

POETRY

Bitter Faith

Kennedy Gisege

Madness, holy madness is doowah,
doowah: open sesame to rainstorms

that leaves one groggy, weak with
lightning and thunder as eagles drop
dead, snaps

forest trees, the roar making lions
draw their tails and slink away like the
Jews of Aden,

Dresden, and Alexandria—the
Messiah walking willingly up
Golgotha carrying

the cross bleeding, urging God to
forgive them with the madness of
faith—that bitter

bad faith while the gods of stone and
skins and cowrie shells conjure up
new evil

so madness can leap and dance as it
wails, leaning down to scream for
new millennia

of misery to pluck away more
hearts of innocents, these idle men
and women that

madness prepares them once more
until despair goes against the will as forests

burst open with blood on pagan antlers
and goat horns plow children back to
slavery,

this new madness beseeching like a
pilgrim and winds howling for eternity like
all madness.

Break from Madness

Kennedy Gisege

You shave your scalp then click
your tongue like a boy who cuts
off his fuzz for the first time, snicks
his chin as blood flows out, then stops
so madness can recede. Or does it,
when you cut off your hand while
hacking up wood. Does madness
begin to wane, then? Or when
the funeral drum rings with sinister
distractions as a woman smiles at you?
Does madness flee for the he-bird
when he warms eggs while the she-bird
goes to war? Because she-birds must do
everything, not just dance when
the drum beats. How about when
a singer yelps without notes and you
wonder if you are black enough or blue
without being told madness is like that—
like waking up from a fever that says
you need a break before it cuts, excoriates.

Insides like the Kora

Kennedy Gisege

The boy will grow to be
curious about
boys and girls,
shoes and t-shirts,
knows to look
with that African heart
and in-grown hairs.
The madness makes him snotty,
fills his hands with pigtails,
but girls won't understand.
They will bawl then run home shoeless.

The boy's mother
will murmur things—
itself a kind of event,
causing madness
to rethink the way
he sees girls,
the mystery of their nipples,
how to nod his head
when their answer
is a stubborn NO—
strong as the laws
of the universe
because it is their birthright.

The boy alone in the night
feels a bit frazzled,
each girl he dreams about
he sees as a thread pulled loose

as he lays awake, waiting for the madness to end.

The boy's mother recognizes the lethal silence
jammed inside like the kora—
that tightly wound instrument from Bamako
ready to bust with its own madness, that desert
music— he will masturbate since the girls are
untouchable. She prays he learns how to become
a man soon,

a hunter brave enough
to bare his eyes to the quills
of a porcupine.

Scattered like Yellow Feathers

Kennedy Gisege

I stand among flowers

scattered like the yellow

feathers of a yellow bird

then start to go crazy

with a terrible flowering

of madness thinking

about a night disturbed by pleasure

of a girl who absconded with a dowry

priced with fruiting breasts

I wonder about her thighs

rolled up with sweetness

now lost forever like

a yellow bird in flight.