

ALL THE BOATS I HAVE BUILT

By

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ALL THE BOATS I HAVE BUILT

Genesis

I have absconded from my dread again—
took to my heels
the mantra of fugitivity.

On the sidewalk of this strange land
that is America,
someone had left their belief
& it doesn't bother me.

I rang all the bells kneeling in the fog,
sure enough I would be seen.

What did I know of the echo
in which the silence
of my life freezes?

A breath inside a breath—
a gasp gurgling.

Someone reached out to me but
I only saw their shadow, a fading
where
I should find a face.

It is true: they say I'd fathom the true scene
of want
when I waka meet am,
despite my fatigue, despite
my mortal foolishness.

About the portrait, I claimed its muteness
until I found its voice—

a bell
on an abandoned balcony.

I traced its beauty;
I lost it,
caught ambiguity.

The certainty of death haunts me—

The riddle was never simple:
dread & death
have the same faces,
altered facets.

I have absconded
my death
many times
only to
 run towards it.

Forgive me, I can't explain the eclipse
that is my fear.

It rises on the East of my life,
casts itself on the forest

of my blessedness.

Citizen of grace,
the word *grave* wandered
into my vocabulary?

Believe me, I climbed naked through dread,
tilted the ladder away.

I knelt a fugitive in the fog of doubt—
to what end?

Fugitive to What Ends

I can't account for the nail stuck out of the nemesis—

I came into the void clean,
begging to be filled.

I carried with me
the pitch of desire;
flowers in place of hands.

Almost everything was plain, even the skylight
at the edge of the dark door.

In exchange
for simplicity,
I traded my mind for an old painting.

I wanted to strike out the complex:
God, what have I done to the film—

its mime of multiplicity?

I cameled my way through the void, touching
every wall, mistaking them for bodies.

I been wan dey full,
an arc of purpose
burrowed into my bones.

To move toward its sun,
the self must snap away from the shadow.

Duende of a dreamer, I slept in a bed
that rehearsed my rage—

What riddle must I unravel
to arrive at the crux of my purpose?

Mortal me, I dey try translate the voiceless fireworks
wey I dey waka jam inside my dreams.

Really, I didn't memorize this part of the vision.

I'd meet my animal selves at several thresholds,
but would they know
my name?

I keep asking: whose debt remains unpaid?

I sit under the drip
of my own damp dilemmas.

I've lost my voice
trying to call out to myself
in the wild.

I have sprinted breathless—

a rumour —

through the thrill
of my own mortal fear.

At the end, the plants rise where I stumble—
the riddle lies in my stillness.

What mystery grows where a body falls?

Mystery Grows Where the Body Falls

Jaded, the animal of me slumps
at the threshold of its own dream— spooled
in its own mortality.

I have been beating the drums
where I saw the footprints
thinking
the legs would reappear.

In my dream, people stood
before a painting,
their fingers tracing its sinew.

In the painting, a portrait of a boy
who has my grief.

In the corridor, a lady said I want to own this painting—
I didn't warn her
about the grief beneath the oil.

The world never does well with warnings.

I was a simple whistle—
an escape through a hollowness.

I went around rummaging
the room for echoes—a residue of want.

Everyday, the sky slips out
of my dreams
into my dawns—bluer

than usual.

The myth of it all is: I spend my life
trapped in the threnody of my own worry.

I felled my faith—a sacred baobab—and
I built a tiny boat; doubts for oars.

Forgive me, I'm paddling toward emptiness—
a void floating inside a void.

What are these tears where a tune should be?

A blur
where I should find a bell.

O lamb of curiosity, this is the curse
you're blessed
with.

Good lamb, I go bleating via the haze—
my gaze trailed towards a shepherd

that's never there.

Dear redemption, I traveled through the forests
of my futures,
hoping to make peace with the premonitions,

with the promises—

my footsteps
leaping between
pleas and prayers.

I want the simple things, a dream
where the mirror is not a mirage;

where the gathering isn't a guillotine;

where the birds sing
not to the gravity of my falling.

I want the simple things.

Dear dreams, I have
no objections, I have
only loyalty—

Loyal Witness

Moon-lit, the old gown glows inside the grove.
Outside, the birds drop

to the earth, &
the garden awakes to its own green throb.

True, I was a witness
webbed in my own wobble.

In place of a tongue, a lit torch;
in place of a mouth, a dark room.

I walked toward the glint, the moon slouched
over the landscape like a grazing cow.

Tired, I sat under a tree thinking
it was skyscraper;

had a dream inside a dream
where an artist asks how long I have been in my body.

In place of words, a tiny waterfall
rumbling within my bones,
spilling out.

Dusk took the shape of a dog,
raced itself toward the cliff
of the world.

True, I was a witness
wounded in my own mortal wonder.

On the field, a carpet of stars—
a boy my brother's age scoops them,

hangs them back in the sky, asks me
if I'd love to learn the trade.

The question beats logic to a pulp.

I surrender my clarity to the wind,
trade my breath for complexity.

I shut the doors, stared at the walls
for a meaning—I broke the mirror,
knelt in the ruin mourning my clumsiness.

This is life, a myth we're thrown into—
spun by time.

I clocked my heart out
of faith, swiped it through fate—

I was the witness—to the self.

The dream replays itself; this time,
with the birds rising from the earth.

God, I couldn't have guessed my own redemption—
couldn't have dreamt the birds' resurrection.

I was breathing inside the riddle—
what did I know of the gown or the grove,

what did I know of the tired self?

Miracle in the Mist

As if questioning its own feathers, the egret leaves them
suspended in the air,

its back combed by sojourning clouds.

I wanted to learn the syntax of surrender,
to gift the self to its own inevitable slander.

I failed.

Across the toe of the forest, a bear strolls head-bow
questioning its own weight.

It's the fickle things I try to understand,
my hands heavy in my dreams, the unripe apples falling off the trees—
the whirl of my own heart.

In the plot, I traced the egret to a shore;
on the shore, a clan of swans, their claws testing the water.
I gift myself to the rites of baptism:

what mystery shall I dip myself in to emerge holy?

I hold a blade to the cactus; count to ten
before letting my blood stain its pride.

I swam from a dream into a dream—an echo
knocking on the walls of a temple
after a thunder's belch —all for what?

To he who has been cursed with visions
belongs the psalms of a premonition.

What did I know of the body's compass?

Colt of dreams, I gaited into a land
with still confetti for clouds, and a ground
that chanted my name
back to me
as I walked.

I waited at the exits for someone
whose shadow I can follow back
to simplicity,

slept and dreamt the exits away, a river

breaking into clay, washing what's left of the threshold.

I no even sabi wetin I dey try yarn.

Perhaps, there was a passage into which I came
upon the self—

my life from another zone.

Watchman

Even the axe must be swung
away from its own violence,
but into what?

The night is an owl's dream—
a woman's hand stirring the last broth

while the moon hides behind the trees.

I can't recite the hymn
the world taught me,
so I kept it under my pillow.

In my dreams, its syllables become a synapse
into which I hear my own failure.

I have revised the riddles,
smudged off the complex;
melted the melody
inside a true memory—

yet failed to name
the angels responsible for my life.

Inside the drumskin of my life, I carry a tune
I heard only from an imagination
that's not mine,
one borne inside the skin of my mother.

I danced toward salvation—my feet
testifying to the secrets
of my lineage—

instead the world only saw a child
trudging into the blade of a communal blunder.

Despite my lateness, I dropped
before the light, limned inside its lore—

what brick must I touch to understand
the texture of the world's terror?

I come honest before you—naked
as a needle.

Tell me you can find yourself in my tenses.

Tell me I'm not alone in this Nile
that is uncertainty.

I come humble, empty of pride—
shey you fit see me as I dey?

Caravan of brief timings, we can't travel
beyond where the sea kisses the sky;

We end at the poles
where our gods stand,
watching us
from their own previous lives.

Listen, even if the flute must sing, it must
do so away from its own fallacy—

and what does that even mean?

