

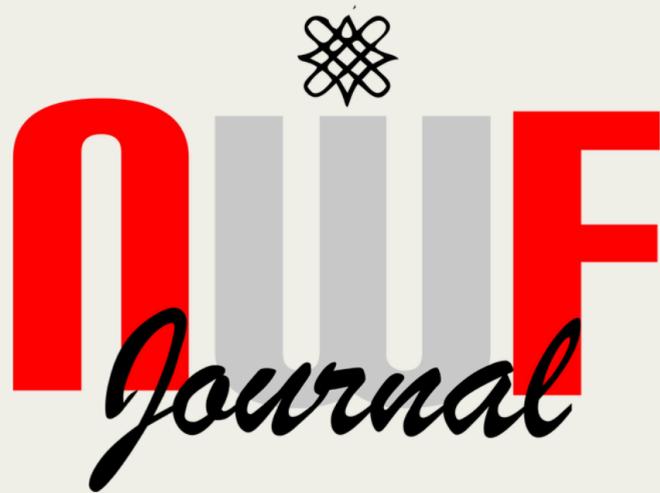
GROWING, UP NORTH

NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE



BALPOLAM IDI

CULTIVATING
CREATIVITY



NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE

a programme of the



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DEDICATION

Tor unfor hay smoe, timi, my unie alat Aka Kakato he longer hear ut not forgotten. For every girl child in Northern Nigeria.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Suffused with beauty and profound thoughts, "Growing , Up North" is an evocative exploration of life lessons learned from everyday experiences and activities. Balpolam Idi carefully weaves together distinct narratives, each focused on a seemingly mundane object, creature, & action: a fruit, a stool, a mouse, & parties. Within these absorbing narratives, she takes the reader deep into her solemn and fulfilling life and allows them to see into the profundity of little things while also sharing insights about family, community, personal growth, and the human condition at large.

In "Muruci," there's the meditative demonstration of patience and the value of Northern tradition through the life cycle of the Deleb palm tree and its fruit. Idi's descriptions—vivid & rich—make the "fibrous seedling" come alive by turning a simple snack into a symbol of history and familial connection. Her subtle reflections on Giginya's shade and the muruci's journey from a buried seed to an edible, nourishing food are metaphoric in a way that emboldens the substance and internal logic of the story.

In the essay "Kujera", Idi interrogates the multifaceted nature of a kitchen stool. The stool doesn't just serve as a prop for childhood mischiefs but also a powerful symbol of steadfast support, representing the "steady, unobtrusive presence" of loved ones. From her "first heist" to her reflections on her own clumsiness with the kitchen stool, the piece feels so relatable and deeply personal. The story of her uncle's broken tooth adds a touch of humor and family lore, adorning the narrative with originality.

Overall, Balpolam Idi's writing is a great testament to the idea that every experience, no matter how small or supposedly insignificant, holds a story. This is a collection carefully crafted with such an emotional and unique voice that is marked with utmost relatability, wit, and depth.

Eniola Abdulroqeeb Arówólò
Nigerian Poet & Essayist

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MURUCI; MU-RU-CHI

(Life lessons from a fruit I learnt to love)

It takes about fifteen to twenty years for a giginya tree to become a fully mature fruit-bearing tree, and afterwards, it can live up to a hundred years. The first time my dad told me, I fell in awe of this tree.

This Deleb palm tree, Giginya, is one of my favourites—ever-growing with a lean, soft grey trunk crowned with green fronds that shoot up like a big afro. And because of how tall the tree grows, you simply wait for it to drop its gems, falling with loud thuds that startle even the most peaceful sleeper out of an afternoon nap. When a Giginya tree drops its fruits, those big, round mounds are eaten heartily. As a little girl, I'd watch from under the tree every season as the fruits sprout, green and spherical, growing bigger and fuller like a teenage girl coming into womanhood. I have climbed a fair share of palms in my life, and just like the gingerbread palm (Doum palm), Giginya has the characteristic spiky trunk while growing. However, unlike its smaller cousins, its fruit slowly turns from green to a bright orange as it ripens.

