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stasis // or the epic of uzzah

O-Jeremiah Agbaakin

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*[during a Tightrope mock drill at a military orientation camp]
“May God have a photograph of this!” Ilya Kaminsky*

i. *camera obscura* 101

we heaped for a shoot by the testament that
we could stop the clock, trap time forever
from moving in that cuboid of light.
we fed machine to machine until the clock
-hands split: two fangs gnawing at the beast
we built. this is how time feeds, conquers every
thing. we dismembered what's left of the card
board box. years later, i'm on a tightrope which
seems lowered from a sky, numb from camera
flashlight. i stare down at my fall many feet
below. the instructor says that fear is a language
filled with many pauses and my body is fluent

ii. *kinesis*

when i torque my feet are heavy on the string
like a strong arm creaking a bow; my head, an
arrowhead advanced at God. i am afraid of
missing targets, of going away like this.
my life is just one arrow left in the quiver.
the rope twists & squirms under my feet: a snake
that does not want to be trampled on again.

iii. *bystander syndrome: abstract*

we hide quarantined outside our foreign body

iv. *camera lucida*

for centuries (as this) we've labored to keep time
in a hourglass, a pinhole chamber & cozy family
albums. we are always this close to civilisation,
to complete the tower. we shall clog the old clock



-work of tongues & the moon cycle with glyphs
carved from the stone age & big bang shrapnel
& bolt every loose ball-and-socket joint kicking
— as the car skids like a horse with its two front
legs raised above the curb which i fail to catch

v. *the mummy*

i tarry static and tethered as a shadow, a pack of
silhouettes ghosting behind . the cameras wet my
body with light as if embalming it

vi. *the viscosity of time*

too much truth hurts the ear the way too much
salt hurts a tongue the way too much light traps
a body so we wrap the word in flesh, the flesh of
a tongue. ask the woman grieving. ask my dead
uncle now jaundiced in our memory. the kids
sit in turquoise silence. time rusts away like his
liver rot from swallowed pesticide. they gave
him a cup of palm oil to shade his liver life-red,
the oil thick as a clot to trap the ghost that was
loose inside his vein. he perished months later

vii. *the constriction*

the sun appears with a surprise. the snake had
coiled all night on the twig of the tree to choke
the taboo & its old language before swallowing
what they ate to pulp. crossed lights cast a mesh
of ray to trap it. the scales glow inside. in Eden,
raffiapalm: the endangered *raphia rhegalis* lobed
like a studio umbrella as we pose for a session

viii. *martyrdom*

the instructor suffers me to move may be others
too can move. he says that the rope is innocent
until tangled into a noose for Saro Wiwa. and now
i can only pray the ropes not pry them away

ix. *fusion*

i am so sorry if i don't feel anything these days
unless it is my own face *selfied* in shock in the

broken rearview mirror. he tells us that the rope
is failsafe unless broken midair like two fangs
split in an open mouth. my mother opens the scar
on her neck. she touches it, calling it death's love
mark. "nothing good comes," she says, "from the
consummation" i ask her *what of me. what of me?*

x. *stasis*

the man in that wounded car gasps again. i close
close my eyelids shut like small shields upon my
brittle body of clay and scales.

