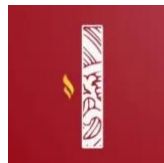


THE
WOMAN
IS
NO
MESSIAH

EDITED BY
ANGEL NDUKA-NWOSU

The Woman Is No Messiah Anthology

Edited by
Angel Nduka-Nwosu



Isele Magazine

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for Busola Dakolo.
for Morenike Olusanya.
for Deinsebobo Tamuno.

...and also for Olamide Omajuwa Alli.
...and also for Kefee Obareki Don-Momoh.
(in memoriam)

Contents

Editor's Note | 7

Angel Nduka-Nwosu | 10

Roseline Mgbodichinma | 13

Funmilayo Obasa | 16

Bunmi Africa | 18

Hassana Maina | 20

Olivia Yetunde Alabi | 22

Glamour Adah | 24

Omotoyosi Salami | 26

Stephanie Chizoba Odili | 29

Grace Alioke | 32

Ijeoma Ntada | 34

Olufunmi Akinfolarin | 37

Semilore Kilaso | 39

Omowaleayo Wale-Olaitan | 41

Tomi Ibadin | 46

Amarachi Nnoli | 48

Adeyele Adeniran | 50

Ruona Idjenughwa | 54

Taofeeqah Adigun | 57

Sarah Etta | 61

Ibi Kontein | 64

Ugonna Ejiogu | 66

Favour Oseigbovo | 68

Amarachi Chioma Mbah | 70

Mercy Harold Waziri | 72

Juliet Nnaji | 74

Clara Jack | 76

Omolola Okunlola | 78

Editor's Note

When I think of the year 2020, two things come to mind: first, the lockdown from the pandemic which had lots of women documenting their leave from work because they were even more burdened with unequal childcare.

Second, I think of it as the year that I actively learned that self-preservation is a must for women. I say this because 2020 had a week in June where each day had a rape report. Yet even the Nigerian anti-rape protests following these, the #StateOfEmergencyGBV for example, did not cause a nationwide revolution or have toll gates shut down, unlike the attention and support received by more male-centric and ironically women-sustained movements like #ENDSARS, whose most visible victims were heterosexual men.

One of the women who was murdered in 2020 was Olamide Omajuwa Alli and I remember wishing during #ENDSARS that women would not collaborate with the very men who victim-blamed the late Alli. I say all these about #ENDSARS and the 2020 protests to lay the background as to what inspired the creation of this anthology.

That year, I also remember asking myself what it meant to be a woman writing poetry in contemporary Nigeria. I wanted to know what an anthology providing unreciprocated support could look like for Nigerian women.

It's been three years since the inception of this idea for an anthology about women told by women who embody the complexities of Nigerian womanhood. And I am grateful to *Isele Magazine* for giving these poems a home.

The poems in this anthology speak to our collective desire to be seen as human and to evolve from a point of endless sacrifice to a sisterhood defined by shared dreams.

It is my hope that those reading shall be affirmed in the belief that truly, messiahship and prioritizing sexist men must have no place in Nigerian womanhood.

Angel Nduka-Nwosu
Editor, *The Woman Is No Messiah*



The Woman Is No Messiah

Three Poems Angel Nduka-Nwosu

rainbow clit

in a very soft beginning
there were igbo women...
who loved women.

in a very soft beginning
there were igbo women...
who loved planting
forehead kisses
...on women.

in a very soft beginning
there were igbo women...
who loved watching the sun
flirt with the skin
...of darker women.

in a very soft beginning
there were igbo women...
who loved holding hands
...with brown eyed women.

in a very soft beginning
there were igbo women
who loved alice walker
and her color purple.
for a part of them knew
even before the
twitter purple ribbons

that they were created
from the finest royalty.

in a very soft beginning
these igbo women
these igbo women
who "swung both ways"
knew they were not
abnormal
or confused
or whatever
lie was told.

in a very soft beginning
these igbo women
knew they were
holy
&
divine
&
sacred
&
loved.

in a very soft beginning
...i was one of such women.

Tell Them

tell them
tell them
we are not our mothers
tell them
tell them
our mothers do not
want us to be them

tell them
tell them
we are rewriting
all our mothers' pains
into love and honey
but tell them
tell them
we would not
wear the chains
our mothers were forced
to call jewellery.

Candlelight

while we birth babies in candlelight
you use money meant for cerelac
to negotiate one more round.
then come puffed chest
to confer a last name
as we heal from torn perineums
and cracked nipples.

About the Author:

Angel Nduka-Nwosu is a writer, editor, and journalist. Her work has appeared in Gumbo Media, HOLAAfrica, Ake Review, The Random Photo Journal, YNaija, and Document Women, to name a few. Her poem "Benediction" was part of the Top 100 poems for the 2017 Poets in Nigeria Undergraduate Prize. An ardent feminist, she is the founder of The Emecheta Collective, a safe space and accountability network primarily for women in writing, research, and content creation. She is also the creator of the #SayHerNameNigeria hashtag, which aims to speak on the gendered angles of police brutality in Nigeria. Angel has judged literary prizes, most notably the Kito Diaries in 2021 and The Springing Women Authors Prize in 2022. The winner of The Nigerian Teen Choice 2017 award for Spoken Word Poetry, she writes from Lagos, Nigeria. Catch her on all socials @asangelwassayin.

Four Poems Roseline Mgbodichinma

When they deny you a seat at the table

Ask them if they made wood
Look them in the eye and remind them of your ancestry
Remind them that the forest houses diverse breeds
Tell them that the female gorilla raised Tarzan
That the lioness does the hunting
 Then take as many seats as you want
Make it a feast
Let the angry ones choke on salt
 & gnash their teeth
Like broken China.

Unwanted chord

(an ode to 'pak 'n' go by Kizz Daniel)

Men have collected their survival from breasts that droop and sag. They have latched onto it with hungry mouths, yearning for both nourishment and pleasure. To reduce the ovation of a woman's chest nuts to a male collectible in the lyrics of a song is to destroy the harmony. It is to strike an unwanted chord in the making of melody. It is to turn the strings into stings and injure. A woman's body is not an adjective for you to pronounce descriptions at will, you cannot look at it & spew foul. It is ingratitude to make joke from a citadel that once housed you. The next time you want to sing about the rise and fall of a body part, please remember that the only thing known to be hard & soft, up or down, itchy and releasing at the sight of nothing and anything is not located in a woman's body.

What to say when they say your body is too much

I am ancient
Living in this modern world
I am a power house
Mixed with old bones & creation clay
You cannot understand if you are not my kind
Look at me
Big
 Bold
 Black
Bright as day
 Voluptuous
Women like me are the reason the earth is spherical

I am coffee mix
With dog-eared descriptions
You cannot find in history books
Glowing embodiment of everything
 Your sons are trying to unravel
So think twice
Before you talk to me about trends
 Or how to fit into a model size
I am not toast
 Everything I carry
Can crush you to potash

Tie and Die

Inside my mother's box
Is an array of colourful textile
Between her wrappers is a
Reminder of places
She could have gone

Freely adorned in beautiful fabric
If the hems had not been threaded in gratitude
To my father,
 So on this occasion
She begs me to choose nakedness
If being clothed meant
Tying male benevolence around my waist

About the Author:

Roseline Mgbodichinma is a poet, writer, and blogger. In 2018, she won the audience's favourite award powered by Union Bank and Okadabooks for her short story, "Silence that Spoke." Her poem, "The Giant," was published in the Poets in Nigeria (PIN) 2019 Anthology, and her poem, "We Were Superheroes" was selected by Theresa Lola, the young people's laureate for London to be featured in the "Say Your Peace" campaign. Roseline takes pride in using imageries to tell stories that resonate with diverse audiences. Gender discrimination and injustice are major themes in her work. She occasionally writes on medium, but most of her works can be found on her blog at www.mgbodichi.com.

