The background of the cover is a dark blue cloth with a complex, repeating pattern of geometric shapes and stylized leaves. A young girl with dark skin and curly hair is peeking out from behind the cloth, her face partially visible. She has large, expressive brown eyes and a slight smile. Her hands are visible, holding the edges of the blue cloth that she is using to hide behind. The overall mood is one of curiosity and playfulness.

The Silence We Eat

Oyindamola

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Other books by **Oyindamola Shoola**

Heartbeat (2015)

To Bee a Honey (2018)

The Silence We Eat (2018)

But Here You Are (2019)

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

THE SILENCE WE EAT

**(An Expanded and Revised
Version)**

Oyindamola

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Cover Design: **Grafreaks**

Published in Nigeria by:

Words Rhymes & Rhythm Limited

No. 2 Adekunle Tijanni Street, Hillview Estate,
Arab Road, Kubwa, Abuja, Nigeria.

08169027757, 08060109295

www.wrr.ng

STRESS WARNING

This book contains material relating to domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, eating disorders, miscarriage, bullying, and trauma in no particular order, which may be triggering to victims and survivors.

This is a mixture of fiction.
Characters and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

TABLE OF CONTENT

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| PART 1 | 14 |
| PART 2 | 31 |
| PART 3 | 42 |
| PART 4 | 51 |
| PART 5 | 61 |
| PART 6 | 80 |
| PART 7 | 91 |
| PART 8 | 99 |
| PART 9 | 109 |
| PART 10 | 117 |
| PART 11 | 139 |

REVIEWS

Oyindamola Shoola's third book, "The Silence We Eat," has made a remarkable impact on my life. All the individual stories in the book somehow merged into one person towards the end. A lot of those stories seemed incomplete which frustrated me as a reader because I didn't want the stories to end, but as a person the book was so honest; not everything in life has a beginning and an end but it does move on...

To me the possibility of one woman having gone through all the things a lot of different people have, was extremely eye opening. In this book, not only had Oyindamola made people aware of different types of abuse - she advocated for the abused. She spoke words that women had never even said to themselves. Personally, *The Silence We Eat* made me come to realization with things in my past. At times, I would have to close the book and cope: it was unbelievable she had written something I have never thought- but she was talking about me; the silence I have been eating became tangible through her poetry.

I genuinely feel like this book can change anyone's life's for the better. This book gave me a similar connection that I had to "Milk and Honey" by Rupi Kaur.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

I cannot stress enough how much I have thanked Oyindamola for writing this book, changing my life, and helping me start over to become empty, just so I can be full for the right reasons and have a say in my own life- as we all should.

– AMAZON REVIEW

Oyindamola is not kidding when she says "I hear you even when you do not speak." She eloquently puts to words experiences of many women that have been hidden, for whatever reason, under a blanket of silence. Be ready to take some of difficult walks that the women she describes have taken. Some of the pieces of this work might even haunt you. But you won't regret reading this gem.

– AMAZON REVIEW

The Silence We Eat explores themes on love, mental health, religion, relationships and parenthood. It touches on sensitive topics like bullying, rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and trauma.

The pieces are written from the perspective of the women suffering the abuse without inserting the voices or thoughts of external actors. It aims to get you to empathize rather than sympathize with these women.

– GOODREADS REVIEW

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Simply awesome! Impressive writing that had me tearing up with the feelings the words evoked. Covered so many topics. Highly recommended.

– **OKADABOOKS REVIEW**

The silence we eat is a book everyone, both male and female should read. It is time to readjust our culture and learn some new things. The silence we eat says it all - the book is a voice on its own.

– **OKADABOOKS REVIEW**

The silence we eat takes one through the journey of domestic violence and abuse. "How much did one know of the true feelings of those who do not have a voice?" This book also serves as a voice for women whose voices have been buried by shame.

– **OKADABOOKS REVIEW**

*This book is for women
whose voices have been
consumed by silence.*

PROEM

With the rise of social movements like the #MeToo movement, which aims to allow sexual abuse victims to speak their truths, many writers and non-writers hold the specious assumption that women do not have voices. There is another thought: that women have voices but do not have the courage to use them. Therefore, we have activists and advocates who shove themselves in the mouth of female victims and survivors to speak and make commentaries without having a full grasp of what the victims' experiences are, be it domestic abuse, bullying or sexual assault.

