

INTERIOR RUN OVER CUPS

Don't forget to love why
you're here. What brought you here
Lithe contours of the unknown,
faint ever presence of the previous
flume forever listing back to the dock.
Some arrivals we never have a shape for
just suggestions that this outline was intended
to waver, to redirect visible streams
we float on toward reasons, which remain
unjustified. Wanting to be anywhere takes
bitten shapes in being there.
Sharp light touches where it hadn't
reached in you before. How come
I feel like I knew you.
Your voice has unbelonging
like the earliest days of my wandering
for what to call memories. Guide me home
where I've never been. I remember that trail
always dissipated but picked back up
right before it became a loop.

ORCHARD STREET

Hold steady, New Haven city, wobble your music
around my hiding places, trap music
rides the Doppler effect through tinted
windows, slurred over my walk beyond the gates
of downtown to my side of town. Past the school
bell's earshot I can attend
the overtones in slow air beyond the perimeter
of sound around study. How come we can't hear
the carillon out by the Dixwell house?
There's no sound curtain where sirens fade
into slow harmonics. Reentry breaks like glass
instead. Thank god these outer streets fill up
on their own music. I love when the oldhead
Cadillacs pass blasting "Family Affair." Playing
"What's Goin' On." Because the city carries
old patterns in concealed cases. The sound
is a watery border, flocking seagulls to empty
parking lots at midday. Common birds blend in
with bare trees outside my window, their hisses branch
around a single pitch. I realize the problem with this
life is that I can't pinpoint a moment when I chose it.
I said *I didn't have to leave, so I stayed.*
I splintered inside it while its mechanism
marked me absent. New Haven equivocates
a dividing line inside itself. The bells articulate
bands of belonging. There is a man on the curb
screaming *you give love a bad name a bad name*
repeatedly through his whole chest. Not quite singing
but sharper to extract us. His discontent is available
right below the eyeline of the tower.

DISTAL FIELD

Is it my desire
for revelation
of an agent
behind these acts?
must be
the murmur of an
atmospheric
river washed me ashore
heart jettisoned from
within my mother's
blood weather, my
abandon—always sliding
into view behind an impasse
like family. particulate
dispersed through
such interference
that my voice precedes
my apparition as
blossoms in the field
before spring
home is everything
i wish to remain three-
dimensional upon
close inspection. weather
is my prospective
love out there
verifying the distances

THE ALIEN/NATION/BODY TAKES A LONG WAY HOME

Shade behind the high walls
of the high-voltage compound, the nation in me
is occupied with unseen workings. What's behind
its walls keeps me lit up
in my apartment. Uncertain if the walls
are charged to keep me out or in. The body silhouette
electrocuted on the warning sticker
got caught in the not-knowing. All night
a stadium light blares in my open window and I know
where it's made, but can't say
what it found in the dream.

The alien studies broken glass for a trace
of a tradition these shards celebrate, ecstatic
holes in the sky. the body is scattered on sidewalk
and straggle grass, nostalgic
to eat something good for five
dollars, like when that was possible- and it was
hot too. Too much to ask; these days I have
hooptie dreams, rattling down
uneven pavement, the nationbody framed
in a system of slipped loops, alienation
an accrual of collisions with love
and other omens. Close to the end
of the city where togetherness twists
into a metal fence. It's just
a plus sign left on the signage, no names
left inside the hearts carved on the poles.

DREAM PARALYSIS

Some nights I step over the sleeping bodies of my parents
to turn off the steady drip of network news into their ears.

Then I climb the stairs and their voices river behind me.

Since I was a kid they'd recount their dreams

to each other in half-sleep. A murmur under my life gets louder at late hours

a long prayer over omens. They understand
each other's metaphors. Fear braids their symbols to the same loom
and I wake up in the tapestry sometimes.

I was in the other room when a voice spoke
clearly- *I was so angry I lost control of it in my body*

The vents hid little chutes back to childhood, I sighed like I understood like there was
comfort in understanding

But the testimony is cloudy. . . what dream

fastened my legs under that table? To listen

I pinned my ears flat
against my skull for their dreams to run over the banks of the river
I heard my voice return sharply from the far shore

STITCH AND DRILL BIT

After Mauro Pech's Doña Mina y Don Sam

Yes the smell of blood rises to mind, the mineral edge of a body
of water. Salt pulverized off rocks into the tender
shroud of the fog. The taste of salt scratched off
cheek, off canker, salt blister. Thought against
the back of my teeth. No doubt I held
beach rock in the scoop of my gullet to sharpen my silent
childhood toward speech. I knew there were green and red veins
threaded through the core of a hard family. I felt
sediment break off where my bloodlines disappeared
into the village. I followed the grain of oral history's
map. Traced relation against the vanish-thin layers between
flesh and nature. We left for a stone called America and shook
our heads as we passed its grain from hand to hand between
us. The red knot I found at its heart for the oldest
ancestor. Our name anchored in the friable house
chipping under our grip. Someone perforated the slate to let air
into an ancient secret. My uncle came first to drive a tonguetip
deep enough to fasten our dispersal to a pattern, a shape to the stoneheart.
Left before I appeared. Stone is a weight for remembering
why I appeared. The cross-section is evidence that blood
moves backward too. I broke the slate to divide an offering,
warm breath rose in the gap like we just cut a fresh loaf open.

ORCHARD STREET

This bramble
I'm bound up in
has borne fruit.
Backyard over
taken by cycles
of planning
then neglect.
Gourd vine planted
long before me
has taken strong
holds along the fences,
permits sparse
light between
its leaves and
lives on it in
shade of houses,
despite weeds
blotting out the blighted
ground where its
doubled lines
disguise their origin
in memory.
No one can
detangle how
to uproot what never
started: an unplanted
life woven for years
in the dark
perimeter of
what I attempted
to cultivate;
a lack of purpose
prolific in the interior.
Garden box wilds
through the winter.
Survival's grip
buckles the fence
trellis. Long
vine I didn't tend to

knotted all around me,
dropped fruit after
four fallow years.
Not the fleshless squash
I expected, not choke
cherries but hard
won bunches of grapes
softening for the birds
to suckle. I saw
daylight a few inches
above the fences
I was penned in.

TOBI KASSIM

Tobi Kassim was born in Ibadan, Nigeria, and has lived in the United States since 2003. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in the *Volta*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Zocalo Public Square*, *Four Way Review* and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Dear Sly Stone*, was published by Spiral Editions. He was a 2021 Undocupoets fellow, received a Katharine Bakeless Nason Scholarship from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and he is an associate poetry editor for *West Branch*.