Manchile

Is escape dem-a farr
musk rose blooms
the tight room with its oils, drying clothes
stale mask of nivea cream
the skin dying of sweat
the mattress drying of rot
she will not open the window
for fear of intruders
yesterday the girl raped in the toilet of the carib cinema
   by four
fourteen year old yout'
yesterday the girl raped comin' home from school
yesterday the girl raped in her home, in her own bed
and all of her dolours taken
the room stifles the forehead
as the necchi sings
if she had had a child, it would have been a girl
sleeping
or a boy sucking his thumb, pushing his soles through
   the hole
in the blanket
you want out de light?
the breasts small and familiar
coconut oil as she stands close
the rayon slip-on thin as skin now
luminous with flesh
black span of darkness
your bridge to her world
and she arching, glowing closer, closer
curving as the world curves
as the evening curves
the wind like a soft fresh of showers
her almond of silence
she enters your soul
displacing your anger, the days' useless lumber
she lets it explore you
converting you prone to columbus,
some eyeless african sailor,
and brings you home hero,
circled with flowers, confetti of love blinding you

but she is locked still in her island
your key will click, responsive to its prick
of heat; the gear will shift, its metal tendons scraping
wheels tearing the gravel as darkness explodes in the engine,
the owls of the lights blinking on at the gate-
way an lard how it hot
how a greasy
an de pickney dress-dem to done
an de long track a night tick tickin tick tickin
machine pedal an clatterin on
and de clock stuck at 1.35 1.35 1.35 1.35

see how me yeyes cahn prop open even
an de rent to pay
an anoder one comin tomarrow
an who will remember dem ancient a days dat i walkin
to school
walkers wood, ocho rios
how me pranalang down to camperdown town
an de man want i sleep wid im
an me got me exam
an de man seh mek i go wid im
do' me yeve never stann mek me look pan im
but what you go do when yuh belly gane slack
and you young gifted an black?

im drive away now
in im company car
in im see-through shirt
an im rolex
while i sittin down here wid dis fine toot’ comb
tryin to scratch out de lies dat a tell
cause a girl got to learn not to get too ole
not to let it look dat she belly gone cole
for dese men who is here tonight
an tomorrow dem gane. . . .

Edward Kamau Brathwaite

Bread

Slowly the white dream wrestles to life
hands shaping the salt and the foreign cornfields
the cold flesh kneaded by fingers
is ready for the charcoal, for the black wife

of heat, the years of green sleeping in the volcano.
the dream becomes tougher, settling into its shape
like a bullfrog. suns rise and electrons
touch it. walls melt into brown, moving to crisp and crackle

breathing edge of the knife of the oven.
noise of the shop, noise of the farmer, market.
on this slab of lord, on this table with its oil-skin cloth
on this altar of the bone, this sacrifice

of isaac: warm dead, warm merchandise, more than worn
merchandise: life
itself: the dream of the soil itself
flesh of the god you break, peace to your lips, strife
of the multitudes who howl all day for its saviour
who need its crumbs as fish, flickering through their green
element, need a wide glassy wisdom
to keep their groans alive

and this loaf here, life
now halted, more and more water additive, the dream less clear, the soil more distant,
its prayer of table, bless of lips, more hard to reach
with pennies: the knife
that should have cut
it, the hands that should have broken open its victory
of crusts
at your throat: balaam watching with red leaking eyes: the rats
finding only this young empty husk: sharpening their ratchets: your wife
going out on the streets, searching, searching

her feet tapping, the lights of the motorcars watching watching, rounding
the shape of her girdle, her back naked

rolled into night into night without morning
rolled into dread into dread without dream
rolled into life into life without vision.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite