

Soonest NATHANIEL**Poems****Vanishing point**

The night before he walked into the sea,
coffee spilled in my father's shirt
and he begged me to help him
take off the regalia of his troubled mind.

Father confessed that he failed to embrace
stubborn dreams of perpetual energy;
feared he would leave the world
without delivering power
to the touch of teeming millions.

The old soldier listened keenly
while the Atlantic replayed
the philosophy of salt.

From our balcony
he could see the waves,
eye fixed like an old poet
waiting for his young lover
surfing upon the tides;
but she had strayed –

too far into the offing;
there is no returning from that place
where the sea kisses the sky.

At dawn, the news filtered in through the windows,

the conservatives said father did not die
the way honest men should;
so he won't be buried in his father's compound.
They left his body in the forbidden forest,
and hung his head on the poles
used to mark boundaries.

A few market days after,
I watched the bone people
and midnight's children
gather to share the inheritance of loss,
gather to savour the remains of the day.
I watched them harvest honey
from the hull of father's skull
where a swarm of bees had settled and made combs.
I tried to bark like they say men should, but it was no use;
for the hunger in the eyes of the disappointed
knows nothing of shame nor honor.

Origin of Sin

At 10, I will wake, a boy

already drunk with the ashes of his father.
Eyes inebriated, yet mind still sober enough
to behold his mother playing pranks with a needle.

Syringe to her right palm, in her left, cotton reeking of spirit.
She divides the earth into an equator and sticks the needle
into the upper left arch.

Eyes closed

in what seem like savoring the bliss of pain;
she mutters a prayer beneath her breath,
I assume it is to the god of things lost;
I assume it is to the god of things
that never long to be found.

At 14, I will kiss a girl –

who knits her own history.
She cultivates a forest on her head,
a thick forest where her broken spirit can be led away,
left to stray like a scapegoat into the Azazel.
She buries my head between her thighs;
she warns that I will taste down there
the essence of her father,
a man who eats babies for lunch.
She will have me weave her hair
into one strong strand, there is a lone tree
at the center of the forest she has cultivated;
her locks will serve as rope
from which her soul
will dangle to freedom.

At 16, I will fail to take off my shoes

at the door of the shrine house;
I will fail to enter the front door –
of the votive temple with my back,
I will enter the most holy place without knocking,
only to behold behind the rendered veil, the nakedness of god.
She could have my eyes gorged out, but there is always another way
to pay for crimes not committed; so, at the hill of rags,
I will leave my gown
like a propitiation on the floor;
I will burn my innocence upon her altar,
and I will learn, there is –
more than one meaning to light.

Parting ritual

When father died, they shaved my mother's head to the scalp,
then they forced her to bathe with the algae-green water
gathered from rinsing father's corpse.

Six yards of white cloth sewn into a mourning gown,
mother wore a smile, it was more lethal than a frown.
They forced her to eat, they said she will need strength,
strength to look the dead in the eyes and confess to lies,
lies that she ate her husband and his other children.

Hers was a feast of worms,
and though sadness filled her stomach,
she struggled to eat the maggots wriggling
from the ears, eyes, mouth, and orifices of decayed justice.

They let her walk the meadows on barefoot,
father's grave had been dug at the end of the grove.
They claim she crossed the thin line
between apples and snakes,
so at the node where two positions meet,
she will light seven candles,
then circle the grave with chalk.

For 90 days,
they confined her to a room,
the "other room,"
*where every limp comes to pose as a patriot,
where every screamer thinks himself a prophet,
and every crook claims that he is a statesman.*
But after all the lechers and mourners go home,
my mother will rise and make love to silence.

Fulfillment

Fulfillment is the smile my mother's corpse wore today.

The moon on this eve of her funeral has entered that phase
in which it becomes a door, door into a history class
where a boy has raised his hand to ask a question about motion.

They say cows do not speak, but this son is no cow.

No! This son is no cow, this son is that proverbial donkey
whose eyes have been blessed to behold an angel.

He has been taught another way; he knows the world is vain,
knows that dirt can be made holy; so he never mocks his own vagary.

He walked into the history class a man dressed in women's clothes.

His masculinity gentle,

His femininity strong,

His arguments weighty;

and he would say,

'who cares if the prophet hangs himself in disbelief?

fiction will always tell a truth that history can never comprehend.'

