

MAAGENDA

Written by Lea Shime



I carry your name in the grooves of my spine
In the curve of my hips and the swing of my thighs
In the taste of jollof rice and the sweetness of plantain frying on the hot stove

I have always pictured you: stately, dignified, queenly
The thickness of your hair wrapped in fabric wax-dyed glaring reds, golds, greens
Silhouetted against the sun, against the yellowing walls
A remnant of when we were Pharaohs and Gods

I know you
A 20th century Nefertiti with tyrants who claim to be kings
Who parade through Freetown a modern-day emperor
In your bed, at your feet, mesmerized
By the sway of your walk, the arch of your eyebrow, the righteousness of your cheek-
bone,
By the Great Beauty of Taiama
And the way your bangles like streaks of sunlight
Dance across the umber of your skin

I can see you, hear you, feel you,
Ankles buried deep in the bone-white sands of Beach No. 2
The weathered creases of your palm greased with coconut oil and
cornrows pulling on my scalp
Mende lullabies on your tongue and gold at your ears

I can imagine you sifting rice, the deft movements of your hands, the grating sound
As the grains fall again and again and again
The way you call me child even though I know the English language never poisoned
The fullness of your lip

I am you
And I wonder what you felt as you lay on your deathbed in the motherland ravaged
by diamonds
and blood
As your granddaughter's first daughter
In the sterility of a maternity ward,

cradled against bleached sheets and the comfort of universal healthcare,
Was christened with the weight of you, the mystery of you, the distance of you
With your name

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