Anatomy Funmilayo Obasa

we ask google, who are we?
google says how to marry us. how not to marry us.
—Afua Awo Twumwaah, *She Shall Be Called*

& i watch a pastor perform an autopsy.
first,
he googles how to make an incision,
how to spread like a fountain,
how to let his lips disintegrate grey matter,
how to let his lips dissolve
a woman.
he peers into his armamentarium,
lifts a bottle of formalin,
smears it on the body
with each page of the bible.
the body —
a union
 where
head = man &
neck = woman.
then
i watch
the pages direct
his hands,
he weaves it into a restraint. turns it into a temple;
in this temple, we are silence
in this temple, we are silence...
he calls this body
an unequal filament.
and so a boy's pride balloons into a man's,

his voice rolls into a jagged cliff,
he stiffens himself, lets
his fists become a knife...

the boy slits the neck before the girl decapitates the head
or
the girl decapitates the head before the boy slits the neck.

About the Author:

Funmilayo Obasa, a Nigerian non-fiction writer, poet, and photographer is passionate about documenting muffled stories with her art. Writing from Kwara, Abuja, or whichever place she finds herself, her words tend to paint the spontaneity of her imagination, humanity and equality [for all], and desires and emotions, in abstract ways, forging a relationship between society and existence. She tweets @funmi796.

Two Poems Bunmi Africa

Irony

The irony of my mother telling me to keep myself because my body was a temple, while her pastor worshipped in it every other Sunday...

When we discuss these things, we say them with a smile, let it leave our lips with a sprinkle of humor, lest the sorrow of our reality drowns us.

We tell ourselves we can't be weak, we can't afford to let it break us, that if we let the tears fall, even just a drop, we surrender ourselves to be broken again.

Our stories have no favorite parts, only scary bits that make our hearts skip with anxiety every time we're asked to recant.

We carry this burden through life, searching for healing, our minds refusing to forget; it manifests itself in love, in intimacy, every time we attempt vulnerability.

We carry it in solace of our sisters who have gone through the same, we say it as grace, so it gives us strength to pick up swords and keep fighting.

Yes, we are strong but we are the strength of evil men with fickle minds, we are the strength of learning to rebuild from houses we never tore down, we possess a strength we wish we didn't have to.

But you see,
Sometimes, I wish I didn't have to fight,
That my freedom would somehow lose appeal to those who keep trying to take it from me,
That when you call me a warrior,
You'd fully acknowledge the blisters it takes to wield this machete,
Because being strong... is exhausting.

Self-Pleasure

Self-Pleasure isn't to be rushed,
Let your fingers draw magic on your skin,
Breathe and hear your insides pulse between space and time,
Speak and let your mouth sing melodies of that which overwhelms your body,
Take a trip into your mind,
Swim to the depths of your soul,
Dive into her rhythm,
Own every movement and arching,
Dance with your bed,
Discover the beauty within,
Finally, let it shake you,
Be blessed with the mystery of unraveling into and out of self,
Know what it is to be consumed by this fire,
Then lay still,
Smile,
Just be magic.

About the Author:

Bunmi Africa is a writer and performance poet. She shares strong socio-political opinions, promotes cultural history, and inspires through Spoken Word Poetry. These are her ways of documenting experiences and challenging norms. She released her debut album, *In Honour of The Broken*, in April 2022, and has collaborated with an array of musicians and other artists in her bid to make performance poetry accessible to mainstream media. She headlined her first international event in Windsor, Ontario, and is set to be artist-in-residence at Stone and Sky on Pelee Island, Ontario.

Two Poems Hassana Maina

Mama's Name

I will remember to teach my children my name
To make sure they feel the weight of it
Watch their little tongues swirl as they pronounce
Not Umma or Mummy
But my name
So, when I get erased by surname
And lineage
When history is not kind to me
And my heritage erased with one question
'Where are you from?'
They will remember their mama's name
My existence will not be reduced to the softness of my back
The warmth of my arms
The smile in my eyes as howls escape through my lips
I will not only be found through stories of sacrifice and pain
Of undiluted adoration and sainthood
It will be said that through my name
I lived!

20.10.20

(in memoriam of the October 2020 Lekki tollgate massacre)

We stand together,
Hands clenched
Fist held high
Enough, we scream marching forward

Enough, the blood of our comrades
from underneath the earth echo back
Though our accents vary,
our voices united
Uttering the silent dreams of generations before us.
We are the hope of the common man
The torch that lay bare systems made for us
But works against us
We understand the intricacies of false promises
This is what we have been fed since coming out of the wombs of our mothers
And now, we stand United.
We stand as one
Demanding justice for the blood of our comrades that flows through the city
Unashamedly being comfortable in the paths we have forged for ourselves,
our identity, our way of tilling the soil.
Our hands will only raise higher, our fists will only clench tighter
Stop killing us, will you?

About the Author:

Hassana Umoru Maina is a lawyer, poet, and gender consultant. She coordinated a standstill rally across eight northern states to push for the domestication of VAPP Act under the NorthNormal platform. She runs a weekly program on her Instagram, the #ABCsOfSexualViolence, where she invites guests from all walks of life with the aim of normalizing the conversations on sexual violence and breaking the culture of silence and shame that surrounds the topic. Maina won the Future Africa Awards Prize for activism in 2020, among other recognitions. She holds a master's degree in Law with specialism in development and globalisation, from SOAS, the University of London.

Two Poems

Olivia Yetunde Alabi

Clouds

What if the clouds that hung above
Were really warriors of old
Frozen in time, blessed for all eternity
To spend their days in great serenity

David with his steel
Achilles with his heel
After all their glories and agonies
Were reborn as heavenly bodies

What if the rain they spurn
Were tears for a world torn
While they were supposed to be in peace
They are forced to see us fall into an abyss

Tailored Hands

Maybe, just maybe, I should turn these pages
Like how one rewinds a clock
Twisting and turning
A clockmaker at work
Or a simple idiot who wishes to fix his watch
Maybe then I can see where it all began
With the strokes of a pen

A child once wrote
So eager to have a voice, eager to be heard
I wonder what she felt then
What made her pour her heart out on paper
Do you think she knew
Just how beautiful her hand was
How every brush of her pen
Like a master seamstress
Stitches her truths to my heart
Did she know those efforts she thought futile
Told the story of the love she bore
Does she know now, just how far she has come
Maybe, just maybe, if I turn these pages
I can take her back
To where it all began
To when she first felt

About the Author:

Olivia Yetunde Alabi hails from Kwara State. She is studying for a bachelor's in psychology and hopes to launch her own NGO in the future. When she's not studying for a degree, she's busy advocating, getting lost in a book, or fighting with her family's dog, Max.

Dear Icarus Glamour Adah

You were determined to fly,
You were determined to love me.
Despite ridicule from many,
You stood with your head up high
Towards me.
In the day, I watched you closely
Toiling away in your little shed.
In the night, I watched from a distance,
So I won't look desperate.
Your passion overwhelmed me,
Your fire mesmerized me,
I watched you laugh in the face of mockery itself,
And blow a kiss to failure.
I saw you shine,
And I wanted you beside me,
Like the star that you are.

