the man with the food," she thought and began to wail. The man looked at her with pity, gave her some 'injera' and commanded her to stop crying. She ate a little and wrapped the rest in the cloth that she had tied around her waist.

Zenebech started walking back to her hut, but after a few paces she sat down to rest. Remembering that her hut was still quite a distance away, she resumed her walking. "Oh, how I wish I could get home and rest," she said aloud to herself. "The hyenas will devour me if I don't get there before dark."

Weak and still hungry, she sat down again and ate some 'injera'. When she finished eating, she got up and continued her journey, but this time a bit more quickly because she saw that the sun was going down lower and lower and that it would soon be dark.

When she finally arrived at her hut, Zenebech was alarmed to notice that the door was open. She uttered a cry and ran in. All her property – her rags and sacks – had disappeared. She found out that her coins too had disappeared, lost in the struggle with the other beggars.

This time she sat down for a real cry.

Abebe Semegn

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GEBRE-AREGAWI'S HOPES

The village of Debre Damo was all green: the grain-fields, the meadows, the shrubs, the bushes, the hills, and even Mt. Debre Damo itself – all, all were green. In that early Sene (June) morning Gebre Aregawi was in his teff-field busy watching his pair of oxen graze on the pasture of the borders of the grain fields. So early, indeed, the morning was (in fact only about half-past five) that the birds were only starting to sing. The cock, too, crowing to herald the advent of another laborious day. The wind of that Sene morning was very chilly; the frost on the ground had not yet melted. Nevertheless, Gebre-Aregawi did not feel the chill, though he was wearing only a shirt and a 'netela' (sheet of cloth) of 'abujedi'; he did not feel the frost, though he was wearing no shoes. He sat squatted, his back supported by a big stone, his front facing the East. He seemed to be pre-occupied with something, but not with worry; for one could easily read happiness engraved in his plain and honest face.

While he was so intent, the birds steadily ceased singing. It was half-past six. Another child of Nature was beginning its perpetually-recurring daily routine: the sun was rising. The first rays, creeping down the *amba* (mountain) beyond, and penetrating the spaces between the trees and shrubs, were glittering on the green meadows and teff-fields. These rays, as they fell on the face of Gebre-Aregawi, filtered deep into his mind and seemed to be readily transformed into rays of hope. And these rays of hope had their outlet along the curved eye-lashes of his wide-open, dark

blue eyes. Yes, Gebre-Aregawi was hopeful. And why should he not be? The grain fields were unusually promising; the stalks of the teff were extraordinarily green, strong, and erect. His oxen, his cows, his calves, and his hens were more than ever, healthy and fat. Certainly, the year 1952 was very conducive to grain and livestock. His cattle were so healthy and fat that they became a source of fear to him. He suspected that his neighbor, the blacksmith, was a *tebib* (*budda*) and that he might 'eat' his cattle; he was afraid that the blacksmith might "cast his evil eye" upon the cattle and cause their death. Except for this fear, Gebre-Aregawi was optimistic and happy.

The sun was getting warmer and warmer, cautioning Gebre-Aregawi that it was becoming late, so he woke from his contemplations, rose to his feet, and went to his house to get ready for the day's work. He was going to prepare another piece of land for the sowing of peas in Hamle.

Soon he was back in the field with his oxen. He tilled the ground until dusk. It was a hard day, as usual. But he spent the time unconscious of fatigue, for he was immersed all day long in a deep ocean of contemplation of the prospects for the future.

So passed many days, each day that passed bringing its own happy tidings to Gebre-Aregawi. And with the passing of each day, Gebre Aregawi became more and more hopeful of the future. He saw ahead of him a life of prosperity and health. He became convinced that the produce of his land would be triple... that of the preceding year. He was also certain that his two cows would give birth to two calves, one in Hamle

and the other in Tikmit (October). On these assumptions, he started calculating his future income and made plans thereon.

He knew that he had to hand over one-third of the produce of his land to the monks of the monastery of St. Aregawi; for his pieces of land, like all other pieces of land in that district, were part of the *gult* (estate) of the monastery. And from the remaining he set aside for the land tax, educational tax, health tax,. Although usually the remaining would not last him and his family a full year, he believed that the harvest this year would be so plentiful as to enable him to venture on new plans. He would buy a bull and an ass, send his ten-year-old son to school in Adowa, for there was no school within a distance closer than 65 kilometers. He also decided to build a new hut. All this was to be done from the would-be exceptional returns of the land.

Many more days passed. It was the twenty-second of Sene when Gebre-Aregawi met a friend who had just returned from Adowa. The man told him the sensational news of a coming calamity: that an invasion had started, that the invading army had already overrun the whole of Eritrea, that it was fast penetrating the north of Tigrai, and that the might of the enemy was such that the places over which it passed were made barren – devoid of everything green. The news of this unassailable enemy was disseminated throughout the whole district like wild fire. Everyone spoke of the might of the enemy as hitherto unprecedented. No one, however, mentioned the name of the enemy; for it was believed that "the calling of the evil by its name would be inviting it." Naturally everyone seemed to be concerned, but no one was desperate. Being devoted Christians and believers in St. Aregawi, the people believed that St. Aregawi would

shield them with his wings from the ravaging enemy. So they all prayed to all forty-four saints, but especially to St. Aregawi.

