

And I, a Wilting Rose **Salam Wosu**

I spent all night weeping in the rain
begging to be washed away
begging for a shoulder to cry on one that will not feed off my weakness
and when the shoulders came I hated them.
I am hiding every day I am hiding
at night wearing my fears like a cloak and sipping my loneliness
small sips I don't want to run out
It comforts me. It kills me, yes.
But it comforts me
unlike your stories of memories I never had
I try to fix those smiles you speak of into my teeth
bite them hard into the red of my lip
hoping they will stay when they taste blood
But this body is wilting
and every smile is dying with it.

And I, a wilting rose have been told
that to make your body a shrine and offer
tears at night is to forget to grow thorns
is to forget that a man's tears are to be swallowed
and his emotions buried away (the lessons a father should teach/I never had)
so, I am hiding every night, I am hiding
hoping that tomorrow God will send rain
to wash off this blood on my lip
to fill this hollow in my chest.
No rain.

I grow thorns.

Sweet stranger,
before you draw me close to your lips
know that I am wilting
and the soil around me is mourning
know that to hold me is to call yourself tree
for me to curl beneath your branches and wait for rain
know this
that you have to learn to pinch off each thorn, piece by piece surely there is a kiss
beneath the softness of my petals
red with fear, loneliness
and blood that never saw rain.

Salam Wosu is a Nigerian chemical engineer, a poet, and aspiring novelist. His works interrogate grief, depression, love, anti chauvinism and sexuality. He was shortlisted for

the Korean Nigerian Poetry Fiesta award in 2017 and 2019. His works are published or forthcoming in *Glass Poetry Press*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Dream Noir*, *PIN*, *RIC Journal*, and *Mounting the Moon*. His is @salam_wosu on all social media platforms.