WOMBA

Eric Ngalle Charles

Womba-Womba-Womba

The smiles of a sleeping child,

that's how I remember you.

In August, Mbua Njorku,

When the rains came,

We sit by the fire side

Counting three stones

Eyes red, smoke.

Womba-Womba-Womba

The smiles of a sleeping child

That's how I remember you.

When I was hungry

My mother's pot empty

She gave me palm oil and Coco yams.

When my sister was hungry

My mother wasn't home

I gave Queenta Palm oil and Coco yams.

Then, my brother came

We went to the farm

We looked for 'Mbete' dry wood

We chased brown squirrels

"Carry the wood on your head"

Says my brother

"It will make your bones strong"

"That's why you have a big head"

My sister says.

Womba-Womba-Womba

The smiles of a sleeping child,

That is how I remember you

My brother hides under the Mango tree,

He smokes a cigarette.

I pray my mother catches him,

She did.

We saw a black snake,

It licked its lips

My brother ran, fast,

His feet did not touch the ground.

We met by the Stream

Where three roads meet,

He held my hands

He told me the story of a woman

She lived on a tree,

On that tree, there's a nest,

In the nest, there's a feather.

Womba-Womba-Womba

The smiles of a sleeping child,

Is how I remember you

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Womba-Womba-Womba

gwên plentyn sy'n cysgu,

dyna sut dwi'n cofio'r teulu gynt.

Ym mis Awst, *Mbua Njorku*,

glaw'r eliffantod .

Pan ddeuai'r glaw mawr

bydden ni'n eistedd o gwmpas y tân

yn cyfri cerrig yr aelwyd - *tondo ine, mbia ine* - i ddewis stori

a'n llygaid yn goch yn y mŵg

Womba-Womba-Womba

gwên plentyn sy'n cysgu,

dyna sut dwi'n cofio'r teulu gynt.

Pan oedd eisiau bwyd arna'i

a chrochan fy mam yn wag

cawn olew palmwydden a yams

pan oedd eisiau bwyd ar fy chwaer

a mam ddim adre,

fe rown i olew palmwydden a yams i Queenta.

Yna, daeth fy mrawd

ac aethon ni i'r fferm

i chwilio *mbete*, coed tân sych

ac i redeg ar ôl gwiwerod brown.

"Caria'r pren ar dy ben"

meddai 'mrawd

"wnaiff o gryfhau dy esgyrn"

"Dyna pam fod gen ti ben mor fawr"

meddai'n chwaer.

Womba-Womba-Womba

gwên plentyn sy'n cysgu,

dyna sut dwi'n cofio'r teulu gynt.

Mae 'mrawd yn cuddio dan y goeden fango,

yn cael mwgyn.

Dwi'n gobeithio caiff o gop gan fy mam

Ac mae o.

Welson ni neidr ddu,

llyfodd ei weflau.

Rhedodd fy mrawd fel y gwynt,

a'i draed heb gyffwrdd a'r ddaear.

Arhosodd amdana'i wrth y nant

lle mae tair lôn y pentre'n cwrdd.

Gafaelodd yn fy nwylo

a dweud stori'r ddynes

oedd yn byw fyny'r goeden;

fyny'r goeden yna, mae'na nyth

ac yn y nyth mae 'na bluen.

Womba-Womba-Womba

gwên plentyn sy'n cysgu,

dyna sut dwi'n cofio'r teulu gynt.

Womba is a Bakweri term, my mother tongue, meaning the smiles of a sleeping child. This poem was inspired by Gillian Clarke when she visited us at ourwriters work tent at the Hay Festival, May 2018. She advised us to revisit one childhood memory, for Gillian it was a rug, for me, it was a sound. I dedicate this poem in both English and Welsh to migrants around the world on International Migrants Day 2021