The world wants certainty
Even when the soul stutters.

Animal Fallacy

On touching its horn to the bark of the tree,
the deer learns
of its own ancestry—
a lineage of horns & hauntings.

On reaching the verge
of the void, I learn the fuzzy
of the future.

The logic is always an escape—
a line outside of itself, a vanishing
where in fact there lives a vanity.

True, I fox
my way through the flames,
startled my fur to its own flammable flaws,
all just to feel
a proximity to the saline of safety.

In a folklore, the fox
was its own undoing—raged
in its own animal fallacy.

In the dream, I skipped
my dawns,
traded my afternoon
for scenes where a shadow without a body
walks towards a casket,
trying to understand its own emptiness—
the body
absent from its own source.

I went late to my own baptism,
stood behind the door
to watch the Priest's dilemma;

the keyhole narrow enough
that I could see my own foolery.

Petrified, I slept so long in the silence of my life,
mistook it for a sanctum;

I snored my past away
only for it to bounce off the walls,
drop to the rug like rotten apples.

Blow out the candles, ballet in the blur
of your own confusion, they said.

I practiced the ritual well,
took the cowries &
replaced them with cottons;

I wanted to see the world different—
an eagle swooning
for the first time
into its own sanctioning.

I wanted to carry the self
into some
different scene,
scrape off the sad from its sacristy,

engrave on the paintings
a prayer.

On touching the deer's horn,
the child learns of its own history—
a sheet of greens,

a flower named after his doubt.

Mortal Gravity

I can't account for the wick
on my worry—
flamed by my constant grasp
at what eventually

falls.

On seeing the mirror, the body doubts
if it really does bear a scar.

I can speak about the stillness, but not the searing—
the exactness of grief—its abruptness and ambiguity.

I have been searching my face in the frame,
took it off the wall and flipped it into my dream.

I constantly amaze myself—
laugh at the gullibility of my own hands.

Night,
I roll in my mortal restlessness—
flip on the switch of my doubts,
set my sleep to sail—
thinking about what exists beyond being.

Once, in dreams,
I awoke into a room full of caskets—
touched everyone of them as I would

a gift.

I was standing inside an ellipsis,
breathing inside the disappearance
of something.

I slept in the damp room of my restlessness.

I wasn't seen, though I spoke in all the scenes—
recited a prayer on a stage
of shadows.

I've been avoiding the stones,
jumping above them as though
this would teach me tenderness, as though
I hadn't adequate dialect for the
register of desire.

I want to be happy
even if it means sleeping under a starless sky;

sure enough to dream the self into some constellation;
even if it means posing naked before the wilting flowers.

How long do I walk barefoot,
with
a lamp held above my face, toward
the lake of joy?

I crossed myself into myself,
convinced I was the bridge

I needed to cross find the sanctuary of joy.

I kowtowed
inside the chapel of my own mortal anxiety—

Chapel of Small Anxieties

I sang all night while I stitched my heart—
a simple yearning, a simpler

yarning.

I sang and my whole life became a singing—
a singeing,

a melody I'd spend my years remaking.

What can I say that I have not said?
Whom do I touch with this self-liturgy?

Claimed, I dropped my fear on the floor,
watched it shatter.

In the smithereens, my doubts glittering
like fallen stars,

my scars flickering on and off like fireflies.

God, make me simple—
despite my glory, despite my grief.

I have felled my faith many times,
built doubts off it. Tired, I crawled my way

back again into the temples, searching
for God's face. What did I find—what did I lose?

Son of a sailor, I imagined salvation was a sea—
that my father could lead me through it.

Don't ask me if he did, ask me why I failed.

Countless moons, I stay up listening to the sigh
of the clock. I count the tiny miracles—

I have been ungrateful.

Where the Sky Falls, My gods Cry

Red, the dreams come to you again
in the shape of blood. What is the shape of blood—
dark or danger?

Cradling what's left
of my faith, I held the rosary above my head.

Each tiny bead a prayer I have said,
forgotten, said again.

To blank the blues of grief, the body
must blaze through its own blur—
a bleating that ferries like a boat.

On coming to terms with my scars,
I strolled in the smoke—signing
what is left of my skin
with the aftermath of fire.

I can't even lie—I bore my cross
across the surface of my own sadness;

walked like any good cat
into the curiosity that's my future.

Again, I can't lie to you—
I have slept in a half-built hut,
sure enough I'd wake up a garden,

a waterfall saying my name
and the names of the women
who held my small body to the moon,
years before I knew the violence of men.

True, I trusted the cymbals of my heart—
I lingered in love;

thought in the cold room of my heart,
that sex was a more honest prayer.

I didn't see the flame when it touched the threshold,
and when I saw it, I mistook the cracks for a cackle:

God laughing at my stupidity.

Sorry, I dressed my doubts in expensive garbs;

took my gods to the street
and watched them wander off.

I heard their chatter, fading

—a family of flowers withering
onto the floor of my being.

Forgive me, I paid so much
attention to my gods' feet—

I didn't see the tears in their eyes.

Cymbals of Grief

I held the blood-stained garment to the sun
to inspect what innocence could be found in violence.

I slashed my wrist, blamed my hands
for being their own tragic machine.

Locked the door, sat behind it
and sobbed while footsteps

knocked the wooden floor outside.
I have said this before

and I'll say it here: the world moves
despite your grief, despite your grave.

Thing with blames is: there's always a hill
to set them on.

I dragged everything out the bed with me
but left my body—moved around a facade,

a fading. I can't describe
what that means: a wind outside the window.

Perhaps; a disappearance. The story always begins
with a wall we can touch;

a tablet where we can circle
the names of our mothers.

What then is this eclipse
where should there be an ecclesiastic?

Lost, I went around
asking for keys to a door I'd never recognized.

What is the psalm of a pilgrim who
must find himself before finding his home?

I can't even say my name right—in place
of alphabets, I adopted objects.

Every year, I describe the things I have lost
by going on all fours: tracing a finger in the sand

to conjure up images. Tell me, does the metaphor

save everything? Uncertain as a cast dice,

I stride toward salvation—my eyes moving
between the scars and the sacraments.

It is what it is: boy touching his feet
to what his heart keeps skipping.

Have I not hummed well in the haze?
Didn't I pull the rope to the right mystery?

Alone in the fog, I tossed my heart.
Forgive me, I didn't know what to expect.

Pride of a fool, shall I tell you
what a slave to gravity my heart was?

Alone in the Fog

I didn't stop to smile even when the sun slid out
the sky. My days have been dark—a starless desert.

Given away hope, squirmed in my own solitude.
It can't be any worse, the painting falling

from the wall, then scattered
over the wooden floor says. I'm whole

yet a void stands like a blank page inside me—
I go down inside the emptiness of life listening for just a sound,

inspecting for just a ray, some light
I could stand under, Adamic.

Sacred, I touched my birthmark
hoping I'd feel the Chi of my childhood—I did.

I tell you this: beneath joy, there lie shrubs of grief
poking their heads up to swallow what they can.

The pigeons have flown home.
Here I am, 25—trudging inside the world's _____,

asking: where is home? True,
I tracked the testimonies: I found joy—

sat in the chapel with cymbals in both hands. Hallelujah!
My hands reach for purpose—a sun

touching the most sacred hibiscus
the eyes can not. I gave my fears a face:

stood in a lit room, painted them with a brush
that comes alive when touched by tears.

I reached for coals I can't claim.
What is the price I must pay to erase the premonitions?

Outside the plot, I stand a lump of salt—
a Lot of an old riddle. The metaphor is on me:

I can't touch my tongue to the tremble—
can't claim no responsibility for the Psalms.

Hopeful, I sleep myself to bliss. In my dreams,

I am my father's reading lamp, his most answered prayer.

