

Unessay Poem

by Lojain Ahmed

Exalted, I host
every string of callous remarks
that trickles out of your mouth,
line them up against previous wounds I have not yet sutured,
and hold myself still in the remaining space of my brain that will have me.

I'm your magic marionette, a sizable trophy,
the kind you do not touch but store in a glass encasing,
the kind beyond the beam of your love.

And yet, I beg for no crumbs.
I let the words boil and evaporate on my tongue,
hold my dignity closer than your body ever was
and will it to be enough to sustain me.

For what else
are women like me
allowed to possess
that is free from the claws of a man?

I see Adaku by the recliner, a batik tapestry in Timilehin's ashen hands,
Ezichi
and Jol
and sunken Zikora by the window, warm sunlight against their cheeks.

We do not speak here, in the shared gray misery,
scrambling to patch up any cracks in this well of words that we've housed for decades.

I want to utter love,
want to shelter you in a refuge of positive affirmations.
But where do all the howls go? The mourning cries?
The wails of a mad woman who'd swallowed loss until it silenced her?

Language coils round and round in my stomach, warped and pestilent.
In the time between one redeeming word and another,
we fall back on what we know.

Skin pressed against skin.