

**Black coffee or To all the girls with hard to swallow names** by Imè Esenam  
*(Won first place at the Swiss Creative Writing Prize Competition, Poetry, 2021)*

To all the girls with hard to swallow names  
The names we never find on water bottles and coffee cups,  
The names people shake their heads at  
The names that so quickly turn into a joke like they have no worth  
The names they don't even try to pronounce  
And in exchange turn it to whatever they want  
The names that go from Chimamanda to Mandy or Consuela to Ella  
Like black coffee diluted with sugar and cream to Starbucks lattes,  
So, they can bare to swallow it whole  
The ones that get called complicated and dismissed  
When asking to be called by their names that are gifts  
And in return say sorry  
The ones that now have apologies for names

Your name might not be a Starbucks latte, that teenage girls down so easily  
But it's black coffee, one so strong people shy away from it,  
Never getting rewarded with its richness  
Your name holds power in every drop  
The very drops your ancestors prayed for  
So don't apologise for your name, when its meaning has saved so many before  
Don't dumb it down so it fits the shackles of society  
It's the only gift you'll get without being expected to return the favour  
Although you are much more than your name  
It's your crown so wear it with pride  
Wear it high and don't let anyone take away its shine  
It's not being complicated, it's called having self-respect  
So, if you didn't offer it with sugar and cream, don't accept it when they add their own  
Or simply said 'say it right or don't say it at all'