In the plot, I practice the science of hummingbirds, sing
even when hungry. I have reached what I can't touch.

god of ordinary things

Robed by the orange sun, the lake sighs
the songs of a new dusk—beneath her skin,

the secrets of sailors whose dreams it'd never know.
To call its dust to the surface, the body rephrased itself in the dream—

a coffin, size of a boat, &
an ark that has no origin.

This isn't my first black dream: its patterns stapled
behind my spirit. To call its dread, the dust shifts beneath the body—

a cling between branch & root, between rot & bark.
I should have known to tip the raven, its feathers of grief—

instead of a hurled stone, a tossed nickel.
What sky did the disaster wing through?

Whose blood stained the raven's beak—
mine or my dream's? Shoveled & seared,

the earth obeys the spade—the earth
a yawn, a void begging, on its hind legs,

to be felt, fed. I can't tell

why I remain faceless in my dreams,
but I fit feel my hands, like say na flowers wey dey drown.

I can't feel my breath: absence—an empty nest;
yet my consciousness buzzes —a myth.

Whose is the boat, & whose body lays in its bare chest—
snoring the song of slumber?

I can't tell if it's mine—can't tell the ark
from the storm. Patron saint of troubled dreamers,

I washed my hands off the tragedy—
took my robe to the river, chanted homilies

while I washed the grief off its hem.
Foolish, I thought garment meant glory.

I mistook my ache for wool, a work
of some traceable craftsman—a needle, a thread

& fingers that understood the craft of creation.
Here is the boat & here is the coffin;

here is the lake & here is a simple truth:
na my body dey inside the boat—na me dey slumber.

Na Me dey Slumber

There was no funeral, yet
an assembly of trumpets blazed through the air—

thick with the unspoken spool of sadness;
no one had died, this I know well.

Every heart beats as it should,
their clocks usual & their dates loyal
to calendars;

By the stream, a gull dipped its beak in the water,
practiced the blessings of thirst.

Bird songs in the trees, then the silence of stones,
then the nests falling,

a simultaneous gasp of thuds.

I can't tell if this was a vision or
if it was a dream—yet, I could point out the divergence,

I could touch the ink to the black
& the white, the song & the silence,

the scene & its vanishing.

Grace, what I saw as the clouds shifted;
Grace, as I stood a disappearance in this revelation.

Grace, Grace, Grace—although, the scenes haunted me.
In one of my dreams, I took my body,

held it by its stalk, to a town filled with trees,
where every woman bore my mother's face.

I sat beside it, listened to its science—its loops & lacks—
sure enough it was the right way to touch its tender.

All the exits I know out of pain
was through it. The body knows this.

Away from the world's calamities, I slip into dreams
pushing my way through a dark blur
into a garden where I water the flowers,
stand in the sun until my skin adopts its shine.

Again, this is a reach.

I no even sabi wetin I really wan do with my life—
I have spent all my coins divining my purpose

in the wrong shrine, spoken to the wrong gods.

Now, I harvest my laughable recklessness.
Believe me: every heart, even mine, beats as it should.

No dead.
No, there was no funeral—

But I was an ink traveling
inside a calendar with dread for dates.

Library of dread

"But at any rate when you say 'I am in pain', you want to draw the attention of others to a particular person."—The answer might be: No, I want to draw their attention to myself.—"—Ludwig Wittgenstein

I was asked: whose grief is this splattered across the floor?
I spoke the language of water, no one understood me:

I left my tongue on the porch. Took the brush to the palette
& put my hands to work.

I wanted to paint my pain: red-ochre, gold-sepia,
a gravity caught outside the frame.

I failed myself again: failed the clan. You see, I rocked
my curiosities, built a small cradle, put them to sleep

while I watched the stars fall out of the sky into a myth.
In my dreams, the stars didn't stop falling;

on the ground, a twinkling twitch, a throb
in the earth's very veins.

Away from the paradox, I sat inside a chapel, heard God's footsteps
moving behind me & then fading away—this could have been a lie;

it could have been the angels testing my faith;
it could have been my mother's ghost gassed enough

to try new tricks. Again, I was asked: whose dark spreads in this room?

I couldn't find the torch, couldn't find the candle,
so I sat in the dark, claimed it for half of my life.

When I painted my pain, I painted out its sonatas—I
was silent in my ache—moved through the thorn a tinker,

moved through the thicket a muffled sob; the tears tuned
out of their tinkle. What could I have said had I aroused

the gentle animals on this voyage? How could I have
described my grief, what face, what dialect, what lineage

could I have assigned to its body?

I don't throw stones at the wrong birds,
I no longer continue to drag the innocent into my wahala.

Omen

I could have left the husk in its cradle, could have
strolled to where the trush gathered itself

like naked children on a sunny beach
& lay my body to rest, sure
it is the right thing to do.

It is right: the westbound gull taking with it in its flight
a prayer not yet heard.

I mistake right for rare, rare for rage.
I miss the surd of their semantics.

The gull wasn't a gull—but a dolphin.
Which is foolish, because I mistook the river for a sky.

There must have been a fog ~~yet defined~~,
its condensed air pregnant with some unknowing—

this again might be a mistake.

For centuries, the skulls of Saints lined the edges of time,
no difference from those of sinners—

the same mistake.

All lines move toward fallacy.
Every lie moves toward fatality.

I never saw the cradle falling, never had the time
to touch the husk (which might
not have been a husk but a heart)

For nights, I clapped outside the body—
each echo a capsule lodged back into it.

How do I tell you this: that I leapt over
my faith—landed inside a fountain of fear.

In my dreams, the dolphin appears quiet,
strategic in its solitude. For days, I've tried to feed the dolphin,

consoled it—even though I couldn't tell for what.
I moved reckless, a tooth through a tongue.

I didn't ask the dolphin why it bellied its own babbles,
held it in like a hut.

Did it lose a child or a clan? For nights, I sighed by the dolphin,
each of us practicing its own death.

Each of us—a diorama—a dream.

All lives move towards finality.

When the dolphin shuddered,
I saw an omen in its fins.

Vanity, Vanity, Vanity

January night, outside, the sky takes what is left
of its new acrimony—dark figment strung across its terrace.

Vanity, the snow melting on my porch.
Vanity: ash falling from the debris

where I must seek the robe of the beautiful.

Always, the threnody places the wrong note
on the bleeding ear—blood bound & mutable translation—

I should have learned of the fingers,
their twitch translated into terror;

I should have found the soft lacuna in the levitating,
foraged its depth for what could have been

a laceration—the epidermis of grief.
I rung dry my rage—spread it out under a moon

whose shadow clawed at my clumsiness.

Vanity—the anthem left in the cuckoo's mouth
as it disappeared into the forest's fang.

Vanity, I sang—ringing the bell of mortality,
mine, ringing the bell as I walked the path.

I'm a speck—a smudge in God's diary—yet
I am bigger than my grief. Yet—:

I crave mercy despite its fickle.
I move lonesome as a spear hurled through a haze.

Nothing prepares the body for the garment of grief—
not even the pyre in the prairie,

speaking a dialect you'd never decode.

Tired, the head rests in its halo, sure enough
it was the closest it could to healing,

sure enough too the hound is just the hound.

Yet, the body travels on—possessed with its own questions:
on whose bed shall I sleep? Whose stream shall I swim?

Where in the city would I find the true lamp?

Logic is a layer—above it fate, faith, fear, flaw:
layers piled upon layers.

Yet, the bodi wan account for everything.
Yet the bodi hold e self to ransom,

makes it its religion to salt meaning to the mysteries.
O, Prince of clay, why, tell me, am I stuck

in my own finite potteries?
Vanity, life is a hymn hovering in a thunderstorm.

I wan sabi my own Hands

Dark metaphor, I could tell: the onions rotten before
I could make it to dinner, the arrow vanishing

mid-air

& the deer startled at this; dark metaphor—i found
myself in a dream in which I was mourning my only sister.

So much of my heart bleeds even before it's laid on the slab.
In the dream, I was a horse, I was *a* wind:

I ran so fast I forgot my legs, trailed God, traced healing—
I wanted to translate the casket to cassock.

