

*The Coloured  
Shakespeare*

Lea Rachel

Published by Writer's Design

1480

The sun burst upon the day, forcing Aboye to see everything with clarity and heat. The foreign ship glinting in the cove, taller and wider than anything he'd ever imagined. The scurrying men in colors and threads that looked uncomfortable and hot. The sticks on the men's belts that clanked and banged as they stomped ashore, and that later cut maame's throat from ear to ear before she uttered a cry. The sparkle of sun on the churning wave tips that blinded him at exactly the moment baaji gave him over to the white man, the one with the voice low like thunder.

He had wanted to cry out. He had wanted to beg baaji not to let him go. All he had wanted was to run back to maame's hut, to crawl once again onto the mat in the corner where they slept when the heat outside made it too unbearable to do anything else, and where she had always held him and sang to him with a voice as smooth as the sky. He remembered the breeze of that morning, a warm wind that touched his forehead as she bent over to kiss him, the wiry sun tattoo on her upper arm, the one that all the women of his tribe cut when they came of age, briefly visible.

But he had known better than to cry out. He had twisted away from the grip of the white man and looked, questioningly, into his baaji's eyes. The answer given had stilled him. Even when the rival for chieftain had slaughtered baaji's goats, even

when the storms had flattened their crops, even when the night cough had taken both of his older brothers, none of these strikes had darkened his baaji's eyes quite like this. It was the look of a fish near death, of a bird fallen from the sky, of a lion stilled by an arrow. Aboye didn't know the exact word for it at the time, but he knew it now in the white man's language: defeat. His father had had the courage not to look away from his son, and Aboye knew at that moment that he would never see his baaji, his village, or his home again. He would board the big heavy ship with the tall ugly white man, and never return.