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AS I STROKE MY CHIN HAIRS

(poems)

Joseph Wodo

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Joseph Wodo



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DEDICATION

... To my former self,
present self and future self.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am, first of all, very grateful to Oyindamola Shoola for constantly challenging me to be the very best I could possibly be.

I am also very thankful to my friend Aidomojie Omokhojie for words of wisdom & encouragement.

And to everyone I have come in contact with since 2012, those who have inspired me, I hope you can in turn find meaning in the words which I have written.

"Nobody can teach me who
I am. You can describe parts
of me, but who I am - *and*
what I need - is something I
have to find out myself."

— Chinua Achebe



THE DESK

Files & documents stacked up neatly over there
Pins & pens littered across the mahogany
What's the delay?
Isn't there work to be done?
Someone needs to get rid of this paper inventory.

Hardly anything moves quickly here
Except cups of coffee and packets of biscuits
"Have you had anything to eat?"
"Aren't you hungry?"
No thank you, someone needs to restore discipline in
this room.

The desk has nothing to show for its continued service
Unless you consider the expired surface finishing
If the desk never complains about anything
Who am I to question bad attitudes?
I guess I'll soon learn that being idle is part of the work.

There are several things that bind us

Look around you can see them
The cobwebs that lie side by side with the ceiling,
The footprints left by termites as they travel through the
cupboard
The dust particles that were born the very moment the
house was built
Even the flower vase that stands on the same spot for
decades
And yet, scientists say that gravity is weak.

There are several things that strengthen us
Look inward you can feel them
The skin that grows over an open wound
The candle wax that melts to uphold the flame
The thread that meanders in between seas of cotton
Even the knowledge we've gathered all these years
And yet, we often forget that wisdom is stronger than
age.

Here's to Nigeria, isn't she great?

The center stage of witchcraft and underdevelopment
Where tribalism and corruption span every state
Ruled by the ever-present, yet inexistent governments

This country was united to enrich itself
By taxing the masses and swallowing the wealth
The real independence is for those who can pay
If your pockets are empty, you don't get a say

We are all equal down here in Lagos
Everyone out here working for their freedom
Money and its equivalent are the main topics of discuss
But if you relax a little, you'll never see boredom

If you like, paint the country green and white
To mask violence stains that are visible from the sky
This country will not be independent, or its people free
Until we attain real growth and real peace

War is looming and the masses are anxious

Where is the referendum?

The Igbos are gathering up their acts

Where is the referendum?

The Hausas are issuing ultimatums

Where is the referendum?

Biafrans have forgotten the tragedy of times past

Where is the referendum?

Nigeria doesn't want another civil war

Oh please, where is the referendum?

The federal government will continue to remain silent

Until after the referendum.

Would you still love me?

When I'm no longer handsome and muscular
When my hairline disappears
And my belly begins to expand?

Would you still care for me?
When I repay your love with silence
When I refuse to do any chores in the house
And it feels as if I'm a completely different person?

Would you still want me?
At night when our bed smells like
Undigested beans, eggs or soured milk
And I still make attempts to caress your body?

Would you still love me?
When I'm grey and old
With aches and pains all over my body
Because that's when I'll need you the most.

Why is there anxiety about a past we cannot change?

These feelings of inadequacy and grief are all too heavy to bear.

Could it be burden of guilt and shameful memories alike?
I think so

Why is there anxiety about a future we do not know?

Could it be the lack of control and unpredictability of events?

I think so too

These feelings of uncertainty sometimes bring us a step closer to madness.

POEM OF GREEN AND WHITE

Green and White for the wasted wealth
Green and White for the impossible peace
Green and White for the dying dignity
Green and white for the slacken strength
The national motto is “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress”
But if we have never known peace, how will we progress?
And if we are a divided people, what shall we believe in?
We all have dreams of a better tomorrow
That’s why we turn our attention to the infants and call them ‘The Leaders of Tomorrow’
But cry for Nigeria because her infants grow up to churn chaos.

