

The Hand that Feeds You

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Overview:

The Hand that Feeds You is over a decade spanning love story set between the years 2020 to 2035. It follows the developing romantic affair between Gerald Andah, a Ghanaian consultant and environmentalist, and Sarah Bateman, an American quasi-state consultant turned US government lobbyist. The story is told over two timelines; one covering the moments before, during, and after Gerald's presentation on the research of a geo-engineering innovation, called the Icarus, impact on West Africa in 2035. The other timeline tells the story of Gerald and Sarah's relationship over the time leading to the presentation of the results.

We also see Accra evolve from a city facing a crippling recession through to a period of violent riots and upheaval, eventually stabilising with a new political party geared towards highly privatised eco-modernisation, effectively creating two cities in one; New Accra, and old Accra. It should be said that in envisioning the transforming society of Accra, a coevolutionary approach (Norgaard) was used to highlight main factors that influence the systems at large.

I have broken down the synopsis into two timelines; (1) Present (2035) and (2) Past (2020 - 2033).

SYNOPSIS

Present Timeline (2035)

Gerald is waiting in the lobby area at the Mayor of Accra's office, trying to distract himself from the impending presentation to the mayor and other senior representatives from across West Africa. The presentation is on the results of his trans-disciplinary team's independent research (sponsored by ECOWAS member states) on the impacts of a geo-engineering innovation, called the Icarus, impact on West Africa. The Icarus is a manmade cloud that allows not only the absorption of CO₂ from the atmosphere, but also deflects incoming rays from the Sun, without having the same impact as mimicking a volcanic eruption.

Before this research, it was widely proclaimed that the Icarus's impacts on West African landscape would be minimal in relation to the potential damage caused by climate change, and whatever costs that occurred would be covered by the USA's defence budget (according to US economists, the Icarus would save so much money, that enough would be leftover as a sufficient economic package for ECOWAS).

The US and UN have been collaborating to push through ECOWAS's acceptance of the Icarus as a 'short-term' solution to climate change, as the impacts of the latter have become ever more apparent. Leading the US-UN lobbying effort in Accra, Ghana (HQ of ECOWAS) is Sarah Bateman, Gerald's former lover. Sarah has been heading the lobbyist for the past three years, and for her this is the final step toward the biggest milestone in her career. Gerald on the other hand has

incrementally progressed his research on modelling Accra (and West Africa as a whole) as a living organism (inputs, flows, stocks, outputs, waste), and is the expert in the field of Urban Metabolism.

Sarah approaches Gerald before the meeting hoping to get an idea of what he is going to present, but also to sway his opinion. At this time, Gerald and Sarah's secret love affair has ended for a few years now, ending after Gerald tried proposing to Sarah and she rejected him to pursue her career. Gerald is cold toward Sarah as she tries to make one last case for the Icarus but she eventually loses her patience when she realises he isn't going to budge.

Sarah enters the meeting room to see all the stakeholders waiting for her to sit before they begin the presentation. She has resolved to use the discussion section of the meeting to argue her point (she has also managed to bribe some of the reps), and is confident she will win.

Gerald systematically informs the stakeholders of the different ways in which the Icarus would impact on the ecological makeup of West Africa and therefore the urban organisms in which most people live and depend on those ecosystems. It is clear from the research that the Icarus will severely disrupt the region's agriculture belts and sufficiently cripple the economy, but also exacerbate desertification and further Saharan migration patterns to coastal cities.

Mayor Smith, who led the initiative to have ECOWAS sponsor its own research, opens the floor for debate between the parties. The group is split between rejecting the Icarus, and supporting it. Supporting it would free up much needed funds for state governments to sponsor developmental programs. Sarah makes the claim again that it is better they slow down climate change to allow West African governments to effectively develop their capacities for dealing with it. Sarah is very much from the school of thought that advocates technological innovation and green economy, believing that the current system can continue but with a greener face. Mayor Smith on the other hand is a fierce advocate for eco-anarchism (even if some of his policies don't suggest it), and the two battle it out. Gerald doesn't involve himself in the arguments, still dealing with his own feelings for Sarah and doubts over what the greater good is. But deep down, he knows the Icarus will be wrong.

