POETRY

Portrait of a Poem as Etymology

by Abdullah Jimoh



"2 Head" by ?evval Horzum

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At the shed-kitchen in the backyard, while cooking, the poem
begins with the voice of my father — archeological, narrating

my biography. Digging up the landscape of my beginning. I watch
him speak keenly of the origin of the word *?p??y?mí*, which is my name,

which means *Gratitude suits me*. Language is like a river
housing various species of fish. How a word in one language

can be a sentence in another. I watch him perspire while unearthing
the difficult past with his tongue like a well-digger. His tongue,

pale pink, the insides of his mouth a shade of red as wet clay.
He says he was at the border between life and death but was more

dead than alive, by which he means his whole body, apart from
his legs, was frozen, the night mum went into labor. He says he couldn’t

sit, stand, bend or lie-down. His name is *Modúp??* which means
I'm grateful. When granny suggested that the baby should be named

?p??y?mí, he couldn't agree more because of the episode of the labor
night. So now *I’m-grateful* fathers *Gratitude-suits-me*. I enjoy

how he tells the story like an archeologist, excavating the etymology
of my name — an artifact. I like how people in my language used to tie

a word to incidence and christen their child with it. Say *Babátúndé*: Father
comes again (after death). Say *Ìyáb??*: Mother returns (from death). Say

Ayomidé (my joy has arrived). My arms are the word “welcome,” opening
like a bird's wings to hug the ones coming, returning & arriving.

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