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Ethnography of Childhood Ghosts Ghost Four: Afamefuna 1906-1929

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When alligator pepper, palm oil, and kolanut paint a vever
outside the medicine man's door, I flow to murder: the summoned
ghost, in wrap of fretted-light, like white lace with dark holes.
Flush me through mouth of World Under, O medicine man. Let
me surprise party B in the land dispute, swaddle my form around his
shoulders when he walks into me in the latrine. It causes heart attacks:
when ghosts fold into men. Men stretch, have strokes, die.
Party A paid the medicine man. I paid no one in Man's World.
Did the killing. Did not give vagina to my husband's friend:
a good wife, gave unfaithful husband goat shit and crushed tortoise shell.
Sprinkled in soup. Presided over his death. 'Drink his corpse-water
in cupped leaf to prove your innocence,' his greedy, suspicious
cousins said. Of course I drank. Of course I died. Was I
not guilty? Murder bites holes in the soul. I patch my holes with snatched
energy.

Some days I miss the smell of food. But here the ease of travel is something:
to bounce like light! The dead though must eat nothing but light.

You can't buy light at the market, take it home,
cook it in a pot. You must eat what the soul preserves.

Or creep out at dusk, and suck it from living bodies. I suck it
from a man tonight. Pepper calls me, the fieriness of his death.

Palm oil calls me, the blood that must cease its tide.

Kolanut calls me, the life I must douse. His wife calls him
as he walks to the pen, where I have scared the bleating
sheep to the other wall, and where I wait by the dark door jamb,
to make sure the wife shall call, and call, and call, in vain.

About Iheoma Nwachukwu

Iheoma Nwachukwu has received fellowships from the Michener Center for Writers, University of Texas, Austin, and the Chinua Achebe Center for African Writers, Bard College, New York. His work has appeared in *Unstuck*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, *The Apple Valley Review*, *Eclectica*, and other publications.