathered, like marrow it knows deep in its essence the truth, which is the future, the present.

Orange dust ran over his face. The Harmattan began early with the force of an elephant stampeding. Faces became powdered quick. Cars lacked their shine in a minute's time outside. Months without rain. Skin cracked, hair cracked. Everyone and everything waited for water. Waiting for something to fall, to fill what was waiting inside, to brush the outside.

Orange dust always had power. The people feared it and revered it. The swirling dust told them they were not in control—all they could do was watch. Parts of them fell off during Harmattan. The parts they no longer needed—the dead skin, the half-alive leaves, the brittle vines, whatever was hanging on could be torn off, could be broken and taken to the wind and dust.

Surrender to the dust storm screeched the wind. It was right to pause and give thanks to the prior and future rains. Turning towards the screech, he asked it "Where do I try next? What sign of direction can I expect?" The wind died down. It was quiet and the air began to clear. He could make out all of the baobab's branches. The grandma of the Sahel. Wise sage. Spiritual anchor. Its gnarled branches and solid trunk called him to mentally encircle it, pressing his heart deep to its core, opening his pathways to receive the tree's vibrant force that sustained it already for over a hundred years. Closing his eyes, inside of him it felt like a glow in the dark stick in his heart, as if this green light was entering him from the tree. He breathed deep and felt the inner glow, felt the love and power of the tree. The green glow soothed the dust racing over his face and arms. He knew the tree's inner force rooted to his heart would water him and carry him through these dry times.

With the tree's glow inside him he did not need hope of her return, did not need to imagine her perfume. The house and his life could open with the baobab's force. Like a hug from his great-grandmother, he could see through the dust of the Harmattan to the tree in a few months' time, ripe with green fruit.