

SECTION H: POEM

Still Heart

Alex Asigbo

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To the memory of Auten Romiwa Enaye,

Who died a death and killed a dream

And it happened that on a certain day in a certain month at the University of Port Harcourt in the year of our Lord, Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Two, The Circle came together to deliberate. And they spoke and said that at such and such a time, they would of need fulfill certain objectives. For then, they reasoned that their chosen profession is still in need of fresh blood, fresh ideas and fresh hands. Thus, they resolved that at such a time, they must of necessity; provide all these to their chosen profession.

And there and then, The Circle initiated a ritual. And they gave it to themselves as covenant that at a particular time, in certain evenings, they are to wander abroad from their rooms to a certain secluded area. And that spot is to become privy to their most private confessions. But that is not the end of the story for there they are to regurgitate and meditate on certain issues, prevalently those concerning Eve and how it is that this sly creature, soft of bone and build could tame Adam – taut and strong.

And they drew freely from experiences of members of the Circle – analyzing, dissecting and formulating theories as to what Adam could do if he must free himself. And it happened that on a certain day, the one that was to die came to The Circle and declared himself free of a daughter of Eve who before now was known to be his mistress. Whereupon, The Circle fell to question and to discern what might have inspired his new found love for freedom and how he intends to stay free and friendly to this daughter of Eve.

And he, the one that was to die, made a boast and said that such a feat he had achieved even though in the opinion of The Circle, that was no mean feat. A bet was straight away placed but within a few weeks, the one that was to die, capitulated. No, no, he stayed free, thanks to The

Circle, but unfriendly and to that score, a poem was written by the one that was to die and promptly replied by the cynic of The Circle.

The story did not end there for then a plague came into The Circle. For then, two of the four members of The Circle were bitten by the “Born Again” bug. Whereupon, it threatened to break the union, for then, the two saw their former habits and indulgences as unworthy of their holy selves. And it was a tough time indeed for The Circle for a bond forged strong and tight was strained to breaking point. We all felt the strain and knew that we must do something to correct such an anomaly. And we set to work, each in his individual way on how we might save a precarious situation until providence struck and the one that was to die was “debugged”. And it proved quite a reunion for The Circle for he was by far, the most infected of the bug.

Still the story did not end there for The Circle was not complete without its intellectual wrangling and debates. Indeed, so vast a field did we cover that we were easily the pivot of the class. From the Greeks to the Romans, the English, the French, the Germans, the Russians, the Scandinavians and the Africans – none were spared our avid readings. And we enjoyed every bit of it, challenging ourselves, routinely.

And he, the one that was to die was called Gus de Bois and Regular Jerry, after Jerry in Albee’s *Zoo Story*, for he like the rest of us was always in search of something. (Himself?). And the rest of us were called by various other Pseudonyms, each according to occasion and inclination. And we thrilled “The Crab” with our writings; for not a week was to pass without something novel from our bleeding pens. And even our Lecturers took heed to their actions in front of us fearing a rejoinder from our ever active pens. And often times our Notice Board bore the brunt of attacks as the butts of our stories vented their spleen on the hapless Notice Board for we wrote under various pseudonyms hence could not be easily traced.

And there came a certain day in the month of December, Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Three being a year of our Lord that the one that was to die fell severely ill and we in hospital to see him that was to die. Whereupon he fixed his eyes on us and volunteered to pay whatever debts he might be owing to members of The Circle and we stupefied, inquired if he was planning to die. He, laughing, waved it aside and we rested the matter there and the one that was to die got better and returned to The Circle to continue our debates.

And it happened that on a certain day in the Month of February Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Four, it being a year of our Lord, the one that was to die undertook a journey that was to be his last to Lagos, to be followed shortly by the Cynic of Circle, we having finished our programs at the Ivory Tower. And it happened that as was his wont, he did not call on the Cynic; whereupon, my sister-in-law stood on my neck for me to go and check on the one that was to die.

And it happened however, that I did not go to see my friend but rather, returned directly to our station where about a week later, an ill wind carried it to our ears that the one that was to die was dead; whereupon I took the next bus to Lagos to dispute such news. And for two days I could not

summon up the courage to go, lest my fears be confirmed but on the third day, I no longer could bear the suspense and so set forth for their house. Upon knocking on their door, out came the sister. A glance at her face told me all I needed to know. My friend was dead and The Circle whittled.

And but still clinging unto a hope I knew was gone, I asked – where was Austen? And she, in response started a ululation but soon to calm down and acquaint me with the particulars of his death. For on the eight of March of that same accursed year, he had complained of a headache and promptly to his doctor went. On the ninth however, he was spotted making his peace with God for soon to get worse was he and back again to the doctor where the one that was to die, died a peaceful death the following day being the tenth of the month. And on the twelfth, that marvelous work of God was interred at Ikoyi cemetery.

And he the dead one, my friend was an Epicure to the core, for now he takes an intellectual quarrel with him to the grave – to settle with Christopher Marlowe who dared write a play about three centuries ago that disagreed with the dead one's conception of verisimilitude. Ah, of a truth, the dead one quarrelled with many an author. And we ink slingers wrote with utmost caution, lest the dead one should spot a flaw. Ah, such a one, the dead one!

But Austen Romiwa Enaye is not dead but lives on – in the hearts of members of The Circle, who have vowed to live the dream. And anytime I pass by his abode, I say a silent prayer for the peaceful repose of a friendly soul. And anytime I pass by his abode, I always doff my hat to the memory of him that was to have been great but who bowed too soon to death. I doff my hat and I pause to ponder how it is that such a one as he could die such a death on God's earth.

I realized then the value of the Preacher who preached a sermon in the Holy Book and said that all was vanity. And I realize that when all is said and done, man returns to dust with his dreams – food for the worms. And I realize that all our struggles here on earth are to no purpose as we will soon leave all that behind. Adieu my friend! Adieu Austen Romiwa Enaye! Salute! We'll see brother!