

A Letter to Isolation

The New Normal

Another day, another zoom
A new routine I'm accustomed to

This meeting was slightly different
Advised to dress nice I sat beside my sister
and my mother typed those ten digits in

Connecting...

Connecting...

Connecting...

finally.

Pages
and pages
of boxes
of faces
glowed.

Without sound, I guessed it was a surprise birthday zoom
maybe someone's 50th, their golden jubilee

Then it dawned on me.
In a little box no different from the one we were nestled in
Another box was being lowered into earth.

"A box in a box"

out of shock or maybe it was awkwardness
I felt the urge to laugh
I know. I was disappointed in myself too

Three quarters of a century of life
reduced to
a wooden frame
within a virtual one

This felt wrong.

Degrading.

Unfair.

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A few hours passed of singing hymns, lagging,
reading eulogies off the Notes app,
sending prayers in group chats.

But all Zoom meetings have an end.

After waving our pixelated goodbyes,
the white mouse scurried to that glaring red button

in one second we were transported
from a cemetery
5000 miles away
to the grey couch in our living room

Another day, another zoom
A new routine I'm accustomed to.

Premature

I cling to
seventeen

my childhood fades

from pastel tints
to mellow greys

New thoughts and feelings swarm
my brain

I cling to
seventeen

sulphurous gas congested our lungs
our dwarfish digits found the triggers of guns

gypsophila buds flourished on my chest
as insects preyed on my blossoming breasts

I cling to
seventeen

syllables leaped from my tongue to your ears
I realise some thoughts were not mine but theirs

August 30.

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Stumbling and staggering
I catch my balance ready to fly
I wonder why I gripped onto the twigs
of that nest:
l'abri

Time zone

I lay awake
aware
alone.

I'm terrified
Terrified of what I'll miss
if my drooping lids kiss

And embrace each other
In that moonless
intimate sleep.

Your chest
rises then sets
mimicking that swollen amber ball in the west.

You are even more terrified.

Terrified of what you'll lose
If Lethargy swallows you whole
and captures you in her perpetual snare.

Yet we persevere.

Blessed by Kronos
You and I
share one sky
in two phases.

Compulsion

How do I heal this wound
I've picked and scratched for centuries?
How do I try to forgive
the errors of our history?
How do I ease the pain
that is laced in every memory?

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On the Circle Line

I've love riding on the tube since I was small
It's actually my favourite mode of transport;
I always felt slightly anxious
in a good way.

Maybe it was the crowd.
Floods of faces
off to different places
with a distinct scent trailing behind them:
Cigs. Maccy Ds. Earl Grey. Fresh Rain.
Car Exhaust. Shisha. The Chippy.
Hugo Boss Cologne. The Thames. Curry.

Or maybe it was the noise:
controlled pandemonium;
at nighttime I adored it:
coming back from Notting Hill
after Carnival
when mandem brought the party to the platform,
eating patties in the carriages,
and I missed my stop *by mistake*...

I've not been on the tube in nearly a year.
I wonder what's changed
And what's remained
The pandemonium I gravitated to
Now repels me.
Belly Mujinga's story
Angered—
No, frightened me

Enough about me.

How on earth
will the newborn,
who are yet
to feel
to smell
to see
to hear
to taste
to know
that experience,
travel?

Underneath the Orange Tree

L'abe igi orombo

the multitudinous roots incarnadine,
making the brown one red
your caretaker hoards your life elixir in
the garden shed

N'ibe l'agbe nsere wa

Docile, meek and mild
as lambs, we graze
upon your poisoned land
while enticed by your shade

Inu wa dun, ara wa ya

We are gaudy flowers sprouting in your soil
Our red petals are weapons, we will not obey.
For us and you caretakers are water and palm oil
We will not mix

Soro soke werey!

L'abe igi orombo

(Yoruba folk song)

L'abe igi orombo – Underneath the orange tree
N'ibe l'agbe nsere wa – Where we play our games
Inu wa dun, ara wa ya – We are happy, we are excited
L'abe igi orombo – Underneath the orange tree

(Yoruba phrase)

Soro soke werey – Speak up madman

The neighbourhood

Ikoyi, Lagos
Our very own
Beverly Hills

by the slums