To make the death into a delirium; a sojourning from slaughter
to salvation. I couldn't trust my prayer,

doubted if it made it past the threshold, so, I slept on the altar,
imagined my body a sacrifice, a sacrament, a currency

in exchange for my family's safety. I can't lose no one again,
can't dry myself by the fire of loss.

What did I know of the heart's fickle? I mean, mine breaks daily,
a bell caught in a whirlwind: my heart tolls restless,

a throbbing snail. There has to be something beneath the ache,
its luminous fins & films; there has to be a mirror

I could turn to, translate the reflection into revelation:
messy into mercy. Can you believe I took my faith to a pub?

Drank a glass or two & argued with myself
on a lone street: shey you fit still count on God?

Stupid, I mistook my horrors for hands, ran into them:
had nightmares where I dozed off naked on a railway.

Lord, have mercy—I haven't been able to erase the violence from the vase,
haven't even blurred out the blasphemy from my tongue

as I promised I would. Dark metaphor: I been wan sabi my own pain:
so I stayed up at the wildest hours of the night & doodled

my grief into calendars, blotched out the dates—

how alone I was in the hut of horror.

Mercy, Lord

The genesis of the blood wasn't mine to tell—I only touched it to the mirror to be sure it wasn't the clan's. I only performed the ritual, mined the mirage into murmur as if that'd change anything. We can't say the blood is a blessing. We can't say if elsewhere in the castle the lamp still flickers. All we know: if there's blood, there's a blade, behind it, a motive. I can't tell who ran their horses through the haven, can't tell if we should hunt for some signs in their tracks. Every day, the heart yearns for a clear cloud— a clarity of some sort—despite the calamities, despite the dirt of shame that the world has crowned upon failure. Still—we slip, stumble into our own stupidity—thinking we could trust our own human compass—instincts rendered dry, a flower on the pillow of a ghost. Some things never made their way toward me: the divine urge to lay my bones to rest, pull my heart back where it belongs, let fate take its steer. Forgive my human spirit to always anchor towards labeling the ache, towards plotting new escape routes even though the city isn't burning; even though I slept inside my lover for centuries dreaming of daisies, naming sunsets after children we might decide not to have. They all these things even make sense? I mean: a whole library of dread built into our dialect—a whole thesaurus outlining ways to get along with the tragedies. Yet, we stumble—slip into our own terror, doze there. Although, the sky would not fall, I practiced explaining reasons why it might—why God might look at his own oeuvre & toss it out the door. My stupidity shatters me. My questions waver between belief & blasphemy. Lord, have mercy on me—I have spent my years stitching flaws into my faith.

Can You Believe I Took My Faith to a Pub?

I spread my guilts on the table—
splintered gulfs of my own doing,

strutted across them, my eyes taking them by their christening,
taking them by mortal capsules.

This: the ritual of the lamb who must let go of the let-
gos: the regal of faith—the ritual of faithfulness.

At the panel of dreamers,
I told my story without a mortal subject.

Cradled in my hands a cat while I said
All that needed to be said: what does need to be said?

This is a lie: the cat

was not a cat but a sewn parcel of my guilts—
14 lbs of regrets. Lord, what else
must I cradle to be whole?

On the walls, the ghosts of past sighed univocal—
a music of sanctity.

I didn't want to take the template of my life to the temple,
I thought I could trust my hands, trust my heart—

I combed the dark for
the tune of my own salvation.

I thought I could trust my eventual happiness;
What did I know of the slab placed inside the hut of my heart?
What did I know of the hands scribbling & erasing its leaps?—
loops levitated by a language I didn't divine but defended.

Forgive me, I can't unsee my guilts.

I fell into my own failure by repeating my rage; I take to my own constant
stumble at language —wetin I wan talk wey I neva talk before?

What could I have painted differently on the canvas?
How could I have held the parcel?

The prelude of my psalms starts with a nocturne
I only hear amidst hallucinations.

Abel of small things, I walk the streets of America naming the squirrels after
my ribs —blue star—
thinking: how could I detach my bones from the brunt?

How Could I Detach My Bones from the Brunt?

As I lay still with the silence, I found inside
it my very own brevity—a sigh escaping the seraphim's

last note. I counted my days backward
in a language that wasn't mine—

strung the last string of my mortality &
it travels for years & years after my absence.

The platter on which I lay my flaws shines, its raw sheen
polished again & again by my wishes.

I can't tell you what I found in the room where
I assembled all of my selves: the April-selves the love-selves,
the gullible-selves
roaming lost in my dreams.

I can't tell: the malady of my mortal melody:
the tune trapped in the raven's beak like a bane.

Yes,
I hurled the bells into the haze.

True, all my voyages begin with faith,
move through foolery.

What is the salt of my constant fallibility?
What are these blotches on my dates?

I go gats talk am: I bargained with
my angels in the wrong temple —now,

they say my name in a language
that is not even mine. Can you imagine that?

Outside my vagrancy,
what else am I?...exist in dreams I hardly remember:
feed birds, kiss a faceless girl, mend my mother's wedding dress,
set a boat on fire—sleep on a shore naked,

sure enough the stars perch on my black body.

Na the thing with language be this:
I said *perch* when indeed I meant *peer*.

Inside the silence,
I grew younger—found a flower where I left a blade.

Can you imagine that?

My Angels are Not in the Right Temple

after Nulla In Mundo Pax (Larghetto)

By God, I carried the trumpet of my life around in my dreams, played a solo tune I practiced while setting my closet afire every night. I warmed myself

in the destruction of what once comforted me. That was my first error but it Was also my first honest prayer. Heavenly, the angels speak twice as fast as

normal, their pidgin flushed with an accent. On my life, I could swear I heard my name traveling back to me years after I kept it in the angel's pouch; yea, I

could tell the history —the haibun of a holy helium. I left the last seeds at the edge of the shore & sat under a godless moon, its hue knelt on my body.

I sat there waiting for the right time to test the ocean with my own mortal gravity, sat with a trumpet fleshed out of dread rather than desire. I must confess: I was

scared of being lonely, I was scared of drowning a vagrant. Yes, I erected a veil with the music of my own failing & baletted inside it. I mounted a melody at the

edge of my life so everyone mistook my sob for sonorousness. Fragile, even grief throws itself on the podium waiting to be claimed. You see, I can't even

account for my own failure without falling: son of the soil, my hands in the sand is my hands in the dust of my own becoming —don't you know this already? Do

I have to play this tune again? Stroked continuously, I could count the bruises the tune leaves before it fades; I could count the scars even without seeing the

blade, even without seeing the body. Forgive me now, will you? I led you this far only to point you to a language only I know—forgive me now, will you, really?

Vagrant

April—and the moons are nowhere to be found;
it's been days since it snowed in my dreams.

I fathom that all my wolfs sit at the edge of the woods
waiting for the moon. It's scary how meat doesn't fill their hunger—

how desire is a breathing hole.

I could feel their want—my want—so thick I could hide in it
my father's secrets. My most desired language is the in-betweens:

the wolves' paws tracks in the woods that translates first as presence then prayer.
I have been dreaming of my own surprises even before I saw them.

I bear in me an ocean humming with wonder
but what are the blames in the blunt of my bones?

I can't tell you what the nightingale divined about my life;
can't tell you how my life responded—but I have come this far

a bridge; a portrait where abstractions meet.

Congratulations, I made it out of my nightmares
though I brought with me their scars.

Often, my therapist talks about all the tools I could
use to break the walls—but what is it about the dark that feels soothing?

Is it its blankness, its blade, or its banality?

Of the blade, I know nothing—only found it before it found me.

What is this green of grief?

I arranged the grids of my guilts & placed them alongside a hashtag for healing:
see, I thought I could fool myself into believing I could make things work;

I doodled on the canvas the shape of my faith—
it lacked its mortal light, its crescent moon disguised as an eclipse.

I've been translating my heart's rhythm—it stopped sounding
like the horses' gallops but sounds instead like the echoes of the horses' gallops.