Additionally, we have a society that prioritizes the public perspective of these victims or survivors' lives, rather than giving room for the victims and survivors to express their own individual experiences. In some cases, to satisfy our own eagerness for progress, we are quick to bandage sorrow, pain, silence, and shame with the title: survivor and we impatiently dismiss the needs of women who are victims. *The Silence We Eat* reveals how, it is one thing to sympathize with victims, while it is another to empathize with them.

The Silence We Eat provides a unique and fresh perspective by focusing on the victim's thoughts, silence, and shame. It allows readers to understand and feel the impact of their perceptions, words, and actions on women who have fallen victim of these unfortunate circumstances and survivors who have healed or are in the process of healing.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Many women are presented through stages of an unnamed but constant female character's life from childhood through adulthood. The Silence We Eat explores the themes of love, mental and psychological health, religion, relationships, and parenthood while simultaneously touching the sensitive topics of bullying, rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and trauma.

The Silence We Eat is written as a mixture of poetry and prose that impacts even the creatives to realize that art is not a pure and single form. Short stories can be elaborate forms of poetry while poetry can be summarized forms of short stories. In The Silence We Eat readers will find a skilled and smooth mixture of quotes, poetry, poetic prose, and short stories, which is rarely found in books with themes focused on women's issues.

Notably, The Silence We Eat caters differently to the needs of women in our communities. My goal is not to speak for another woman but to acknowledge her silence, shame, voice, and to be present through her trauma and healing process. With this book, I am saying to a young girl or woman out there that:

I hear you even when you do not speak. I see you even when you choose to hide as a result of fear or shame. I understand you when words fail to express your feelings. I am patient with you when you need me to be. I am open to being vulnerable enough to sympathize and empathize with you in your journey. I am moving with and for you, when you are ready.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

The quote on the back cover of *The Silence We Eat* states: *Eating Silence always give the illusion that we are full.*

I believe that if we are genuinely breaking the culture of silence, we need to pay attention and listen to the silence, voices, and narratives of, and from, women who are victims and survivors. When we jump to conclusions with limited perceptions of women's experiences and hug their stages, we unconsciously contribute to the culture of feeding women's silence with a façade of being full.

While writing *The Silence We Eat*, I read a series of books including *Hunger* by Roxanne Gay, *Rebirth* by Juliana Olayode, and *The Mother of All Questions* by Rebecca Solnit. However, a quote from Rebecca Solnit's book stood out to me the most. In the chapter titled *The History of Silence*, on page 18, she wrote:

"Silence is what allows people to suffer without recourse, what allows hypocrisies and lies to grow and flourish, crimes to go unpunished. If our voices are essential aspects of our humanity, to be rendered voiceless is to be dehumanized or excluded from one's humanity. And the history of silence is central to women's history."

With *The Silence We Eat*, I intend to support the rehumanization of our womanhood, while informing all to do the same.

PART 1

*This silence enveloped
invitations to sing
eulogies at her grave.*

THIS CHILD BECOMES MEMORY

Memories take me home to this faithful evening
cursing sounds of my father's footstep roughing
against the cement.

My eyes window my mother hurriedly dropping the
milk she had been feeding me from a cream colored
bowl and with a small silver tea spoon, to
accommodate his presence.

My mother says that I would not swallow anything
else because they did not settle within me.

My father walked past her, he did not acknowledge
that she was there nor that I was there.

The child in me was tongue tied with the lack of
language to vomit all the things that my mother said
my belly would not hold down.

This child kidnaps emotion and refills the cream
colored bowl with questions tucked between the
spaces of her teeth and cellared in her gums.

This child gathers memories and gives the rope
which latched her tongue a new bait to hold.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

This child turns the spoon into a blue pen and drinks the ink, and this time it stays; it settles and this child is satisfied.

This child's purpose has grown into the character of her mother on a plain slate – something memorable deserving of being penned. Muse, before she kisses goodbye and goes to another lover like when my father stopped acknowledging her presence.

This child want to preserve memories before they become adulterated. This child writes.

This child becomes memory.

This child in me wants to know what it would feel like to unleash a baby's tongue so that the lion footsteps roughing against the cement that night can meet his match when he walks through the door not acknowledging whom he was responsible for loving.

This child is in me and she wants to roar.

THE INVITATION

Since the last time he hit her, her mind has become a battleground of unusual thoughts. One minute, she is admiring everything and the other minute, she is jumping off a bridge, screaming, as the pressure of the air caresses her face. Her clothes are parting ways and her body is plunging into the river beneath the bridge. She never drowns. She swims to the river banks and finds her way to the top of the bridge again.

