

# Four Poems

Adrie Kusserow

## Jesus, Immaculee and the Pig —Essex, Vermont

This is where Jesus dumped Immaculee,  
before wandering off  
to tend another flock of clouds,  
down in the psych ward, clutching her bible and scattered papers,  
preaching to the nurses.

Jesus in his nursing home bathrobe, polyester slippers,  
Jesus whose rings-of-Saturn halo float passively  
from the fridges of all the Congolese in this quaint  
Vermont town. Jesus who for all practical purposes, did nothing  
to stop her gang rape in Essex, Vermont  
(instead of the Congo, rape capital of the world),

Yes Jesus gave her a tepid blessing  
as she left each day,  
her psyche padded like a hockey player,  
but when winter got tight and stingy,  
snow tendrils curled around the trailer,

swallowing it like a great white squid,  
Jesus fell asleep in front of the TV,  
while her mother prayed and cooked *the loso ya boulayi*,  
*ntaba, mipanzi, makemba et salade*,  
banana, pepper, cassava steam rising, the heat cranked up,  
the trailer humid as a jungle,  
Immaculee's mind loosening enough  
for one memory to squeeze out of its cage,  
snorting, then shrieking, a frantic pig squealing in her skull.

For days the pig raced inside her head, shredding raw sirens, while Jesus  
did nothing but smile from his perch in the Lazy Boy,  
like he'd had too much weed.

Even when the family held hands, prayed the rosary together, Jesus  
with his puddle-dull dopey eyes  
draped like a Dali doily over every  
refugee couch in that town, Jesus,  
with his tapered yellowing fingers, could not catch the pink squealer  
screeching, tearing about, knocking over teacups.

Jesus who comes to her at night, feeling guilty,  
like a cat kneading the lap where it wants to settle. Jesus

who circles around and around, pawing,  
suggesting forgiveness to the three grunting white thugs,  
then curls up and closes His eyes, purring  
while the pigs roam frantic and wild  
and the night skins the moon alive.

Come Jesus, wake up,  
put your *Bed, Bath and Beyond* self to rest,  
give her something more than the Prodigal Son,  
or the social worker draped in polar fleece  
huddled like a wolf outside her door.

Enough already, please, Jesus  
rise up from your beige Lazy Boy,  
put your mangy Old Testament fur on,  
summon the ragged dark clouds  
and your fake *Game of Thrones* sword,  
help her pin the squirming pig down,  
help her finally slit the motherfucker's throat  
til the blood blooms relentless and warm  
across the carpet floor.

## Patchwork Quilt for a Congolese Refugee

None of the white coats

    predicted the autumn leaves would be such a trigger.

Every fall she grows suspicious

    as the days pass, sly and dark, behind her

and the earth shifts slowly in its seat.

    Blood orange blotches catch and spread

like birthmarks along the mountain range.

    In the cold, balding woods where they tell her to walk,

she can hardly breathe when she sees it,

    the sugar maples gory neon spill,

as if kicked in the gut,

the first burning vein,

    scarlet bolt of lightning,

She could sit quietly, letting the lonely priests that flock to her daily

    sew the dull needle of Jesus

through the little jungle brute

    who crammed a gun up her nose.

She could spend her whole life

    picking through images

of gang raped, machete-gutted women,  
cobbling together a patchwork quilt

with its bold "African" traumas so in vogue now.  
She could fall in love, with a rapt audience,

clinging to her words  
as she Ted-talks the noble tragedy of her story.

She could drag her past around like the American kids  
with their baby blankets,

demanding their rights to bedtime stories.  
She could even sell it at the boutiques

where Americans shop for Fair Trade.  
Or, as the eerie geese fly south above her

and the cold creeps across her skin,  
crimson gashes ripping through the hills

with their brilliant mad infections,  
she could let the blood leaves break her apart,

let go of it all  
and finally just begin.

Refugee Christmas Eve, Psych Ward  
—for Jurkuch Arok Atem

*Lost Boys of Sudan* were over 20,000 boys of the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups displaced or orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War.