Eventually, the deadlocked parties look to Gerald to provide his final conclusion on the matter. Gerald, having come to terms with the fact that he is indeed emotionally compromised, tells the stakeholders of this realisation and exposes his relationship with Sarah. The two are effectively evicted from the meeting, and the parties put it to another vote, in light of the shocking news.

Outside the meeting room, Gerald feels like he has turned a corner, but Sarah is beyond herself and rounds on him, claiming that he did it to spite her. Gerald tells her that he still loves her, but it is a dead love, and decides to leave her in her wake.

Past Timeline (2020 - 2033)

Sarah meets Gerald for the first time at a circular economy conference, after he raises his hand to ask her about why she chose to use the phrase 'linear economy' instead of 'growth economy' during her opening presentation. After the session is closed, Sarah convenes with her diplomatic friend, Osla, who has been in the Ghana-West Africa circuit for a long time, and her older friend tells her of an upcoming opportunity to head a soon-to-be-established UN organisation focused solely on climate action.

Gerald introduces himself formally to Sarah, and the two exchange contacts, with Sarah telling Gerald to message her for drinks. The two get a couple of drinks the following week, and Sarah advises Gerald to check out programs in sustainable urban development if he is interested in pursuing his education. Gerald follows her advice, since he has grown a little tired of his current work. Gerald doesn't like the feel of Sarah's old program but rather finds one on Urban Metabolism, which strikes his academic curiosities.

The two meet again several years (2025) later at another conference, this time at Ashesi University, which is beginning a series of events to mark the 10th year anniversary of its pioneering Global Climate Innovation Center (incubator for green businesses). The two have seen little of each other since they first met, but they pick up from where they left off. Gerald has finished his program and is now being sponsored to do research into forming a model of Accra as an organism. Sarah, on the other hand, has made significant strides in passing policy toward enforcing recycling regulation. Gerald takes Sarah to a local spot away from the event, and the two dance the night away, before eventually kissing and sleeping together. Gerald tells Sarah of being in a relationship. Sarah understands and tells him that it's their secret to keep.

Ghana is going through an economic recession at this time. Severely hot weather and low rainfall crashes the cocoa industry, in the countryside, (and other key cash crops) which has been ailing for a while now. The power sector also experiences a major crisis, as well as the banking sector, as bad-debts continue to pile up and cause a liquidity crunch for government. Mayor Theresa, who had been elected in the 2024 elections, starts an aggressive on the ground movement to formalise informal economy, since it is thriving despite the recession. Her programs eventually lump Gerald and Sarah together to work on a few projects, leading the two to continue their affair.

During pillow talk and other intimate encounters, the two become aware of each others point of views. Gerald at this point is an advocate for ecological anarchism, which Sarah is aware of, but believes it to be too utopian to actually work. They carry these ideological differences to their work places, but the arguments remain in good spirit. Accra, however is beginning to simmer with trouble as the masses become impatient with government inability to provide jobs, and the economic hardships. Small spurts of violence and crimes become more prevalent, and Gerald hints Sarah that something big is going to happen soon, which might allow for a new system to be created to replace the old.

By 2028, Sarah and Gerald's affair has gone through the ups and downs of a real relationship, but Gerald remains with his girlfriend, and Sarah is happy with the lack of obligations they have to each other. They meet at another conference in Abidjan, after an extended period of not seeing each other (Gerald attempts being faithful). The conference (Assessing the SDGs Successes) is formulaic and quite misleading, and during one of the sessions Gerald rants about how the inequalities growth is creating will cause a violent reaction. Sarah and Gerald are unable to keep from each other, and they end up extending their stay in Ivory Coast with a visit to a quiet beachside resort. Gerald asks Sarah if she could imagine them together, she tells him it would be magical, but remarks that the world wouldn't accept them.

Their affair is reinvigorated, and Gerald consciously suffocates his relationship with his long term partner to open up a chance with Sarah. Accra has reached boiling point and riots breakout across the city. Sarah leaves the country in fear but Gerald stays behind with his family, straining their

relationship. During this period, Gerald's life takes a turn for the worse as he loses funding for his research and a close family member passes away. The violence and unease stretches into the 2032 elections which sees the election of a new party, the GGA that sweeps the executive and parliament. The victory seems like a big win for the masses, and the new party uses the euphoria to bring peace and calm to Accra, and Ghana. Sarah returns to Ghana to collect her things and head back to the US, but US military officials intercept her and inform her that she is the new head of its (SDG goal 13) climate action group. The main agenda being to push for the deployment of a new invention, the Icarus. The technology has been adjudged to be most effective over the West African mesosphere. Sarah accepts the solution and her role, but it is at this point that Gerald, somewhat in desperation, asks her to marry him and she refuses. Gerald, disconsolate and depressed, realises his mistake, retreats, but is lucky enough to be recognised by Mayor Smith, who appoints him as one of the directors of the new improved EPA.