These days, she says that as she moves,
her body feels
like heavy steels,
from loose thin
threads, dangling
making melodious sounds
at life's grooves.

She says that her knees have the feeling
of two wooden sticks rubbing
against rough edges
and unsmooth surfaces.

And her hips sway,
alternating the pressure on each side
it feels like their strength has gone to hide,
as her control over them has withered away.

The rosary hanging on her neck with a cross absent

of Christ's body loses itself underneath her blouse. She prays to it every day just like the priest does. I refuse to wear mine.

I remember one of the nights that we all gathered to pray in the living room. It was my mother's turn to pray and as she did, my father and I in loud unified voices chorused *Amen!*

She prayed for the protection of our finances and the new car that our neighbor bought. She prayed that *God should take the fishes in father's belly that made him drink all day long*. That was how the devil received an invitation to participate in our prayers.

By the time she completed that sentence, my father, still holding a bottle of beer in his left palm, struck her face with his right palm. I sat still with my eyes firmly shut because the priest always instructs that no eyes open while praying.

The next Sunday, after the church service, my mother and I went to the priest's office for "a brief meeting" as she said we would do when we walked out of the auditorium. The meeting lasted for about two hours because she would not stop crying.

He has done it again. She said, with a teary voice and sobs between her syllables. *He-ha-has-done-it-it again*.

She fumbled her hands through her bag to find a

napkin for her face. Her eyes were a swollen red. The left side of her cheek where my father struck was covered with lies and her cascading tears slowly revealed the truth.

She dabbed her eyes and the mascara from her eyelashes scared her cheeks. She blinked to push back her tears and gasped between words to catch her breath.

When the priest spoke, he mentioned how *true love prevails*, emphasizing that she needs to *be patient* and *pray more*. His coarse voice with thick Nigerian accent swept through my ears violently.

When the meeting was over, the priest escorted us out of his office and bade us goodbye. He waved and said, *May the Lord's peace be with you*.

The voices from the prayer sessions that Sunday night was louder. I said my prayers and asked for forgiveness so that we could be happier. I dangled my small feet above the ground and occasionally peeped through the spaces of my little fingers.

When it was my mother's turn to pray, she became silent. The room was quiet for about two minutes and I could hear the whistling of breaths sneaking in and out of our nostrils.

Then she said, *In Jesus name, we have prayed*. It was the first time she prayed like that. I said a firm *Amen!*

My father did not say *Amen* to finish the prayer with me.

Stuttering through his drunkenness, he yelled, *What-what-is that su-su-pposed to mean?*

She did not respond to him. She stood up and lifted me from the dining chair into her arms. She walked to my room, laid me on the bed and drew the blue blanket that was rolled beneath my feet, upward, to cover my shoulders. She kissed my forehead and turned off the light bulbs in my room before going to her room.

In the middle of the night, I heard my mother screaming. I gently climbed down from my bed, walked out of my room and proceeded quietly down the hallway.

The closer I got to her room, the louder her screams were. The door to her room was partially open with a blue curtain made from batik covering the entrance.

I knelt by the door and peeped through the curtain. I saw my father hovering over her like a hungry lion on a prey. He was swinging his arms all over her body. The movements of their bodies looked like shadow puppetry against the wall. My mother coughed as she continued screaming and begging. I pushed a corner of the curtain very slowly to the left to get a clearer view.

I saw her mouth dripping blood mixed with saliva. Her eyes were swollen and they looked like the size of my small fists. Her black hair strands were scattered all over, on the bed and the floor. She gasped for breath as her hands fumbled in the air while attempting to catch my father's palms.

Suddenly, he grabbed her shoulders and tossed her on the floor like a bag of trash. The sound of her body slamming against the floor caught me off guard and I gasped.

My father climbed off the bed and slowly moved toward the curtain where I was kneeling.

The shadow of his huge figure slowly built against the blue curtain. I turned away and ran as fast as my feet could move toward my room. My footsteps sounded like two palms clapping in the church and my heart beat rapidly.

I was out of breath as I jumped on my bed. I pulled the blanket up to my shoulders, just like my mother did before she left for her room that night. I shut my eyes very tightly and tried not to breathe as hard even though my nostrils failed me.