But as they say
"Don't fly too close to the sun",
And I knew why.
I knew I could hurt you.
I knew it wasn't meant to be.

You and I,
You took a chance,
A leap of faith.
The moment you got your wings,
You threw caution to the wind,
And flew towards me,
I knew what I had to do,

So I burnt off your wings,
And watched you fall and break,
I did the very thing I tried to protect you from,
I hurt you,
I'm sorry, dear Icarus...

About the Author:

Glamour Adah is a poet and aspiring prose writer. She writes because she believes writing is an art and a voice. She hopes to be one of the best writers of her generation.

Two Poems Omotoyosi Salami

Decent Clothes

i do not know when i started to morph into this—
just yesterday i was a baby girl, wasn't sure if i was four or five, couldn't tell the difference
between
auntie A or auntie B. just yesterday, i dressed in
frilly pink dresses and unnecessarily intricate socks, wore my hair in dangling curls, was
oblivious to any crises, any
wars. i was
my mother's own baby,
her pride and joy. my mother even renounced her name for me, started
to go by "Mama Toyosi."

only days ago i was not a sin,
not an exotic, poisonous abomination—
i was the gateway to Jannah for many of my male family members.

but today, all of a sudden,
i have become a serpent; the accursed one that tempted Eve &
i have also turned into Eve herself, the queen temptress, the doom
of the world. it's
as if i rub melted sugar all over my body and pay soldier ants a visit,
and then
i pick the ants with my giant feet and
drop them on men's bodies, & i am poison;
it is me who destroyed the world
with
these tiny breasts of mine,
these lips
that are starting to go red.

slithering sexy seductress of a child,
i've heard that every female is a witch so long as she answers, so long
as she can come.
i miss the times that my mother's male visitors would smile fondly, ruffle my hair,
and give me money
when they came to our house.
now, when she receives them,
she sends me away from the living room, &
says, sternly, that if i have to come out at all,
i need to wear decent clothes that
cover my thighs
and hide my tiny nipple prints.

For Femi Salisu Adesola

I took a break from writing about frivolous things, like beauty and love and fleeting sadness
to write about this.

I know one thing for certain: past sinners are the most aggressive faithfals.

My mother doesn't cry often. I cannot remember the last time she wept,
until the phone call came in and we heard her father had passed.

My aunt said she woke up and saw her phone filled up
with missed calls

and thought to herself, This man is gone.

He was an Imam, and a former Christian, and an alcoholic pagan in another life. His
children believe he was his father returned.

My grandfather's hands, his teeth, his black skin and his dog-eared copies of the Qur'an.
My grandfather in the middle of the night,

praying fervently for his children and their children and their children. In the heat too,

because in that house they don't get electricity past nine pm.

My grandfather and his appetite for justice. My grandfather and his skinny body and kind
tongue.

My grandfather, who argued with his children every year because he always wanted to
attend the Eid prayer
despite his age-induced weakness.

My grandfather, in the hospital said, When I die, I don't care if you all want to have a party,
just make sure you do the obligatory Islamic ceremonies.

Now, he lies beneath the red earth of his house that he built before he died.

And somehow I know that if there is a real heaven, my grandfather struts casually through
it,

his hands in the pockets of his Jalabiah, a kind, humble smile on his face,

and a King's Hand badge on his chest pocket.

About the Author:

Omotoyosi Salami is a poet, radical feminist, and writer living in Lagos. Her writing is influenced by melancholy and a deep yearning for love. Omotoyosi has been published in Vagabond City Lit, Constellate Lit, and Brittle Paper. She is on Twitter as @HH_Omotoyosi.

Three Poems Stephanie Chizoba Odili

Foremothers

Who are my foremothers?
Who were the women who breathed air into my mother's mothers mothers lungs
and carried her across the river?

Who are you the daughter of?
Where do you come from?
Whose body did you originate from?
Who's the woman who, like the curtains of the Jerusalem temple, tore in the middle to
birth you?

Tell me the story of this warrior,
Broken within, yet pieced together for you.
Tell me about the god that is your mother
Blessed enough to partake in this glorious creation story

Where is your mother?
Where are our mothers and their mothers?
Their days of suffering and its glorification is over.
Their days of silence and protection, not for themselves but for men are drawing nigh.

Tell them that whether they were born strong,
or were thrust into it by the chaos of the unfair world,
Tell them that it's all better now.
Tell her that soon, she'll sit in heaven
in daily conversations with God.

Knowing

Before I left you, I choked on the hardest pill I ever tried to swallow.
Knowing.

I knew there was something dishonest about the way you called my name
I knew there was nothing propitious about us, about you.
I knew a few things in our tumultuous love that screamed toxicity.

But I lacked the courage.
That is until I swallowed the pill of acceptance.
Knowing all along that I knew
And wasn't going to hold on anymore.

Men Like You

I stopped believing you when you continued to attend church,
watch football
listen to music
hang out with friends
buy drinks for
work for and with
and watch the movies of men who assaulted me and my sisters.

I stopped trusting when you asked
“Why couldn't she just...?”
“Why didn't she leave?”
“This doesn't sound legit”
“Are you sure that's what happened?”

I get it anyway.
bros before hoes
we do it too,
sisters before misters

but you see, that's the difference.

Unlike us, we call out bullshit and never condone bad behavior
But you do. You call that brotherhood, and what do you call us?
'Women hating women'.

Sadly, men like you are our husbands, fathers, brothers, friends.
Men like you are everywhere, and we should have never believed you.

About the Author:

Stephanie Chizoba Odili is a British born-Nigerian writer, editor, feminist, and author of novel *Deafening Silence* and a collection of poems and short stories—22. Stephanie writes fiction and non-fiction, enjoys performing arts, as well as exotic food. When not writing or teaching, she's either watching horror movies or documentaries based on real events & humans. She is directly advocating for SGDs 4, 5 & 13. Her debut novel, *Deafening Silence*, was the 2019 1st runner up of the Association of Nigerian Authors Prize for Fiction. Some of her other literary works have been longlisted, most recently in the 2019 K & L Prize for Literature.

Three Poems Grace Alioke

Question 103

she's metamorphosing from a staled snail
to an exhausting moth, clutched to the window
& asking the wind when the streets would be free from
the indefinite imprisonment; when the day wouldn't be measured
by the number of bodies baptized into ashes by the virus but the tick
tock; when she wouldn't sniff the formaldehyde singing in her room, & grief
creeping into her fingers, 'cause the lockdown is scraping his touch from her dreams
& the quarantine is weaving him into a distinct ant, but silence keeps hanging in her hollow
head.

my skin is my sin?

i can't add the a
in w_lk without eliminating
the l & adding e before the a.
without tasting the lyrics of my blood
on the street.

if fists fight or insults
roll on insults & make a
crisscross on the air
instead of digging into the root
to get the creeping millipede
you build blame atop punishment

on my back & it droops like a
retired chick, 'cause my skin
is my sin?

“all lives matter!”
really?
did this philosophy break her
beak when my third brother's blood
colored the street black?
or did she forget her feather in her
mouth?

everyday, i can't add the a
in w_lk without eliminating the l
& adding e before the a, & drinking
grief after sorrow, 'cause my skin// our skins//
gleam(s) melanin?

