

Love & Sacrifice

For the Harana Poetry Tour

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Teaching my mother how to pray

Mother, you are a church of bones,
the candles burn, and we sing
from our hallowed throats;
only you can teach redemption: show me your hands
we were reborn in the darkness of the seventh.

The first time you saw my father
you prayed for thirty days and thirty nights.
If Eve was made for Adam
you thought yourself nothing but clay and dirt:
a woman,
is just a torn rib.

Mary Mother/Magdalene dual martyrs
do you have any more heart
for a holy man who hates
His Father?

Three wise girls
With such sad eyes
Your gifts; grit, rage, submission
We almost forgot we were children.

It has been four years
Since I started to forgive you
The dirty laundry, maggots in unwashed cooking pots
A monthly supply of Mi Goreng and Costco wontons
Your weekly wages spent
On God's coffers
For He loves the poor and devoted

At five years-old
my kindergarten teacher
started to ignore me because I cried so much for attention

My father has six children
Two from before, three including me
And the two-thousand-dollar TV set
He borrowed money to afford
One day,
He came home with new Ray-Bans, told me
We couldn't afford my school excursion

Mother, if your God
Was anything else but my father
Maybe I would light candles
Once more - Maybe, I would
Name this blessing in disguise
Instead of divine punishment

Mother, it is hard
Not to see a mirror in your eyes
To reject this happiness
Carried by your sacrifice
This hallelujah – tainted
By perseverance
How are you to turn ocean out of soil
Make husband from demon?

Mother, you are a church made of bones
Each of the twenty-seven that comprise your good,
Right-hand is bruise
And mercy

There is punishment at your fingertips,
Still, I fear the memory.

I was your lucky girl
Born on the seventh day
Bathed seven times in the river Jordan
Marched seven days and seven nights
To the sound of your apology, still
Seventy times seven I yield forgiveness

Heirloom

My Lolo only loved one woman.

Imagine; they dared to walk too close,
made accidents habitual,
rehearsed their public voices
in private.

Mirroring/kamusta

mastering/mabute

as though they'd never kissed before.

I was told my Lolo was a strict man.

A Christian man, a bread winner,

honourable and respectful,

easily angered and malicious,

unmistakably frowned,

in all the wedding pictures.

No one speaks of him unless asked.

But my Lolo loved one woman;

with hair made of shadow,

her voice humility and prayer,

the lull of sleep, heavy at dawn.

Lady in Black – adrift on street corner,

Hinged

at doorway:

gone.

Lady of Alabaster, Lola

wore ash at his funeral, cursed

my mother's marriage, a sepulchre built with frail promise.

The first of ten commandments

is unyielding. Their wedding vows begin:

I am thy husband your God.

How could she choose

fury beneath the ocean, fissures

deep and unpredictable – or

shame as a wasteland.

There is honour in drowning, she thought – duty and servitude,

for God made woman for man,

and a man of God is good enough.

As Hagar is to Abraham,

my Lolo loved another woman, one whom he could not bear children:

for obligation is a sordid love

of soot and barren soil: your children's children

wander the desert as punishment.

Worship is an heirloom for women in my blood.

Psalms 147:3

If you are Samson
let me be your hair
of strength, of gift to purpose
blessed and sacred
secret; if you be starved
I shall be manna from heaven
Bathsheba as you are David
a King as I am yours; let us wrap our scars
in linen and holy oil
rest, and know peace
pray through shared ligaments
fragrant skin, burns
fills the house with cardamom,
cloves, ginger, saffron
love is a tender insurrection.