

in their exuberance, showering sand over staid folk. When this happens, it is simple, for those who find this tiresome, either to move to another part of the beach, or else to request the players to move away, which, providing they are not too rapt in their game, they will do; what is remarkable is the complete absence of any resentment or malice or viciousness, for the Ghanaians are not usually a violent people, and they display an unusual tolerance.

The beach has many itinerant vendors of a variety of wares, particularly fruit which is carried in large shallow baskets on the statuesque heads of handsome Ga women who sway along, clad in their printed flowered cloths. In season they sell pine-apples at 25c (2s.6d.),

coconuts at 10c (1s.), and oranges, mangoes or bananas at about eight for 10c (1s.). They will willingly peel any fruit for their customers, and it is an impressive sight to see one of the fruitsellers, still balancing the heavy basket on her head, deftly holding a pine-apple in one hand and her cutlass in the other, usually with a small child playing round her legs. There are also little girls who sell roasted groundnuts, wrapped in pieces of newspaper at 1d. a handful, and men from Northern Ghana who offer the brightly coloured woven baskets of their region; there are women who vend the attractively carved traditional Ashanti stools, and a cheerful Nigerian who has a good stock of jewellery and trinkets, who will offer me a beer on a day when

Okara

PIANO AND DRUMS

*When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
the leopard snarling about to leap
and the hunters crouch with spears poised;*

*And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
topples the years and at once I'm
in my mother's laps a suckling;
at once I'm walking simple
paths with no innovations,
rugged, fashioned with the naked
warmth of hurrying feet and groping hearts
in green leaves and wild flowers pulsing.*

*Then I hear a wailing piano
solo speaking of complex ways
in tear-furrowed concerto;
of far away lands
and new horizons with
coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
of a phrase at a daggerpoint.*

*And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.*

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Soyinka

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

*The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. 'Madam,' I warned,
'I hate a wasted journey—I am African.'
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurised good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lip-stick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
'HOW DARK?' . . . I had not misheard . . . 'ARE
YOU LIGHT
'OR VERY DARK?' Button B. Button A. Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—
'ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?' Revelation
came.
'You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?'
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose, 'West African sepia'—and as an afterthought,
'Down in my passport.' Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. 'WHAT'S THAT?,' conceding
'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'
'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether.'
'Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
'The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
'Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused—
'Foolishly madam—by sitting down, has turned
'My bottom raven black—One moment madam!'—
sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunder clap
About my ears—'Madam,' I pleaded, 'Wouldn't you
rather
'See for yourself?'*