Come sister, and tell me your life

Tell me all the things you dreamt of as a child
Tell me all the secrets you've kept hidden all these years

Come sister, and show me your history
Show me the scars whose origins you don't remember
Show me the field where you danced and laughed under
the moonlight

Come sister, take me on a journey
Take me far away into the Utopia created in your mind
Take me into the deepest corners of your heart

Come, reveal all this Christiana
And I will forge simple words
Words which even the children will understand
Words which will enter every heart, every home
Words which will pierce through your bones like air
Words that begin and end with absolution.

LET'S PRETEND

Let's pretend
You're not the last thing
I think about
As I lay in my bed slowly drifting to sleep.

Let's pretend
The weather wasn't so cold
And I didn't have to hold your hands
Or give you tight hugs every chance I get.

Let's pretend
We didn't smile at each other
Or look into each other's eyes
Stylishly avoiding the inevitable.

Let's pretend
I never said hello
Let's pretend you didn't ask for my name
Let's pretend we never met each other.

Let's pretend I never wrote this poem.

If a Lion in the Savannah

Can wait for days in search of prey
Then we too can wait
In this deserted wasteland.

If the grass of a field during harmattan
Can dry up and seem dead
And then flourish again in the new season
We too can survive this hardship.

If the moon
Can wait all day
Just to reflect light at night
We too can show forth God's light no matter our
tribulation.

If a man
Can spend his entire life
Thinking of the most suitable way to die,
Then death can wait
Oh yes! It must wait.

I feel like a pebble by the seashore

Picked up by children and tossed into the air
Sometimes I am tossed into the sea by strangers
And most times I can't resist as the waves pull me into
the ocean.

I feel like a pebble in the deepest part of the sea
Unaffected by centuries of constant tectonic movement
Too weak to overcome the ever present gravitation
Too streamlined to swim even for my own benefit.

I feel like a pebble in the palace of a glorious king
Used for decorations in many disturbing ways
I was used once to bring a proud giant to his knees
I am a faithful servant, very loyal to the human cause.

I feel like a pebble in the pocket of a school kid's shorts
I know not where I come from nor where I'll go
Yes, I am that same pebble found by the seashore, now
ageing with grace
I have seen too many lifetimes to know that death is
inevitable.

TO MY FIRST CHIN HAIRS

Arise, ye little soldiers of maturity
And fight the battle of adolescence with me
Fight till ye are cleansed from all impurity
Unlike your brothers in the pelvic region who do not
want to be clean.

Arise, ye little soldiers of maturity
But do not overstep your bounds
Do not make me look unkempt and void of all sanity
But rather make me a man who is intelligent and sound.

Arise, ye little soldiers of maturity
Arise from your lengthy seventeen year slumber
Arise and deliver me from all earthly vanity
And give me wisdom to know that I'm not getting any
younger.

RUNWAY GIRL

Slave to the system
But yet, you were born to cause mayhem
In the lives of those that do not know their problems
With your quick steps to deceive all of them.

I sit here mindless
At the end of the runway speechless
Drowning in my thoughts, sipping good scotch
regardless,
Waiting to see your new shoes and your spotless ivory-
like skin

They wanted you first
When they got you, they named you "*The Thirst*"
Aye I'm thirsty, not because the lustful steward spilled
drink on my shirt
But because I wanted to see what was hidden beneath
your skirt.

You've forgotten your real name because of the hype
You're now used to men being intimidated by your type
But when your reign is over and your skin becomes
unripe
I'll sing you a Ballad with my obstreperous bagpipes.

Being a fuck-boy

Is as a result
Of a habit
Which has been unchecked
For several years

It can be likened
To a weed
Which hasn't been uprooted
Or a crack in a wall
Which appears
When a house is not properly built.

Lust is a silly game

You lose, you get played
You win, you still feel pain
Because your feelings have no name

Lust is the reciprocal of love
Her problems are hers to solve
You both refuse to evolve
But your faults she easily absolves

Lust is a loner's labyrinth
You're lost like an African slave in Corinth
But you love it when she's dressed in red and adorned
with cheap jacinth
Then at midnight, you both baptize your livers with
absinth

Lust is a never-ending adventure
Your heart is dissolved in evil mixture
You disobey all that is written in the scripture
And it may seem as though heaven was never in the
picture.

