

is on the surface, some of which has long been buried—that whites created in me and ultimately trained me to feel, all the while accusing me of hypersensitivity. I am able to believe in myself, to take myself seriously and to unlearn much of what whites have taught me. I even begin to love myself, my skin color, everything that I am—but slowly, carefully. Every time I repossess a part of my heart or my body, it hurts. And finally, I discover that I can love myself as well as my brothers and sisters.

With my newly won self-assurance there also comes a sense of indignation and outrage. I am enraged with all those who have shirked responsibility for what I've endured, with all those who did not want me to survive. I should not have to strive to be acknowledged or wanted. Never again will I stand politely by while people look down on me. I will no longer trust the type of person who, having just hurt me with their words or attitudes, then bursts into tears because they can't take my pain or my anger at them. They caused that anger. I'm no longer troubled by the possibility that whites will distance themselves from me if I don't believe in a manner they expect. I've struggled long enough without any support from those people, and I survived it, but I'm not going to fight against myself anymore.

As long as I don't know what I want, others will decide for me. As long as I don't define myself, others will. As long as I don't know who I am, others will try to tell me who I ought to be. My mother thought Erika was a beautiful name, the most beautiful name she could give me, and till now I've always liked it. But I decide that from here on out I will call myself Ika. Almost everyone else does, too.

May Ayim Vatersuche

als ich dich brauchte
hielt ich das bild an der wand
für wahr
das schönste was ich von dir hatte
und das einzige

du warst
wie ich dich wünschte
ernst und klug und zart. unendlich zart.

von angesicht zu angesicht
traf mich dein augenblick
ernst und klug und kalt. bitterkalt.
wortlos hab ich das bild

erhängt
das den traum vom vater mir
träumte
zartbitter der abschied

ich gehe und staune

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May Ayim Father Seeking

when I needed you
I held the picture on the wall
to be true
the most beautiful thing I had from you the only thing

you were
as I wished you to be
serious and smart and tender, infinitely tender.

face to face
your glance caught me
serious and smart and cold, bitter cold.
without words

I hung the picture
that dreamed for me
a dream of father
bittersweet the parting

I go and wonder

Translated by Anne V. Adams