Trust me, all rhythm leads us to the root: the truth is:
there was no melody in my dreams that could lead me to the true self.

I am waiting for the moonlight: is this what it means to wait for one's life?

I am Waiting for the Moonlight

The creed doesn't circle back to my static—I moved further west
trailing the bell's hums. Last night, I had the dream again:

there was a thousand clappers, each note carrying a variation of my name.

In the aisle that leads the boy into his own body,
he finds nightingales who sang the hymn of a recluse.

I placed my palms on the boy's face—it was mine.
I have been shouldering a storm, too afraid it would swallow all I have built

if I let it off my sleeve—the metaphor is in the mythic.

I broke the last calabash on the tablet, stood under a sun
that knows the sacrament of my solitude, & inspected it for new creeds.

I spoke of the cast dice, spoke of the whispered riddle: is this it?
Is this how we open a door to a mystery thinking it's an entry to memory?

In my new dreams, I walked naked inside a room of mirrors—
all my selves rendered Adamic, the dust of me a good sheen.

In the dream, I danced in the body I thought I owned, knelt before a blue flame—
& recited the chants of a holy rite:

what did I know of the body's sinister miracles?

Troubled, I trudged, a tired lamb, into the woods,
let down my storms, & begged it to swallow me inch by inch.

Believe me, I no know whether na lie or na just illusion
but I know say I no fit mistake the blade's ballad for any other thing: pain na pain.

The candle flickers with every sob that escapes my body;
the light never fails to lick the scars off the saddle,

never fails to fall on the sail. I have been pointing fingers to my
wounds: how do I strip this language off its regalia to show you the blood in it?

I Danced in the Body I Thought I Owned

after Tamanda Mulalu

It's simple: all love does is make us simple again—

All love wants us to do is forget
the blood at the deer's feet; the knife still poised inside him.

See, I can't tell you why all these should matter:
the sky, the weather, the books we translated, replacing

all the darkness with desire.

We even scribbled rules for a new world, a new world being
dreams where we might meet, united in our animal selves.

Drowsy, I moved the mirrors away from our mimesis.

Now, we are left with our mistakes,
cradled in the coop like newborns.

We are left with our hands on our bodies, unsure of their tasks.
Everything was empty, except for the homes we built while our breaths touched.

Heavy, I left my grief in the landscape of a riddle,
yet traveled all my life with trickles of it mapping

my footprints—blood slumbered on snow.

Trust your guts, it seemed to say, the deer,
not dying, but galloping with the knife rewriting itself into a flower

then back into a knife.

All my problems start with perspective—
the perpetual flaw of my seeing—you hear me?

All My Problems Start with Perspective

And this is also a misgiving:
my mother gathering the firewoods to make a fire
in a night that we both might not be in.
Three days—it took me three good days to realize
I've been planting the seeds meant for the garden
at the old graveyard, thinking it was an abandoned treasure;
instead, it was an unkempt tragedy.
The mistake I made was thinking I could give away all I witnessed
with just words—that bird that births itself with every song,
that stone that, you know, polishes itself with each hurl.
I thought I could swim under a signature that only I divined:
slit the riddle & create a pathway where everyone come
bare to their own mortal fallacy. Guess what? I failed—
the arrow mistranslating the target with its silent whistle.
I sat inside my solitude: held the snapshots of my failures—
I know this one, I remember that one, oh, this was in December,
I can't really remember this. I tricked myself
by thinking I needed a language for these flaws;
thinking language was a horse I could straddle,
ride in the fields of my existence.
I suppose even know say language na the landscape
& the horse grazing wey dey graze inside am.
I should have known language was the song
& the very vanishing of its tune.

Also,
this is a misgiving: my clone gathering the red candles
to make a light in a temple on whose altar we both can't find what we
prayed for. April—I am tired of pulling my anxiety into the rain,
hoping it would at least understand that angels too cry,
that the sky sometimes gets tired of its own blue.

The Sky Sometimes Gets Tired of Its Own Blue

Lord, I have left the wild birds to their own fates:
walked toward the threshold with them in my hands,

out into a sun-bleached sky, I let them go.
For nights, I had dreams in which this scene rewinds itself—

my feet on the floor an eerie note, the walls moving
as if drunk with skeletons, the threshold a coffin on its toes,

& the sky a night beaten off its lights.
I prayed to learn the wildness of the wing's sojourn,
to transcribe the vibration of its keels,

I prayed to be useful, shoveled a bucket of snow into the temple,
spread across the altar, & buried my hands in it.

I wanted to weigh the magic in my own labour:
to watch a flower grow where I last touched—

& is this too much to ask? That I, lost to my own faith, could build
an ark where I could marvel at the mystery of my destiny?

I gave up at surrendering the body to the bed,
so I carved a room inside my sleep, & lit a pyre—

I could swear I saw all my various selves: a constellation of shadows.
But this was a lie—all there ever was in the vision were trees gripped by a strong wind,

& in that haze, in that tussle, a boy with my face stands frightened.
Who'd translate my heart's new notes?

To whom do these all belong? These—these questions
growing like mushrooms at the crevice of my mind.

I've sprinted through dilemmas—crossroads marked by riddles, myths,
my foolishness, my doubts, & my flaws—what did I get,
whose hands bore the fervor of my fears?

I wan just dey my lane—waka into life wey no get wahala; eh, I
just wan dey alright—but is this my court to build?

For hours, I sat in a dark chapel with a cat that would not stop purring
about her loneliness—but how could I have comforted her?

Riddle I

Across the sky, the doves have left a new wonder—a sojourning.
In the new plots, I walk through the maize farm with a sickle,

whistling a tune that the birds taught me. I have nothing in my hands.
I have only tenderness—damp of old coins, tenderness of new seeds.

I have no bloodstain on my shirt: I am just a wanderer,
Calvary of the faithful, I bear a cross that's built with doubts,

fall all the way through, & with each thump the vision becomes clearer,
the question marks vanish.

I've been sitting by the fire I made while the world sleeps,
not to warm myself but to understand the vanity of light.

It will always haunt us: the dreams we failed to hold,
the nests behind our eyes where they failed to brood.

It will always come back to us: death.
In their mantra, the angels stress the first syllable of my name

& I go about telling everyone I am A-maker.
Of what they ask. I don't know. Of dreams, maybe.

I step outside myself into the snow of my being—
no matter how hard I blinked I couldn't feel the fire in my eyes.

I'm twenty-six & life seems to be a house
that moves farther away the closer I get.

Shey you dey get me? Mek I tell you:
all I know about my fate, my faith taught me.

How then do I translate all these dreams
having stepped outside the temple in which I was carved?

Made a holy animal—christened to move via life a hum.
How do I fathom the dots the doves left in the sky of my dreams?

All the Boats I Have Built

While I plunged the fishing hook into the river, I was thinking of you: the self—
flawed, hysterical, animal & true— I was thinking of what it meant to walk into

a field & pluck a song, what it meant to dive into a river to fish out the rungs
of forgotten things. Desire—that's all I was to the other part of my body moving

in the mirror, that's all I am in the nameless dreams. Vain, the birds tear secrets
out of leaves, make a nest out of it. Can I do the same with my glories—moments

when I dance in my mother's room, nights when I write with my father's hands,
days when I speak in my lover's want? The simplicity of grief really troubles me—

the bloodstained rosary, the carpet crowned with dust, the boy at the table looking
out into a world that wouldn't remember his name, years from now. The vanity

of life fascinates me—that all the boats I've built with my beliefs would someday
tumble in their motion, that all my efforts at language would walk ahead of me

beyond my death, that all there is to life is death: that door we strive towards, so
unaware that it is before us. I will speak the language of joy—dip my tongue in

a hymn that preludes with joy & continues with the names of those I love. Farmer,
I would labour in the fields where my body only waters under the weather of a true

tenderness. Tell me, wetin else I fit give the world to show them say all these kini, all
these talks of blood aren't about darkness but beauty—that the camel could strut via

a dark desert only to arrive at the bluest dawn. Tragedy—it's all the birds trapped in
a falling tree dream off—but what if tragedy is a prelude to tenderness? Try reason am.