Its unique fragrance, said to be strong enough to repel snakes, permeates every room it enters. Giginya cannot hide. It is saccharine and tropical at the same time, with a taste and texture like mango. And eating giginya can be messy, just like eating a large mango with nothing but your hands and teeth. An average Giginya is slightly bigger than a shucked coconut, making it difficult for one person to finish. So, more often than not, eating giginya is a communal affair.

To get muruci, a local snack made out of the seeds of Giginya fruit, one needs about six months of patience. After the giginya fruit is eaten, its seeds are collected in a corner of the house, then subsequently buried together in a pit, not so far from the house.

This is done all over our village and the neighbouring villages. The seeds are buried in groups—sometimes in many pits dug on one piece of land—watered occasionally and left to germinate.

This process can take up to twenty four weeks. Experts like my grandfather can gauge when muruci is ready, long before the first leaf of the plant shoots out of the dry ground. They can predict which of the pits will produce the right-sized yield.

The first time my father explained the value of muruci and how it was the nourishment they relied on many hungry days, I began to understand that this fibrous seedling is a lot more than a boiled tasteless root eaten for enjoyment or out of sentiment. It is a companion, a part and parcel of my people who grow it. It's a part of who we are. My people love and respect this snack and I have so many memories linked to it.

I remember the moments its strings would get caught in my teeth and frustrate me to tears, as I tried unsuccessfully, to pull them out; and when my father patiently taught me to peel its translucent skin and enjoy its starchy, crumbly flesh like a pro, without the interference of those pesky strings. I think of all the times we went digging for them with my father and grandfather. The first rule of digging Muruci is to water the environment. The dry, dusty earth, never eager to release its new captives, must be cajoled with water and a digger. The damp soil is then broken up to reveal the buried treasures as we uproot the plant.

These memories, interlaced with the joy of eating the snack, have made me believe that each of us carries an entire generation within. And when we explore certain foods, we connect with the lessons, the joys, and sometimes the pains, of the ones who were here before us. I recently moved to a new place where the food was unfamiliar. I felt myself losing the mental grip of the history behind the concoctions and recipes I ingested. Normally, when I eat a good plate of Jollof rice, I think all the way back to the first time someone conceived the idea, down the line of thousands who kept trying and are still trying to perfect recipes. I think it is utterly beautiful how everything has a story.

In a sense, our conditions as humans might be like that of the muruci, a Deleb Palm seed buried and abandoned in deep darkness for many months with no hope. But someday, we are dug out, maybe we even dig our way out—transformed into something else, useful to certain people, bringing joy and laughter to their hearts, putting food in their bellies. The dark seasons are not necessarily our enemy, uncomfortable and disconcerting as they may be. We only need remember that the longer we are buried, the greater our chances of being a fruitful tree, if we cling to hope and hardwork the way giginya roots cling to every nutrient the dark soil may provide. We are at different levels of our lives; some of us may already be ripe fruits, while others are seeds, seedlings, tender shoots, or even growing trees. Whatever stage you are right now, every single step in your journey is necessary for you to become who you must be. It's all part of the process. We must learn to enjoy the process. The Deleb palm tree does not cast its shade close to the tree as other trees do; its shade falls a few meters away. This has taught me that sometimes, your impact will only be felt away from home. You may not find appreciation in your immediate circle, and your true audience may be miles away from you.

BIKI

(A guide to a Northern Nigerian feast)

I'm 27 and the last time I felt excited by the prospect of 'getting dressed up' to go somewhere was at my 7th birthday party. Unlike a good number of women I know, I detest the whole process of getting dressed for an occasion. I find it very stressful, unnecessarily expensive. I don't like the fuss of anko, the wild mental gymnastics of looking for a style and sensible tailor, not to mention the requirements of new shoes and bags to go with the outfit. Absolute torture to my heart. However, since I am yet to meet with someone who agrees with me on this so we can form an alliance and revolt, I get dressed every time there's an event. I get so dressed you'll never be able to tell the difference between me and a girl who is happy to be at the party.

