

The first thought I had this morning was to look out the window opposite my bed at the sky to see what the weather was like.

Then I remembered that the rainy season was over and that the sky will look the same every day for a long time now -- even until I leave Guinea and start looking out on a different landscape. Every day the sky will be ugly, barely blue, and hot. Not to be pessimistic, but it's true. Not a cloud breaks it up. Sunrise is a moment of orangish reflection, after which the blank canvas rolls down again.

So the days will be ugly and hot from now until next May, the sky empty and unfeeling, begrudging not a single second of respite or a passing shadow of cloud. Change will come only when the Harmattan winds sweep down from the Sahara, bringing all the loose dust of the desert with them.

I always think that Harmattan is such a beautiful word and should name something lovely, but the heavy, hazy reddish air that settles in and hovers above the land is not lovely. But once the day is over, sunset -- the same brief orange moment as at sunrise -- and THEN the night ceiling comes over us, and it is beautiful. Maybe to make up for the ugliness of the days, the nights are dazzling - - cool, clear, and hung everywhere with stars.

And so for now we will have vicious days and gracious nights. When the rain comes again, it will be reversed: dramatic, fast-moving clouds will dominate the days and throw down merciful rain, leaving the nights to be empty, stars all hidden behind the layers of thick vapor, and very dark.

It could be that life is a deal struck with the sky.