

Essex Street

Kolá Túbòsún

August 13, 2021



That evening, the prophet singled me out
& asked the church to fervently pray for me

that in a vision, he pulled me out of a room of cobwebs
& that an old woman in my father's house hid my star
in a black pot buried at the base of a baobab tree.

Outside my grandmother's house is
a baobab tree on which an owl hoots.

I asked my grandmother why the owl
hoots & she says *the eye of an owl*
is as old as the root of the tree

in one dream, a faceless woman serves me
amala & feeds it to me morsel by morsel

I take the feather back into the house
where I wrote my first poem, which is now sea

in my eyes; each letter, a pillar of salt

The day I arrived irvington,
my mother cleared cobwebs out of their front door,

my eyes tear into a button & my body a compound of dust
& as someone gathers me, i wake inside a church.

new jersey

the tree outside my parent's apartment on essex street
bled rubber syrup

on the day that i arrived a person half my age
dragged a bucketful of nicotine the sidestream
reminded me that i crossed three seas to get here

i carried you for 23 hours, within doha airport
into chicago where the white officer seared my eyes
looking for carcasses through countries
that didn't know i phased through their borders

i am the first son of my father
the second child from a bloodline
that hangs a cross in everyone's arteries

i cannot name the graves i have said prayers over
but i know i want to be here
outside in the sun scalding my skin

my mother hugged me when she saw me,
she planted tears on my shoulder, wept bitter leaf

i don't know if it's for the breakthroughs we have sought for in prayers /
the loss
we both have strung into our ribcage:

the night she slept beside me in a church
where the messenger wore me a white sultana, asking me to sleep
inside the candle sanctuary where i dreamt of my grandmother
laughing over me as i slept where i attempted to shout *jesus*
but my voice was collected over a bowl of water

my sisters emerged at the door
collected my bags
& we went inside

Springfield

in the parking lot of 99-cents on springfield avenue,
my father says, *nobody charges you for parking at home*

we stand outside the mall, beside his black unnumbered wagon,
talking about home; the cold hands it plunges deep
toward the ossicles of dream

in ibadan, there are no buses waiting for you,
& you are not waiting by a lamppost in irvington
at 5am when your throat is thick with fog

you are not wearing three trousers
and a winter coat, you are not heavy
with desire, & you are not trapped here

wrapped inside the fond hope you carried years
before you walked before the consulate,
before sliding the white paper

beneath the glass barricade.
i wanted to be here, in this country,
to claim triumph over grief

& not worry that there is a shrine in my father's house
where an old woman is calling my name
into a calabash

Adedayo Agarau's manuscript, *The Morning The Birds Died*, was a finalist in the 2020 Sillerman Prize. He was the third-place winner of the Frontier Industry Prize, 2020. His chapbook, *Origin of Names*, was selected for New Generation African Poet (African Poetry Book Fund), 2020. He is the author of *The Arrival of Rain* and *For Boys Who Went* chapbooks. His works have appeared in Agbowo, Frontier, Barren, Lolwe, Perhappened, and elsewhere. Adedayo curated and edited *Memento: An Anthology of Contemporary Nigerian Poetry*. He is a co-editor for New International Voices Series at IceFloe and the Editor-in-Chief at Agbowó.