

Poetry Porch: Poetry

A Dress Rehearsal

By Jonathan Chibuiké Ukah

On the day that I turned thirteen,
I decided that I had come of age.
My sister and I dressed for school.
I wore blue khaki shorts and a white short-sleeve shirt,
while my sister put on a blue skirt and a white blouse.
From nineteen to a dozen, I counted my stares in the mirror,
curled my lips like an embryo in my mother's womb,
wet with the blood of the umbilical cord.
Planning my retreat or escape,
I twitched my muscles in anger,
as though I knew the meaning of righteousness.
I threw my feet over the iron bars of our house
and jumped into our kitchen with a bullish body.

My mother was flummoxed;
my father was beyond excited.
The soap was in his eyes when I re-emerged in a skirt
and the same blouse as my sister's.
My sister could not believe that it was the rainy season
when the day began with a silent sunshine
and ended with a dull downpour;
suddenly, the downpour was irreverent.
How such hysteria about the weather moved her,
yet managed to lie still like a latent volcano,
still festers in the cages of my mind,
as if to live and to die were not a matter of our choices.

My father was the first to recover from the shock,
which he put into use by keeping me at home.
An act of disobedience must not exhaust itself.

Sometimes obedience needs to make a point.
My father fumed that he gave birth to a boy, not a girl,
meaning, if I were displeased with my gender,
there's a better way of starting over.
He stared at me baring the gap in his front row teeth,
screaming that I must decide whether to live
or stay unborn, or better, a stillborn.

Was I not aching to ache, to choose mortality,
while eternity stared at me like a flower at the sky?