

if i know any god

and i am not weeping. i'm not weeping because i have no mother.
my body knows the comfort of warm hands and soothing lullabies
to quieten my so big worries in this little body. and i hate to make
this another father poem so i will not make this another
broken telephone to call then die in stillness only to hear him breathe
on the other side. i have wanted to breathe easy for as far long back
as i can remember and i do now. but they don't tell you about the seasons
of warmth and fatness and mirth. they don't tell you that is when
you're most at risk of exiting, your finger prints on every arrow
showing you out. papa, i am married now and i don't want
to compare notes. i hear you are too and i am worried,
do you understand? she is my mother in every sense of the word
and all i want is to save her, do you get that? anyway,
i am another lost thing in the quagmire of our relationship.
and if i know any god, it is both because of you and in/spite of you
i have loved things that hurt me, i have wanted to be nothing
like my mother. beside you she was prey and who wants to be
devoured (even) by love? i wish to say i am nothing like you but here i am
perpetually angry and raw. papa, i need you, present, healed and mine.
i need your voice firm and sure and gentle. for the road ahead,
i will need your love a satchel and a piece of bread.
cross this river with me, hold my hand. i am afraid
i will not know what to tell my daughter, what to show my son.
tell me, when your father came back home, did you know him?
did you too hold the palm of his hand as a map to gaborone?
when he died, did you feel the murder of crows collapsing
in your chest? or did you keep going, obliterating everything on your path?

Gaborone Is Nobody's Mother

The first language I learnt was my father's
Laid on my tongue by his mother
Whose am I now that it has grown heavy?
And this tongue cannot lift any sentence beyond
ndo shaka... something

When Marobela sent me to the city
Saying she could not nurse both infant and wilting old woman
Her language was not in my luggage
She forgot to call me back home
Ndo shaka kwilila kunzi

For a year around my mother's sisters
I am daughter from the gods speaking in tongues
My cousins gather around me in hilarity
You cannot blame me when I say,
Ndo shaka kwilila kunzi

And then I learn my mother's language
Forget the first love of my iKalanga
I go to visit my grandmother's grave
And my father's sisters ask me,
Uno dwa ngai?

I have forgotten the language
with which to say-
This too is home

I craft myself a home in the city
Between Marobela and Kanye
But everyone knows, no one is from Gaborone
This city has no daughters of her own
This city is nobody's mother

When My Mother Asks How The City Is

I don't know

What else is there to say about this place

And its unforgiving hunger

Besides its forever asking where I am from

But then quickly unlearning my answer

People here ask me how I am

And before I can unfold my business

They are a bird already chirping to another

What else is there to say about my ache for home

This open wound of loneliness

The men here say I am not from around here

They say it with their silence

Their leaving while I am busy loving them

What else is there to tell about this place

Besides its stale hospitality

Like I ever asked of it anything

But a small-small lie that we both pretend

it is home