For instance, I wore a wig for my sister's wedding this weekend. I sat with discomfort for hours but I did it for love. I do not understand why I have to bury my God-given nappy hair in exchange for a faux, Caucasian straight one, only because there's a new societal standard of beauty. Even though I still don't get why some African women are obsessed with hating the kind of hair that grows out of their scalp, I advocate for natural hair love and nurture with the understanding that we're all different.

In my place, biki, a party, is all encompassing. An immersive experience of sights, smells, sounds and tastes. A biki is only a biki if you involve the entire community, otherwise, it is just a nice meeting. There's the dramatic but seamless transition from the whispers of unannounced 'open secrets', to the clanging of pots and basins. The thuds of thick muciya against large quantities of tuwon masara drowning the noise and laughter bursting out of the people in all corners of the gidan biki. With the noise and rhythm come fragrances and colours. Fragrances like the mouthwatering scent of fried meat and chinchin, and the sharp red colour of the smoky jollof rice with carrots and green beans added last minute.

It's the vivid hues of black and red henna dancing in symphony, clinging to the hands and feet of women cooking and cleaning, as well as brides and bridesmaids lounging in rooms. The air outside thick with sweat from the labours of opinionated mothers, a sharp contrast to the bridal room, rising with incense and other fragrant scents. There are soft giggles, silent feuds as well as passive aggressive commentaries.

The rules of attending a wedding or feast where I'm from are simple. First, you must eat at home. Never go to any event hungry if you don't want to cry. It is surreal how you feel the sting when food is shared and you are either left out, or unfortunate enough to hear the dreaded "food has finished". What is it about party food that gets us so emotional? We are connected by this one desire to enjoy, eat, drink and merry. Free advice: never go to any event with an empty stomach. But you must learn that sometimes, to get food at the party, you need to have friends in high places. Like the one aunty who hides the key to the storeroom inside her bra. There's always one like that, she wields unfathomable power and she's the kind of person you need to know if you want to eat a lot at the party. She walks through the house with purpose and usually, a pair of slippers that slap against her feet quite loudly, as though announcing her arrival.

Second, one must greet as many friends and close relatives as possible. You have to greet those uncles and aunties very well, including those who don't know or have no recollection of who you are. You must introduce or reintroduce yourself with a bland, polite smile and receive all the compliments, backhanded and otherwise. You must do it gallantly like a soldier at war, for you are defending the dignity of your parents, particularly your mother. I have had to bite my tongue and rein in tears when commentary and unkind statements about my family or siblings fly about my head. I'm learning the hard way, not to take it to heart. Otherwise, I'd make an enemy of everyone.

The next rule is, be modest. We don't exactly know what this means, but at these events, you'll learn to be modest in all you do. You don't want to disgrace your parents and ancestors. You must reach in and tap the inner navigation to know what modesty is. It could be from how loudly you speak to the kinds of words you choose. We never brag. As the Hausa saying goes, girman kai, rawanin siya (pride is the crown of fools). It is modest to keep your accomplishments, no matter how grand on a simple level. It is also modest to look down when an elder is speaking.

Lastly, you're expected to be helpful, especially with the chores. Whether you want to or not, you can be drafted into the destabilizing act of ushering in any Nigerian party. If you say yes to the task, it will show that you have good tarbiya. This role comes with some risks—there may be a few punches, especially if you're sharing food. Accept them and fight no one's mother (I assure you this is a rule commonly broken) and mind your business.

When the gossip mongers do their benevolent duty and share unsolicited tidbits before politely walking away, remember to interject the conversation with appropriate hmmmms and habas.

Biki is not fun for me but it is where everything happens. Where I come from, men and women have entirely different experiences at biki. Your age bracket will also determine what kind of experience you have. As a younger child, if you go to gidan biki, all you do is play and eat. As a child, all the goodies go to you first. Premium treatment, I tell you. It gets even better if your mother or aunt is in charge of the murhu, where the food is cooked.

