

A MOUTH SWEETER THAN SALT



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SALT

AN AFRICAN MEMOIR

by TOYIN FALOLA

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For JAMES ADESINA FALOLA

The thick rod that troubles the brass gong
The heavy rain that reduces the anthill to mud
The irresistible deluge, child of a warrior
The author of life who bestows blessings on others
The child of death who kills as he dies.

Offspring of the wealthy ones
Possessor of the machine that brings wealth
The boisterous one full of stomach like pregnancy
Adesina is more handsome than a woman, but for her beads and breasts
A deity that tempers drought.

Adesina, I shall call you three times more
If you do not answer, you will be like the wild bird who lives along the road
Let the farewell be long
As we meet only in dreams
An encounter between man and the wild bird.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I waited almost fifteen years before deciding to write this. The pressure to write a memoir had been mounting for several years. I had been tempted to sign contracts in the 1990s when a publisher friend, now of blessed memory, traveled from the United Kingdom all the way to Austin in order to persuade me to write a first installment. The political aspects of my life that most interested the publishers are the least exciting to me, and they have not even been included here. The circumstances that compelled my change of mind will be narrated at the appropriate time, hopefully not as part of an obituary. Meanwhile, the present memoir covers my childhood years in the 1950s and 1960s. This was an era marked by the end of British rule and the management of the country by Nigerians during the First Republic. Extended families, the city, and the politics of the city and nation provide the larger context for the memoir. I am no more than an observer who saw more than enough, heard more than necessary, and listened to an excess of words.

This is the shortest acknowledgment I have ever written, but I cannot end it abruptly without thanking those who have encouraged me in various ways: Vik Bahl, Tayo Alabi, Rasheed Na'Allah, Ann O'Hear, Edgard Sankara, Paul Onovoh, Ben Lindfors, Barbara Harlow, Andrew Clarno, Niyi Afolabi, and Akin Alao. Rather than use mere written words to thank them, as is customary with most acknowledgments, I prefer to sing.

I swear to all that I am not a witch	O! friends, people's mouths
The terror that kills friends and foes	Minds full of wisdom
I swear that I am not a snake	Givers of wise counsel
The thread that sews life and death	By your authority
I belong to the company of life.	I walk not purposelessly, aimlessly, clumsily, slowly . . .

Honor me, I sing to you
Unaccompanied, we live in fear
Beautiful birds who strut in a sea
of heads
I greet you first today
Let there be no trouble for what I say.



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