

## Wood For The Trees

Zena Edwards

*This poem speaks to the strength and fracturing of blood lines. It plays with the ontology of our bodies being like trees and how bloodlines are the roots of forests, of peoples re-rooted from the Caribbean into UK soil with migrant settler experiences. The poem gives a head nod to Audre Lorde's insight that 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.'*

The family home, full to the brim. Facts and fiction  
Fasten themselves to the fraying curtains, and the shadows  
Become pugilists as the walls promise to remember  
What new owners would prefer forgotten  
With new wallpaper, flossed or Dulux paint, matt gloss.

Memories of footfall refuses to let go,  
Choosing to grow like moss on innocence,  
They tap the sides of teacups left on the kitchen counter,  
Spray aprons with flour and egg yolk  
As mother spins dumpling comfort for her children  
Who practise being their parents to siblings early,  
And squabble over the last of the rice, crunchy  
in the bottom of the pot. Everyone knows  
that certain rules apply, culture carried  
across the oceans from Caribbean.

Then washing their hands of rough play  
In adventure playgrounds, scuffing hand-me-down shoes  
Snagging oversized blazers,  
The shields on the breast pocket do not protect,  
Instead, it seals the closed doors yet to come.

Every day there are small forgivenesses,  
Because the struggle is real.  
For every fumbled dish, there has to be a plan.  
For every precious smashed, a new dream must replace it.  
No one speaks of the shock of the drop.

We are told it is good for us  
to memorise the stars and stripes and how many states  
of violence we are to exist in.  
How many rooms we occupy, and still pay rent.

And a century on, the closest we come  
To belonging is when we hear our ancestors speaking  
In the rafters and beams, doorframes and staircase handrails.  
They creak with waiting.

We belong when we carve our identity into the grain  
Of doorframes, mark how much we have grown.  
The knots in the floorboards are the eyes  
of our Ancestors who came  
with dreams and understood their position in the world.

It is the Matriarchs, who carry owls in one hand  
and the machete in the other.

They mouth wisdoms to wild flowers

Who are deadly diamonds

Who do not know the tree they are cut from.

Though they grow close to the roots of the family tree,

They might not even know enough: how to chop wood

And build, their hands, softest kid gloves,

And patience is a foreign land.

The compass needle spins

On the return of each full moon

When the veil to the next world thins.

Remind them how to cut the bark So that it does not bleed.

Teach them to remember Being fed rice with your fingers,

And that at the bottom of the pot

The highest quality of us exists.

### **Zena Edwards**

For 27 years, since graduating from Middlesex University, Zena has been a professional writer/poet performer, facilitator, creative project developer and vocalist. She studied storytelling and performance at The London International School for Performing Arts and is published in several anthologies including Margaret Busby's *New Daughters of Africa* (2019, Myriad), and *Dance the Guns to Silence* (2005, flipped eye publishing). Zena is a passionate advocate for environmental issues, decolonisation, race and

power and has been mentoring young and emerging artists in professional artist development and creative campaigning since 2010. As a multidisciplinary collaborator, Zena has worked with internationally acclaimed choreographer and dancer Akram Khan (*Xenos*), visual artist Theaster Gates (*Soul Manufacturing Corporation*), radical filmmaker Fahim Alam (*Riots Reframed*), and The Last Poets.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

**[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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