

Teen Poetry

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Mandy O.

eat of the fruit but never speak of it  
our throats are sore and seeds spent  
shouting about the labor it took to get us here  
the hands that turned the soil  
stolen growers planting for survival

what does this color mean?  
is it the sound of sirens getting closer?  
the flashing red and blue that sits behind  
our eyelids, the terror of imminence held there  
held breaths and another headline—one you wouldn't get to see

raised hands in front of a uniform  
is this victory or surrender?  
a press, a slowly shut door:  
dignity burns down to the wick, refuses to cower

glowing with joy, lit from within  
this blaze, this hunger, this spark  
the clear amber of melted wax  
something about the melanin  
we are exceptional

yet I'm watching a 3D movie with bare eyes  
seismic colors; skewed images I can't make sense of

I will always be *oyibo*  
unfamiliar with the violently blushing red  
of cashew fruit and song, sacrifice and system  
the bold tang of music, sweet soft harsh corners  
exclamation points nursing drinks; notes with wings

jollof and plantain chips  
yam porridge with pepper enough to  
clear your sinuses and connect you to your roots all-at-once

yet there are whatsapp calls in a tongue that  
makes mine a very poor gymnast

the years have scrubbed my memory  
of the exact way the pitches  
swing under and over I can't  
pronounce my middle name  
I mirror my father's intonation but  
I guess some of it was left across the atlantic  
because my tongue's a clumsy talking drum

there's a seam down the middle of me

I am a barrier to my own history

I've been rinsed out with bleach

and wrung dry with remnants too few to be passed down

"this is all I have" I will say to my children

so much water

bucket to bucket to bucket

and now we're left to stare at damp tin

try to call to memory the splat of rain on zinc roofs

and pretend we remember

pretend it is enough

# Teen Poetry

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Lillian M.

## Stinging Nettle

The silent nettle

sits in the grass,

face upturned

to the blinding heat of the sun

and the vicious fury

of wind and storm.

Though she dwells in the midst of all the plants

she dwells alone—

rejected by all,

she rejects all.

Long leaves of misty green flourish from her roots

and thrive—

barbed with the poison of rejection,

the pain of endurance,

and the beauty of having

defiance enough

to live.

Teen Poetry

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Josselyn T.

I'm from...

A place far from where I am

A place where everything is within walking distance

A place where the sun fills every corner of my home

A place where a gathering is a celebration

No matter how big or small

I'm from...

A place where cooking is a family activity

A place where food is made by hand

A place where you don't know if people are clapping

Or making tortillas

I'm from...

A place filled with laughter

Where jokes are always said

And conversations are hours long

Because time has no control over my family's mouth



I'm from...

My grandma's hands

My grandpas laugh

My mother's hips

My father's smile

They are a part of who I am

And wherever they are

That is where I'm from

That is where I call...

...home

Teen Poetry  
Honorable  
Mention

Fatima N.

## Uneasy Like the Moon

My morning bed shows how rested I was—  
still made and in place:  
slept in by a corpse  
solid tired, drowned right away  
by the pulsing ripples of an ever-moving world.  
—sideways duvet, vertical pillow:  
kept awake by lying lullabies  
that told the story of a  
life well-lived,  
but not by me.

Nothing breaks quite like the heart  
that dreams of what it cannot be:  
One, jagged half made of mare  
(from reaching so far  
that the yearning pulls the arm from its socket).  
One, jagged half remnant of the average, basalt  
terrain of supposed current, so beneath the  
mountains that reign above.

I am more than defined by  
disordered cloth and illusions,  
conjuring histories and legacies  
from ideas of confusion.

Unconscious yet gathering  
thoughts of unreality;  
rest easy tonight,  
sleeping on a deep breath of clarity.

You are more than the designs  
imagined by your mind—  
there are craters of depth, and  
glaciers shifting into place and  
icebergs secure in position from  
unyielding afflictions.

You are aware and awake  
and changing tides you can choose  
to break  
into or to live like a timid flame that stares  
into the darkness and ignites.

Tomorrow, you have  
stories to write  
because you are bound  
for more,  
souls to mend, and  
people to confound,  
but not now,

so, rest easy tonight.