BEAD WORKERS BY LAURA ‘DA

Needles in skilled hands

pulled through cloth or skin

move of their own

gilded volition.

Taaniwe laakwa?

In Shawnee,

you ask

where in time

as opposed to when

and it helps me

consider folds of territory

tilled by memory and capacity

where the ones I tender

bloom quietly and eternally.

A strain of heirloom corn

roughly translates to the word

sustainer—worlds

that germinate inside such a word;

wild horses, lilting shadows,

glimpsed in the elbows of the hills

like opaque flags of prayer.

My distant kin in Neosho

folded deep indigo beans

into the palm of my hand

and said try them

where you stay.

Within the words of a blessing

in my husband’s language

I recognize through repetition—

The word for city.

The word for garden.

Like an heirloom seed,

I was sown and cultivated

back from the brink.

To rise within

a place in time,

hands sorted

hundreds of seeds;

medicine and sustenance—

pallid disks of immunosuppressants

and steroids.

Flint corn from the Scioto Valley.

All those moments

I shook too hard

to do it myself.

Running a finger

across the slight backs

of trade beads: cornflower blue,

grassgreen, the white-heart red

a fire-flood of sunset.

I feel the shadow

of my aunt’s beading

wringing my neck and wrists.

Spells to protect

my casing gates.

Cerrillos turquoise

threaded into my earlobes.

Intricate blueprints

to the homelands

kept my toes

from the sky ladder’s

sapphire rungs.

Sustainers are all around:

songs chanted

seven states away—glistening exhalations

of devotion and sacrifice,

migrations of breath.

Adorn the skin with glass.

In a place in time

the ground warms and opens—

the hour is right,

stitch a seed and it sustains.

*Da’, L. (n.d.). BEAD workers by Laura Da'. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/158154/bead-workers*

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# Author Research

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| --- | --- |
| Title: | Author: |
| Where is this author from? (Country, state, region) | |
| What university did this author attend and what were their areas of study? | |
| What is their tribe and where is that tribe located? | |
| What is the focus of the author’s work? | |
| What is this tribe known for? What makes that tribe unique? | |