A haiku

voting day...
a cat kills another rat
in the room

About the Author:

Grace Alioke is a Nigerian writer and poet, a decorator, and a student at the University of Benin. She writes only when her pen draws her. Her works have been published in Praxis magazine, Analogies & Allegory, Havilah Woman, and forthcoming in others. You can find her on Twitter @gracealioke.

Three Poems Ijeoma Ntada

Little Boy

My little cousin regards me as a goddess
who can bring satisfaction
to the end of his wants.
I become that genie that grants wishes.
And he, a worshiper looking up to my benevolence.
This little boy seeks to become a copy of this goddess.
That he begins to copy her words,
her little habits of godship.
Like folding in her legs like a Muslim man seeking the face of his God
in between bowing heads and moving lips when she eats.

This little boy proves this law of physics.
A body will continue in its state of Uniform Motion unless acted upon by an external
force.
This little boy stops right in his tracks
and pauses with this goddess that is now a force.

This goddess has become a trembling leaf in harmattan.
Slowly thinking, what becomes of this boy when he sees the tiny specks of inherent demons
in the goddess's temper and agonies?

when pictures become moving bodies

since grandpa died, I have learned to live in my dream.
Papa, when I grow, I will build you a house.

yesterday, i found him dining with youth and style
on the table of an album.
my hands have withered from clapping in sorrowful dances
that i see his smile crease into a frown when i touch his face.
i caress his beards, then i empty the last drop of vaseline to oil his bulbous afro.
the width of his smile bigger than my afro,
come sit, he says in an accent that is not his.
i join him on his cane chair.
slowly, he touches my cheeks and tells me repeated tales.
this time, it feels new.
how long have i searched for this baritone in my chest of past times?
story ends. and i make to hug this body.
body is as volatile as naphthalene.
body disappears with the arrival of my arms.
body walks into a picture.
body becomes still.

when next Tata asks where the dead go,
i won't say the skies to God's heaven.
nor below the soil to Satan's pit.
they become A L I V E in pictures.

Lipstick

When a girl is pushed to the extremes of herself by a man,
she weeps and recoils like a cobra teased in an inferno of poison.
This is the first p-u-s-h.
And she obeys the law of vessels.
She becomes a weak vessel with uplifted hands pleading with the heavens
to help her stand and not fall like a droplet of rain.

When she is pushed a second time, she rises like a bird that braves the rain to make a nest.
This is the point she fights the man and seeks a balance with her own hands.

When she is pushed a third time, she becomes Delilah.
She lures and coos until the man walks into the gloom in her lap.
Then she becomes a clone of anger and pain and vengeance.
She picks a sword and slits the man's throat open.
His blood will find its way into her box of colours where he would become her brightest
shade of red lipstick.

About the Author:

Ijeoma Ntada is a Nigerian writer. She wears her bulbous afro with a lot of pride. She has been published in the Praxis Review and the Ducor Review.

Two Poems Olufunmi Akinfolarin

The water that was trapped in a stone

I praise you for healing.
I praise you for cutting down the thorns that tear you on the inside.
I praise you for being able to pour out the battle wounds within you.
I praise you for learning to breathe.
For facing your fears again.
For calling yourself home.

I praise the Most High for your presence,
Because the world needs your existence.

You were almost broken but you did not break.
You were almost broken but you survived the pain.

I praise your courage.
I praise you for facing your scars
I praise you for climbing in life,
for soaring higher.
For doing what brings your heart joy.

You are finally free from the broken and dark place.
You are filling the earth with nothing but light and grace.

thorns that bleed

Mother.
Do you know that the skins of your daughters are peeling?

Father.

Do you know that your daughters' tears come from the wounds they are feeling?

Do you know that every time you tell them to smile at pain, you are killing them too?

Do you know that every time they think of pain and sadness, they always think of you?

Mother and Father

Do you know?

About the Author:

Olufunmi Akinfolarin spent her early years in Nigeria and eventually moved to the United Kingdom to complete her education. She holds a degree in Law (LLB). Her poetry book, "Untangled Screams," can be found on mybestseller.co.uk and Amazon.

The Hymen Chase Semilore Kilaso

Your period would come on your wedding day.
You would feel the slimy blood trickle down your thighs
as you feed your husband cake four hours before he planned
to take your hymen.
You would be unprepared and embarrassed
until he notices your silence and discomfort.
He would call your mom and tell her your body is bleeding —
punishing you for keeping yourself and not carrying a baby.
Your mother would tell your bridesmaids to help you clean up
and change into your after-party dress.
You would return to your husband,
laugh and merry at your wedding party until he takes you home (to the hotel).
At the hotel, you would apologize to him for not christening
your wedding night as planned. He would kiss you,
touch you in all the right places, and tell you not to worry.
He is tired anyway.
On the fourth day after your wedding,
you would seduce your husband and propose sex.
He would take you on kitchen counter
glide into you
till you quiver in unexplainable pleasure.
You would change your walking step
and blame it on your sore thigh.
That night, your husband would call his father, tell him he is wrong.
not all pastor's children are perverts.
She really was a virgin.
He saw your blood.
He is sure it's no dove's blood.
You would also call your mother,
laugh at his naivety and how he thinks he tore your hymen.

About the Author:

Semilore Kilaso is a Nigerian writer who loves to collect photographs of humans, architecture, wildlife, and landscape. When she is not playing Scrabble or reading books, she is reading lines from architectural drawings. Her work appears in Culturalweekly, Entropy, Litvalley, Radical Art Review, nantygreens, and elsewhere. You can reach her on Twitter @ooreola.

Four Poems

Omowaleayo Wale-Olaitan

When Love Goes Wrong

When love goes wrong
It doesn't give you a prewritten note
It doesn't hold onto you
To lessen the pain.
It doesn't give you a ring
You've been waiting for your whole life.

When love goes wrong,
It's never as you planned.
You plan to hold their smile
Even if for just another moment.
You plan your children's names
And exactly what you'll say to them
The first time they look up at you.
You plan to stay in that hollow part of their arms
You plan a forever that'll never come.

When love goes wrong,
The sun still shines.
While you're drowning in an ocean of hurt,
The rain still pours,
While you're burning in the rays of pain.
The milkman still delivers,
Life goes on.

And somehow, everyone around you is in love.

Loving the Girl with Anxiety

When you love the girl with anxiety,
You love the 5am tears,
And the 2am laughter.
The unending apologies
And constant reassurance.

Sometimes it's like being thrown off a boat,
Without knowing how to swim.
It's full of twists and turns,
And dangers.
Sometimes you'll listen to her stories
Till your ears hurt.
Other times, you'll have to endure the silence
Because she isn't in the mood.

She'll be fine one moment,
And be in tears the minute after.
She'll love you for bringing her tea
But hate you for pushing her to speak up.
You'll go through her changing moods
Like the waves of the sea.
And sometimes you'll be carried away by her pain
Like the raging ocean.

Sometimes she'll doubt your love,
She'll question your words.
She'll choke you with her presence
And make you detest her absence.
Sometimes she'll be too much to handle,
Too empty to ever fill.

Her pain will make her lash out
And you'll question her sanity.
You'll do all you can,
But you may never erase the sadness in her eyes.

And sometimes
You'll question why you stay.

It's a rollercoaster ride with her
And you're never sure where you stand,
But oh
You'll never doubt her love.
She'll love you with everything,
Her whole mind and heart,
And give you her all.

Loving the girl with anxiety is never easy
But you'll never regret you did.
Trust me,
I know,
For I am one.

