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## KENBE LA – HOLD ON

In the palm of my hand,  
three seashells  
gathered innocently long ago,  
their opalescent pink hollows  
recalling the outrageous fluorescents of the  
now-vanishing coral reefs.



I wish I could give them back,  
breathe life into them  
and the ancient underwater animals that once  
sheltered within their spirals.

“Kenbe la,” I whisper to them.  
An invocation offered in the sanctuary of my attic,  
amidst wilted, cardboard boxes  
as I clean house while locked in my safe space.  
A call to the ocean and its kin.  
A Creole phrase I learned in Haiti,  
“Hold on.”

Haiti, where families cut down their last mango tree  
for wood to pay their children’s school fees.  
Where the rumble of thunder  
awakens the traumatized  
from earthquake nightmares.  
Haiti, whose tin roofs fly away like gum wrappers  
in the yearly hurricanes.  
Where the ocean releases its wrath on humanity.

Sequestered in quarantine,  
time fertilizes my awareness,  
affording the luxury of compassion  
as I empty the boxes of my past.  
The proof of my deeds.

How selfish, these three skeletons  
taken from the once invincible ocean.  
I would rather hold Haiti in the palm of my hand,  
carrying her with outstretched arm above my head  
as I swim for a distant safe shore.  
Leaving our salty mother  
to heal in peace.