

Be One with the Rain

At eight, a storm unlaced our house.

Walls softened and folded. The flood lifted our photos from their frames, leaned the wardrobe sideways, and carried a chair toward the doorway as if it had learned to swim. The floor turned to a shallow river that spoke in bubbles and grit. Afterward, the rooms were scrubbed of sound; even our habits felt rinsed thin. I kept waiting for normal to drip back from the ceiling. It did not. Weather, I decided, had a will. Thunder made me flinch. Lightning felt like someone calling my name and then hiding.

By fourteen I began writing letters.

Dear Rain,

Why come uninvited, then vanish when we plead?

Why take the pictures and leave the nails?

The poems did not cure fear, but they slowed it. They taught me to look longer. In Ethiopia, rain is not only ruin; it is rhythm. Mornings open with bunna (coffee), green beans crackling in a pan, frankincense curling at the edges, a clay jebena (coffee pot) beginning to hum while neighbors turn news into blessing. Afternoons lift with injera, a shared plate that widens for one more hand. Even on clear days, rain lingers at the horizon like a lullaby someone forgot to finish. Water, I learned, can interrupt and still keep time.

That lesson arrived as family. My grandfather, a farmer from Meko, stitched weather to wisdom. He would sit with a cup cooling between his palms and say, "Be one with the rain." His voice had

the patience of fields. For years I misheard him. Was he asking me to surrender, to let chaos in, or naming a practice that helps life bloom?

The answer found me on a field, not a farm.

“Leul! Pass the ball!”

Saturday heat pressed metal into the air. The dust tasted like old coins. A teammate stumbled, then dropped, eyes glassy, breath thinning.

HEATSTROKE.

Our coach carved a path through panic: “GET WATER NOW!”

We stared at the cooler as if it were a vault with one key. My hands shook while I lifted my bottle to his mouth. He drank. Color returned. Relief moved through us like shade. I do not remember the score. I remember the sentence that stayed: water is a fragile privilege, not a guarantee.

That sentence bridged two worlds, the drowned house of my childhood and a noon that tried to steal breath from a boy who only wanted to run. It braided fear to my grandfather’s quiet and showed me the difference between yielding to weather and learning from it.

In that clarity - witness to my country’s thirst, faithful to my grandfather’s wisdom, accountable to what I had seen - I founded Project Burayu, an NGO addressing water scarcity in the neighborhoods where drought bites hardest. I won’t rehearse logistics; the meaning lives elsewhere: in what the work has made of me and what it allows others to become. To date, we

have held over 30,000 liters of rain - thirty thousand chances to drink, cook, wash, and simply live.

From that holding, my definition of self shifted. Identity, I've learned, is a verb. Mine takes its motion from water: sometimes a rush, sometimes a hush, sometimes a stillness long enough for silt to settle and the rest to run clear. *Be one with the rain* isn't a mystic shrug; it's a civic stance - catch what arrives, hold it wisely, share it forward. Project Burayu tuned my voice to the weather of people: the roof as an open palm, the tank as a keeper of stories, the act of sharing as kinship. Water taught me tempo - and tempo taught me how to live.

We wrote instructions in Amharic and Oromo, then read them aloud until the steps felt like a song. We held demonstrations in school courtyards where the smallest kids watched, solemn and bright, as if we were taming thunder. We asked a mechanic to show us a better seal; he drew a circle on cardboard and told us, grinning, that circles do not argue if you cut them clean. We learned the price of elbows and T-joints by heart.

We built for care, not spectacle. Small crews of mothers, uncles, and teenagers agreed to a rotation: check seals on Sundays, skim screens on Wednesdays, drain sediment at the new moon. We kept a ledger for parts and a repair fund that neighbors filled with coins or labor; receipts sat next to notes that simply read "swept courtyard" or "watched the tap while others prayed." Keys lived with three people instead of one. A tank was never just a tank; it was a promise we could see.

The work did not turn me into a hero. It turned me into a neighbor. I learned to say I do not know and to ask a grandmother who did. I learned that dignity is cheaper than any part and more

expensive than all of them. I learned that water is technical and deeply social; a pipe is only as strong as the hands that will reach for its tap.

I learned to refuse the easy mask others offer. Headlines like to freeze places into a single face; famine as a permanent expression. I choose smaller truths you can stand next to: a welded elbow that stopped a leak, the stamp of a calloused thumb on a ledger line, the way a child's face changes when a first clear stream arrives and keeps arriving.

Water taught me tempo. Where I am from, time bends toward people; elsewhere it sharpens to a blade. I keep deadlines without treating every interruption as an enemy, because thirst does not follow schedules and dignity should not have to. School did not crown me; it equipped me. Mathematics showed me that small angles become large distances if you walk them long enough. Science taught me that a nudge in pressure can redraw a storm. History lowered a bucket into older wells of perseverance. Language gave me the legend. I move between Amharic and English, knowing each tongue carries its own gravity. In Amharic, gratitude lengthens, amesegenallo, a note you hold when you want the song to last. In English, I find rooms for analysis, tools to turn an experience over and trace its seams. Code switching is not costume; it is confluence, streams meeting to make a river wide enough for others to cross.

If you ask what I am proud of, I can point to numbers, but I would rather point to mornings. The morning an elder showed me her ledger, columns neat as ribs, every maintenance visit initialed. The morning a physics teacher balanced a level on a beam and told us that patience is also a tool. The morning the committee decided to keep the keys with three people, then added a fourth

because a wedding might take someone out of town and thirst does not wait. Pride looks like four keys on a ring and the quiet of a line that moves.

The storm once took my photographs; this work returns my memory. I belong to Ethiopia's morning, the smell of coffee rising, elders blessing one another's burdens. I belong to the afternoon's patient labor, the quick lift and cool of injera, the way a table widens when another knock comes. I belong to a future that refuses to wait for permission to be realistic. And yes, I belong to rain, its temper and its tenderness, its memory and its mercy.

What does the work ask of me now? To keep my posture open. Roof as open palm. Tank as keeper of stories. To stay bilingual in time, fast enough to fix, slow enough to see. To let fear settle like silt until the water above runs clear. To remember that identity is not a wall I stand behind; it is a current I carry forward.

Dear Rain,

You made a child of me, then asked me to grow.

You emptied my rooms and left a map in the puddles.

Teach my hands the patience of roofs and gutters.

Teach my voice the grammar of wells and buckets.

Grant me the courage to listen when metal complains.

Grant me the habit of sharing what arrives.

Let fear sink to the bottom and remain there.

Let what falls become what we hold, together.

This is my story—a story I haven't finished. When clouds gather over Burayu and the first drops stitch the air, the old fear moves through me like water through a clean filter. What remains is quieter and sturdier: the conviction that identity is not what I keep; it is what I carry. Now, when

the rain comes, I step into it—not to be washed away, but to hold what it offers—and to pass it, steady and clear, into other waiting hands.