Untitled

Outside the world, the sun has sunk into a woman's calabash,
a boy on a bike crashes into a market of miracles,

& the bird in their voyage leaves behind psalms
that would alarm our bones for days.

But this is a dream: I was in a room, then in my lover's body,
then in a boy's body, then in a market, then in a bird's body.

Verily, the hands that rest in the haze finds its way into a prairie,
the body disciplined by grief eventually rabbis its science into a prism of joy.

I can't say this enough: love will find you—the mantra my mother's ghost
emptied into my mouth, months after her death.

It's okay —the bird shrieking in my bones, the sand shifting in my ribs—
to wade through the riddle; to cast your shadow into

a mileage of mystery.

God, for the second time, I ask: whose voice shall I find
in the silence of my undoing?

For the first time, I ask: mine or the seraphim's?

I have made myself a ship—sailed on waters
troubled by my doubts. For my oars, I tooled my anxiety—

emptied my pills in the ocean's belch.

You don't get it, do you?—this constant sprint towards meaning:
my left foot stuck in a question mark, my right foot motioned by a god.

Praise: it is all I left behind—the hymnal of my tongue blotched,
ink retracting into ink, alphabets merged into a block of blue.

In the prelude, I mistook the boy for the voice:
forgive me lord, I saw the sound before I saw the animal from whom it arises.

I no fit say no be my fault —I turned the vaults
not looking for gold, but looking for god— is it a foolish thing to do?

I Turned the Vaults, Not Looking for Gold

In my dream it was snowing hard—
I saw an angel walk through that abundance.

Awake, it was raining— Lord, what have I missed?
What am I missing now?

In my bed, my body has made a pact, a streak of blood.
Believe me, I gave the flowers away to the boatman.

In place of money, I knelt & asked for his blessing.
I have been seeing God in the simplest of things:

the oars, the beggar's eyes, the rosary abandoned in my pocket.

'I have been a truly good lamb,' I whisper into myself
as if to convince myself that I haven't traveled too far from God.

In every plot, the horse is alive: this is enough reason for
for me to keep dreaming. In every dream, the plot grows wider,

expands toward the crescent ocean, toward the tree
where my mother's ghost weaves my sister's hair:

this is enough reason to stay alive. On the phone,
my lover wants to know when I'd take off the gown

I made for myself—the one in which I speak in riddles.

Does god really exist in this mileage
between my ageing body & what eats it?

Oh, the metaphor cuts itself—bleeds into a paradox.

I have been singing about my dreams in a room
where everyone else snores. The joke's on me, I know.

The joke: I put up the portrait & paint language
only to realize I was in a dark room.

The joke is, of course, the paradox.

The cold fact of my constant grapple at language fascinates me—
the wild lamp of my heart flickers & flickers like stars dreaming.

Congratulations, you don't make am this far dey mumu yourself.
When I am gone, what will I miss? God, What am I missing now?

When I Comot for this World, Wetin I Go Miss?

Enough flowers, enough velvet tamarind to go round, enough light to pass through our bodies, enough mirrors to inspect what the sky says about my

future today. I am thorough in my doubts—the ripe cherry fallen on hard soil, the monkey too confused of his own hands, surprised he could hold the branch

for that long. It isn't luck—it is grace: that I am alive today, a coin inside a clue. Think about it—I never really praised my own strength enough; kowtow inside

the blur, blaming anything but myself. On the wall, I drew the horses, then the deer, then a moon. One night, I dreamt these animals were walking inside the

moon. Isn't this what a god must feel like?—in the day, a bored painter; at night, a man baptized by his own vision. Mercy me, I scissored the parts of the book

that mentioned death, I burnt the parts that mentioned grief, & made a meal out of the portions that highlighted joy. The playfulness of the sad lamb: I could tell

what sky would bring the wolves, what howl would skin the woods bare, yet I go crawling towards my undoing. & what am I to say of this religion: the arrow-

head of a premonition burning blue, the blood I could have seen on the sunflowers but ignored anyways. In bed, my hands sleep on their own accord while my eyes

breathe alive. There is no sleep for the bad believer. I took my faith to the river & let it test the cold with its own toes. I am telling you now, I can't hold your heart

how you want me to, my faith whispered before it drowned. Lord, abeg I must ask for your mercy again. Lord, na ontop my knees I dey like this. You dey hear me so?

The Horse Wants to Know

What clutter must I run through this story?
Where must I begin with this plot where the self sleeps—

a bat in the dark, dreaming of its own glory.

I took to my tongue a melody carved out of a mime—
rephrased all the echoes that fell away.

On becoming, the horse has nothing to say, I just live—he neighs.
I just live—three letters tattooed to the wall,

the stars perching on its initials.

Dear, put your hands on mine—touch this oars I have fashioned
from a place of love. On living, the horse wants to know why &

where his existence starts—asks questions that haunt
the silence of our sleep. I can't think of whose heart

I must feel to understand mine—the horse confesses.
In the vision, there were thousands of horses, everyone with my face,

the earth so melodic its tune a roar of gallops. At the end of my grief,
I found a garden of withering flowers

& went on my knees to mourn this sign. I don't get it.
The rabbi appears in my dream, on his wrist, my father's old watch.

I don't get it—he says time is nothing but an illusion where
all things come to wrestle their myths.

Speak simple—speak the language of my mortal hunger.

Of desire, the horse drinks from an archipelago
where the moon comes every night to rinse its eyes.

Of desire, the horse gallops inside a riddle.
At the edge of my grief, I came upon a stillness

that sang the language of bones—I came upon a vastness
that reframed itself with each breath I took.

I no fit explain this thing to you—
that I would touch my lips to the paint & see the future of the self,

that I could predict the stillness through which I'd sleep

in my own mortal questions. What fear must I hold to become this alive?

I Have Strayed Away from God

I took the scissors to the hem of my doubts & chikichikichikichiki,
I sliced what I felt has pushed me farther away

from the salt of my faith in God.
Slant, my foolishness stands questioned.

In the plots, I put up a flag in the middle of the fields,
& at night, when the moon sneaks into the graveyards to listen to ghosts,
wolves strut into the fields & marveled at the flag's stillness.

I doubt if my faith could teach me tenderness
the way love has done—

I doubt if I could crawl into the vastness of my life,
& marvel at the flag that's my faith with wonder.

There's always a fang to faith—there is always the eyes mired with
blood, blood not as lineage but ablution.

I shall tell you this: in a dream, I carried a boy's hymn in my throat,
thinking it was a promise that I'd wake up tender, clothed with a desire

that I can show the world. Bones & skin, & all I can think of when I look
at my body is the scar of a question: what might God look like?

Took my forks to a festival where I can only hear people
munch their fears for dessert.

Language escapes me always---
the very first song I sang was composed in my mother's heart—

the song of a child lost to the presence of such love.

Grown, I dream walking into rooms where all the women
carry my mother's smile—all gesturing me to sit at the table,

to stand at the mirror, to say my name how my father says it.

The truth is: I dance in orchards where boys my age
speak of the divinity of horses.

Each voice layered with tenderness—a prayer rinsed in a psalm.

Tilted, my faith slouches like a deer at the edge of a river in summer.
My faith, a thirst, an animal, a river.

I have strayed away from God.

Translator's Notes

I have failed to point where in the fields the stars sank.
I know—the finger directed at the haze is mine—

I can't account for its wobble. I can't testify to its reality.
For years, the seeds of my faith grew by a sea

that echoes the violence of the world; by a wave
that spoke always about the fragility of being.

Of the self, I have come this far translating all its plots,
& to what end? Am I a good translator?

What if I have been writing calamity
where I should write cloud?

What if I have mistaken glory for grief?
Garden for guillotine? On what stage can I stand

& pledge the truth of all these accounts?

