



# Poem Freetown

When they had chased him to the end of the world  
and frozen him between two fresh mounds  
in the graveyard, then thawed him hysterical  
to offer money, gold watch, shoes, clothes  
(all the world he had left, nearly as good 5  
as dust now), his knees sinking into the grave  
as he prayed, they laughed, amused by God's silence,  
and one levelled his AK-47  
to prove the new divinity, to save time  
for pressing needs of the revolution. 10  
But their captain remembered the cause,  
the dimmed glory of his city's name;  
he silenced the gun for axe and matchet  
and in homage to freedom asked, 'Long or short sleeves?'  
It was a riddle too hard for his heated head 15  
so he sank deeper into the grave and wailed,  
'Long sleeves! what I'm wearing, I have nothing else!'  
They needed to teach him the vocabulary  
of the new age for its choice sacrifice,  
so they set his hands on a fallen headstone; 20  
the bright edges of stainless steel flashed, dazzled  
the sun with the arc of the strike. Only one wrist fell clean,  
the other flailed, hanging on slender hope  
as the city's defenders stressed the lesson  
and marching to another front, the old school 25  
that thought learning served the cause, they made sure to set  
at the head of the band the four boys abducted  
on their way to school, a week before promoted  
sergeant-majors of the people's army  
and led home to enact their first acts of valour 30  
each wearing back to school the dread-digit diploma.

by Ogaga Ifowodo

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