There was prayer everywhere – prayer at work and at rest, prayer at home and away from home, prayer by the righteous and the damned – prayer, prayer, prayer!

Nevertheless, that day was inevitable, it was imminent; the twenty-seventh day of Sene (the Saviour's day) at last arrived. Early at dawn, one could hear the humming and buzzing sound far in the horizon. Alas! It was the sound of the air force of the enemy. Soon the sky was overcast. It seemed as if there were a partial eclipse of the sun, though the sun that day was unusually bright. The heavens seemed to be covered by a reddish-yellow blanket. At last, the myriads of migrating locusts had arrived! Every soul in the village witnessed the flagrant act of aggression.

Terror mingled with horror reigned over that village. Every moving being was panic-stricken. And before the voracious nomadic invaders, everything green crumbled like dry leaves before a wild fire.

As soon as people recovered from their bewilderment, they tried to do something: some were shouting and yelling like dogs that intend to bark away a host of hyenas; some others, weeping in despair and still others, praying earnestly – all for nothing, for a lost cause! When they soon realised their endeavours were impotent, they stood shocked and erect like statues. Even the cows and calves and oxen that were running in

panic, seemed to have felt the loss and followed suit - they remained standing. For a while, every moving thing seemed to have ceased its motion, except the Earth. The Earth was moving, and soon it was dark!

Early the next morning every man and woman, young and old, healthy and sick, went to the field to see the remains of the barbaric invaders. The nomadic invaders slowly impeached and behind them they left whatever could be left by such a multitudinous vandalic nomads; heaps of green excreta! Nothing green was left erect. The green stalks of the grain were mowed down; the herbs, the shrubs and the trees were stripped off their leaves – they stood like withered plants in a hot desert.

Thus everything green was cut and Gebre-Aregawi's hope with it. No more hope – not even of survival; no more plans – not even of buying a shirt for his son; no more sign of happiness – not even a grin. So crumbled all his grandiose plans, like those of the milk maid in Aesop's Fables. To him, the future was dark as Hell. What was going to happen to him, to his family, to his livestock? Starvation? And then, death? God forbid! What a curse to be starved to death! He, of course, knew that he had 40 kilograms of wheat in his grannary. But what was it for a family of five? What would happen to them when it was finished? Naked starvation? Such questions puzzled Gebre-Aregawi. Gebre-Aregawi had experienced many an unwelcome vicissitude in his forty years of life, but never of such black helplessness. He perceived the world around him as the gigantic hydra with its jaws open asunder, anxious to swallow him. He was uneasy, insecure. He felt very lonely, forsaken and deserted by every human being. He sought for, but could not get, security from his fellow beings. So the only source of security he thought

of and resorted to was the Supernatural Being – God. He prayed and prayed... every day and every night.

Meanwhile, his 40 kilograms of wheat was dwindling to extinction although they used it very economically. He and his wife fed only once a day; his children, twice a day. Every member of the family was growing slimmer and slimmer, everyone was a weakling. His wife, because of starvation, fell sick and survived by the skin of teeth. At the same time, his livestock were dying one by one. His cow, which he expected to give birth in Hamle, gave birth to a dead calf, and it died a fortnight later. One of his oxen also died for lack of grass. What a misery! Misery with all her children was crawling to his home on all fours.

Everyday passing increased his despair and insecurity. This made him, more than ever, seek security from the Supernatural. He went to church everyday. One day the priest was preaching a sermon. "The catastrophe is a punishment for our sins. It was sent to us by God against whom we sinned he declared. "We have sinned before God," he continued. "The rudimentary dogmas of our religion have been overlooked; I have witnessed a man tilling his farm on St. Mary's day, I have witnessed with my own eyes a nine year-old child eating 'ingera' on a Wednesday morning. All the Wednesdays and Fridays, and the other hundred and ten days are meant [for fasting]. All the days, mainly [of] the ten saints, of the month are to be observed without work. We have, indeed, sinned, and we deserve the evils of the pestilence. Let us pray lest the worst should befall us." In the course of the sermon, five biers were laid at the stairs of the church. In those days of famine, many people claimed the

right to share "God's Acre" and as a result the "acre" was daily decreasing in size. At the other side of the church, too, a hermit heroically asserted that he had prophesied the advent of the calamity, while declaring that it was one of the signs of the Advent of Doomsday. He asserted this fact by reminding the congregation that they were on the eighth millenium- the millenium of

Doomsday. At the end of all these sermons, Gebre-Aregawi was still insecure: he did not have a solution for his problem – starvation!