Choose Not To

Sitting in a crowd of familiar faces
And drowning in the unfamiliar
Waiting for the ground to swallow you whole
But you cannot show fear
You cannot tell of the pounding heart
And the rushing blood
So you put on a brave smile
And laugh it all away.

Sometimes you are the life of the party
The one who helps everyone feel better
The one who convinces the others to dance
And pulls them off their feet
As you belt out the lyrics to each song
But little do they know

That you spend your nights
With your headphones in
As you try to drown out the voices in your head.

Little do they know
Of the days
You go home in tears
And wonder why you exist.
Little do they know
Of the nights your pillow drowns in tears
And you silently try to stop the dam.

Or maybe you are the boy
Who silently shies away
From every crazy party
Because the party in your head
Is enough.

And so there are nights
You try the pill
Or maybe turn to the knife
And just when you are about to do it
You choose not to.
So rather than go through all the reasons why
You quietly brave another day.

I think you are brave
Brave enough to be the semi colon
The one who could have chosen to end the sentence
But rather silently braves on.
I think it's brave
That rather than end it all
You silently brave on
Like the semicolon's
Quiet
Daring
Strength.

If I Ever Love Again

If I ever have to love again, I hope I never have to fill the pillow with my tears. I hope I never need to smile through the tears. I hope I never have to break myself to please you. And I know, I know, that love isn't always rosy; it has its own thorns but I never want to beg to be loved again.

If I ever have to love again, I hope to look into eyes that mirror my heart. I hope to laugh till I cry while staring into eyes that can't help but reflect mine. I hope to dance in the rain to our own music. I hope to truly be loved back.

If I ever have to love again, I hope it's never with you.

About the Author:

Omowaleayo Wale-Olaitan studied English Language and Education at the Obafemi Awolowo University, has published articles in Nigerian national newspapers, and is particularly interested in gender-related issues. She coordinated African Rubies Rizing, a youth wing of the Non-Governmental Organisation, African Rubiz, which aims to empower African women. Omowaleayo is a sister and a daughter; roles she cherishes.

Sister's Crown Tomi Ibadin

They say my sister's crown
Should cause me to lose sleep and
bite my fingernails in worry
and trepidation.
Because hers is bigger, a lot shinier and more beautiful.

They say women hate women
And we are our own worst enemies.
But all my life...
all I have ever seen is the
love in sisterhood.

From my days as a girl
When I wasn't yet aware of
what it meant to be a woman
When my body was still developing
When the blood flowed and stained my uniforms,
My sisters, as I call them, would often be the first
To offer me their spare.

They would hold my hands and tell me
There was nothing to be ashamed of.
They would wrap me in their arms
And comfort my aching belly
They would feed me and
love me through my pains.

But they say women are their worst enemies
That soon I shall see my sisters for who they truly are

That time only would tell.

But here I am...

Time and time again

They have shown and taught me leadership.

They have led

They have marched

And keep encouraging me to keep my head above all waters.

Women are not women's worst enemies.

We argue and disagree just like everyone.

But I shall always know that,

when I'm writhing in pain

when I'm worried about my future,

my sisters shall always be there to hold my hands.

They shall be there at all times

to wrap me in a deep embrace

as they love me into wholeness.

About the Author:

Tomi J. Ibadin is a Nigerian lawyer and creative. She is a deep thinker who is passionate about women and children and uses writing as a means of self-expression. In her free time, she volunteers for various organisations. She uses real life events to tell stories to encourage individuals into living their best life. Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @jobosele

Let Me Teach You My Normalcy Amarachi Nnoli

Normalcy: /nɔ:'malsi/

the condition of being normal; the state of being usual, typical, or expected.

Teach me how to love my body, how to not wake up in the face of a mirror at dawn pinching crevices in, raising every fold & dreaming a liposuction(ed) figure into existence, teach me to discard shame when the waiter asks “Just one portion, ma’am?” on a first date & an affirmative suggests the subtle art of cutting carbs & sit spine-straight in strict crunches; teach me how to evict nervous throaty chuckles from my lips when confidence, whoever she is, is applauded for how I lift my skin saggy with the weight of three women, or the swagger in my steps,

teach me about boys, the unending cycle of boys, who tell me I’m beautiful in dark corners, pressing eager hands against sensitive flesh, between thighs moistened with mixtures of bodily fluids; teach me about men who only love me in the dark, men who lay heads on my chest, “You feel like mother,” a compliment they force down my throat between feverish kisses becoming bile in my throat. If you can’t teach me these things, maybe I can teach you that my body isn’t a gateway to exploring uncharted fetishes. I will teach you how the multiple lines across stretched skin on my back, behind my thighs, across bubbling bum cheeks aren’t tiger stripes or tattoos or beautiful; I will teach you how my heart pumps out self-loathing at dusk; my eyes hold less plea for acceptance. So when you try to teach me to play pretend normal, we will klink! our tiny teacups & I will teach you that my XL is human.

About the Author:

Amarachi Nnoli is an undergrad Nigerian student. She wears the title of writer, feminist and other times, poet, boldly. Her works have appeared in GreenBlackTales, Urights.com, Ukwumango, and elsewhere. While Amara performs poetry on her podcast leisurely, she also tries to pass time by scaring people into believing she performs witchcraft. Get at her on Twitter and Instagram @amaratheamazon.

Three Poems Adeyele Adeniran

self-adornment

for the days you feel strange in yourself remember to hold yourself and love you well.

hair is a halo
reaching up to heaven
bursting out
“Hallelujah”

skin is a testament
gold from God’s kiss
when he blessed me
“this is my child”

body is a vase
holding a soul
of scents and colors
“for now you are at home”

some days you hug your
body
because it feels ancient
you squeeze your skin
begging it to once again
be warm, be kind, be mine.

A rainbow at midnight

when I speak to God
my prayers become poetry
soft and quivering as they
spill from my tender lips

this night, I looked into God's eye
the moon as the iris
and sun for an orbit
around it was weathered clouds

my brown body swayed
left, right
to the cool tune of
midnight's silence

looking into the heavens
straight at the eye of God
where rainbows formed
along its rims

my mouth like a tap
pouring out my pains and joys
beseeching that His light
grants me peace.

A Feminist Cries

feminist because first
this shouldn't even be a debate
you believe this is a war
and that power
is why you bring fists
to a game of words

we simply request
that you see us as humans
before our gender
it's outrageous that at the
simple sound of equality
your blood boils
as if a woman
standing tall is
the end of the world

we are lynched, killed,
cheated, raped, silenced
objectified and maimed
where is your voice then?
where do you stand?
on the side of all the men
who say yes, simply unbelievable
that they think they can speak
that they have a right

but my life is worth more
than silence and servitude
everyday around the world
my sisters see the red of blood
living in homes that
replicate battlefields
faces melted by acid of hate
body deformed by the breadwinner
innocence stolen by a family man

you want us to live like
we have no reason to bleed
because there's comfort
ignoring what you cannot feel

it's easy to type "bloody feminist"
trying to take over the world
you voice harsh with a sprinkle

of despise
like you're blind to see your kind is
the enemy
why do you belittle the notion
of female solidarity and clamor for equality
is it too preposterous to think of
that a woman can lead
and make decisions independently

yes, i am feminist
my stomach curls each time
i get a cat call, some slurs
experience harassment
i retch because I know
i am a statistic of abused women
i know chasing my dreams
means at a point
one man might request I offer my body
for a price
and I know my success might never be
defined by my hard work
my worth will almost always
be tied to a man.