If you're a teenager, you're sent on multiple annoying errands that leave you either in literal tears or so close. You're at an age when you're self-conscious about your appearance not just to yourself but in front of your peers. Your elders, however, are unaware of your predicament. Or they do and don't care that you wish to look cute for that boy who came into town for the wedding. They're oblivious that looking fly for that girl who's back home from boarding school in the city is what will save your street credibility.

They will send you on errands until you look like an apology. Dem no send, e no concern them if all the markaden kunu (millet paste), pour on your dress.

But what is the feast without all the drama that happens at biki. It is in the Constitution. Fights ensue, tears are shed, feelings get hurt, people steal. There's also the joy of cooking with many other women in large pots and pans, big enough to contain a few adults and learning from the old and young. There's always the excited, disruptive, intermittent ululating of women, because what is a book without guda? This joy will make up for all those other things. If you are wise, you will open your heart to learn but remember to take nothing personally. A wise man I like said, "it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting." I have learnt to be ready to learn in both places.

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- *Markaden kunu- grounded millet paste used to make kunu*

KUJERA - STOOL

(A kitchen stool can be your greatest alibi in a multivitamin heist)

We had two kitchen stools when we lived in the Federal Polytechnic staff quarters. These carved artefacts varied in size as they did in colour. The big, black one, burnt with fire to a deep charcoal shade, with sharp patterned cut-outs that speckled the entire circumference in leafy designs, came from the Mudalawan market. It was for the older people with wider derrieres to sit on. I'd watch my mother, aunties and cousins ease their buttocks and wide hips into the stool as they cooked rice in front of the kerosene stove, thighs together. It fascinated me how they seemed to occupy more space when they used their strength to turn the big pot of tuwo that was our default dinner. Thighs open to accommodate the pot are safely locked in between the rubber soles, protecting their two feet and abducting their hips, giving the stool fuller coverage. The small, brown one was just right for children to sit on. Most preferred for the ease it provided when the shorter people in the house wanted to reach the top shelves and cupboards.

These stools were my best companions in breaking several house rules. Against my mother's warnings, I would stack them one on top of the other so I could become tall enough to peek inside her cooking pot. It is a wonder how I never cooked one or more body parts in the process. I'd sneakily wait until the chaos of the clanging pots and pans stilled before creeping in slowly to go check out whatever soup was left simmering. My thoughts, never skirted along the lines of 'stealing' meat from the pot. I know. A huge disappointment to the underage-pot-researchers committee all around the world. I was simply more fascinated by the wonder of cooking and how certain ingredients could morph into something so different, so luscious after a few processes.

I did not plan to stage my first heist. But being very bored that evening after our siesta while everyone else was still asleep, my younger brother and I went for it. My plan was to steal the multivitamins my father once gave me when I fell ill. I realised that I had a fondness for those tiny black tablets and was ready to have my brother taste them, too.

The black stool did not like me. It was obvious in the way it made sure to always be in my way. I ran into it the most; its sharp edges bruising my shin. I remember how terribly my construction wobbled, when I put the small stool at the bottom. My heart was thumping in my chest from the fear of falling and breaking a limb. The black kujera (stool) carried the small brown one nicely, and since the first day I stacked them, I never looked back. Those stools elevated and gave me access to the multivitamins stashed away in the cupboard in the living room.

The novelty and anxiety of my first mission soon gave way to a determination to go unnoticed in my crimes. I'd pilfer those pills for my younger brother and myself, and we would lick them clean and spit out the whitish and unsweetened portion. After our plan had materialized and everyone else awoke, the stools were still there as I assisted my mom in making my first pot of Jollof rice. They helped me that afternoon when my mother was too ill to perform the task. She had to rest at intervals, and having done the bulk of the work of frying the sauce and parboiling the rice, I simply had to add the seasoning cubes and salt she had kept.

I sat on the stools outside as the adults did the real work of Christmas preparation. I, the chatterbox, was only tolerated for a limited amount of time before my proneness to accidents offended everyone. Since I dedicatedly contributed nothing but noise, as my family's radiyon jini (live radio), it didn't take long until I was sent back into the house, crying. Those stools watched in silent judgment.