Would this be gullibility or foolery?
Can I measure the sight via which the self questions its aliveness?

It took the metaphor days to arrive at its own meaning:
to register itself at the closet where men sync in their mortal curiosity.

It took me years to solve a riddle that has been snoring
inside my bones all along. Sure, you can imagine that, can't you?

I worry about the smudge where I promised to be exact?
Who would come upon the plots & find themselves?

Who would see in the horse's premonition where I intended peace?
I no fit tell you how to read my own palms—

I can only show you how the lines on it have deceived me all along.
The plots take their own course —shape their own movements.

All the Mirrors Grow Thinner

I prayed for the nightingales to find a clean nest in their nights.
I dreamt for many nights of squirrels trapped in a hole that led nowhere—

the world was filled with dark sonatas—

& the cloud was a cotton farm.

I could count on my fingers the nails we found in the walls,
portraits of our religions hung on the old buildings, & in the distance,

the chapel blazed with the voice of angels.
I must admit, they sounded like my mother & sister singing in the kitchen.

All this was in a dream.

I can't trust what hymn I find in the harvest of our mortal homilies—
songs snapped from tongues, synapse of a riddle.

I carried various snapshots of what I hoped
I'd find in temple, hung it around my neck like a gift —

the lamb bleating its way via levitation:

okay, okay—the menagerie of the mysterious son;
the troubadour of his tremble, having seen his flaws weren't faults,

having stamped his failures as foolishness.

Thing is, I wrote the self on a shore, slept by its tides,
just to sneak up on God's hands retracing it.

It's true: the fur of of our desire would taunt us
even in dreams where we are drowning —not in water,

Of course, I made up stories in which my heart was the protagonist,
palpating years even after my body sank into its own doubts;

I made up plots where the horse speaks my name
the way my mother would—each syllable a door I would walk through

to find myself.

All the mirrors in my body grow thinner—each self of the self

All the animals in my life grow younger—the lamb, the doves,
the ageless horse sitting under a sun that yawns holy.

When I am gone, in whose voice would they recite the odes?

Now, I sing of feathers & flowers & foolishness.

Riddle II

Look, the goat's dream —grassland, sunshine, moon on water, barns of desire—
is where I found the goat's need: the questions grown, sturdier, much louder

than I'd imagined it to be. The fear: the axe hung at the threshold, the distance
between the fields & the slaughterhouse. On the goat's skin: the invocation of

furs: the flute of fear. I can't describe what song the body makes in tragedy, but
I can point to gardens where birds fall before the stone even finds them. You can

kneel with me, put your ears to their keels—you can sit with me, listen to the tick
in the goat's breath. Having built a lighthouse, the shepherd walks into the dark

to summon his purpose. Is God always reaching out from their lighthouse towards
the self asleep in its own fatigue? The bell, its accent of pride, wakes me even

before I reached the end of my dream? Is that God keeping me from reading the
edge of the riddle —where I find the root of the self, where, if I come upon it, I

might stop dead in my tracks—choked by my own mortal questions? Verily, I think
with the goat's heart —dream with the goat's eyes. In our dreams, the field is a

cloud—I mean, it's all white—the colour of holiness, the texture of faith. I swear
we could have sworn we saw God, but what we saw: our shadows filed clean by

our mortal failures, a family of flowers that could only have been planted by hands
that knew us before we were born. See, of all things to reach out to: we reached

out to the mirrors, except that they were walls, behind which the ghost of our present
dances. Of course, I declared my love for the goat—but what did I get in return?

Glory

The lamp didn't live so the light is really the
Light and nothing else. The biology of ray defined –

What blinds us blinds us –we trapped in the skeleton of
This soiree. Forgive me, I sing homiletic –laugh louder

than agreed. Whom and what animal have I awaken?
What creed must I compose to be let back into

The temple? What light touches me to my own
Flammable flaws? I don't understand why I must

Always kneel to be seen? Considered a good angel –
See, I trouble my own storms, sleep in my sanctuary

A lamb –I'm so sorry, I forgot my hands in the
Haze again. I'm so so sorry I clung so hard to

The riddle. I lost my life in its cervix. What can
I say –what do I say now that my tongue is the only

Tablets for threnodies? Can't I tether my doubts
To my debts for once? Animal me, wolf wobbling

In the dark of its own mortal mystery. I move
Toward the river mistaking it for my revelation,

Mistaking each gait for glory. Glory, glory, glory, the
Hooves of what I can't name echo behind me –glory glory?

(B)Abel

I didn't name the camel, I walked beside it to
understand its voyage of bearing. In the vastness

of the dream, windows opened, angels divining fates.
I couldn't speak the language of loss.

I was lost. I touched the camel's head to mine
thinking rite would translate to reverence.

Took the hum of its silence in my hands, shoved it down
my throat. Lord, forgive me for I have mis-witnessed the

mystery. Worse still, I'm mis-telling the story. No doubt,
there was a camel but whom does it really pledge its

allegiance? All this to say language falls short at
grasping the riddles in my dreams. All this to say, I have

not the dialect to dissect what should, can not, be dissected.
In the dream, the vastness folds itself into a room

and there again I was: a troubled lamb —bleating my
way through the blank. The chandeliers above me dream

like little stars —their shine a regal pose; doubts poised in
the shape of what my clan has no name for. Yes, it is

true I have come this far a contradiction —lost to err
and to errors —how can I describe here the plot of ipseity?

The Son's Prayer: Iyemi's ritual

Dear Lord, take this plot and make it into
a promise where I am its index, its prelude, and the

prologue of its craft. I am building an ark —soft
Acacia modeled after the ones in my visions, wood

so wood they must remind us of Noah's. Vanity it
is: the blood on the paddle. Vanity, the dove my

grandmother slaughtered every January to ward off
the evil aiming at us while she whispered: God take

us into the shadow of your hands; there we're safe,
we are legible to your grace. The comedy of a ritual is:

It sometimes fails what it is meant to do. The tragedy:
well, the dove's blood stained the knife and my dreams.

Sadly, in some dreams, I see the dove again —epileptic
at its last moment of death —shuddering under

the knife. I stood there thinking blood as communion,
but what if this was just another premonition instead

of a prayer? In baptism, I imagined the doves and truly
believed myself to be chosen. What did I know —that

years later, I'd hold a bloody dove in my hands, and
I'd keep begging it to come alive. Do you know why?

I Didn't See the Blood, I Saw the Blessing

Hope—the dog on the porch dreaming of its owner.

Hope, my hands
reduced to flowers. I stopped painting the tables—but continued
with imagining the suppers I'd someday have with my friends.

The suppers
I'd have with my friends—hope, trust, joy, love, wealth—&
all there is to say about where our trains are moving towards.

Sorry, I left my clock
in the dark; left the dark in my clock—only to have dreams
where an alarm bell kept howling in a dark museum.

Look, there is a jar of blood on the table;
for nights, I mistook it for a jar of ink, dipped in the brush
& touched its liquid to the canvas.

I was painting, but not the tables—
I painted the night & left out the stars;
I painted the moon & left out the sky.

All moves at depiction are deception.

Well, I wanted to wire a mail
from me to me—spent the whole 1.2 mile walk to the library
seeing my face on the glimpses of people whose names I'd never know.

Hope—
how long must I wait before the light captures my name?

I went into my dreams knowing full well the body I possess is
not mine & is not not mine.

I woke up with a new tongue.

I wake up with a new headache—
begin again the harvest for happiness.

Some days, I keep falling into myself—
a constant loop of gravity, a drowning wounded up in my science—
& it scares me.

Lord, it scares me.