About the Author:

Adeyele Adeniran is a poet, creative writer, and feminist who resides in Lagos, Nigeria. Her poetry and storytelling are greatly inspired by her part as a spectator in a world filled with humanity and chaos. Apart from writing, she loves to get lost in her imagination and listen to music that makes her feel like a rockstar. She is a graduate of History and Strategic studies at the University of Lagos. Her works have been published in *Kalahari Review*, *The Young African Poets Anthology*, *African Writers*, *Lit Up*, *NoteWorthy*, *Resistance Poetry*, and forthcoming in the *Women's Peace Magazine*.

Two Poems Ruona Idjenughwa

(to be []'s girl)

it takes more than two
wings to be
a bird

fall in love once and be human
twice
and you're not a fool

to co-exist with the
reason your heart is dropping
steroids, you have to live

see love and taste it
chew it slowly, savor it with
your entire body

and
your eyes closed.

i am in love with []

and i am learning how to
put my mouth where my heart is
catwheeling

to be a pretty rose, you must first
learn how to sting off unwanted fingers with a pierce

to be able to let pain
and sweet fragrance sit side by side in your body,
you must first know god personally

omo, when i am []'s girl
you'll watch me peel the other side
of the moon
with a shredder

and then i'll wear the piece on my neck
i'll shine for my baby

i'll pull the stars open
and their silver dust will be our confetti
and
we'll never run out of things to walk into

violins for eternal

god played me a violin to sleep
yesterday
he knelt by my bed –good lord!
and his fingers curved
into pleasure strings

that is to say–

to know the waves personally
you have to be the water

or know how to call them for a show

to carry pleasure on purpose
inside your fingertips

means you have become familiar
with what my body holds

and the rendition it wants

that is to say—

only god can strike a good tune

and a volcano will erupt
springs of living waters.

About the Author:

Ruona Idjenughwa is a Nigerian writer who enjoys expressive art. When she is not experimenting with the genres of literature or juggling schoolwork, she gives her mind the license to wander. Sometimes, it takes her feet along.

Two Poems Taofeeqah Adigun

Lockdown

Ages ago, we craved the vision twenty-twenty.
Excitement here and there to see the twin year unfold.
It indeed came to send us to the great beyond,
In numbers greater than two thousand and twenty.

What if I told you the world stopped for a cough?
And everything else came to a pause.
A sneeze sang the lullaby that sent the world to sleep.
The beginning of the end of the world that we lived.

I sneezed and no one said 'bless you', it was strange.
It was the year mother earth decided to take a break.
The streets have become empty,
For staying home is the new staying healthy.

We have become prisoners in our world,
Searching for hope behind closed doors.
Handshakes have become dangerous,
Avoiding people is the new cautious.

We isolate during the day and cluster at night,
Watching over lives and washing hands every time.
On and on, the year keeps running.
And every morning is a wake of new mournings.

No Sundays nor Mondays but the Sun and Moon,
Tuesdays are toxic as cases grow in twos.

We ask ourselves what to do on Wednesdays,
Tolls rise on Thursdays and fears on Fridays.

We stay home on Saturdays,
Turning to social media for our solace.
Schools are now very much empty,
The once-packed holy lands are now deserted.

I never knew doing nothing could become tiring.
That we could be at war without shots firing.
But this is our new life now,
And we have to face this weaponless chaos.

Mum says it's all a blessing in disguise,
Brought upon us to purge and purify.
Teaching us to prioritize lives over things,
When COVID-19 gets defeated eventually.

If Tomorrow Starts Without Me

If tomorrow starts without me,
I hope my parents can find some peace,
Knowing that even though my life was short,
I lived so much before it ceased.
I hope you'll also start again,
With the world and all that remains.
If tomorrow starts without me,
I hope you'll speak to your children,
Of their aunty they can't see.
And how much I would have loved them,
In a future that wasn't to be.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Ask why you couldn't see me even when I was close by.
Do you ever try to see if there is pain in people's eyes?
Sighs, I guess the chaos of our lives,

Keeps us from noticing the pain that people hide.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Don't be surprised that I had to die.
I'm a very different person in the sobering sunrise.
So if you wake up alone, don't take it as a slight,
Some things last forever while others last just one night.

If tomorrow starts without me,
Know that everything you see,
Isn't everything there was to me.
Outside I might have seemed filled,
But inside, I was always incomplete.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Don't blame me for never speaking out,
For we're writers, my love.
We don't cry, we bleed on paper.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Know that I tried to be happy,
But sadly, I was never in one piece.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Know that I didn't take my life,
Something else sure, but it wasn't suicide.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Know that it was God and not any disease.
For even if it isn't now, sooner it will be.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Please don't mourn me,
For I was never living when I was alive with thee.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Know that I didn't mean to end it this way,
But being dead is better than dying every day.
If tomorrow starts without me,
Then let my words speak for me.
For if tomorrow comes and you can't find me,
Then my poems and drawings are where you'll see me.

About the Author:

Taofeeqah Adigun O. is a writer, calligrapher, and Mathematics buff, who has a keen interest in poetry, counseling, and languages. All her life, she has lived in Ekiti state, Nigeria but is an indigene of Osun state, Nigeria. Although a science student, she enjoys designing, writing, and counseling, and is studying Biochemistry at Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti state, Nigeria.

Four Poems

Sarah Etta

Untitled

There aren't enough books written about us
or enough songs that amplify our strengths and struggles
Not enough poems that sew our pain together in layers of fancy words
Or enough pictures that tell the tales that have tied knots in our throats
Our history has been written for us, washed up and patched together with lies and half-
truths, like a new layer of paint
to cover the ugliness of it all.
Left with the puzzling fragments
how does one make sense of the madness?
We struggle, virtue beaten out of us by the cruelty of our reality.
Till this day, even as we have managed to wade the storms that come with survival, even as
we are gradually beginning to kiss the feet of change
the validity of this movement is still questioned
our humanity, still deliberated upon
I will not say that the fight has only just begun, for we have been fighting
What I would say is well done!
for the effort, the choice to carry on
for accepting the weaknesses but still willing to hold on.
This is a war cry
the revolution has begun.

Untitled

Beneath the strain of time
The feelings disappear

Before, a memory almost forgotten and after, a future that an us doesn't exist
Today, we are woven into the orchestra of things, good or bad
Laying still, awaiting time to take its course.
Tomorrow we will try to try again
to fix things
We will fail at this.
They will ask me why I let things fall apart
they will blame me for not trying to stitch it all back together
they will say it is for the kids.
But time does not respect our wishes and I will tell them that our time has come-
to an end.

Untitled

Memorized on your lips
like the Hail Mary
are chants of survival.
you have learnt to eat your words and pin your tongue to the roof of your mouth,
learnt to collect yourself quickly from the tumbling down and tossing,
learnt to prepare your body for crashing into anything.
I have often wondered how you felt
watching the Love you gave turn to sawdust in your mouth
how you felt giving yourself over and over again to a man who couldn't keep his fist away
from your chin, his boots away from your belly, only to have him spit your sacrifices in
your face.

The Slipping Away

It is normal enough to catch yourself,
catch yourself slipping away
through old cracks on the walls of your mind
your mind's eye losing vision, focus

as you drift away
perfecting the art of slow communication, isolation, pulling away from human relations.

It is normal enough to be overwhelmed,
normal enough to not know how you feel
when you have lost yourself in the heat of everything; the bad, the ugly, the slipping away.

