

MIRROR

POEM

I: CHOKE ME, DADDY.

*"Brightheart loops a quick knot around doubt and strangles it."*  
— Akwaeke Emezi, *Deity* | *Dear Elogbosa*

both  
MISSING & founding fathers  
set the terms of this place.  
this is what I know:

a death-mask unhinged its jaw & gave us the men.  
the men gave their bricks to the pavement, death-jawed.

betting surely on the blood-colour  
of black anger. knowing to twist our fury, bloodly:

(scale-glittered as the stars are,  
surely). until we gave up

that strange fruit-throated song:  
*i can't breathe. i can't breathe.*

can *you* breathe, babe?  
how are you breathing

in this fucking air? is the forked tongue  
*still* lapping up your skirt? the road forks

up ahead.  
either way,

doubt binds the heart with dull rope.  
give me the noose's careful glitter instead:

blooded sparkling. blood-soaked  
kisses are sweetest, wouldn't you agree?

all of us feathered things, finally. held  
in the maw of the scaly systemic: death-jawed.

sweetheart, open your beak for the question now:  
*are you starting to remember?*

## II: GOOD BOY, MY GIRL

*"Bask in the summer of fathers dying."*  
—Jason Purcell, *swollening*

cinnamon crusted, sugar  
smile on her. fresh fruit  
in the book-bowl, an offering

from the islands. jillian sings  
to me & the sky opens. our  
laughter so honey-soaked

the table collapses  
weak at the knees.  
island fruit

spilling all  
over the balcony.  
soft-tumbling as the story  
you make of me,  
true out your mouth.

I point the lens at you, watch  
you mime *I love you*  
in the air,

make the video  
fifteen seconds

(just so I can post it on my IG)  
an un//segmented story

already pinning a song  
to your smile. my mirror  
makes more of you, in all  
your many-minded magic.

you string my fear up  
by its feet, hanging him  
stem-skyward,  
like a dried-out bouquet.



IV: ON YOUR KNEES, PET.

*“What makes them hands at all?”*  
—Kemi Alabi, *44 Questions to Ask While Bingeing*

Because thou hast done this,  
thou *art* cursed above all cattle,  
and above every beast of the field;  
upon thy belly shalt thou go,  
and dust shalt thou eat  
all the days of thy life:

Why would you even—  
decrease the value of my lobola  
below what we agreed on, bhuti?  
all I did was *talk* to her!  
*she* took a bite of an apple  
& now I’m *fucked* forever?

V: MOMMY? SORRY. MOMMY?

*“My mother is almost my mother now, darker colour of the noontime sun.”*  
—Safia Elhillo, *Girls That Never Die*

under the surface of the green  
water, I begin to remember

my handlessness. all limb  
instead, my scales gleaming

darkly, ancient again. K and I  
swim, instead of speaking.

everyman in me submits  
to the authority of the land,

& the water. each guardian  
makes way for mother: utopic

com/promise. I don't feel  
my brown brass-belled chest

in the water, my mass suspended  
for me. floating, I let myself

dream about the knife. the one  
that visits our dreams & whispers

its edge-doubled song: *let me  
cut you, baby. aren't you a boy?*

dark fins underwater  
swaying in response: *no, mama.*      *but I am*

*asking for it.*