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POETRY

BEFORE THE BREAKING OF THE FAST

By Tijan M. Sallah

The disquiet in waking up, heaven subsiding.  
Grace suddenly abandoned. Desires awaken.

To the temptations of the sun.  
The dreams the night before, carved out  
In my conscience, transported me  
Through the radiance of beauty, showed me  
The reigns and raptures of Timbuktu.  
Mansa Kankang Musa, Sunni Ali,  
The weight of a past rich as embroidery.

The revelations on the pillow, a heaven  
Squinting through our shortness of memory  
And exaggeration of vision.

Exquisite empires, kingdoms of gold,  
Iron and bronze. The goldsmiths' hands,  
The blacksmiths' patience, the glow  
Of fire and dust.

Time leaves no scrolls for memory;  
The wand of the future marches  
To cover expired heavens.

Griots should rise, pluck  
The fiery strings, evoke the roots,  
And leave us with memory-scrolls.  
For who should forget,  
Empires, rare as mermaids,  
Profuse with Grace?

Griots should rise,  
With batik-cloth worn as mantle,  
And a voice fresher than honey.

Our branches, civilized comforts,  
Are only desolate cages.  
We need a calabash of dreams  
To feed us into the Green Age.

## UFAHAMU

O gods, the disquiet in waking up,  
And be engulfed in redemptive memory.  
Hunger biting my entrails,  
But absorbed in meditative thirst.  
My mind soars backward to Kingdoms - of - Grace  
Before the Breaking of the Fast.