

Grain Memory

By Marlanda Dekine

A wishbone branch falls
from my Grandma Thelma's oak
for me.

What do you know about magic? e¹ asks.

E bends e old body down, turns
the wishbone branch into
a cross, places it around my neck.
I am strapped at the Black River's right shoulder,
remembering my Grandpa Mose never wore anything
but church.

My purple head begins to feel
cold as clergy, parched. I ask for water.
E gives me water and rice, says to repeat
after em:

I am fly from nature. Nature fly. I am fly from

nature. Nature

fly. I am fly from nature. Nature

fly. I am fly

from nature. Nature fly. I am

fly from nature. Nature fly. I am fly from nature. Nature fly.

Ah, I get it! It's an affirmation, I say

and e laughs in windoceansongs.

E whispers, *Do not be trapped by language.*

E voice begins to beat my chest
cavity in rhythm, chaff threshed from grain,
separating me from need.

I thought I'd snapped that wishbone branch myself. No.

I am fly from nature. Nature fly.

At dusk,
gleaming marigolds gathered
beneath my feet, singing:

We were stolen shipped across the Atlantic

invasive is a word I heard

stolen *thrash thrash thrash* *and we speak in bloom*

1 In Gullah-Geechee language, "e/em" are gender-neutral pronouns.↩

Source: *Poetry* (June 2021)