

Kasimma's stories and poems appear on Guernica, LitHub, Writer's Digest, Meet Cute, Native Skin, The Puritan, Kikwetu, Afreecan Read, and in many other journals and anthologies. She is the author of All Shades of Iberibe and a Nikky Finney Fellow. She's been awarded writers' residencies and workshops across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Kasimma has enjoyed, very thankfully, the privilege of learning under the voices of Wole Soyinka, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Lola Shoneyin, and others. You can read more about her and her works on <https://kasimma.com/read-online>. Kasimma is from Igboland—obodo ndi dike.

Grief is a Rock

Kasimma

Grief is a rock. One can neither chew nor swallow it. One can only carry and, God healing, along the way, drop it. I mean, come to think of it, like really, really, who wants to come and be carrying a rock up and down?

I find that this rock is constantly sitting on my shoulder, and, of course, freaking weighing me down. Because of its weight, I drag myself through the hospital hallway, through the oceans trudging past, faces swollen, some eyes red, feet slapping the hell out of the poor ground. There are more airs than oceans here. We, the airs, only acknowledge each other with a nod and go on our way.

An ocean with braided, long, black hair sits on the bench. Her intertwined fingers bear the weight of her head. Her eyes, leaking colourless, odourless, salty fluid, are stuck to the door labelled THEATRE. I go through the door and, you know, take a look. A muscular ocean is lying on the slab, arms spread out like the crucified Jesus. A team of oceans, dressed in green scrubs, surround him, opening or closing or washing some space in his head. I leave. I sit on the bench beside the crying ocean. She hugs herself as though she's cold. I wonder if she sees me. I wish I can say sorry to the crying ocean and tell her that at least her ocean has other oceans fighting to save his life. In my case, I arrived dead—well not dead, dead, but brain-dead, which is equal to death, right?

It sounds like a church bell. "We're set to pull the plugs. Do you want to say goodbye?"

I shut my eyes tight. I appear there. She's still there. The idiot. No, idiots are cool. The... the... hmmm... the frog who literally put this rock on my shoulder. She's there, wiping crocodile tears, and talking on the phone with... well, crocodile.

"I can't," crocodile says, her voice shaky.

“He will be gone in a few hours. Say your goodbyes,” frog insisted.
(Please I am not capitalizing any frog’s name. Colonizers, kindly avoid me).

frog covers her face and bawls. I stand there. Next thing, frog is positioning her phone to my face—not this one, the one asleep, no, brain-dead on the bed. crocodile covers her mouth, shuts her eyes.

“Musa,” she says, shakes like a car entering a pothole, wipes her eyes. “Please, forgive me. I love you. I did not lie. I cannot live with myself. I might just die.” She sniffs and recycles snot on her cheeks. “When you go, go well. It is well with you. Please forgive me.”

Something in me gives. My heart used to beat for crocodile, but now, I need life-support machine to keep the heart beating.

frog grabs my palm and squeezes. “Broda mi, I did not intend for this to happen. I swear I was going to let her go because she makes you so happy. Please, forgive me. If you can still remember anything, think of our childhood, not this.”

Of course, I can remember. I’m only brain-dead. Mere mortals! I remember. Everything! Growing up with frog. Looking out for her in school. My whole life has been with frog. She is the one that introduced me to crocodile. And I fell in love: my mistake.

My legs wobble—not the brain-dead ones! The rock grows heavier and I sink to the ground. I am back to where I eavesdropped on them.

My love, this is the last.

No, it can’t be.

It has to be. You make him so happy. You’re getting married tomorrow. I will not ruin my brother’s marriage because of my own love interest.

So you’re really going to America?

Yes. Distance is needed.

And it’s America where you will easily find another lesbian that you decided to go.

It’s hard for me. But he is my brother. And you love him. This whole cover-up arrangement was a mistake. I shouldn’t have introduced you to him. But, be that as it may, he is my brother, and I love him. We have to end it.

crocodile and frog are crying. frog places her head on my chest—yes, please, the brain-dead one. I sink further into the ground. Stupid rock! Did she give this rock to me or did I find it and place it on my shoulder myself? I rake myself from the ground.

I’m grieving my own death. Grieving a lover who hurt me. Grieving a sister who betrayed me. Why didn’t I walk away after eavesdropping? If I did, I might not have seen them naked, cuddling, confirming my fears. I might not have jumped into the car, into the road, into a truck.

But frog is sorry. I can see it in her heart—look, I’m not like you; I see these things. I see the rock in her chest. It’s even bigger than mine. I want to take it away. I cannot allow her carry this rock forever. I reach into her chest. I slide my hands into her beating heart, carefully avoiding her veins and arteries. I try to lift the rock. I cannot. And I know why. Her rock is as big as Zuma—do you know Zuma rock: well, ask Google.

It will be better for frog to die than to live with that Zuma in her heart. But why can’t I save her? I start to cry. I shake. I fall on the ground. I shake/cry until I feel light. I raise my shoulder. It’s light. My rock is gone. I jump. I feel light. I look at frog—no, not frog. Her name is Zainab. Her head is no longer on my chest. Her eyes are wide-opened. I follow her gaze.

Colourless, odourless, salty liquid leaks from my eyes—yes, the brain-dead ones.