About the Author:

Sarah Etta is a writer who specializes in creative non-fiction and research writing. She draws her inspiration for poetry and her writing in general from her experiences with womanhood and the self. She writes poetry for the fun of it and enjoys consuming all forms of media that celebrate and document women.

Untitled Ibi Kontein

When they ask you how women like to be loved, you will smile, and blush.
Allow color to flood your cheeks, even though your skin is darker than coal.
Blush and say all the things you know about the right way to love a woman.

Of course you know these things because you are a woman, not because you yourself are in love with another woman.

That would be a taboo. You will tell them about flowers, and dinner dates, chocolates and expensive wigs.

But you will not mention your lover.

You will not tell them that your lover feels like fresh air.

Or that the only thing you like more than her wild hair, is the deep velvet of her skin.

You cannot say these things. It is a taboo. Remember?

Do not mention that every time her father brings a new suitor for her, you pick up a smile and plaster it on your face.

Meanwhile your emotions are scattered,
like ants after a beating of rain.

They will ask you what her dress size is, they will ask you if she prefers jollof rice to fried rice.

Tell them that she likes fried rice. But do not mention that she likes peppered snail, or that your lover likes to drink red wine from your lips. You will give good advice, like a good friend. Not the jealous lover that you are.

They will push for more.

That is the thing with people.

Greedy.

They do not know when to stop.

They will ask you to plan a surprise engagement.

They will tell you they see a future with your lover.

By future, they mean good food, regular penetrative sex, and four well-fed children.
They will even ask you how to please your lover.
Your mind will run here and there.
You will lose your breath.
Cold air will slap you in the face—turn the other cheek.

You will respond, “go down on her”. But do not tell them how.
Do not tell them that when you spread your tongue and slide it up and down the space
between her legs, or slightly curve two fingers and thrust them in, she holds your head
down, and moans your name.
This knowledge is for you alone.
You will not tell them that you have to draw the curtains first, and the bed must not creak.
You have to put a hand over your lover’s mouth, lest she wake the neighbors.
The neighbors must not see and get evidence to call your love a taboo.

When they ask you how women like to be loved, you will smile, and say “openly and
without question.”
You know this because you are a woman.
Of course this is not the truth.
You cannot tell the truth.
Tell a story.
Because the truth is that you know what your lover tastes like.
And that?
That is what the naysayers shall call a taboo.

About the Author:

Ibi Kontein is a storyteller. Through stage plays, children’s fiction, and poetry, she tells the stories that birth nostalgia. Some of her theatre works that she has scripted, directed and produced across major cities in Nigeria include *Back For Ground*, *Wari The Play*, and others. She uses her literature as an advocacy medium for feminism, and highlighting womanhood through the lens of a black woman. Shortlisted for the Nigerian Students Poetry Prize 2017, Ibi successfully merges her career in International Diplomacy with her mastery of subtle story telling. She is inspired by her life and the lives of all the women before her.

Seven Days Too Long Ugonna Ejiogu

the week is seven days too long and again

the bliss is far from home.

Keeping her head above water is the only hope

she's three days away from another month

and five months away from another pointless year.

She's hours from her big break and seconds from disaster

if daylight breaks before her silent night fall

the days and spaces won't matter.

It's raining opportunities outside

but she's inside giving up

counting wasted moments

not brave enough to dance in the storm.

The rainbow will be her price

only if she has the courage.

The week is seven days too long again

she needs a moment to make a perfect memory

but life's imperfect flaws get in her way.

If only breaking clocks

could stop her time from ticking

and her life from speeding.

She would put down a thousand clocks

and their lifeless bliss will give her peace.

She's too weak for another long week.

About the Author:

Ugonna Ogechi Ejiogu is a writer and a pioneer food tourist in Nigeria, under the brand name Mitya's Food Diary. She is the co-founder of The Tang Impact, a food and hospitality consulting company in Nigeria. She is currently a fellow in the Leading African Women in Food Fellowship (LAWFF) Program and an Ambassador to the World Food Travel Association for Nigeria. Since 2014, Ugonna has consistently engaged in the art of poetry composition, amassing a collection of diverse poems that have been published on Booksie. Throughout her formative years and beyond, writing has remained an enduring and fervent passion, making it a prominent aspect of her personal and creative journey.

I Am Here Now Favour Oseigbovo

Don't write about my infectious smile;
tell me in person.
Don't whine about our estranged relationship—
there is ample but temporary time for reconciliation.

Don't wait to speak of me in the past tense,
with a sad smile plastered across your face,
wishing you had done things differently;
opportunities still abound.

Don't wait to ramble about who I was!
Do it now.
Don't wait to tremble at the mention of my name,
it will live forever—I won't.

Don't wait to live the regrets
of your overbearing ego.
Make a reasonable judgment and
thaw it now.

Don't watch from afar
until I walk six feet under
You can rewrite the writings on the wall now

Don't lie to yourself,
you will miss me when I am gone.
Why wait until then, when there is now

About the Author:

Favour Oseigbovo is a young creative writer. She hopes to communicate with people with the creativity of her pen and influence the world into positivity. She writes about real-life experiences and tries to pass along a positive message to her readers. Her works can be found on Medium @Favour Oseigbovo. She is also active on Facebook @Favour Oseigbovo and Instagram @favoured_osei.

Two Poems

Amarachi Chioma Mbah

Binyelum

Binyelum, daughter of Izundu, the cotton trader
Do you hear the beating of igbaya coming from Osime, the neighboring village?
Have you heard that their high chiefs come bearing Mazi Ugo's palm wine?

Binyelum, the dancer with anklets of beads and cowries in her hair
Is it true that your widening hips and beaded waist lured Chukwudi to Ojuta?
Have you forgotten what befell the ones who came before him?

Dance, Binyelum, for Chukwudi beats a tune on the igbaya for your pleasure
Dance to the beat of the igbaya, for your new home has come calling
Dance, let your waist sway to the tune of your womanhood

Dance, for your cowries shall quake as you glide and the wind shall draw men to you
Dance, let the anklets on your feet and the beads on your waist blend with the drum
Dance, for you are saved from the clutches of singlehood and your father shall drink wine

Binyelum, daughter of the drum, dance for your mother beckons on you
Feel the ground quake beneath your anklets, for your mother awakens
Now stop and stand still, let the blood flowing from Chukwudi's neck soak your feet

For your mother, has come for his head, like the others before him
For you shall not be bought or sold as property nor led like sheep to the slaughter
But as free as the ukulele's melody gliding softly through the udara trees, you, Binyelum,
shall be

Shujaa Wa Kike (We Rise)

Wipe those tears, my love,
Don't let them see you break.
Just a little while, my love,
And we'll watch them quake.

Listen, child, look at me!
Our tears are rivers of gold,
Laden with mirth and earth,
Waste them not but be bold.

Soon, their blood will flood,
Yes, we will bathe in their grief.
We'll lodge spears in their loins
And sunbathe by the corpse-filled reef.

We are the slow poisons nature begat,
With skin black as coal and night.
We'll pick the locks, bash the chains,
Our fire will rage and so will our light.

Like Phoenixes, we'll rise from their ashes,
In our glorious, prideful, melanin birthday suits,
Queens, Goddesses, Heras and Vernas, we'll be,
The rest of this wretched world, covered in soot.

About the Author:

Amarachi Chioma Mbah is a graduate of Biochemistry from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She is a Nigerian poet, feminist, blogger, and storyteller and enjoys reading novels and articles on Nigerian history before colonialism. She currently resides in Rivers, Nigeria.