*We teach women that their
silence is godly, shows
humility and that it
connotes respect while we
teach men that the absence
of their voices is disrespect
and weakness.*

*There is no respect in
stripping women of their
humanization and voices.*

THINGS I HEAR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

(An Excerpt From To Bee A Honey)

Unlike other nights there were no clashing, no breaking, or screaming. This night was solemn and brave. He did not come home drunk and she knew well that he had his strength.

Last Sunday at midnight, he returned home staggering through the entrance door, whistling a church hymn. She silently watched him walk to the bedroom, then sink in their bed like a piece of wood.

When he woke up on Monday morning, all hell broke loose. It was almost 10:00 am and he was late for work. He jumped right off the bed. Rubbing his aching head stung by alcohol, he walked toward the kitchen. She was always there.

At her sight, his speech started slow, blaming her for his lateness but when she paid him no mind, he found a balance to mutter straight words. He moved closer to her and with his teeth clenched like his tight fist he muttered, *Did you not hear me?*

She stood still and as she opened her mouth to reply, he grabbed her by the neck. The steel utensil she was using to cook slipped from her right hand. Its clashing sound got lost in the noise from him hitting her body against the wall again.

Once satisfied, like he would let a glass cup slip from his drunk fingers at midnight, he made her body slip from his hands. Blood spilled from her mouth, her lower lip, quivering, was split open.

I would have rescued her even if I hadn't the power to, but the last time I intervened while he was beating her, she yelled at me. She said, Go away and stay in your room or daddy could hit you too.

This Sunday night, he didn't come home drunk. He was sober from losing his job because he had too many queries about being late. Mommy had packed our luggage and as soon as he entered the house, she started speaking. She did not wait for him to apologize or kiss her like he always did when he was sober. His kisses made her change her mind the other six times she had packed our luggage.

Her grip of my palms got stronger as she spoke. In some way, I felt as though I gave her the courage I was too little to have.

She said,

I spent so much time in loving you and trying to fix you that I almost missed out on myself. All the rooms I should have filled in my mind have your name hung on their doors.

My body looks like the rainbow, my eye, purple from your blows, my healing wrists, blue from iodine and my heart, still red and fresh because you lack the intuition

to love it.

I grew and broke myself for you. Lost too many pieces, some between your fingers that hit me, some stuck between your teeth that kissed me and your voice that says "but baby I am sorry" as much as the times your hands lashed me. You say sorry and you treat me as though love needs curing too.

If love is supposed to be a pinch of how you treat me, I'll rather let your love for me be the night and I, the day.

That was the last time I ever saw him.

*A little plucking here and
there is what makes a tree
naked of its fruits.*

FOR SOME OF US

For some of us, the school meant more than education. It meant escaping home and being away from the burdens that our young minds could not bear at home.

For some of us, it was the other way round. Going home meant escaping from the realities that we were too afraid to face at school. It meant not having to see the bully's face the next morning, not having to look at the classmates we were not friends with, and not having to walk in hallways and passages with our knees feeling like two magnets trying to connect.

Some of us did not even think about these transitions because either way, they made no meaning to us. Neither home nor school was a savior, so all we did was hide. We got smaller and smaller until we were not so visible enough to be teased. Where we hid may not have been clean, safe, or appropriate but it accepted us more than everywhere or everyone else did. Where we hid got called names a lot: attention seeking, stupid, depressed, lonely, attached, meaningless, sad, angry, and weak. It was hard to determine if these names were right or if we just wanted meaning so bad that we accepted anything that came our way.

Some of us searched for alternatives to provide belonging. Sometimes, it was finding love or what we thought to be love that may not have been right.

It was sitting behind in classrooms when school was over; palms weaved together with our lover's.

This alternative had consequences. It meant losing ourselves and having pieces of ourselves shed in classrooms, stuck on the lips of those who gossiped about us, and coating the canes that whipped us when we were found guilty of loving at a wrong age.

For some of us, it was all about surviving the moments because we were told that school was not forever. But is that true?

For some of us, these moments cut through our skins too deep and no matter how far we went, the blood trails marked our footsteps. Our nightmares, insomnia, therapy sessions, and regrets make it easy for us to drown again and feel what we hope to survive.

We wish surviving means wiping these unwanted memories. We wish surviving means not having to write this someday.

*This silence is a
shapeshifter.*

*One day it is the prey
seeking safety and another
day it is the jungle aiding
the predator's evil*

PART 2

*I caged my voice within
my growing body, but my
body was not strong
enough to protect it.*

I POUR

My skin like dirt caught up in your nails,
I scream, yell, fret as my strength fails.

