

Self-portrait as an opposite of my country's bitterness

by Eliongema Udofia

i.

I wish that the distance kept between a girl in a hijab & one with a crucifix dangling from her neck, is a hair strand apart. Or like dreadlocks, that they are allowed to walk with hands interlocked, nosing the scent off an hibiscus, the way children in movies do.

What I mean is that, I wish my sister and the Muslim girl next door, do not have to trash their friendship like leftovers, at the school gate. Or exchange smiles across the fence, the same way people peddle drugs. Instead, they come home chattering happily, their voices clinging in the air like freshly grilled beef, and no one gets lashed.

ii.

I wish that my mind is washed off of all the hatred sown in me, by my country's tenebrous fingers; and that I step out to a Muslim boy and unlike other days, we do not exchange arrowed looks, instead, we wave hands, the very same kind of wave one gates from a relative who exits a terminal, years fading in each wave. that for the first time in eighteen years, my eyes softens at the sight of a prayer mat, that I change my synonym for Muslim from bomber to brother; that I step into church and don't have that fear of stepping out in a body bag. that I touch the part of my heart painted in my parents hatred, and a rose bush grows in its place.

iii.

I wish that all the bodies my grandfather silenced during the war come home as pilgrims; that the regret in his voice dissipates like nose blown cigar ash.

iv.

I wish that I am nine again and seeing a white man for the first time, that instead of staring at him with the hatred our history teacher had given us, that I ask him if he has everything that makes me human- a heart, conscience, tears.

He says, Yes; so I call him Brother.