While he was in such a plight, rumours were spread that help was coming from "beyond the sea" (a foreign country.) Some said it was from Tito (President of Yugoslavia) for they had seen him pass in Asmara some time ago; while others asserted that it was from England; still others believed it was from the "American", the man who makes the roads. The news, naturally instilled new hope in the minds of the people, but not without simultaneously inciting suspicion (as it is natural to Ethiopians. They asked, "Why should the 'American' help us?") In any case, everybody seemed hopeful, after those days of hopelessness. Gebre-Aregawi especially was extremely glad; for he and his family were on the verge of death itself. Could it be true that he and his family were to eat 'ingera' once more? Unbelievable! Could it really be true that every cloud has a silver lining? Could it be true that he would once again see his children recover their original stout composure? Unimaginable! At the prospects of the future, Gebre-Aregawi's heart leapt with joy.

At such times of social unrest and distress, many rumours spread – some encouraging, others disheartening. After many rumours, it was finally

rumoured that the ship that carried the wheat had reached Massawa. But no wheat for a week! Then it was rumoured that the wheat had reached Asmara and that it was fast being transported to Adowa. No wheat for another monotonous week! Finally after eighteen days, the wheat reached Bizet, the nearest village-town to Debre-Damo! Nevertheless, it was announced that the wheat was not to be distributed as soon as hoped. Every man had to have his family counted by an official, testified by three witnesses, so that he might receive a bag of twenty-five kilograms of wheat per head. In about three days, Gebre Aregawi fulfilled all the formalities. So, then, he was to receive the wheat – the source of his salvation! What a coincidence! His forty kilograms of wheat would expire that day – that very day! The help reached in the nick of time!

Gebre-Aregawi finally prepared his ass to take it to the village town. It is about a three-hour journey from his village. It is a tiresome distance for a lonely, and what's more, starved traveller. However, on his way to the village-town, Gebre-Aregawi did not feel the fatigue; for he was completely engrossed in his own self. He was, naturally, thinking about the amount of grain he was to receive and what he would do with it. He believed that the grain would last his wife and his children a long time, while he went to a big city to earn money by performing manual work. He would earn so much money as to enable him to buy an ox, seeds for the next harvest, and clothes for the family. The plan, certainly seemed feasible. This being his long-term plan, his short-term plan was to take the grain home, feed himself and his family to satisfaction; and after they regained enough strength to revenge the starvation – eat more and more. Could it be that his ordeal was over after such misery?

Without being conscious of the distance he had covered, he reached the place. He waited for his turn. Then he presented his documents to the district governor for perusal. After the approval of the governor, he was given five bags of wheat. Having instantly loaded four of the bags on the donkey and carrying the remaining bag on his shoulder, he started his way back home. Now that he had achieved what he wanted, he concerned himself with the long journey that lay before him; it was too long for his patience. He sought a companion. He could find none.

Therefore, he started all the long journey alone but gladly. All the time, he sought a companion, however. He had walked for about one and a half hours, when he saw three men far in front of him. They were dressed in white "netelas" like him. As they came nearer, they seemed to be very anxious. May be they were anxious to get their share. They came nearer and nearer, while at the same time, they looked at him and spoke with one another in a low tone. Perhaps they knew Gebre-Aregawi somewhere and were recollecting. As they came very near, Gebre-Aregawi could see them very well: they were all middle-aged, emaciated and honest-looking. He thought he had met one of them before; perhaps at a funeral. The men slowed their pace and seemed to be hesitating about something. They were arguing; they could not agree. Finally one of them came to Gebre-Aregawi, bade him good-morning, and, in a twinkle of an eye, clutched his two hands tight. One of the others then came and helped him twist the hands of Gebre-Aregawi. The third man, picked the bag that fell from Gebre-Aregawi's shoulders and started hastily driving the donkey. What was it? Robbery? And by such honest-looking people? Yes they were robbing that miserable man. Oh! If only

they knew how miserable he was! Anyway they drove him to a near-by tree and tied him hand and foot to the tree.

"Starvation!" They justified their action. And it was all over again. Survival of the strongest?

Berhane-Meskel Redda
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A FREAK OF NATURE

Everything in the court remained still for a while. Some were whispering to one another, nodding and shaking their heads, watching the accused as she was being brought in. The only dominant voice that could be heard was when a gentleman at one or another corner coughed, cleared his throat, or blew his nose. Those who were close to the front row were sucking their lips, signing and looking at Woizero Zabib rather pityingly.

Woizero Zabib was sitting in the front row in a black garment, drying her eyes with a white handkerchief she had just taken out of her bag. This lady was the mother of the young man who had been found dead in his room three weeks before. Next to her were sitting relatives, neighbours, and friends. Two of the neighbours were whispering to each other.

"No, " one of them said, " I can't understand this. You know Ayelech has been working in Zabib's house for almost seven years, and they never seemed to dislike her. "The neighbour paused for a moment, and then added as an afterthought:" I just can't imagine why she should do it. You see, nobody suspected her at all until the policeman insisted on her arrest after the doctor's identification of the a-a-what's-its-name that was found in her room to be exactly of the same constituent as that which killed Berhanu. "Well, anyway, I – I don't know," she concluded and felt touched when she saw tears trickling down the cheeks of Woizero Zabib. The other neighbour opened her mouth to ask a question, but suddenly there