My body like wine drunk to your groans,
you twist, twirl, twine, call God with moans.

My waist and silk, no longer feel like mine,
the clock and my head tick,
tock, is it too dark for God to see?

Silence dawns upon me and my tears cry.
You pour, gasp, and sleep.

In strength, I try but my spirit is now dry
and everything tastes sour.

My body, stiff, struck,
I feel like a living
soul in a dead body stuck,
like clouds in the sky's coffin.

My body looks like war's mist
and I am defeat.
It looks like a feast
that I have been excluded from eating.

OVERSTAY

You created circumstances that made me overstay
my welcome in my mind.

At some point, all I wanted to do was get out of all
the places that were supposed to be home for my
sanity.

I wanted to get out of my body, my heart, and my
head. I wanted to get out of all the places you
touched even if it would cost my life.

SHAME

Because of shame, I became skinny
mourning a soul that was not dead.

I stuffed all the filthy words that I knew
down my throat and waited
for my voice to choke on it.

I danced rhythmically to silence.
I hit my head against the wall
and waited for the pain I felt
to prove that I was alive.

THE FALL

This body moves around me
like a paper wrapping to a gift.
It sways to the calling of the wind.
I lean forward, sideways,
and with a little staggering to the back.
I find my balance.

My shoulder draped
with thick clothing
absorbs the season.

It is the fall.
There are plenty leaves on the ground.
They cover the pavement,
and it is almost invisible.
I am almost invisible.

The man that I once fell in love with
tells me that if this world
were a game of hide and seek,
I would win.
He said that I have become so good at hiding
that even I can't find myself.

It is the fall.
It is the withering of my love
from the tree of my body.

THE AUTOPSY

What will they find
when they do an autopsy on my mind?
The names of the men
whom my shame won't reveal?
Silence? Or emptiness?
Or the coffins of pain and anger in which I have
already been buried?
One or many of these things I have written?
Tell me, what will they find?
How deep will they need to dig?

How will they stitch me up?
A hush here or there?
Incisions of curses and names through my ears so
that their words can pierce through easily?
As if I already didn't say that to myself...
Why don't you try something else?
A shame or two, to add to tons I already have?
Check my neck, I already adorned them there.

A touch or two like my body's never known?
This body matured by hands of strangers in the
ways that my mind was never prepared for.

THE MUSE

This is how I bee while disguised as honey,
this is my voice clothed in silence
finding ways to undress,
and to unravel,
but I have known and seen
that in this world,
except a woman is a thing for muse,
no one wants to see her nakedness.

THE BODY

I drink water and somehow,
the coldness of water running
down my throat
and sinking into my empty stomach
satisfies me more than this life itself.
... or is it the death of it?

I hear my stomach ministering its hunger
to the congregation of my body
but today, god is not here.

My wrists are draped with the name tags of my
illnesses. These thin strips of papers are joined at
each other's ends in a circular motion. They make
my body look like rooms and I am becoming a place
where sane people do not visit, let alone live in.

My mouth with little flesh on it
holds tight to my jaws.
My thin and dry lips expose my yellow teeth.
My teeth look big now.
Everything looks big now.

This world now translates
itself differently to me.

14 COMMANDMENTS

¹Because I am a woman, who is supposed to be strong for everyone else. ²Because I am a child that hasn't lived enough to experience real pain. ³Because there are people, who don't even have the chance to live. ⁴Because I am a Nigerian and depression is a white man's spell. ⁵Because things are smaller than my mind makes them seem. ⁶Because there are people, who will pay to have what I have. ⁷Because it could have been worse and this is not that bad. ⁸Because I am an ingrate for being depressed. ⁹Because I look too happy to be depressed. ¹⁰Because I am too pretty to be depressed. ¹¹Because we all go through things. ¹²Because depression is not real. ¹³Because it is the devil's work. ¹⁴Because it is a sin.

I want to make this a poem.

I want to make a muse out of my pain.

I want to make this beautiful
but it feels like another grave
adorned with fresh flowers.

WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN MY OWN LOVE?

You were supposed to be the first love poem
that I should have written
but you withered when my silence
couldn't water you alive.

You became a dry well
that could only contain
the echoes of beauty unexpressed
and of an unspoken treasure.

When you refused to come out,
my body bled even on the days
that the witches weren't supposed to burn.

My heart beat for you even
on the days the masquerades
in which you hid weren't supposed to dance.

I became for you a woman,
latched upon a life that she couldn't live
because you refused to be birthed.