They were always nearby when our father's only brother, Uncle Nuhu, barbecued the goats we often brought back from the village. I was always torn between empathy for the bleating goat in the boot and excitement for the delicious roast that was bound to happen by the time we were home. It was until when I became an adult that I realised slaughtering animals could be jarring for some people. I grew up with animal farmers, and I was never sheltered from the reality of the origin of the food we ate.

I sat on the smaller stool as my siblings and I, alongside our uncle, talked while we roasted salted goat's liver. He'd always keep us busy roasting chunks of liver on the hot coals while he gutted and cleaned the whole animal. We would narrate our shared experiences, tease each other or listen to Uncle Nuhu boastfully tell us funny stories about his childhood.

One story lives rent-free in my head. While I cannot remember if this happened when he was in Nguli or after my grandparents relocated, I am very much clear on every other detail. My uncle has a broken tooth; one of his incisors is chipped. If I'm being honest, it is more than chipped. How did it happen? When they were boys, they used to play the game, dara, a popular game in West Africa, also known as Ayo. They usually gathered to play this under a big locust bean tree. After every game, it was common practice for two moderately sized stones to be tied together to a rope and mounted up a tree branch for everyone to see and laugh at. The loser was mocked as those stones were referred to as his testicles. On a fateful day, one of Uncle Nuhu's friends lost his match, and while they were howling and gloating, one of the stones fell on my uncle's tooth and broke off a portion. No, he did not repent from making fun of people. He still has a wicked sense of humour, and I love him for it.

I was disappointed when I came back from boarding school and found that the black kujera had broken. It wasn't even my favourite, but I was sad to see it hacked into pieces for firewood. Unfortunately, it still hasn't been replaced. There's such a void in my mother's kitchen now. And even though I spend almost all of my cooking time standing, I feel the absence deeply.

I believe some people are like stools in this life. They are a steady, unobtrusive presence, very supportive and readily available. They elevate you, ground you, make you comfortable. Like Pwanedo, my sweet girl who had been a silent pillar since I first adopted her as a friend in 2010. Such people journey with you through many seasons and courses, asking for nothing in return, except that they not be forgotten in your way.

They do not place demands; they just show up. I could say my relationship with Pwanedo was a low-maintenance friendship, but it was anything but that. This woman travelled across cities to be with me. There was always real effort.

The thing about these stools is that though I always sought them when I needed a boost, I forgot them every other time. Even as I scan through memories on Google Photos, left with only wishes and hopes that I had spent more time, made more effort, and made more sacrifices, the truth stares me in the face with shocking pain, like a stool to my shin. I could have done better. Now that she's no longer a call, text or city away, I can only live with regrets and wishes for more time spent together.

I am quite the klutz, but it was worse when I was a child. At ages five and six, I'd walk into things and hurt myself at every turn. I'll place a part of the blame on astigmatism and the other on generally being absent-minded. Or it could be because my struggle seems very personal and embarrassing— I can not seem to find the balance between walking and taking occasional glances at the ground.

Most of these painful accidents I had involved stools and metal buckets. The pain would shoot so swiftly from my stubbed tiny toe to the centre of my skull. My shins bear witness to these painful and scarring episodes with a lot of dents. My greatest bane was that people who lived with us never put things back where they found them. So I'd walk into the kitchen expecting the stools to be neatly stashed in the corner near the kerosene stove, where they ought to stay except when in use. However, we'd collide somewhere in the courtyard or the small, dark storeroom inside the kitchen.

I am no longer a kid, but I don't just run into stools; I do tables, doors and their handles, beds and couches now. It's amazing that I have a marvellously useless ability to injure myself in the most impossible places and ways. I still run into stools and bedside tables.

Though every time I do that now, I remind myself that I have real-life stools, and I hope I am not forgetting any of my helpers and supporters. Or kicking them due to my poor vision and lack of motor coordination. Life and visual impairment have taught me to do periodic assessments of my surroundings. My lack of foresight might stop me from seeing or sensing the future. My poor hand-eye motor coordination can make it hard to translate kind thoughts into tangible actions.