She knows the road

She knows the road out of the village,
out of the maze of our dark history,
out of this box with four sides
closing in at right angles.

She knows the road
to that place my father is afraid to name,
that place where the earth is a sphere.

She knows the road out of the 'other room',
out of the cage filled with children
who bear ancillary dreams.
She knows the road out of spaces
with accidental geometry,
there where the forgotten children
are forced to understand public grief,
yet the children still laugh at their father's funeral.

She knows the road out of the desert of memory,
out from the grave of the womb;
away from this place where the earth is flat.
In her eyes lay the compass.
In her eyes lay the map.
In her eyes lay corridors to cities of desires.
But my father does not love her,
he says her mouth is full of her own stories.

Libations

History accepts them all,
protons drooping from the orifices –
of space merchants,
photons, neutrons, quarks,
the chagrins in the suitcases of cosmic diplomats,
the chaotic wastes of high energy.
She accepts them all, profusions of timeless possibilities,
sordid convictions of doubt & the spilt milk
of consciences expiating guilt.
So in the lungs of the rain forest
the Carbon chains are breaking
& Kekule's monkeys all joined together by their tails,
are falling from the trees.

History accepts them all,
coconut water, palm wine, decanted semen, milk and blood.
She accepts them all, the aspirations of aborted offspring,
ancient animosities, the iniquities of saints,
cycles of stagnation and the computed eternities of chaos.
So the child with silver hair leaves home in search of god,
in search of new worlds where she can gather stars in gourds;
but it is the night of the Askari
& this daughter knows nothing of what it costs
to purchase a harmless smile in the land
which the cartographer left out of the map.

History accepts them all,
liquid music, sugar, bleeding ignorance, stale beer,
toasted leaves and fragments of disintegrated suns.
She accepts them all, glyphs, monads,

broken syntax, false tongues,
sentences that keep changing their sex
& love that lays hidden between the chaos of texts and symbols.
So a son murders his mother's god and invites her to his funeral.
Time dissolves in her mouth as in the emptiness
she discovers that the rainbow has no colour.

It doesn't take a penis

I was born by a woman, who sits like a man.
Her legs wide open without fear
for what the prying world would see.
And she will say, *'let them bear witness
that this lady is endowed with an elephant-size testicle'*.

My mother wears yucca fibres for sandals
and rabbit furs for clothes.
Her neck is adorned with shells, stones,
Bones, and dried berries;
and she will say, *'dead memories too are ornaments.'*

On certain days she will place my head on her thighs
and with affection in her eyes
she will say,
*'big ships drown in pools, ponds and puddles,
it doesn't take a penis to impregnate a woman'*.

So at the school of her lap, I learnt to castrate my fears
in faith to fertilize the womb of barren dreams.
Last night I heard her say,
*'the open road never leads to death,
it leads to a lake full of laughter'*.

Cameroon Woman

My mother weaves baskets in Cameroon,
for grass she uses boy's pubic hairs
and for rush, the thicket of their eyelashes.

She twines into wicker baskets,
men's beards and moustaches,
and stores in her womb
beer, grains
and the skulls of decapitated dreams.

She sings as she does here weaving, her song says hope is reed
which forms the spokes and staves of ambitions without base.
It says lust and greed are weavers to fill the insides of nothingness.
It says sweet lies are peddled best on the lips of 'honest men'.
She chants a savory song; the fool's ear refuses to eat.
it says love is cocoyam, patience is oil;
and all you require to enjoy this meal,
is to sprout again your milk teeth.

When flowers grow teeth*.. (forRonke)...*

I smell death.

I tread on blood. I am last on the procession line;

last line of code. The light has come and gone

& the programmer will never return.

Some dreams die before they are born.

Arrows in flight may never return.

So I ask: *'Who writes the algorithms of our fate?*

Who plots the graph of our existence?

How can we measure our lives in binary?'

They aimed for his head, lodged lead in the nursery of his brain,

and they found out he did not bleed in pseudo-codes.

His mnemonics had their binding time.

They have come again//they always come.

Assemblers//compilers//seeking to decode the language of memory,

daring to dissect destiny//They ask: *"when is the end of eternity?"*

And some long for a look into the infant's eyes,

longing to read the past of tomorrow;

yearning to know the future of yesterday.

When flowers grow teeth, Lord, let my flesh not pass for meat!

Who will write the Messiah's iteration?

Who will program the day unknown,

now that the light has come and gone

& the programmer will never return again?

