

The Immigrant's Paradox

I left home carrying just a single suitcase,
Packed with dreams and a passport
Stamped with prayers and Mama's
Voice echoing in my ears:
"Go, my child, make us proud."

I landed where the air smells like exhaust
And cold concrete.
Back home in Kumasi, they called this place
Paradise.
But nobody told me paradise has so much
Paperwork,
Or that the Chicago winter actually bites your
Bones
While you wait for a bus that's always late.

In history class, the teacher points to the text,
Reading the lines out loud like a prayer:
"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all
men are created equal..."

It looks so simple in black and white.
So finished.
But I sit there wondering if that equality has a
Boundary.
Does it stop at the door of my apartment on
Buena Avenue?
Where the sun barely fights through the tall apartment building
To touch the plant on the windowsill.

I walk into the room carrying bright Ghanaian
Kente,

Looking at the reflection in my bathroom mirror,
Trying to hold onto the exact roots I miss.
People look at me and see an outsider,
Like, I'm just a character from a story they read
For a grade.
They don't get that this is my reality.
They don't see someone just trying to bloom
In a place where the radiator barely works.

They tell me I'm lucky.
Lucky to escape the power cuts and the dust.
Lucky to trade the noise of home for constant
Police sirens.
But they never bother to ask what I left behind.
I miss the laughter that doesn't need translation.
I miss the aunties who called me "dear" even
When I messed up.
I miss the street vendors who knew my order
before I spoke.

They love my culture, my music, my food, my style
But they seem afraid of my actual presence.
They'll eat my food, but won't offer me a real
Seat next to them.
They'll dance to the music,
But they avoid looking me in the eyes when I talk.
They call themselves open-minded intellectuals,
Yet they fear the culture carrying through my
Blood.

But still, I rise.
I rise with the accent I refuse to erase.
I rise with every single tradition I carry in my
Bones,
not as an old relic, but as a map for where I'm going.

**This is the immigrant's paradox:
To live in search of more,
and find that the "truth" we were promised
Always comes with a cost.
And I am still learning how to pay it.**