

Besaydoo

Yalie Saweda Kamara

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Yalie Saweda Kamara's lucent poetry collection *Besaydoo* encircles matters of race, heritage, boundaries, and exchanging "worry for hope."

California-born poet Kamara challenges the description of Oakland as a "killing field." "Oakland as Home. Home as Myth" peers beyond the city's reputation for violent crime to note a whiff of cocoa butter lotion in the train station as "warm air kisses bare ankles and calves." Oakland is also the sweetness of blackberries picked on Thornhill Drive and "Chow Mein and pine trees."

In "New America," Kamara longs for "an edited issue of the *Oakland Tribune* with every splayed corpse cut from its pages." She'd rather hear the music of Donny Hathaway blaring from "an onyx Cutlass Supreme," projecting a "Black that is steadfast and opulent." Yet the pain of loss penetrates "Aunty X's Dream Door Has," as Aunty X makes an extra "plate of jollof rice" and hides a spare key for the spirit of her son, Ray. Ray died on her doorstep, leaving behind a gun, many questions, and a "raspberry puddle" of blood.

Away from Oakland, Kamara spends time in Bloomington, Indiana, where she joins a Baptist church and finds aspects of community and personal peace. There's also the local menace of neo-Nazis and ingrained racism. In "Ulotrichous," a patronizing pastor describes Kamara's hair as "woolly" or ulotrichous; he erroneously links her with urban housing projects and notes how "Bloomington must be hard...for people like you."

The titular "Besaydoo" recalls Oakland teenagers urging each other to "be safe, dude"—or *besaydoo* when spoken swiftly. Kamara and her mother also make *besaydoo* their special phrase, spoken face to face or whispered with love during long-distance telephone calls.

Eloquent, proud, and discerning, the poems of *Besaydoo* preserve the wary splendor of lived experience.

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