Excerpt:

2020 Chapter III

Gerald tried to link up with Sarah again but it proved futile. Instead, when he wasn't bogged down by work, which was becoming less and less busy by the day, he spent his time scouring the programs Sarah had suggested to him. The program she did was in sustainable urban development, and it looked interesting but a little too plain for his liking. He could imagine the course work without having to look at the curriculum. The typical class on the impacts of climate change on cities. Then the ways cities should be seen as places of optimal resource efficiency, but also be a place of equal rights for all. Probably some elective courses on transport, another on urban sustainable housing, water, waste (as Sarah did). Then he would maybe, quite possibly write a paper on the prospects of marrying urban development with some variation of climate change resilience, focus on some case studies and it would be all well and dandy.

But he didn't want that. Even if his father did say that it would line him pretty well with work once he was done.

"Gerald, I am always thinking about you and your sister. If what you are doing will be enough for you to sustain yourself and a family." That was usually the starter for any conversation Gerald had with his dad about his career, and Gerald would always find himself marking at the back his head to be better in understanding his children when or if they ever came around. Then his father would say something like this "when I was first getting started, there wasn't so much at our disposal, so maybe it made it easier for us to join a career path. But now things are much more complicated and difficult." Then there would be an adage, one of his many that Gerald was familiar with, a story about his own father and what he had said to him, along the lines of "a man is only as good as his plan for himself."

And then when Gerald was allowed the time he would reply, saying "oh, daddy, you know these times we are living in, it's hard to make a career out of one profession, you have to be fluid nowadays. Diverse."

And Gerald's father would shrug his shoulders and finally offer some form of an olive branch "you have done well to get involved with this environment thing. It is becoming a big issue. And maybe

you can look to the oil companies for work, Uncle Thomas, his son, making a lot of money working in the sector. Maybe you can advise them on how they can stop polluting.”

And Gerald would always have to bite back the retort lingering at the tip of his tongue, and rather think for a second what a life working in oil and gas would look like. To be honest, it looked pretty glorious. Well paid. Out of the office work. Apartment paid for. In the in-circles of high society. He would justify the work in the sector by saying “if you can beat em’, join em.” Or a little more intelligibly by pointing out to himself that a few years accumulating capital would allow him some room to start something more environmentally inclined. More so than getting oil companies to clean their oil spills. All within the confines of the current system, though, rapidly heading for climate disaster. But hey! He would be well-off by then.

But Gerald couldn’t bring himself to follow that path, just as much as he didn’t have the heart to tell his dad that that wasn’t an option for him. So left with the options at his disposal, that is, staying at his current work, or finding a new spring to jump up the theoretical career ladder, Gerald leaned on the latter hoping that something interesting would really entice his academic curiosities. And it came from an unlikely source in Louisa who had hustled Gerald into driving her to Makola market to check on some fabrics she had spied a week earlier.

They parked the car way out from the main market. It was severely unwise to drive into Makola unless you had the courage to accelerate through a fluid mass of people. Gerald, lacking this courage, and knowing it for himself (some people would fool themselves into thinking they were hard enough to try) argued his sister down to size, and the two walked together into the market place. Aside the swarm of moving feet and bodies, there was the more static posture of the market stalls. Standing still, providing the framework to this massive in and out of people and goods. Pushed along within the main current, Gerald, gripping his phone inside his pocket, took in the in-takeability of the place. Louisa was leading, and the two weaved into tighter corners of the web, needling through half built houses/stalls/walls, indistinguishable to Gerald, and onto an opening that housed a dazzling collage of African prints and wear.

“Hold my bag,” Louisa instructed, removing her 80s style shades and rummaging through her bag for a pocket calculator.

“Where does all this material come from?” Gerald thought that he might as well use the excursion to educate himself.