Hope: when I hung the painting on the wall,

I didn't see the blood but its blessing:

It breathed my sadness & my songs—

Penance

This is my first failure: language. The tambourines string all the songs yet forget the part where the rabbi slit the ram's throat, raised up its dripping

body, says *what do we have to offer but sacrifice?* My first success is: penance—I crawled on my knee for years begging God, not for mercy, but for a stable

heart, a good weather to my moods. Beauty, I have recited my bits of it, pointed the sheep to a fresh garden, woke up in a dream inside a body of

a dove, soared through the drowsiness of clouds. Beauty —I have touched its face, felt its cold texture against my nape, but I can't describe what it is

like, can't describe what it feels like to hold it for too long. I've done a lot of transcribing: the heart's songs, its solitudes, its silences; yet, I can't tell

what language it speaks when grief becomes a horse in its barn, I can't tell what flower turns ash at the very moment when the music stops. Is there

a veil I should wear, take off? All the fields in my life are so green & gorgeous yet, the butterflies sail home early, the birds build their nests in a foreign place.

How do I move through my failure? How do I sit through my success? Whose mirror should I undress before? How long does it take to build the altar

where everything can just be—even this tired heart? I have been running away from the language of amnesia, but all I truly remember is the joys I could've

touched, the men I could've called brothers, the lovers I could've shared coats with—all I remember is the ache: when will I enter a grace that doesn't shrink?

Untitled II

I can tell where I began from, though without accuracy. I pick my shirt
from the floor where a cat slept meowing all through the night—throw it

upon my back. Those who know the ritual of longing, let them continue;
those who scoop the ash from the remains of their beloveds just to feel

again the fragility of life, let them continue. Those who get it, get it—the
wine, the booze, the sleepless nights where anxiety runs aloof, the passionate

night where bodies calm the night; those who want it, want it: peaches, joy,
a good shoulder to dream on, a chair in a garden facing the sunset. Listen,

I started out a promise, I knew what path I could walk, what rest I should
have, whom to kiss & whom to tease; then life, with its metaphors, happened:

the diagnosis, the meds, the struggle —how could I continue? Blessed these
legs, taken me to the temple & back; taken me to the therapist & back, yet

they can't walk me past the veil—the wall where cracks open & I find my hands
reaching out. I can't tell where I am going, though with inaccuracy. I pick my

shirt from a dream, but I was wrong, it wasn't a shirt, it was a scapular, I hung
it around my neck, a sheep marked by its beauty, by its sad gait. Those who

know the tune of vagrants, let them bless my heart, let them hum my voyage
to benediction. I don't know how to be a happy animal—yet, I carry a hymn

inside of me; I carry a pouch filled with cowries named after my doubts; you
whose palms mark your future, give thanks. How long shall I look at mine?

Blessed Be the Woman Who Sings in My Dreams

Where am I in this carnival?
Lush & full of light, I have washed my feet in the holy brook,
scented my shirts.

I have lit the candles,
Sigvaldi's 'Ave Maria' hums in my head—
Today, I am joy—voracious & neat,
thorough in my smile.

On my way home I came across my dead mother: a lie.

I came across a woman who has the voice of my dead mother
who, in the soft Providence sun, told me you look cute.

It wasn't the words, but the voice—inside it a past:
my mother in a gown saying: 'you look cute in that';
I, too young to understand what death lurked in that space.

When it was time to call the birds home,
the old hunter buried his gun beneath a tree full of nests—
as if saying to the birds,
here beneath this tree is a guillotine that would always appear
in your dreams —years after I am gone.

Then, he knelt under the tree & sang:
May you find peace in this very moment.
May the wind be gentle.
May the nests be warm.
May your dreams lead you into a clean cloud.

When it was time for me to say my night prayers,
I stripped naked,
lit a red candle & let my tears say the words.

Joy—despite it, I wake up in dreams were the fields fold,
where black coffins yawn open,
where I am running but into a desolate city.

I can hear it, even now: my mother's lullaby in that chaos—
I can hear it: the clink of a coin in a burning palace.

Blessed be the woman who sings in my dreams.
Blessed be the melody her voice carries.
Blessed be the body it animates.

Lonely, in my dreams,
I build canoes despite the absence of water;
I take my pickle to the gardens
despite the absence of apples.

What is this hunger to whistle despite the whiplash?

God, I can't feel my hands.

Lord, I keep reaching for your throne:
What is this rung of silence?

Remember the Son of Whom You Are

Sacrilegious, this love I have for my life, for where it is headed—
this train of glory, the rail of its story, the history it will leave behind

in its absence. I'll give it to the philosophers, they know their onions:
one said language is the presence of things not said & I pondered on

that for days. Where & how do I arrive at the language of my life? When
it started to rain, I was thinking of what my grandmother said, almost

as if in that cloudy mumbling I could hear her: *remember the son of*
whom you are, Seun. Iyémì, I'm far away from when we last met, oceans

away from the locales of my dreams. Scary, this curiosity I have for
what lies beyond my life. *Even in its darkest, the night dreams of dawn,*

Aladesawe my grandfather, once said, polishing his hunting gun, a stick
of cigar in his lips. Who can tell you where you're headed if not the path

you find yourself on? Let it guide you. Let go—what will be never ceases
to be. Let go. On days when I dance in my room, I remember my friend

who on a date asked me to cheer up. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to carry the
weight of my life into this American bar, to sit here across you, marveled

at your beauty, scared of fucking up whatever castle we'd build with this
mutual admiration. Simple, my constant struggle at loving the world.

On Ives street, I saw a squirrel & thought of love. On Ives street, I saw
a green house & thought of living longer. Isn't this what hope is all about?

Monologue in a House of Dreams

The snow has been licked off the balcony by the sun.
I didn't expect anything to change, certainly not as much
as I'd have expected the bird I dreamt of to appear
on my porch. One good question: what would you do if
God failed you? Do you sometimes wonder what would
become of you if you lose your wings? It can be wild, you know,
this assumption that only men imagine what their lives could be.
Wild, that the skin outlives the serpent—that everywhere
the serpent finds itself, it is first a target & the targeted.
To be the victim always: to be the villain—the cast out,
to exist in a world as a symbol of blood & betrayal.
If the serpent could speak, what would be its defense,
who would listen? In the wild, trees pray to the sun in
the phonemes of the wind—yet, the script stamps man
in the middle of it all, the world circuiting his shadow.
What I have here is the innocence of a child who questions
his own hands—the curiosity by which the cat hangs itself.
I can not tell you where the riddle falls, neither can I attest to its rise.
All I know, All I have become happened not by my will,
but by the urgency to prove my human-ness: that I know,
that I know above all what it means to grow, to be of age.
Innocence—it's all I want you to hear in my words;
Innocence, the child waving a flag on an empty beach.
If you came here looking for wisdom, you are not lost.
If you came here looking for a door that opens to a new room,
you've found it. Human & hungry, I wanted a clean table—
a template free of questions, a heart clean of doubts. Oh, fuck the flaws—
I have got a decade & more to show for it. All I know, All I have
life placed in my hands—do you understand what I'm telling you?

Revelation

God, I have come this far away from my dread—leaving in my
track letters to trace my footprints On this shore of my beautiful

life, I have left my belief & God, I am so scared it doesn't bother me.
I did ring the bells kneeling before the gate, sure I would be heard.

What did I not know of the echo that hummed in the silence of my life?
One deep breath by one deep breath—I traced the gash with a long gasp.

Everyone reached out to me but I only saw their shadow, a face moving
inside the dark facade. No doubt: they sang about want in my ears —

& for years, I kept reaching for it; I'm so tired, I'm so fucking tired, but
what has foolishness got to do with any of this? The portrait, I knew its

silence, its voice a heartbeat—a bell from a distant balcony. Of beauty,
well, I move towards it, its variousness. Death scares me now, with

all the love I have to give, with no certainty if I'd have it after my time
here on earth. The riddles are simple: dread moves into death, death

circles back to it Oh, I did abscond my death, but what if i'm at its very
threshold? All my theories about the eclipse are made up: there was no

face to the metaphors. Who am I that I should question the cloak
of my blessedness? Grace, what more could I have asked for? What else

is left in the vineyard? Brethren, I have said a lot, do you believe me?
I'm back to where I began. I kneel a boy in the vast of all these, to what end?