I am still learning. Grappling with this phantom thing called balance. I don't think I will stop running into things or people. However, I have learnt to keep the precious things that matter away from areas of vulnerability to accidents. I send love to all the kujeru in my life, I'd be quite lost without them. I'm thankful they've not taken offence at my stumbling and inconsistencies. And my novelty to walking, living and loving. They've been gracious.

It can be quite upsetting to be the kujera. I wonder what it was like for the black stool and the brown stool. Did they hold congress in our absence? Did they intentionally wobble and cause my aunties to fall on those two occasions?

Being a Kujera is hard. We often feel used, stomped on and neglected. People climb on us to reach the top shelf, but they don't even extend to the common courtesy of taking off their shoes before stepping us. I understand. I have felt it too. But I am teaching my heart to let the Author write the story. Do whatever you must to heal.

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- *Kujeru - plural of kujera*

SAVE THE LAST MOUSE

It's me again. Ten years later, a different city, a different life, same problem— mice.

Authors, Art and Attachments

The last piece I wrote about Monica, the mouse that started living with me against my wishes, was a short Facebook post I wrote for fun. I enjoyed the little ruckus it caused among my Facebook friends and family members. It gave me an unnamed sense of pleasure to toy with people, including my friend, who was living with me at the time; she thought the story was about her.

That was until someone I knew sent the same story, word for word, to my DM on WhatsApp as a broadcast message with #copied and #lol under the story as the only difference. Suddenly, those ‘funny’ little stories we used to get as broadcast messages meant more to me. Because for the first time, I thought of the original authors. It felt weird to be so possessive of an inanimate thing; to feel so deeply offended that someone was passing off my relationship with the stubborn rodent as theirs. I did not like it one bit. I felt quite erased and very invisible. These feelings were so strong that they clouded and almost superseded the thrill of writing something so witty that others were stirred to copy it.

What is it about art that makes us esteem non-living things as most precious beyond description? I think our intellectual property was scarcely protected in the early days of posting quotes and stories on the internet. Not that there's an impenetrable firewall now—I see how content creators and skit makers lament about idea theft, about being copied without being acknowledged. We're not yet there, but we are getting better.

Art usually comes like a child. You conceive it somewhere hidden, intimate, and sacred; you birth it in a frenzy known only to you. Sometimes in delectable pleasure, other times, it rips out of you like a seahorse birthing its offspring. It can be delicate, it can be primal, but it's almost instinctive, the desire to imprint your essence on it.

It demands our protection. But this is not about art of which I am fond. This is about mice; I have no fondness or attachment to them.

Wanted Pets, Unwanted Pests

I grew up on a farm. That simply means it is quite difficult to impress me with the proverbial ‘manly deliverance’ from the assault of living things. I do not squirm or screech when I come across the common intruders that usually terrify people— scorpions, mice, roaches. I am practical to a fault. I do not react to situations in an expected manner. But though I have left the cold, airy city of Jos for the humid, foul-smelling city of Lagos, my approach to eliminating mice remains the same. I do not bat an eyelash in executing my extermination protocol.

Step 1: Find their entry point and make it inaccessible

Step 2: Get an easy, safe, and practical solution to ending their unpaid co-tenancy.

I do not subscribe to any of the rat bombs and traps advertised in the open market and some stores. I find them quite messy and prone to leaving a foul smell in their wake. I want to get rid of rodents, I do not want an air cleansing and incense-burning parade to cope with the aftereffects.

In the absence of nature and felines, my preferred non-engaging way to eradicate mice has been rat glue. I feel the need to point out that I am not a sadistic human who derives pleasure from watching animals struggle while stuck. I only use it because it is the safest way I know. Well, not the safest for the mouse, but you get it.

One of the reasons I am even more particular about this is because of a white and brown active puppy we had in 2019. Jagu was lively and bubbly, a well-mannered and delightful pup. He died of complications due to rat poison. How did it happen? Someone, whose name will not be mentioned, was trying to control rats in the barn where the grains from my parents’ farm are stored.