“The ones over here are from Holland, and some from Tema. The ones Aunt Augusta gets are from China, if you may know.” Louisa was sifting through materials of different patterns and fabrics so rapidly it was a blur to Gerald. The trader was following closely behind, naming prices, and supplementing Louisa’s chatter with yes mas, and no mas.

“Come here.” Gerald, who had been entranced by a stunning flower pattern cloth, ripped himself away to go over to Louisa, as she held a long stiff fabric across her arm. “Feel the cloth. See how stiff it is. Different fabrics, different weights, stiffness, breathability. You might look around and think a lot of it looks alike. But you hold it and there is something off. So you have to keep coming back, two-three weeks new materials come in. Mix and matching what you see and feel. Sometimes its perfect. Most times, it is just off the mark like this one. See, gorgeous pattern, but the feel is rough. Too rough. You hear aunty! Bring down the price for me...” Gerald left his sister to her craft.

His thoughts were doing their own matching and sewing in his head. He was multiplying, and aggregating the volumes of material, the shipments, the traders at the port, the trucks moving them out from Tema, to Accra. Broken down further. To the different stalls. Or the women went to choose from the source, and bring it at their own cost? Then, how much of it was sold off, how much stayed over, to be recirculated? How frequent did some style of patterns get changed? How about the cloth itself. Now taking into consideration the source, before reaching the business of distributing it. A network. In and outs. People. Material. Waste. Recirculate. Money. Designs. Added value. More money.

Then his thoughts went further. What about all materials, not cloth. For instance, concrete. The energy used to make the concrete. The energy used to make the electrical energy to make the concrete. The water expended, not recoverable. What if... What if you could keep track of these flows, stores, and wastes going through Accra, per day, per hour, per minute? What if, all of the information flowed through some sort of interactive flowsheet? Or model?

And following this expanding idea of modelling Accra, Gerald returned home later that day, excited as a waggy tailed poodle, got onto his computer, searched Google for every way he could articulate his thoughts and finally got to something that hit the mark. Academic curiosity on fire! It's name, or names, Industrial Ecology, or Urban Metabolism. And now, knowing its label, he restarted his scouring of the internet for programs. Netherlands. Barcelona. Yale. These were the places with the most extensive work in the field. Work on the rates at which Oregon metabolised its raw metals. Not just the lifecycle of the element, but its economic and social ideations. Research on water, in Cape Town, with a more directed hypothesis on asking 'what is a sustainable way of managing the water, given the current systems and sources of it.'

And not knowing how exactly he was going to fund his educational advancements (his dad would need some convincing), he created a folder and started filling it with all that was needed to apply for each.

2035 Chapter 2

Gerald had had his head down when Sarah approached him, and thinking that he needed a little jolt, she pinched his shoulder. The effect was instant and he stood up instantly, and the two were facing each other as they had before in another time, in other places, in each others arms. Gerald stepped back, adjusting his body so their faces didn't exactly fall into each other. It was a conscious movement, and Sarah acknowledged it but decided to pursue further anyway.

"Hey Gerald, how are you doing?"

Gerald's gaze drew away from hers, down the hall where the secretary had just disappeared. He turned back and lifted his chin ever so slightly.

"Considering, I would say pretty good."

Sarah who had thought Gerald seemed a little frigid before, got a different sense of his state of being. A little standoffish, if she had to say. On the defence. Sticking out an arm, keeping her at length.

“I guess I am happy to hear it is pretty good. *Considering.*” Gerald didn’t say anything but nodded his head and tried to smile cheekily. At least that’s what it looked like to Sarah.

“I am just here to wish you the best.”

“You are?”

“Of course, Gerald. I have known you for so long.” She was going to pat his arm but thought better of it. She still wasn’t sure how he would receive it, and any false move could cause a knee-jerk reaction.

“You actually shouldn’t be talking to me.”

“Weren’t you the one always going on about ‘the rules.’ Fuck the rules. Or have you changed on me Ger?” Sarah thought maybe she was laying it on too strong now. Why did she call him Ger? That was over the line. Hopefully he would pass it off, kindness prevailing over awkwardness.

“I guess I have changed. Sarah.”

That was as good as it could go.

Pause.

“Well, being serious now. As I said, just wanted to wish you the best of luck. Cause I know this is heavy stuff. And it is probably already in your report. The impact the Icarus can have. It is probably already in your report, how much damage we can avoid if we were to deploy it. And I am sure a lot of your team have already considered the possibility that it would, I mean, - could be deployed without your consent. A unilateral decision by the US. Seeing that it would give us more time to decarbonise. It must be in your report.”

