

This Fallen World

I walked through the West African town every day,
Rust-red dirt beneath my feet, green leaves crowding overhead.
Sounds of chickens and of mortars pounding
Marked the houses hiding in the trees along the road.

One day, at my feet, against the rust-red dirt, I saw
A streak of green – grass-green, glittering emerald.
I bent to look: a tiny mamba, just hatched, innocent
As Adam on his first day in paradise, and poison.

Entranced by its brightness, I crouched
In the rust-red dirt and speckled shade.
I looked at it; it looked back at me, unmoved.

“Da SNAKE!” a voice screeched from the end of the road.

How could she even see the tiny creature?
“You mu’ kill it!”

I stood up and considered the hatchling at my feet.

Beyond its beauty I could hear

Barefoot children playing in the yards

Of mothers too familiar with death.

I picked up a stone, dropped it on the snake's head,

And stepped down, hard.