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THE WEAVER

By Egbuniwe John Nwoko

God, these hands, these arms that breathe
And talk to me every night after I have
Washed dishes and scrubbed floors are my mother's.
My mother wakes up before the sun bloodies
The first sight of day to card cotton and spin the yarn,
Then she stoops by the loom and clutches the beater
As though she is begging the Earth Goddess
For more food for the five mouths she must feed.
All day she eats kola nut that aborts
Sleep spun by nature's own hands.
And the village women would say:
That woman who squats on the loom daily
Weaves her cloths more graceful than a cocoon.

In the sale season she peddles woven cloths,
Two shillings a yard from my village to villages
That my children's generation will never know,
To the old towns now gone, their ruins
The bosoms of new cities where they wear blouses
And trousers; even that price huddles the pauper in his lair.
These days she uses improved threads
Trademarked in foreign words she can't say.
But her tired feet know many distant places,
Her toes which have knocked at the threshold of many houses
Are now curved and hunched into a mass of nuts;
My toes, their offspring, lap one another.
Yesterday when the foot surgeon said I inherited them,
I told him they are my mother's
Whose toes crouch beneath a plaque of years.