“Everything is in the report Sarah.”

Sarah didn’t like this response. It was closed. She didn’t understand how Gerald still didn’t see it? After all the debate, and data. Overwhelming evidence. The climate models. What was a little sacrifice for the good of the World! A handsome compensation for ECOWAS to bite the bullet of being the worse hit by the Icarus, but at the end of the day, everyone being much better off for it. Their economies receiving a financial package unheard of since the Marshall plan.

It must’ve been a personal thing. His discretion was tainted. Irrational.

“I don’t know why you are being like this Gerald.” She was stepping up to him, losing a bit of her composure. Her inbuilt nudges for keeping it cool and calm were being lost in the mix. Lost in the vibrations building beat by beat from her heart.

“This World will literally turn to shit! It is already turning to shit! And after all this time of you telling me how you were going to dedicate to the cause. How you are for the environment. You going to fight climate change. This is it! And it is so-so simple Gerald, can’t you see that? Doesn’t your report say that? You can’t let what happened between you and I influence your decision.”

Pause.

And it was as if Sarah had never known Gerald at all. His metaphorical arm as resolute as it could ever be. They stared at each other, and the World melted around them, slopping into a blurred blob of everything. Gerald the only fixed thing in Sarah's view. Sarah the only thing in Gerald's. Who would flinch first? Not Sarah. She wouldn't. This was her shit. This is what she was trained to do. Had lived to do. Break people down. And Gerald, as she could see now, was no different from any other man. And in fact, the memories of what they had, what she had held as dear even after it had all gone south, it was all a mistake. She felt silly for not seeing it that way sooner. But things had a slippery way of popping out from under you, when you squeezed them hard enough. Yes! And even if she couldn't get much assurance from him now, she would bulldoze him down when it came down to a debate. And he knew it. Boy, he knew it!

"Excuse me, they are waiting for you Gerald, Miss Bateman."

Unpause.

How long had they been standing there? How long had *she* been standing there? Had she heard everything they just said? Sarah, Sarah, Sarah, this was profligacy.

"Sorry I was heading off to the bathroom, Gerald and I were just exchanging..."

"Greetings," Gerald chuckled to himself.

Sarah tightened her coat and walked past Gerald toward the restroom.

"Hey, Sarah," Gerald called and Sarah, spinning too quickly, almost tripped on herself.

"It was never about the environment. It was about the people." And he was off, walking down stupidly, with the secretary, toward the Mayor's meeting room.

He must've thought himself high and mighty by saying that, Sarah bit. About the people! Come on. The people of the bloody earth. Fuck him. Fuck all of them.

Busting through the bathroom door, Sarah didn't even acknowledge the Care-Bot's hello before splashing herself with water.

"Is that all you would need Madam Bateman?" The bot emoted with its programmed care.

"Yes. Yes. God yes! Thats all I need."

"I can sense that you are distressed. I have a hot towel for you, if you would like?"

"Sure that would be great. I am sorry I bulged in like that. Really am. You can't imagine the stress. You can't imagine. It always feels like the worlds against me. Hooting for my downfall. My father. Gosh. Yeh. Really bringing him up. But yes, everyone. But without them I won't be the strong woman I am. I won't be the thunder they fear. No, I wouldn't. And so I do what I gotta do, right?"

Bounce back. Push and shove till I get my way. And that might sound like an awfully spoiled thing to say, from a spoiled person. But as a matter-of-fact, yes, and it is fact, things need to go my way. It is for the World for fucks sake.” And Sarah couldn’t help but sob a little bit of herself away. And the sobs progressed into streaming tears and she felt silly for crying, but it did her a world of good, because the foggiess that had descended on her was clearing up, and she could see the way ahead again.

“I have a message for you Madam Bateman. Mayor Smith has insisted you are seated for the start of the presentation.”

“Of course,” the hot towel felt magnificent but her makeup was sodden. She hadn’t taken her bag with her, but the Care-Bot provided her with some basic cosmetics to touch herself up with. After a few minutes she looked herself in the mirror and made the promise she would always make.

“If you will it to be, it will be.”

And Sarah’s was off to the meeting room, ready for the battle ahead.