

MOUTH OF DUSK

NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE



SURAYYA MUSA

CULTIVATING
CREATIVITY



NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family

EDITOR'S NOTE

Mouth of Dusk is a quiet miracle, a mini chapbook that reminds you why poetry first found us through feeling. Surayya Musa writes as if remembering how to speak after a long silence: each poem is an act of witnessing, an honest encounter that makes the world both larger and nearer. There is magic here in these poems, the kind that arrives when emotion outruns diction and language becomes a vessel for something bigger than ourselves. I'm struck by how these poems take us back to that first rush we called a poem: a burst of feeling that needed a shape. What makes this collection so tender is its innocence. The craft is deceptively simple; Surayya trusts plain lines and familiar imagery to do the heavy lifting. Where other books complicate, these poems let nostalgia carry them, and nostalgia here is generous, not sentimental: it is a doorway that brings you home. Voices move from the personal to the communal with an ease that feels inevitable, as if memory itself were the bridge.

Even the formal choices feel pared down on purpose; simplicity becomes a form of brilliance. The poems were written with patience and an unforced clarity, and they burst with grief and love.

Mouth of Dusk doesn't ask to be admired so much as to be remembered. Read it and you'll find yourself learning how to feel again, how to listen, and how to let a simple line become the place you return to.

Abdulrazaq Salihu

*Author of *Quantim entanglements* with notes on loss*

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BORNOS STUBBORN WEED

I belong in the North

The real North.

Once, they called my homeland the Home of Peace.

But deep within my mother's flesh and blood,

I never knew a peaceful home.

I was not here when the day danced to the tunes of birds,

When we were rooted in traditions,

When tourists wandered the woods in search of adventure.

I belong in the North.

When I was born, the sky was already ablaze.

I never knew when the clouds ignited the flames.

I was born into a world of hiding

For they whispered that safety's walls had been breached.

My birthdays were marked by the rhythm of gunfire.

I heard tales of terror

Cold enough to freeze my soul.

I—no, we—belong in the North,

Where children were abducted from schools,

Where houses burned to ashes,

Where villages became abattoirs and graveyards.

Our roads are battlegrounds, where ambushes are frequent,

And our children were orphaned.

We belong in the North

When fathers served as shields

Until their bodies were torn to shreds.

Mothers were forced to behold the horror

Of stolen daughters and slaughtered sons,

When each new dawn brought gunfire and bombs.

We belong in the North.

Today, some of us are back home,

But some places are lost to the winds of time.

Travel those roads, and fear prowls

Like a predator waiting to strike.

I remember my mother's stories
Of her mothers and grandmothers,
Trekking from towns to villages.
I yearn for home
As in the tales of old.
We belong in the North.
Not just my homeland is wounded
Many homes bear scars of pain.
But we refuse to be called homeless.
We are Borno's stubborn weed,
Thriving even in the dead of winter,
We belong in the North.

A WORLD UNKIND

Days shone bright, like the icy fur of a polar bear.
Sun's golden rays as breadwinner,
Moon's soft radiance soothes sunburn.
Birds harmonized with breeze,
Leaves swayed to their melodies.
When the earth was painted moist,
With hues of emerald, green islands and blue oceans
With boundaries that let nature breathe
Humanity basked at nature's pinnacle.
In days when man wore fatherhood's valor,
Woman's velvet palms of mother.
My neighbor's fields watered
In the tender sweat of my children.
Once, Homo sapiens stood as blood brothers,
United like the fist of Adam.
Now they call it the twenty-first century.
Fists clash against the raw flesh of brotherhood.
Girls wear tattered gowns of SA,
As their Poseidons heroes stride across the world's stage.
Children sip cocktails of deceit,
With honor laid as mocktails at predators' feet.
After all, it's the twenty-first century.
We march forth into a cruel world,
Shadows chained to our hearts.
We patch leaky roofs, others throw
Malicious stones, widening the holes.
Thirsty souls offer nauseous glances like crispy fries.
Mouths are bows with sharp arrows.
Lives are no more a scenic circle of nature,
But balls in masters' strings.
In this nasty realm, where Jollof rice
And wine are served at funeral rites,
Graves are dug to pluck the eyes of corpses.
In the twenty-first century,
Humanity fades like a scar in a honey jar.

