

JOHANNES ANYURU

FIGHT POEM

Translated from Swedish by Bradley Harmon

The night bus salvages the city
flies up to the curb and stops.
It is, in a word: wreckage, it is
a beetle schlepping its shadow,
cast across the entire Milky Way
behind it.
But no one gets off
and no one gets on
(sidewalks, walls,
like always
slung a thousand miles up and away).
Are they killing each other out there?
the driver whispers, closes his eyes *tight*
and turns the great big wheel away
again. Invertebrately, irrevocably
gone.

DREAM IN COLOR, FIGHT WITH KNIVES

At night, blue jellyfish are flushed into the apartment.
My books glow, my palms open
and I'm driven out into the summer, into the part
of myself that I want to be.

When I look up and see the black leaves of the sour cherry
extinguish certain stars,
the distances are impossible to judge:
solar systems, nebulae, the tree's black branches
and the deep blue that begins
where the arms of the outermost galaxies
sprawl out and vanish in a white underwater haze –
all of this I could touch with my fingers
if I stood on my tiptoes.

Far away I hear
the comets and the motorways
roar.

*

Before the dance begins, men and women are impatient and
nervous. When the ceremony is over is when calm,
peace, tranquility return to the village –

The wild rites
that the colonized peoples
used to vent the huge quantities of
life
that coagulated in their brains.

The clay masks, the great sun,
the torture camps. All of this is real.

It is the Afternoon of the Great Sun.
Nothing will ever be the same again:
when you cut into poems, they get bigger,
when you cut into people
they shrink.

*

Someone bounces a basketball off a billboard.
Two dogs scramble for secrets in the sandbox,
crows screech down into the earth's telephone receiver
and the Native American woman walking by
is wearing a 20-year-old padded jacket
and a facial expression from a time
before the whites—

you see, nowadays even the most basic observations
must have an undertone
of resignation, fatalism, black magic.

There are only a few days left until summer break
and there was another knife fight last night.

The cops were here questioning us.
The guy talking said it was "poor form"
that none of us told him
what had happened,
made the correct assumption
that we all saw the whole thing,
that we were somehow involved too,
complicit, condemned.
What could we say?
The nights are scorching, radiant . . . as if
a meteor were rushing through the atmosphere.
Nothing's the same anymore,
pigs.

Silence, the ambulance smashed its blue
galaxy
against the walls of daybreak far away.
It never ends, everything turns to blood and milk
that's poured into clay pots within us,
we go round and round and catch fire, the planet turns away
and twilight
approaches once more, reaching through the Milky Way.

With the promise of revenge, and
of blood, more
blood.