And to think you were supposed
to be my first love poem?

Even if it is at the end of eternity
that you are ready to unravel,
I will wait for you.

PART 3

*These therapy sessions are
just cheaper versions of
healing that I can't afford.*

TO WHOM IT HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM

This body has now become something for the palms of men, even with good intentions to taste.

He is now analyzing what I am doing to my body for my parents to understand. His pupils are dilating and constricting as he uses his palms to make shapes signifying my heart, my stomach, and my throat.

I am not listening to what he is saying. I stare at him and watch as his lips mouth medical terms that I do not care to understand.

He is wearing a white shirt with blue polka dots and a white lab coat on it. There are three pens of different colors hanging in the left pocket of his coat. There is also a slim notepad with spiral iron holding its papers together. He is wearing a stethoscope loosely around his neck. I think of the things that I have put around my neck but not loosely.

SAVED

I look at my parents in the doctor's room again. My mother's face is now soaked with tears. My father, who has a blank expression on his face, asks the doctor how I can be saved.

The word "saved" brings memories of God;
of the church;
of the music in it;
of the rosary around the priest's neck.

It brings memories of the last time I went to the altar to kneel when the priest instructed that the people who desire to be saved come out. I needed someone to save me from myself.

Two other middle-aged women went to the altar. A man and a young girl about my age: 18, came out too. We knelt according to our arrival from the congregation.

The priest and two deacons of the church gathered around the first woman. Three female ushers with small blankets stood about 10 feet away from the deacons.

When the priest and the deacons spoke in tongues and in loud voices, the middle-aged woman who knelt at the left end of the altar shook violently, then slowly surrendered her body to the ground. She

rolled her body on the floor and started yelling, *I have been saved! I feel the lord in me, and I have been saved!*

The woman who knelt at my left side, at the front of the altar also did the same.

When it was my turn, the priest laid his palms full of olive oil on my head. He started to speak in tongues and the deacons followed, just like they did for the other women. They shook my body violently.

Although I felt nothing that those women claimed to feel, I swayed and squalled slowly to the music.

I could feel the congregation's eyes on me.

The choir stood and started ministering. They sang a hymn about Jesus chasing the demons out from the madman into a swine of pigs.

The chorus went,
Spirit, fall into the pigs
and the pigs into the river.

The priest gripped my head with a tight firmness. I told him that he was hurting me, but he pretended as if I had not said anything and continued his ritual. I repeated myself more desperately and firmly. The priest and the deacons were still not listening to me. The deacons' palms were wrapped around my wrists like the wealth of diagnosis the doctor placed on me. I struggled and tried to wrestle free from their grips.

The more I fought, the more they tightened their grips on my arms.

A woman in the congregation shouted, *Hallelujah, the devil is coming out.*

With all the strength I could muster, I screamed at the priest and the deacons to let my body go. Tears rolled off my eyes as I continued to fight.

Their grips all over my body felt like
branches of leaves clinging
to the body of their trees
at the command of the wind.

This clinging was a reminiscence to the experiences that brought me forward in the first place. They felt like the palms of the man who touched me in a lonely room.

My stubborn body struggled beneath their weight, but it wasn't strong enough. As my strength withered away, my mouth stopped screaming. My body breathed heavily and laid stiff on the floor. My eyes were fixed on the ceiling. Everything felt like it was falling.

I had fallen beneath the grips of strong men before, so, this ritual was not new to me.

The same woman in the congregation who shouted *Hallelujah, the devil is coming out*, cried seven

hallelujahs while clapping repeatedly.

The congregation followed and their applause for my submission sounded like raindrops beating the ground in a storm.

THE TEMPLE

At this time, my answers
are as much of a defeat as my questions.

If my life were in your hands would I take it?
If my life were in your hands I would not take it.

If my life were in my hands would I take it?
Would you take it?
Have you taken it?

*Every day, I stuffed all my
insecurities and shame in
silent prayers and hoped
that your Amen would not
be a trigger.*

PART 4

*One part of me feels like I
screamed too much to
soothe my hurt selfishly,
yet another part of me feels
like I did not yell loud
enough to heal.*

FRUITS

The next time we talked, to justify his actions, he said that I should be grateful because he could have done worse.

...but evil doesn't get satisfied by eating half a plate of a person's mind neither does depression buy a house and rent the basement to gratitude.

A person buried 4ft beneath is as dead as one buried 6ft. beneath.

Because it could have been worse doesn't mean these things are right.