HER DANCE

Carefully I studied the rhythm of her walk
Noticing how her words rearranged when she talked
Moving steady as the harp followed her move
All eyes followed her, imitating her groove
Only a matter of time before three damsels joined in
They moved in unity and the King clapped in unison
Salsa was the name of her dance
Winnie was the girl with stance
Humbled by her beauty I doffed my hat
She came closer and dropped a white cloth
Led by my hallucinations, I asked for a dance
Amused by my courage, she threw me a glance
Hung in this suspense, she demanded a new tune
As if not offended, I tried a new move
As though learnt already like a conceited play
Hands on hips we jolted away
Drums beating and our hopes ignited
For sure, our hearts had become united.

GIFTS

Give a man a meal he can eat
Give a man a weapon he can wield
And his rank, his health and strength
In neither battle nor war shall cease.

Give a man his whole world to make
Give a man the Holy Book to take
And his future, his destiny and life
Though he may be void of grace.

Give a man a girl he can love
As I, O my dear loves thee
And his heart is great with the pulse of fate,
As he does the work of Thou above.

Give a man a bed with which to lie
To count the remaining days of his life
And his success, children and blessings,
So he may find peace when he dies.

What is dead may never die

The dead are in the air we breathe
They are at the breast of the wife
They are in the seeds that grow into trees

The dead are never dead
They are not under the ground
They are in the forest, they are in the homestead
They are in the shadows darkening around

Those who are dead have not gone away
They are in the waters of the rivers
They are in the child's cry of dismay
They are in the leaves that shiver

Those who are dead are not invisible
They are in the birds that sing
They are in the raindrops that dribble
They are in the bells that ring

The dead never sleep
They are in the limbo of time
They are in your bloodstream; they are in your heartbeat
The dead do not know night time
Never mourn the dead my friend
Rather celebrate their lives
We both know that all good things must come to an end,
So don't cry when the angel of death arrives.

BEAUTY IN THE PAIN

Why did I stop dreaming?
Maybe I realized my thoughts may never become reality
It's painful, really
That those beautiful ideas I had may never come to life.

How did I hide the pain?
Simple. I learnt the art of compartmentalization
I constructed walls of ice and fire
To keep me from being hurt by love and hate.

When did I stop being vulnerable?
It was the day I decided to hide my mediocrity
Underneath layers of suppressed emotions
And place my trust in a frowning face.

When did society finally accept me?
Last year. When I pretended to be like everybody else
It's beautiful isn't it?
That we have to lie just to see the truth.

THE BURIAL – REQUIEM

God will not ask your race
Nor will he ask your birth
Alone will he demand of you:
“What have you done on earth?”

O Lord, if I have faltered more or less
In my great quest for happiness
Let not my sins as black as the night
Eclipse the true nature of your light
But let it be known ages that my guilt was taken away
So that when the world is drowned in eternal sleep
I would wake up afterwards into heaven’s day;
Now I am but a human
So quick to judge and quicker to fault
Even when I bury that sinful nature of man
I would that my tongue could utter;
*“Come and take me when my eyes are closed in death,
Sweet Jesus of Nazareth.”*

AS I STROKE MY CHIN HAIRS



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Wodo is a Lagos based Nigerian writer from Delta state, Nigeria. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Landmark University, Nigeria.

Joseph began writing poetry in 2012, and he has utilized opportunities, networks, and experiences to maximize his knowledge of poetry writing. He loves to read the works of African writers, with particular interest in fiction, and is currently learning the art of storytelling, inspired by Chinua Achebe. He draws inspiration for his poetry from

life, love, politics, and society. He aims to inspire people positively with his poems and influence the world of African literature.



Joseph can be reached via social media on Twitter: @JosephWodo_, Instagram: @josephwodo_ & Joseph Aguariavwodo on LinkedIn.

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