

An artistic illustration in a sketchy, painterly style. A hand, wearing a dark sleeve, holds a set of keys. Below the hand is a red car, also with a dark sleeve visible. The background is a dark, textured grey. The overall mood is somber and evocative.

MOMMA'S TEARS

PD Collar

Art: Inara Padilla Salas

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Momma's tears were spring waters on the fertile Sahel soil where she planted flowers at the grave of her eldest son, killed by a Christian mob years ago. Abah's six saves in a U-17 World Cup qualifier shootout inked an athletic scholarship, and her youngest flew to America to play the beautiful game in the great state of Oklahoma.



On coach's advice Abah chose business for his major. He was smitten by a tall shy girl named Vanessa from his English class and began to see her. Unchallenged on the pitch and in the classroom, he tried the American sports he knew from television. He found its cadence on his third try and beat the university's triple jump record and the next day clocked an 11.1 in the 100-meter dash. His height

and power were indomitable in pickup basketball, and he was ushered to the gym to try out for the team. In the pool he sank like a rock and left the water to others better suited. His acute vision and coordination left the varsity pitching squad floundering on the mound, but the game's culture was foreign to him, its rhythm unnatural. He walked on and asked meekly if he might try his hand at catching the pig's skin, and the Offensive Coordinator tossed and turned that night, his bed on fire.

Abah adopted a kitten and named it Abasiami. When told he could not keep her in his dorm, he packed his bags and rented a studio. His smile, power, and



gentleness made him friends in his classes, on the field, and in the Student Union. When warned by Coach about “playing the field” he was undaunted.

“That is what I do,” he said, his smile incorrigible. “I play the field.”

Dissension in the Athletic Department spread from its halls to campus gossip to the city newspaper as the track and field, basketball, and football programs courted young Abah with their perks and competing visions of his future. Coach foamed at the mouth about sedition, perfidy, and betrayal. There were whispers of an I-phone, a car, shopping sprees, and other signing bonuses.

He left Vanessa out of his deliberations, this being a thing of men, but lay on the floor and placed Abasiami on his chest to share his thoughts. “I must do what brings the greater good for the most people,” he told her gently. The kitten curled into a ball and purred.

The Athletic Director was beside himself; he had never had the opportunity to dream of a Heisman.

“If anyone asks,” said the friendly older man that knocked on his door to hand him the keys, “tell them your mamma bought it for you.”

“Thank you, Sir,” he smiled. “Now who will teach Abah to drive?”

Vanessa ponied up, only too happy to help.

He had seven catches, 172 yards, and three touchdowns the season opener, and the great State of Oklahoma went wild. “It’s Abaht Time!” was the headline of Sunday’s Sports Section. By November they were undefeated and on their way to a conference title. There was talk of a Sugar Bowl.



It was a text from Coach on their way home from the movies, talking points for tomorrow's big interview. Fumbling with the touchpad to reply, he missed the light. The Ford F150 clipped the Mustang's rear bumper and sent it spinning, and the driver's side crumpled against the post of the traffic signal. Vanessa suffered a mild concussion and retrieved Abasiami from the studio. Abah was removed from life support and buried the next day far from home, following proper Islamic rituals.

Momma's tears salted the wilting flowers of Mohammed's grave, topsoil lifting into the Saharan wind bearing down upon her.

