



GOMBE SAVANNAH

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(GOSAJOLLCOS)



DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES
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GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY



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Poems for *Gombe Savannah: Journal of Language, Literature and Communication Studies*

**Ismail Bala
Aubade**

I

If the stomach scarcely hides what churns
inside
if fingers exist only as ornaments of the
palm
if the constellations keep their counsel
sealed
if the bones that carry us through the
planet's clay
are nothing more than water stirred with a
trace of spirit

if stooping to gather what we ourselves
have dropped
becomes the hard wisdom we must learn
just as refusing to divide the "clean" from
the "unclean"
remains the only road back to lucidity

if touching the outcast with the mouth
is the surest way to polish the soul's glass

then, Lord, do not reduce me
to a silhouette sustained
by another person's breathing.

I will move forward unbent,
binding in one continuous thread
my actions and my being.

II

If the body is a thin veil
and what we carry spills through it,
if the hand exists only to display its fingers,
if the heavens have learned silence,



if what drives us forward
is a fragile solution—
mostly water, faintly charged with breath—

if humility begins
by lifting our own refuse
and wisdom survives only
when we stop sorting the world
into what may touch us and what may not,

if mercy is a mouth placed
where fear forbids it,

then spare me, Lord,
from becoming a shade
kept alive by borrowed air.

I choose the narrow forward path,
stitching act to self
until there is no seam.

III

If the body barely holds its truth,
if hands are only their fingers,
if the stars refuse to speak,
if our bones are mostly water
briefly persuaded to move,

if learning means lifting what we've fouled,
if clarity comes from refusing
the split between clean and unclean,
if mercy is the courage to touch
what repels us,

then do not make me, Lord,
a shadow fed by another's breath.

I will go forward whole,
binding deed and self
into one line.



IV

If the body is not a disguise
but a disclosure,
if the hand cannot deny its fingers,
if the heavens choose restraint over
prophecy,

if the bones that bear us across the earth
are nothing miraculous—
water briefly instructed to stand—

if wisdom lies in lifting
what our own hands have soiled,
and clarity survives only
when we abandon the false divide
between purity and stain,

if mercy requires the mouth
to cross the final boundary of fear,

then, Lord, refuse me the life
of a dependent shadow,
one animated by another's breath.

I will walk forward intact,
weaving action and self
into a single moral fabric.

Neem Leaf

The warrior, balanced
On the tightrope of his breathing,
Takes on the stillness of a Neem leaf,
The hush known to sleepers in high
mountain air,
the keen edge of the blade by which a life is
kept

Through the plea of a tree
Leaning out over the ravine,
The sacred reaches the muddied man—
Born from a fist of clay,



Sheltered in the cave of silence

Misplaced in the clamorous maze of his era,
He sets names upon the world,
While naked-breasted stars
Stand witness



Season of No Blossom

(Upon Re-reading *When We Were Fireflies*, for Abubakar Adam Ibrahim)

It is late afternoon and nothing is flowering.
Only the sound of heat easing from the ground, distant,
Like the memory of a tune thinning out on an old radio,
Its batteries failing—outside the window, stillness.
And the heavy stem of the bougainvillea bending,
Holding back its colour, or forgetting it.

Now, only dust on the sill, gathered,
Like the memory of a shirt left behind in a room...
So much has been misplaced.

And I, who have waited for a step
All afternoon, hear it now, already withdrawing,
Already surrendering to the past. And the last notes
falling
Inside the quiet; the heat; and the unblooming season
deepening.

The Translator

(Calling Robin Robertson for Mazhun Idris)

He will row east
and east once again,
paddling out on his accord
in the turbulent water.
Stitching the surface,
one half bloke
three halves noun,
calming his turbulence
for the undercurrent.



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