

“Take me home, great steel bird, take me home”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the November 8, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Arts in Bethlehem* 

In June 1989, I traveled to Kaduna, Nigeria, to visit my daughter and her family in Nigeria. That visit forever changed who I am as an American black woman. When I returned home to the states, I was haunted by visions of that visit. Words related to that visit consumed me until I committed them to paper. Even now, I need only to close my eyes, and I am there.

Flight of the Steel Bird

Hurry, great steel bird, hurry
Carry me swiftly to the motherland
of my people;
descendants of great kings and queens
who are bearers of a rich history
I hunger to hear.
Let me walk on the shores of Africa:
birthplace of Queen Mother Nandi
and the pharaohs, Ra Nehesi and Taharka.

My ghostly companions are restless
as they hear the
muted drum sounds of ancient warriors
welcoming them back to the place
they called home
three hundred years ago.
The red clay earth awaits anxiously
to join spirits to hearts that were
left behind in
a thunderous parting storm.

Linger not over seas of torture
tainted with sacrifices of the
first journey:
brave lions who sleep with sharks;

maidenhoods of innocents
stolen by captains and
cries of babies
stilled with tears of love,
all victims of our early
struggle to freedom.

Take me home,
great steel bird,
take me home.

Louise Holmes-Johnson
Bethlehem, Pa.

first in a series

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