They decided that spicing a delicious plate of fish with poison was the fastest way to go. Before this, my cat, Star, was the resident mouse-catcher, but while I was away working in Abuja, I received news of her mysterious passing. It was still quite fresh in our hearts, so no one was thinking about feline adoption. The plan was to trick the big rodents into eating the laced food and then pick their bodies in the aftermath. Unfortunately, things do not always go according to plan. My little cousin left the barn door ajar, and the puppy ran in and lapped up the portion before she could say his name. I do not want to relive the horrendous experience, but believe me when I say, the glue is better.

After a recent trip to my hometown and back, I returned to my least preferred city in the world, and as soon as I entered the house, I smelled a rat. Literally.

I thought it'd be two furry creatures or three at most, camping in the cabinets, the ones you rarely open. To be honest, at first, they were just an inconvenience I wanted to get rid of, especially because the corner cabinet in the kitchen reeked of their business, and that smell made me break out in allergies. However, my mission soon became personal as I discovered that they'd gotten into my treasured supply of paddy rice for making tuwo, kunun gyada and gwate. I was livid. It was then that I marked them as mortal enemies to be destroyed. I am a simple local woman. I will not stand by and watch uncultured living creatures vandalise sacred food.

This mission has proved to be arduous, I must confess. I have exhausted four rat glue boards, trapped five mice, and I think there's still one (or are they two?) that have been squeaking and scurrying about in the most annoying way.

Dealing with unwanted pests demands exposure to high irritation, and to make matters worse, I think they're becoming wiser, learning that the glue boards are not floors they'd like to step on. I have lost the element of surprise in this battle. I know it because of how carefully they now skirt across the board, avoiding the glue until they're home free, then they run along and cause havoc.

I really am not trying to dance with any mouse. I just want my nose to stop twitching and running when I approach a certain area of the house. I need relief from the allergies without having to resort to antihistamines. I want to be able to sleep blissfully without the scruffles of papers and poly bags waking me up at intervals. I did not set out to make enemies. They crawled up my window, using the gas pipe as a ladder, chewed through the protective net, and let themselves in.

On some days, I feel like one of the humans in those cartoons and animations I watched as a child, unwaveringly searching for little creatures to exterminate. On other days, I feel validated in my quest. Most days, I am just tired of the allergies, and I want to breathe clean air through an unblocked nose.

Rodents, Reading and Writing

I find it interesting how problems with non-rent-paying rodent tenants seem to lead me to writing. I cannot sincerely say they have done nothing for me. Writing about Monica opened my eyes to a whole new world many years ago on Facebook. Even as I write this, I have no ambition, except to express myself, but perhaps the mouse is my muse, and it makes my fingers twitch both in irritation and artistic response to the rainbow of emotions it makes me experience.

I still wonder though. Why does an infestation stir me to write? Is this my farm girl persona demanding a depiction of her reality on the screen? Do people even like reading about animals anymore? Well, even if they do, do they not prefer fluffy tales about feline and canine domestics? Stories that thread around cute hamsters, Guinea pigs or rabbits? Perhaps it is my arewa girl brain thinking that pests and their pesky intrusion should probably remain an irritation you only talk about while trying to find a lasting solution among kin or friends. But maybe, just maybe, pests and pets are not so different in the fact that they are all animals who elicit strong emotions from us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



BALPOLAM IDI

Balpolam Idi is a creative writer driven by a fervent desire for holistic learning and inclusion, passionate about making learning an enjoyable, lifelong, fun, and exciting experience for others through her content. She often dresses her ideas in stories, sometimes disguised as poems, and at other times, presents them with raw honesty. Her first book, *Growing, Up North*, is a memoir chronicling her childhood in northern Nigeria. Balpolam is deeply committed to education, culture, languages, and the girl-child. Her work has been featured in publications such as *The Kalahari Review*, *SprinNG*, *Applied Worldwide*, *Data Driven Investor*, *Sarauta*, and *Medium*. She hopes to fine-tune her nonfictional storytelling to make a significant educational impact and raise awareness. She also aspires to publish at least one article on *The Republic Journal* and/or *Brittle Paper*, and to restructure, edit, and pitch *Growing, Up North* to a publishing house.

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