LISTEN

When I am telling you
how much you hurt me,
I do not need you to explain
why you did what you did
or validate your actions
by explaining how it could have been worse
or how it could have been better
if I took responsibility
for your choices and actions.

I already spent the last years of my life
doing that on your behalf.

I just need you to listen.

WINTER

That winter, the trees were naked and their fruitfulness had fallen.

My fruitfulness was silent, and I was a drought of happiness.

The bed I slept in was a practice of my funeral and every night my body laid stiff on it.

My head and pillows had conversations of the river in my eyes and the thoughts of more to come.

I starved myself of poetry and everything that I loved.

I denied my mind of the pleasure and satisfaction that I had access to, if I was willing to accept.

SOME BODY

My belly sunk into my ribs and became a well for folded arms, storage for groans, and famine of hunger to live.

My breasts laid helplessly on my chest and dangled like two murderers on a noose.

My thin neck unable to bear the burden and the shift inside my head, bent in shame.

My lips became dry with every word that I spoke. My tongue spat self-apologies and like a towel, my heart drank the sympathy of visitors.

My nose whistled dry air and inhaled the stench of my feelings.

My hair strands agreed and stood at attention like compasses pointing to where I lost myself.

My ears became cobwebs that trapped gossips from the other room opposite where I lived. Two men in that room whispered that I was insane without the realization that I couldn't smell their sanity either.

Everything that I was smelt rotten as if I was an opportunity given to death.

THE AWAKENING

As my body moves fast against the wind, I imagine how my bones would break from its impact, colliding with the surface of the clear concrete.

I see the green tips of tall plants at the other end of the ground. My floating body in the air feels like an explosion.

The sky is now gathering clouds and it looks like heavy rain is coming. I am coming too.

I imagine how the heavy rain would wash the splattered blood from my body, off the concrete, toward the sand and beneath the plants.

I imagine the sand beneath these plants absorbing the diluted red stains like a piece of foam in water.

I imagine my blood going through empty pores beneath the ground.

I imagine these plants growing into trees with my blood in their veins and becoming fruitful in ways that I have not been.

I imagine the trees swinging in the wind of the fall and their pieces falling me all over this space.

I imagine the parts of my body from this landing.

I think of how this body did the things that fought this moment from coming. My hand, writing and my feet, dancing. My lips, singing and my heart, falling in love.

My body is two feet away from the ground. I am fighting my thoughts even if they don't want war. What if I still have a chance to stretch my palms beneath, to protect me from this impact?

My nose picks the dust on the concrete. My neck turns and the right side of my face meets the floor. Slowly, my skin rubs against the roughness of the floor. My face and chest settle.

My cheeks and my lips shake and wobble. My legs lay awkwardly and I look dead. Blood strolls down from a split on my head.

My palms lay open and the broken bones in them prevent movement. My belly with scratched surfaces mimic the imprints on the concrete.

I wake from this dream gasping for air. My purple nightgown is soaked with sweat. I touch my head in relief to know that it is still intact.

MOUNTAINS

It is not always the darkness that swallows my emotions or the sadness in my heart that hurts.

Sometimes it is the realization that happiness is not a privilege handed freely to me.

It is the knowledge that it will take more effort to be happy, when I have always believed that happiness comes easy to those who deserve it.

Sometimes happiness is what gives me the strength to reach the mountaintop.

Other times, I have to climb the mountain to the top, to find happiness and possess it.

On some days, joy is delivered by the cashier
at Strand bookstore on 14th street,
cracking me up
by telling me how his day went.

Sometimes, joy sounds like
the cashier announcing
that a box of little rubber chickens
just fell off the counter.

He asks me, *How many times
in one's life does one get to say this?
The rubber chickens have fallen!*
I repeat, *The rubber chickens have fallen!*

This made me realize that,
many things in life can be abandoned,
but nothing in existence is too little
to be left behind.

Need I know how many times
in my life this may be true?

PART 5

*I found love again like
heaven and gave it
permission to set my heart
on fire with a desire hotter
than hell could ever
record.*

They say beauty lies in
the eyes of the
beholder...

But you have become
my eyes, for my life
wouldn't be beautiful
without you.

If I could, I would
reincarnate into words
so that space or travel
will fall short
of setting us apart.

I would be in your heart,
mind, mouth, thoughts...
your everything.

The poetry of
my love for you,
roughs against
my tongue like
two stones
in a hunter's palms
setting moments
and these words ablaze.