Dear Ayomide (II)
Mercy Harold Waziri

Your mother doesn't warn you of pain;
she teaches you to avoid it.

But

If it comes, she teaches you to kill it, to chin up.

Ayomide,

your father knows nothing of a loveless visit.

There are stories only your skin can tell,

a reminder that pain is personal,

of happy beginnings squashed in starved emotions and a death sentence.

There are days you wake up and remember that love hasn't been fair to you. You will pinch yourself,

bite your tongue, starve yourself of happiness, place yourself to be run over by a train, eyes open,

watching love pack its belongings from the neighborhood of your body, regret paddling in.

You will mourn the death of every memory birthed, not because you killed it, because you were born soft, because you are everything every man wants.

You were once his favorite song; he sang different versions of you, he wrote an album, he left.

Ayomide the last thing you learn about love is letting go.

Sometimes,

love gets malnourished.

Sometimes,

a favorite song loses its vibe.

Sometimes

love becomes pain.

About the Author:

Mercy Harold Waziri is a mass communication graduate from NTA College, Jos. She is a poet and blogger. As a womanist, she is very keen on the realities women face today. She currently works as a content creator and runs the blog, *Letters to Ayomide*, where she writes about the realities of girls and women. She has an unpublished work of poetry, *Tales of a Black Woman*, which examines womanhood, motherhood, and child marriage.

Not A Property Juliet Nnaji

Just waiting to become amorphous
Heart aching
Head spinning
My thoughts played a game of hiding
And seeking answers to the tales of ancestors
Retold by descendants

One on Modernity
"Your skirt is too short"
Men are monsters
They lack self-control
They are moved by what they see
So, "Cover your body properly well, well"
"If your eyes cause you to sin,
Pluck them out," become lost in his-story

One on Who Owns Whose Body?
Unsolicited affirmations
Eyes sharp, scanning the streets
Doing the mathematics of how many hurried steps
You would need to arrive at your location intact
Because they will ask you
If your body said Yes
Even when your mouth said No

One on Traditions
"Ugo nwaanyi di na be di ya"
What if marriage holds no attraction for me?
And I don't want my body
To become a soothing place for any head?

"Oge anaghi eche nwaanyi"
What if being a mother holds no attraction for me?
Even when I am a great aunt?
Should that make me less human?

I am from an ancestor
I know
This striking resemblance
Proves their blood flows through me
But their traditions and "norms"
Are sucking out my life like bloodthirsty leeches

So, day and night
Pursuing the passions
That burn in me like a raging tempest
I search for "Who I am"

Who says I can't tear my branch down
And plant my own tree...

About the Author:

Juliet Nnaji is a writer, performance poet and front-end developer. Her poem "If The Country is a Book" was personally read and selected by Prof. Wole Soyinka after which she performed it at the World Poetry Day event in 2019, organized by Providus Bank. She is also the anchor of "Poetry In Motion", a column in *Naija Times* that serves as a platform for poets to connect.

Four Poems Clara Jack

Wine and What not

...and when any of the women I have fallen in love with come staggering into my dms with a broken heart to sew, I will bring out my thread box, wine and what not, to listen and to mend. No judgement because one will never be wrong for loving.

Strings

Is it weird to ask who will write about the writer?
To hope the writer becomes the muse?
To dream the writer is doted on as she dotes?
Because it is magical to possess skills to string stories together but it gets really lonely when no one feels enough to string even a one-line poem about you.

I won't beg you to love me

I won't beg you to love me
Oh
Wait
I will
I'll beg you nine hundred and ninety-nine times
And when it's getting to the thousandth
I'll clear the message trail
Then beat my chest proudly,
And say
I won't beg you to love me.

Heart of glass

It's dark out isn't it
Everyone is asleep or pretending to be asleep
Each doing the best they can do to survive
Very few taking the necessary time to live or even breathe
Even he
Now it's dark it's even worse because you won't see clearly
Let's recap the last week, shall we?
You met him on Monday
And you looked into his eyes on Tuesday
Your heart broke into a million pieces when you found out he was married on Wednesday
You sulked about it and told him on Thursday
He told you he loved you back on Friday your heart cold beat again
On Saturday you did your hair because you are meeting him tomorrow
But right now at 11:58pm on the bridge of night and day, your heart is breaking again
Perhaps the glue you used isn't strong enough
Or you know
That you're lying here alone
And he will never leave his wife for you
Even though he sang the whole song for you
"A bottle of lean, a gun in your jeans and a little faith in me"
Blow out the candles my love and sleep
No one can ever catch the stars
Not even you with all the love in your broken heart.

About the Author:

Clara Jack is a 23-year-old writer and editor who lives in Buckingham, England. She has a master's in public and Commercial law, while working in compliance and Communications. Her life's work however is Pencilmarks, an online publication and literary community for amateur writers. She enjoys films, cooking shows, traveling and literature. Her ideal Saturday night is potatoes & chicken, wine and the Great British Bake off. She writes a newsletter column as often as she can, titled 'memoirs of middles', hosted on substack. Clara has been writing for ten years, published continentally, and had an exhibition for her poetry in 2021 courtesy, Delaroke Art Gallery. In all, she aims to do big things from a small place.

This City Omolola Okunlola

i.

in this city, you don't drag your feet. you always rush—a frantic attempt to matter, to make something matter. you hide stories under fingernails, between clenched teeth. here, you hold your heart tightly in your fists. you hold your love under your skin and pray that no one carves it out of you. the music here is red, never-ending, always familiar.

ii.

the houses here have life. you wonder if they ever get claustrophobic, the way they cluster around each other and dine in each other's generator fumes. they glow in the dark, until they don't.

iii.

someone dies to make room for you. it doesn't feel like much room at all. the tightness squeezes colors out of you. an unwanted guest steals flowers from your doorstep every morning and leaves you love letters.

iv.

you're not sure God hears you. He is the one to thank when someone that's not you dies. He's the one you thank that you're still alive, gulping the city's dusty grey air. here, nobody forgives you for believing in something other than God. you ache for this city & wonder if God feels it too. you wonder if his palms throb.

v.

did you know there are 13 ways to die in this city? you can get high on a kaleidoscope of shimmering nothings. the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is a reflecting mirage of abandoned dreams. it rains every day. there are rivers spilling over the edge, unable to catch

themselves. there are houses drowning. it rains every day but the fire does not stop. you are trapped in a coffin that nails itself—a graveyard that screams. when the rain pours, you try to figure out where the lightning hit your body. it burns everywhere. when the city shoots, there are no exit wounds. you spend hours every day looking for where the bullets escaped, but there are none. bullets are rioting/rotting inside of you. your dreams taste like metal, like water rushing out of a rusty tap.

vi.

at night, your lover blankets you in their arms, gives you the grace to break over and over again, say, “you will be whole in the morning.” you can hear the bullet lodged in their throat too, screeching, straining, grinding. when the morning comes, the city carves a hollowness inside them nobody can contain. you hold your lover in the void, tell them, “you can be vulnerable in the morning too.”

you taste that bullet again. like fire scraping against innocence. like metal clanging against glass. all the fires in the world stare you in the eye. and something breaks. again.

About the Author:

Omolola Okunlola is a multidisciplinary storyteller from Lagos, Nigeria. Her works have appeared in Agbowó, NND Poetry Column, Eremite Poetry and elsewhere. When she is not reading, painting or watching sitcoms, she is telling stories on her personal blog, The Pastel (www.thepastel.org).