

PREPARATIONS FOR THE AFTERLIFE

In the doorway of an attic, a daughter stood between guilt and uncertainty. How could she exit, eliminate rent income to an uncle, multiply distance from few living blood relations? Her mother had not been prone to doubt. She had packed for diaspora in one suitcase and left Port-au-Prince with warning to none.

Sirens drowned creaking eaves, but she heard her mother's voice giving precise direction. *Cotton on Main Street should handle the arrangements. Red petals are for the joyful, unprepared to leave. No reception after the funeral. The bedroom set should go to someone in need. Keep the white sheets I bought for last days in Haiti.*

Mandates were delivered with panorama of slights and rivalries. Her mother tallied debts owed, resolving, *For any good I did, for being caretaker, no regrets.* Her exhausted eyes mirrored the future like a sage reading bones. *Mwen pa vlé kité ou pou kont ou. Yo pap aidé ou.* The daughter did not accept this prediction of aloneness until divisions solidified, until some became angry when nothing was left in their names, until she embraced legal threats for unpaid medicals, until she listed what was worth selling, until visitor passes to her sick room idled at a front desk while staples burned a horizontal scar on her uterus. *You have been present and useful, so love for you will be measured by conditions. Viv tankou moun ki pa gen fenmi.*

She played her mother's last instruction like a favorite ballad. She parceled clothing, unworn shoes to a Miami ministry and hauled mattress and box spring to a friend in Brooklyn. The daughter sealed embroidered linen in plastic as if afraid they would dissipate like clouds. Movers loaded belongings onto a truck and as the October wind rattled oak leaves to the path at her heel, she began saving her own life.

Mwen pa vlé kité ou pou kont ou. Yo pap aidé ou.

- "I don't want to leave you alone. They will not help you.

Viv tankou moun ki pa gen fenmi. – Live like someone without a family.