When We Were Fireflies BOOKS



When We Were FIRETEES PROPERITES

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The Whispering Trees Season of Crimson Blossoms Dreams and Assorted Nightmares

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS



To the June Bugs.

And

To all those who love even in the overwhelming presence of hate.

And those places where flames of odium licked lovelor dives.

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKINGS.



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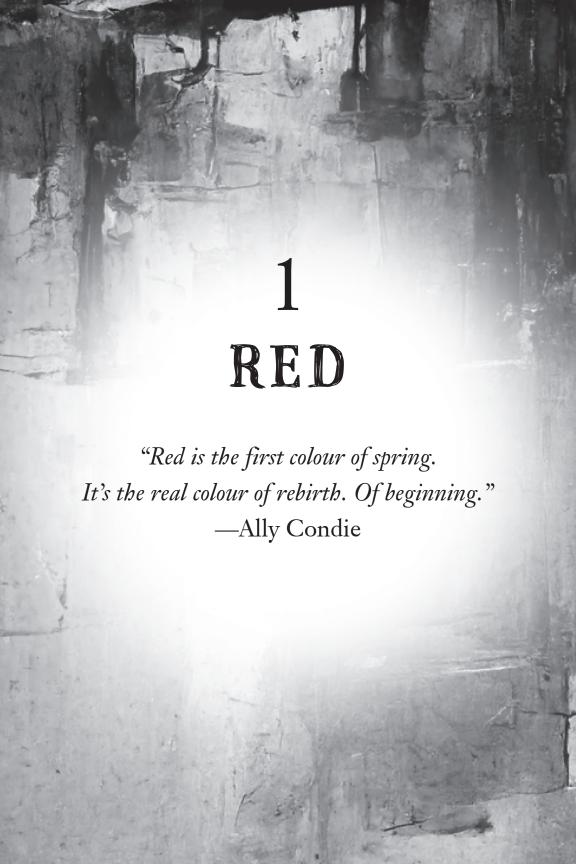
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An Artist Meets a Train

The first time Yarima Lalo saw a train trundling into the Idu Station on a hot June day in Abuja was also the first time it occurred to him that once, many years before, he had been murdered in the carriage of an old locomotive with well-worn, seaweed-green seats.

The instant he heard the blatting horns and the rumble of the engine from a distance, he knew, with unwavering conviction that in a previous life, one he had had no recollection of until that moment, he had had his head smashed in by an angry, squat man with a club. Memories of that incident—the metallic taste of his own blood in his mouth, its fine spray on the train's upholstery—rolled towards him like the approaching Chinesemade demon with a frightening roar and overwhelming certainty. The force of it pulled him towards the platform edge until a railway man tugged at his shirt, glowered at him and asked if he was crazy or just wanted to foul the new tracks with his blood.

"Kai! Who do you think is going to clean up that mess, eh?" The man's thick moustache arched downwards and his scraggly eyebrows furrowed into a scowl. "First time train is running in thirty years in this country and already some soko is trying to soil it with gore." He spat on the tracks and turned away, just as the train zipped past, stirring a gust that rattled Lalo, still stunned by the confetti of images popping in his head.

Before that Friday, and as far as he could remember, Lalo

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had never before seen a moving train. Determined to rid himself of that besmirchment, he had come to the station, stood in the middle of the hall and inhaled the still-heady smell of fresh paint. He crossed the gleaming hall, his reflection on the tiles distorted by the LED lamps in the high ceiling. Lalo was desperate to banish sad memories of the decaying carriages he had seen years before at the Jos train station. A raw army recruit at the time, he was exploring the Jos terminus when he was confronted by grey cargo carriages withering away at the station they had slithered into three decades before. Wheels fused onto the tracks by rust, gaping cavities of pussing doors and windowpanes, loose electrical fittings dangling by wires knocking hauntingly against the panels in the light draft. Each bit of flaking paintwork ferried away by the harmattan breeze, like broken moults of a serpent, was inscribed with a small piece of history.

That image slipped into the shadows of his thoughts only to resurface from time to time over the years. The last time it did, two days before his birthday, he set up the easel in the corner of his small, cluttered studio on Kolda Street, plugged in his earphones, as he often did when he worked, and splattered this grey, haunting image onto the canvas, all the while bobbing his head to the music in his ears. He was rubbing in the grey skies over the carriages with his fingers when the small silver bells on the door tinkled as it opened to let in his patron, Ben Bangos, a man the size of a fully-grown orang-utan with an afro like an upturned eagle's nest. He was followed in by his driver, whose potbelly and flowing kaftan gave the false impression he was the principal, especially since Bangos himself was wearing jean shorts and a simple white T-shirt.