

One ah Dem Days Before they happened upon us Two poems

Adisa Opal Palmer

Former Principal Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies.
RCO University of the West Indies, Jamaica

Traduzione italiana di Federica Messulam

Introduction to the author by Michela Calderaro

Opal Palmer Adisa is a Jamaican poet, writer, and cultural advocate whose body of work spans twenty-six books, including novels, short story collections, poetry, and children's literature. She currently teaches part-time at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, where she continues to inspire through her scholarship and creative practice. A committed cultural and gender advocate, Adisa's work often explores themes of memory, history, identity, and redemption, giving voice to personal and collective experiences within the Caribbean and beyond. Her latest works are the bi-lingual Italian collection of selected poems, *La lingua è un tamburo*, 2025; *The Storyteller's Return*, a poetry collection, 2022; *Pretty like Jamaica*, a children's picture book, 2023.

Introduction by the author

One ah Dem Days is a reflective meditation on aging, desire, and renewal. The poem's persona – a mature woman weighed down by the stresses of life and the creeping awareness of age – seeks solace by the river. There she encounters a group of young boys whose youthful vigor is expressed in their daring leaps and playful somersaults into the water. Watching them, she is both wistful and tempted, longing for that kind of abandon yet recognizing her physical limits. Though she does not join them, she allows the river itself to offer healing, release, and a gentle reminder of vitality. The poem captures the tension between yearning and acceptance, and the quiet redemptive power of nature to soothe the spirit.



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One ah Dem Days

me head feel
 like a big bankra
 loaded wid yam

so me go to de river
 listen to de water
 dat loosens de knots
 cool de fever of waiting
 rinses de sticky fog
 of aging

de river
 nuh argue wid regret
every day new
 as it moves

on de hill above
 boys learn flight by rope:
 climb / swing / double-flip
 into green pools
 dem laughter
 like coins on tiles

me think
 if me leap
 me would dead
but still
 me want fi swing,
 flip like de boys,
 even if death meet me

but for now
 me watch dem

mek de slow mercy
 of de water
 love me clean
wash de malaise from me shoulders
 carry weh de heavy grammar
 of doubt

maybe tomorrow
 de sun will find de same skin
 mek it feel
 kinder
 to touch

È una di quelle giornate

sento la testa
come un grosso cesto
zeppo di patate dolci

e allora me ne vado al fiume
ad ascoltare l'acqua
che allenta i nodi
raffredda la febbre dell'attesa
sciacqua via la nebbia collosa
dell'età che avanza

il fiume
mica fa tante storie coi rimpianti
ogni giorno è un nuovo giorno
giacchè scorre

lassù sulla collina
ragazzini imparano a volare appesi ad una corda:
si arrampicano/dondolano/ doppia capriola
e giù nelle pozze verdi
le loro risa
suonano come spiccioli sul pavimento

penso che
se dovessi far io un salto così
di certo creperei
eppure
come vorrei dondolarmi
far capriole come quei ragazzini
anche a rischio di trovarmi la morte davanti

ma per ora
resto a guardarli

possa la lenta misericordia
dell'acqua
mondarmi amorevolmente
lavare il malessere che sento sulle spalle
trascinare via la gravosa grammatica
del dubbio

forse domani
il sole incontrerà la stessa pelle
e la renderà
più carezzevole
al tatto

Before they happened upon us

my body was this land
fertile fresh
neither cliché nor fantasy

soil
red open
wet dry
breathing

lizards
roamed freely
crawling/scattering

trees = ribs
plants = mouths
rivers = veins

water
everywhere every where
blue abundant
sweet cool
quenching
balm

before they happened upon us
my body was this land
able to slither
(lizards in trees)
able to sing
(green parrot throaty)
able to wobble
(wild pigs grunting)

the first ship that brought
my ancestors

land imprisoning
becoming refuting
transforming
nourishing again
and again and again
again

Prima che incombessero

il mio corpo era questa terra
fertile fresca
non uno stereotipo non una fantasia

terreno
rosso sconfinato
rorido riarso
che respirava

lucertole
vagavano libere
strisciando/disperdendosi

alberi=costole
piante=bocche
fiumi=vene acqua
ovunque e in ogni dove
azzurra copiosa
dolce fredda
balsamo
dissetante

prima che incombessero
il mio corpo era questa terra
capace di strisciare
(lucertole negli alberi)
capace di cantare
(un pappagallo verde gracchiava)
capace di dondolare
(maialini selvatici grugnivano)

e giunse la prima nave
che trasportava i miei avi

la terra è stata prigioniera
è mutata è stata rifugio
è stata cambiamento
è stata nutrimento ancora
e ancora e ancora
ancora

but now
shuttered
broken/closed
pain inside
the green
sealed
verdant love
locked

peace
withheld
for now...

from the forth coming collection,
My Boyd is Xaymaca

ma ora
 spezzata
 infranta/racchiusa
 colma di dolore
 il verde
 inaccessibile
 la lussureggiante passione
 imbrigliata

 la pace
 negata
per ora....

Dalla raccolta di prossima pubblicazione
My Body is Xaymaca

