

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Praise Osawaru: “Stuck In Traffic, I Witness”

Praise Osawaru · Wednesday, October 14th, 2020

“Stuck in Traffic, I Witness” examines a small incident and meditates on its spiritual and humanistic significance. The poem’s power derives from the intimate conversation the speaker has with us readers: “Sometimes, I wonder if the universe intentionally breaks us till our bodies compete with dust before dispensing a rain of half-baked glee to whet our appetite for living.” The speaker then invites us to bear witness to the beauty of the human spirit. Going against the experience and understanding of an adult (i.e. her mother “whose screams rival with honks for dominance of the air” in reaction to her daughter’s action), the little girl returns money (described beautifully as a “aerogami” tossed in the Lagos wind) to its proper owner, a little street beggar. Such gesture moves our speaker and, in turn, us, and “whet[s] our appetite for living.” Our hope for a better world is ultimately sustained. A world where generosity, kindness, and compassion serve as antidote to the narcissism and egocentrism that currently plague our real world.

— Bunkong Tuon

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## Stuck In Traffic, I Witness

*“Before you know what kindness is you must lose things, feel the future dissolve in a moment like salt in a weakened broth.” – Naomi Shihab Nye*

Lagos wind can be calm like my mother’s voice when she sings a lullaby or fierce you’d think the earth is belching. Stuck in traffic, I peer out my window, & see a boy, tattered, begging for change from commuters. & passers-by glare at the kid, their faces heavy with resentment. Sometimes, I wonder if the universe intentionally breaks us till our bodies compete with dust before dispensing a rain of half-baked glee to whet our appetite for living. The window of the car adjacent to mine rolls down & naira note extends from a hand like a streetlamp, gleaming above the boy. He lunges, cupping his hands as if manna is about to fall from heaven. The wind slaps the note off the giver’s hand & it becomes an aerogami, floating away, intrepidly. The kid attempts to recoup it from the air, but tumbles down. On the roadside, a mother stands, left hand fastened to her daughter’s. The note, weary from the tumultuous ride, lands before the girl. She uncouples from her mother, whose screams rival with honks for dominance of the air. She fetches the note & scurries to the boy, placing the money in his palm. & this act of warmth deluges my body with a frisson of glee.

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