THE OTHER LEG

In the cold winters of Savannah hills,
I was the sick child of fate,
The green hat legend with swirled moustache
My mother's husband I stole.
With heritage of his gallant height,
He wrapped me like sticky pollen in his core,
And adorned my world with dream frames and flowers
Wildflower that swayed in every season.
He watered love into his tiny blooms,
Until one eerie morning, my petals fell at his door.
The weakest flower in his garden began to wilt.
The day the lion roared, his throat went numb.
He skinned every deer in the forest to shelter my pain,
To breathe life into his pale rose,
To see my suffering vanish like stars at dawn,
But the doctor said, her kidneys have failed.
He could hear the tick and tock of my minutes.
With trembling hands, my father signed the paper as my donor.
And I lived to see the sunrise
With my father's kidney wrapped in my flesh.
Now he walks on one leg,
The other tied to my waist.

DRIFTING THREADS

In the cold winters of Savannah hills,
I was the sick child of fate,
The green hat legend with swirled moustache
My mother's husband I stole.
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THE STREET WITH DIRTY CLAWS

Last night, I looked at the sky, adorned with stars,
And the universe smiled.
Then my brain echoed, it is time.
It is time, it is time.
Time to harvest truth from the garden of flowers.
The naive bloom each morning
Epitome of innocence, pure heart, clean mind, and fragile soul
Dancing gracefully like a butterfly in a garden of red roses,
With dreams to fly higher than the birthplace of stars.
Her smile shakes the multiverse.
Too good to be true.
They said we are born to reign
Princesses blossoming into queens,
Grace upon grace. But did we?
The big picture in my eyes is a mountain of trials.
Rather, let me say, the flower is a victim.
Elegance is her middle name.
She is in love with makeup,
She loves to look good, walk good, smell good.
But the streets are dark with marauders
Those stalkers on the streets with dirty claws and licking jaws,
Ready to scratch and devour every bit of innocence.
Bound in bruises, painting her life in shades of agony,
Unmasking suffering's dour visage.
Her petals withered, a spiritless soul,
Stigma's merciless reality.
I wonder,
I wonder why the universe smiled.
Then that night,
I dreamt
That it's going to be better than it is today.

I dreamt of a world for us,
Where every flower blooms with equal sunlight,
Dancing freely again.
Where streets are warm arms embracing dreams,
Corners soft whispers of encouragement.
Roads escort the way to safety.
Where girls walk with confidence,
Each step echoing strength, not trembling fear.
A world where we don't shiver in timidity at every presence.
Where girls sway like wildflowers
In joy,
In freedom.

CHOOSING HER

The day I plan to elope for love,
I sneak into my mother's room to leave a letter.
My heart nearly snaps out of my ribcage
She's there.
Eyes wide, breath held, I find her asleep.
Her face, bare and tired
She looks so innocent,
So beautiful.
I slip into bed beside her,
Rest my head on her chest.
For the first time,
My heart feels the weight of her pain.
Is it right to leave her?
I am the only child she bore.
What if she dies of a heartbreak?
Is this the harvest,
For sowing all her love in one womb?
Her bones are weary.
She needs someone to steady her,
To laugh with, to eat with,
To say my child is doing well.
She has paid the full price of motherhood.
Now, it's my turn to be the peace she yearns for.
And I choose to be my mother's child.

CHILD OF ECLIPSE

Sunrays propose to moon's warm light
A love story in the world of light.

A forbidden tale, too doomed to last,
We promised to die in the hands of light.

I, conceived in dim-lit rooms of love,
A prophecy gave, a child of light.

