

Neema Ngwatilo Mawiyoo

Sukuma wiki

Across the road from Machakos Country
Bus Station—that people filled-and-spilling
bus and cargo open earthen space—
beside a dusty bougainvillea
and plastic laced barbed-wire fence,
crooked concrete slabs disintegrate
under the weight of working women walking
to build a nation, this morning mainly concerned
with tonight’s meal of Ugali and Sukuma wiki,
the hope that today will bring money
—enough to tide her over

Sukuma wiki: green leafy vegetable; kale: literal Kiswahili translation, “push the week.”

Dear E

Dear E,

My life's joy has become letters to the ambient space around me, often addressed to you. Today there is no one to whom I can send this note, but I must let my pen translate and calm in ink the pulsations that bother.

Perhaps it is these black and white moments, tangible or beyond the screen, which comfort—preserve my sanity; more than the thought of you sitting at your desk, attentive or absent, weighing the worth of your own tragedies.

Round Again

i met a man today who speaks like you—
i want to tell
you (can't find your grave, won't
go) there is nothing warm he means

mourning does not end (mourning
cannot end)

he's speaking
now. i'm behaving badly
writing you while he's exposed, waiting
for me. i wanna talk so i can pretend

it's you listening, it's you
talking back when his voice vibrates
inside my head, smiling about

everything you said (everything
you can't see)