In the name of my mother
(after Romeo Oriogun)

I did not want to be asked the riddle of a lion and honey,
nor be told the tale of the prophet who loved the harlot;
No! I did not want that great controversy.
No infidel or lost girl feeling unworthy in the presence of her father,
no eyes peering into her soul, no elders rebuking
demons that will not compromise,
no witch, tied to a stake and burnt with the fire of hypocrisy,
no prophet seeing the end of our forever
no deacon measuring our lives on the standards of stewardship;
no tithes of our privacy, we have nothing to confess to you.

I did not want her to be forced to cover her hair in prayers,
nor to take off the 'strange gods' of her ear rings,
neck chains and bangles; no sermons of a golden calf
and an irate prophet breaking two tablets of stones,
she is not ill, so no hard sponges and hyssop
to erase the tattoos on her back,
her scars are beautiful,
she is beautiful in her sin.
No fasting to regain lost virginity,
the world has become too cruel
and even the savior will not agree to be reborn.

I did not want her to grow thin from feasting
on the junk of father's borrowed doctrines,
but I knew no better,
I had no one wise enough to teach me
how to prepare tastefully the tart repasts of compromise,
nor the ambrosia to be offered the gods at the crossroads.
So I muddled it all up,
having pork and spiked-vodka for sacrament,
pouring libations on wet earth, chanting psalms at the nodal,
walking the sacred path with shod feet,
my boots trampling upon the faces of the ancestors.
Oh! Who offers Ifa praises by reciting canticles with a rosary?
Our father has refused to answer my prayers
because I prayed in the name of my mother.

Oedipus revisited

I swallow the yellow and purple pills
and again, the child returns,
but this time
not to wail by the window.

The child rises from his watery crypt,
pulls his father from the bed
unto the concrete floor
and drags his papa by the hair,
through the blue door.

He trawls his father along the dark corridor,
asking for a name, asking for his mother,
longing for breast milk, yearning for water;
seeking blood to fill his empty veins.
But his father has no answer,
his father holds no reply.
This is no place to weave another lie,
fear writes the truths in the white of his vacant eyes.

The child wants a body not a poor mix of blood and mud,
the boy wants a mommy, something more sacred than god.
But how will this child be made to understand
that a woman learnt
how to sit comfortably inside a burning bush,
so they accused her of defiling god,
shaved her hair with broken bottles
and banished her to a wilderness of dogmas.

What becomes of this child who has no ears?
When his mother cries in the grave cold night,
when she craves for a mouth to suckle her breasts
whose tongue will console her.

A woman's body never forgets

It never forgets that it was once a home
to a child kneeling, back-arched
like a half-ball set for trajectory.
Tonight, my mother's prayer
is fluid like a river,
She places her soul between the light
and lets her shadow be cast upon the canvas
of a memory cut too short to be held unto, yet so deep to let go.
She goes back to forbidden places seeking their sacred grounds,
she wants to unearth a child like a seed but the nursery bed is empty.

She sits at the brink of an amen awaiting the visit of sunlight,
awaiting a stranger whose mouth holds meaning,
but more often than not,
the penitent woman only gets divine deceptions.
A woman her kind adorable with almond eyes
is no stranger to the textures of pleasure,
but most times even when the beach is blue
we take its waters for granted.

Hers is the unheard cry of the concubine,
the unappreciated grasshopper sitting by the brook,
bringing joy to all the other bugs.
The setting sun did not bring her a lover,
so she has nothing to look for at dawn, except
a lecher with promises of graves glistening on his lips.
He says there is a stray dog dancing in the white of her eyes,
he comes to her with loads of destinies,
She knows what the soul will do for solace,
but there are voids we must never attempt to fill.

So this woman will not make a bed in her heart for the prophet,
she has run out of beatitudes, no oil, no dough, no miracles.

The man who dropped at night from a moving train
attempts to move into the dark spaces of her body,
carrying an ambition to leave her gravel
with nothingness and ghosts;
but love must never be shrouded in the language of limbo,
this woman's body has learnt enough and won't forget.
Yes her body won't forget how only innocents pay for atonement.
She won't forget the child stolen, the one deprived of giggles
laughter and songs from the heart of a yearning mother;
the breasts are still succulent and full, but dreams have no lips,
so her milk will eventually go sour in this room that still reeks
of lust, lies and emptiness that a woman's body never forgets.