Heat threatens cold with burning lasers,
A sinful eclipse that darkens the light.

A forbidden love, a story doomed to pass
Alas, the sun's rays break the moonlight.

The Earth, I named child of our eclipse,
Yet the universe grants custody to light.

Moon tears form oceans on earth, longing to
meet its father in daylight, and mother in twilight.

BREWING LOVE

He asks me out for a coffee.

9:00 AM, and my wardrobe's overkill for a simple coffee.

Casual coffee, yet this feels uniquely special.

I opt for Death Wish coffee.

Crisp air, cozy vibes, and butterflies in my tummy.

His was espresso, mine was iced coffee.

Velvety smooth, sprinkles of cinnamon and a hint of mint

Clouds of silence, sipping our coffees.

My tears fall like snow, drifting down like autumn leaves,

Bittersweet ache, beyond coffee.

For my mother, father, brothers, and sisters

Does he think I am sour about him, or just the coffee?

Just a flash lost in déjà vu,

Of Mother Teresa and her family, sipping coffee.

Her love was as beautiful as birds' feathers, flocking together.

The weather's chill seeps in, I fade like ice in lukewarm coffee.

He pulls out a ring, and my heart starts racing

We are hooked on a Death Wish coffee.

Swept away, lost in a sea of red roses,

Nervously, I gulp my cup of coffee.

I am not worthy of the fluffy puppy's adorable smile,
Not ready for eternity, or early morning coffees.

I stare as the smile fades to sadness in his handsome, teary eyes.
Yet still death do us apart, my Mr. Coffee.

WHAT DID THE RAIN DO

In the endless dance between winter and summer,
A white sky lacks the colors of love.
It's been a while, my love
Like rivers and lakes, I yearn to bathe in you.
Lost in the savanna's golden hills,
My eyes have longed for the sight,
My skin craves the soft touch,
My soul, the scent of flowers.
Steeped in my sweat,
Sunrays beat down on me.
Scars have parched my heart,
Painted in hues of invisible tears.
See, I'm a cat who purrs in the rain.
I lift my mood with the rhythm of thunders,
Leaving my pawprints as I sway, catching every drop.
It washes my pains like it washes clean
The zinc roofs worn by winter.
I smile as rain kisses my fur.
Vegetarian deer, thirsty calves, and weed seeds awaken,
The rain blesses the barren land,
Breathing life into the breeze,
Weaving a serene song for the ocean.

YOUR ABSCENCE

I wish I could see you today,
Feel your curved, pure eyes staring into my emptiness today.

I still feel Mama's touch, her mellow words for tomorrow,
A thorn pierces my heel for the fifth time today.

Rushing to unlock the gate for you,
A mystical veil blinds my sight today.

Oh, to be blind
No reminisce of you will stalk me, flying kite of love today.

You promise fairytale, but happily ever after it's a lie.
You left me a promise, ink blurred by tears for you today.

Will I wait till the sun rises in the west?
I fight for you in a den of lions today.

Have the war-forged bullets taken you, oh my love?
Is your soul torn between the heaven and earth today?

With your name dyed on my face, a wife without vows,
I feel like a white dove with broken wings today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SURAYYA MUSA

Surayya Musa is an aspiring poet who enjoys writing non-fiction poetry about real-life issues, her country, and patriotism. She is continuously learning and improving her poetry skills and is excited about her journey ahead. Although she has not yet been published, she was a finalist in a poetry slam competition, which further encouraged her writing. Surayya uses poetry as a medium to express her thoughts, feelings, and observations about life, capturing moments, emotions, and experiences in her words. Her overarching goal is to continue growing as a poet and to share her unique perspectives with others through her writing. By the end of the program, she hopes to enhance her poetry skills in areas like metaphor and storytelling, develop a body of work (possibly a chapbook), and increase her online presence. She also aims to get published in literary magazines or journals and build connections with fellow writers and mentors.

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