

READING

Immigrants: First Generation

In this “prose poem,” Nigerian-born poet Ijeoma Umebinyuo pays tribute to the stories of immigrants and the lives they lead in the United States:

Here’s to the security guards who maybe had a degree in another land. Here’s to the manicurist who had to leave her family to come here, painting the nails, scrubbing the feet of strangers. Here’s to the janitors who don’t even . . . understand English yet work hard despite it all. Here’s to the fast food workers who work hard to see their family smile. Here’s to the laundry man at the Marriott who told me with the sparkle in his eyes how he was an engineer in Peru. Here’s to the bus driver, the Turkish Sufi who almost danced when I quoted Rumi. Here’s to the harvesters who live in fear of being deported for coming here to open the road for their future generation. Here’s to the taxi drivers from Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt and India who gossip amongst themselves. Here is to them waking up at 4 am, calling home to hear the voices of their loved ones. Here is to their children, to the children who despite it all become artists, writers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, activists and rebels. Here’s to Western Union and Money Gram. For never forgetting home. Here’s to their children who carry the heartbeats of their motherland and even in sleep, speak with pride about their fathers. Keep on.¹

¹ Ijeoma Umebinyuo, “Immigrants: First Generation,” in Questions for Ada(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015). Reproduced by permission of Ijeoma Umebinyuo.