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Writing Sample

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Two poems. "Getting Home" and "We are in the Front Row"

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Obari GOMBA

Two poems

GETTING HOME

1

Over here, away
From home, I caress
One Heineken as

I read *The Paris Review*
On a Windows Phone,
Powered by Wi-Fi.

The poets are a mix
As they always are,
Winged creatures

From their nest of diversity.
They are all given
To flight and sound.

2

Some like bluebottles.
Some haunt like bees.
Some like doves,

Some eagles.
I would not be
Shocked to see owls

Or vultures or bats
Or whatever.
But not yet,

None yet, none turns
My beer to vinegar,
At least not mine.

3

A certain poet rues
A fire in New Mexico
And a suicide

That atones for nature's
Huge loss. Another
Speaks of a house

Frequented by
Benign ghosts, full
Of tripwires

That un hinge the doors.
I think of this
Surrealist haven.

4

And I flip to Facebook.
There – from
Vintage and Anchor,

An excerpt in
Memory of Nabokov,
A rocket of sorts

In orbit. This rare wit
Mocks the jest in
Majesty and the ass

In passion. It fits
Them all – all jesters
And asses of history.

5

They keep a truly
Littered earth, fouled
By vanity. But we shall

Not nurse despair.
It is a marvel to see how
The earth always

Prevails over its affliction.

I think of that
As I walk to my car.

Away from the web,
The road is a curious
Medley of neon lights.

6

Headlamps, honks,
Gunshots - you
Know a city by

Its song and scream.
There is blood in
The eyes of the night.

My car speeds by
Default to my love.
And to my lovely

Daughter too.
Their eyes
Are the lamps of life.

7

Getting home, high
Or low. My love
Comes to the door.

'Welcome,' she says,
'To your primary
Constituency.'

She asks, 'Is that
The breath of Heineken
On you or what?'

I let out a guffaw
As I put down a bag
Too heavy with books.

8

It is a pity I bring

More books home.
Always more books

Than money.
'That's one thing
I love you for,' she says.

She says it with
A delicate tone.
She says, 'Build a big

House like Neruda.
We shall set a room
For your books.'

9

She says, 'I thought Kindle
And Windows had saved
You from cased and limp?'

I let out a guffaw again.
'Anyway,' she says,
'Welcome, my dear.'

I have been away
For hours. 'Your daughter
Is asleep,' she says.

'Like you, your daughter
Is always *everywhere*. Wait
Till she wakes up.'

10

My daughter, just two,
Paints the walls with
Crayons of diverse colours.

Life is everywhere, scripted.
From the verandah
To the sitting room

To the bedrooms, walls
Of ideograms and
Of pictograms tell

That a child lives here.
*Would you rather have
Clean walls or a child?*

11

My daughter, just two,
Unstacks my shelves.
Her love for books

Like her hunt for toys.
Now, her dutiful mother
Has begun to teach her

To stack the books.
She would stack one or two
And throw down ten or more.

A child lives here, yes.
*Would you rather have
Stacked shelves or a child?*

12

My daughter, just two
With nimble feet, sprints
To my handset,

Raises it to her right ear,
Says 'Halo.' We begin
A tussle over the set

To save the caller
From a bout of queries.
The set falls, broken.

She stares at me, aghast.
*Would you rather have
An unbroken set or a child?*

WE ARE IN THE FRONT ROW**1**

We do not seek
Salvation in the ego trips
Of a hazy paradise.

We do not seek
Salvation by
Knocking on

Pristine rocks in cities
Robbed of their souls.
A dead heat between

Forces too keen
To seize the elbow
Of a nebulous paradise.

2

Under the anemic light
Of your abiding fear, you are
The Drunken Boss

Excavating
Old identities from
The valley

You dug yesternight.
It is good to see you there,
Clutching the handle of

The spade of change – your
Choice is okay if you are okay
With your choice.

3

While you clamber
Time to behead it,
Note that we

No longer know how
To cry or make
Fetish of sorrow

Like deities feasting
On grief. Go on

To measure the height

Of the earth and say if
It is taller than
Your abdomen.

4

Or tell us if quicksand is
Quicker than your hubris.
You have despised

Everything.
You dreamt of
A mighty tower

Rising from the skulls
Of the fallen.
Tell us about

The old monsters
You see at your site
Of new wonders.

5

You have despised
Everything.
Water and sand.

Forest and desert.
Rainfall and drought.
You have despised

Everything.
You have despised
Gold and gravel,

Laughter and tears,
Day and night. You turn
On your own intestines.

6

You wear a garland
Of loss. Your
Story will drag itself

Through
A thousand routes
To the sea.

When you drown there
In your misery,
Remember to leave

The earth behind.
Truth abides.
We own the earth.

7

Truth abides with us.
We have heard words
That hurt

In worlds of hurt
Where worms eat souls
Because souls eat worms.

We have heard about
Worlds of hurt
In words that hurt

Because some eat worms
And worms eat some.
Yet we are not broken.

8

We know as surely as
We know that darkness
Will not beat us.

We say it as surely as
We know that darkness
Will not beat us.

For every word of hurt
You have thrown at us,
We raise a counter-word.

Speech is a blessing
And a burden.
We raise a counterforce.

9

We could have feared
For the fate of our words.
Someone is trying

Somewhere
To twist their necks.
We could have feared

For the prayers we have
Left in the open, naked.
Somewhere out there

Someone is trying
To behead them. But
Darkness will not beat us.

10

We are in the front row
To dare headwinds
And tsunamis.

We are in the front row
Of hope and spur
To face the burdens

Of the dead and
The living dead. Darkness
Is not strong enough. We

Mass the Will at this hour.
Darkness cannot bury us
Under the debris of hurt.

11

We do not seek
Salvation in the fantasies
Of fearmongers.

We do not seek
Salvation by
Knocking on

Pristine rocks in cities
Robbed of their souls.
A dead heat between

Forces too keen
To grab the elbow
Of a hazy paradise.

12

We are in the front row
To prevail over the rods
Of petty gods

And petty folks.
Over dogma or politics
Or rituals of angst.

Over the deluge
Of blood. Darkness is
Not tough enough.

We call forth the sun
And tame its temper. We
Mass the Will at this hour.
