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## Beating the Graves

Tsitsi Ella Jaji

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# BEATING THE GRAVES

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# BEATING THE GRAVES

*Tsitsi Ella Jaji*

*University of Nebraska Press / Lincoln and London*

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*for Franklin D. Cason Jr.*  
*in lingering embrace*



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# *ANCESTRAL.*

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# Drought

It is so goddamn hot in our country that blooms  
—jacarandas, bougainvilleas, flamboyants—  
erupt in a shock of fuchsia from pipes laced with rust.  
*Hokoyo!* Step too close and your skin will crisp up like a chicken in hot Olivine.  
Everyone will see the fat sizzling from your innards.

It is so hot that locusts  
drop in pools around your feet,  
their musical legs all melted.

In our nation a waterfall is a cauldron of steaming falsehoods.

S m o k e t h u n d e r s . . .

Maize simply withers in  
the miserly shade of thorns.  
Men quiver at cock's crow and  
hang their cattle out to dry.

Pumpkins turn to gourds.  
Midnight flushes out hunger.  
*Ngozi* dart in disregard  
across the oozing tar.

*Ach* man, spare us your sermons  
concerning our weeknight brews:  
the problem we are facing now  
is the drunkard who drains  
his own water pot, leaving  
the mother of his children

with one thing only:  
pure grit.

Rhinos are shrinking.  
Filthy crawfish bloat.  
Our grandmother is just seated  
as if death were a bus running late.

We have now reached the stage  
where lackeys are openly trafficking  
dragon fruit, smuggling them through  
customs as if they were Marange diamonds.  
Meanwhile, at the small house,  
their scrawny young girlfriends  
are just hassling the houseboys.

Our eyes run  
all through October,  
slash-and-burnt  
like rhizomes.

We hear the drum's skin  
crackling as it curls.  
We smell the coming rain.  
Archangel, your time draws near.