Hush, remember, the wind was howling,  
snow squalling into eddies and currents  
that writhed across the fields, vanished into blackness.

I was sitting by your side, on the locked "low stim" floor,  
as you sat, stunned, regal Dinka of the Blue Nile,  
on the psych ward's stiff white sheets,

like a fallen blackbird beating against the glass  
you thought you could pass through.  
All night you kept watch,

in the United States of *How Are You Feeling?*  
where fluorescent bulbs sizzled,  
struck threads of lightning above you.

Self-starved, indignant,  
you overturned trays  
while nurses dressed like astronauts

shuffled around your bed.  
Each time you screamed  
white coats rushed in to gawk

to watch some Lost Boy trauma.

Though they tried to look solemn,  
they could hardly hide their glee,

such exotic displays of PTSD!

When they finally left, we sat in the dark,  
the blizzard slamming itself against the window.

We weren't supposed to,

(on account of your fragile psyche),  
but we stormed around each other's childhoods anyway.

And though our histories were not supposed to congeal,

(on account of my privilege, on account of our differing skin),  
let alone take to each other,

our pasts grafted together

into some clumsy mutation,  
some cross cultural Quasimodo

that limped around the room, made us laugh.

Later, when the meds hit, your eyes rolled back  
began to flutter,

you fell into what should never be called sleep,

Despite the conspiracies I knew  
still whipped around your lonely skull,

I told you of the goodness  
that even the Snowy owls held in their claws,  
as they swooped the winter sky blood hungry.

Though I was probably transgressing  
another therapeutic border,  
I cradled your shaved skull with the tenderness

meant for a robin's egg.  
I even sang.

In fact, I was so good at it,  
all night even the owls looked longingly  
through our window.



## South Sudan Elegy

Tucked inside the mosquito net's  
gauzy bubble, taut white fabric  
like a bridal dome,  
the anthropologist turns out her headlamp,  
so they can't see her silhouette  
from outside, where Nuba soldiers drink hard at the bar,  
a six foot waitress shuffles by in flip flops  
shooing away flies scurrying  
in and out of the mouths of bottles of *Blue Nile*.

From her room, she can hear Amin,  
all fire and brimstone from the throne  
of his broken, plastic chair. His brain gutted

Thunder, already whole chunks of road  
gape open. Another aid project falling apart at the seams.  
Taban, their tiny night guard,  
bow and arrow at the ready  
sleeps fitfully in the closet with the rats  
amidst the pounce of rain  
and frayed electrical cords.

She doubts herself a hundred times a day,  
her efforts to help  
just more puppetry,  
in an endless play which has no plot,  
no end to anyone's meaning, no beginning,

no eye dhatu, no ear dhatu,  
no Post, no Modern  
no-anthro, no-polo, no-gist,  
only this planet, with its sweet and terrible songs  
that hover like fog in giant capes of hope and doubt.

and even these if whipped by the mind into froth  
still light as a cloud, no less fragile  
than a child's meringues  
which themselves crumble into dust  
at even the slightest touch.

The next morning  
cachectic men still sleep off hunger  
as the cicadas whine like sirens.  
The fluorescent sun  
still bleaches the crap out of the Congo road.

In front of her dilapidated NGO  
a Nuba boy looks up from his dopey malarial puddle  
as a landmine truck races by.  
A tenderness passes between them,  
a brush of sweetness,  
the way an owl beats quietly, across the night,  
amidst the endless black  
that isn't really endless  
at all.

**Adrie Kusserow** is a cultural anthropologist working with Sudanese, Bhutanese, Congolese and Somali refugees internationally and in Vermont where she teaches at St. Michael's College. Along with the "Lost Boys" of Sudan, she is cofounder of Africa Education and Leadership Initiative ([www.africaeli.org](http://www.africaeli.org)). She has published two books of poetry (*Hunting Down the Monk* and *Refuge*) with BOA Editions, Ltd. as part of their American Poets Continuum Series.