West Indian Primer

Malcolm Friend

I curry chicken and imagine Manchester Parish,
my dad as a boy, breathing in the thick, salted air,
being chased in the yard by a chicken whose neck
he's just wrung. His granddad—my namesake—

maybe teases him in Patois before gathering
the lifeless meat for dinner. My good fortune:
being able to buy thigh and breast by the pack,
avoid plucking feathers from lifeless fowl.

I know next to nothing about this man or the island
he never left, the ocean's chant of waves that may have
lulled him to sleep, the sea breeze that may have licked
at his ankles in the morning. I know nothing of the music

of the name he gave me, how it rings in the right accent,
until I'm in grad school and a student from Kingston
says it with a steups. All I know is squeeze of lime
washing this chicken clean. All I know is fresh ginger

steeped into it. All I know is curry powder staining
the bird's flesh yellow or maybe gold like the cross
on a flag, allspice berries nearly black, green lime squeezed
into the pot, but what I know about that? Scoop out a bowl

of rice and let it soak in this stew.

Malcolm Friend is a poet originally from the Rainier Beach neighborhood of Seattle, Washington. He is the author of the chapbook *mxd kd mixtape* (Glass Poetry, 2017) and the full-length collection *Our Bruises Kept Singing Purple* (Inlandia Books, 2018) and co-edited the anthology *Até Mais: Latinx Futurisms* (Deep Vellum, 2024). Together with JR Mahung he is a member of Black Plantains, an Afrocaribbean poetry collective.

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