Your love, whether
wrong or right
may have been the first
thing I have dared to ask Christ
to not save me from.

My tongue slices
into two confessing
how much I love you.
It is this much intentional.

I mean every word
I speak of loving you.

On our nights of loving
 skin deep,
 we pile the stars
 along the aisle
of our tongues as we kiss
and summon the moon
 to shed light to
 the deepest parts
 of ourselves
 that we explore.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Tonight, you and I will
let our bodies return to the night,
to high like mountain tops
and rock like a canoe on an ocean
and stage a deliverance into heavens
and move the sheets; our skies
and make it pregnant
of clouds; our sweat
and chant affection;
like church hallelujahs,
and confess,
and profess
and become one, You and I.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Your love makes me lose control
and have control over everything
at the same time.

Darling,
how in the heavens do you do that?

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

You are my madness
and you are my sanity.

You are my home
and the door to my world.

You are the sky that holds the light
to my world and the ground
to keep my feet balanced.

Darling,
you are my one in all
and my all in one.

To be loved
is being lost
by your touch
as much as it is
being found by it.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

I am still whole without
you. But you...

You are the rainbow on
top of my storm,
you are the sparkle to my
stars...

You make me a desire.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

I wish I was informed ahead
that I will fall in love with
someone who lives
like a poem without a title.

No warning to make me hastily wear
a façade of perfection,
in thoughts to be found desirable.

You taught me that
love has a bad habit
of not scheduling appointments
when it wants to meet
with someone that needs it.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Recently, I realized that falling in love
doesn't always involve moving forward.

Sometimes, it is taking two steps backward
for a second glance after catching a glimpse
of my body in the mirror.

Sometimes it is standing
in the sun for a while,
to admire the beauty of my reflection.

Love doesn't always come in lousy roses
and goosebumps crawling up one's skin.

Sometimes love is the unnamed smell
of a new book
that you are too broke to purchase.

Love is the sweet aroma of passion
that fills your belly
the way food can't.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Love is a wanderer, and sometimes,
it gets caught up
in the wrong places and at the wrong times.

Regardless of where I find it,
I have concluded that
love is supposed to warm you,
not set you on fire to burn to ashes.

If hurting is not loving,
then love is not supposed to hurt.

Love is not supposed to choke you
in the process of feeding you memories.

A love that is supposed to lead you
won't show up blind.

Love won't leave
with a suitcase made from your heart.

And if it happens that love
can't lead you home,
it will be kind enough
to become a home for you.

Love is a wanderer but regardless
of how, when, and where it finds you,
love will never leave you stranded.

Sometimes, love wears
yesterday's clothing
while trying
to impress today.

My love story did
not begin with you
and it won't end
with you.

With you, I hope it
never ends at all.

PART 6

*The silence that we
swallowed were seconds of
our lives and it did not
stop the clock from ticking.*

SHAKARA

Fela had a weird way of loving me.¹ He never loved me too much to make me think that I was the only one he was having an affair with, neither was he too distant to make me feel that he did not love me.

On some days when he did not have a show to perform, he took me for long walks to the park. He loved to talk. Using big grammar that I did not understand he told me of the introspection of African politics and the enigmatic problems of corrupt sentiments in Africa. He also told me of how SARS officers *waka like zombie* ² and the *jaga jaga government*.

Last month, few hours before Fela's show, he and his band barged into my house when they knew that I was at home. Because they were used to the show lifestyle, they loved elaborate entrances. When they saw me in the living room, they proceeded to give unnecessary and elongated greetings some saying, *Bororo wa*; our albino and others, *lyawo ile wa*; our housewife.

I responded saying, *Soon, you will have to pay for what you always come to take*: Jollof rice and chicken.

Although agitated by Fela's arrogance in invading my space, it was easy to forgive him because he always has a humorous way of bailing himself out of my

anger without apologizing.

After taking his portion of the food which was the largest, when he saw that I shrunk my forehead and folded my arms, he smiled. Then, he came closer to me, half dancing and half walking. When he was close enough to my feet and looking morose like he was about to apologize, he winked lavishly at me as if there was something inside his eyes, then he did a spin like Michael Jackson and turned away to the other side. Everyone including myself burst into loud laughter.

Then Fela said, *You go frown and raise shoulder, say you no go give me food again, na shakara!*³

Footnote

¹Fela was a prominent and highly praised Nigerian musician. His birth name was Anikulapo Kuti and he was professionally known as Fela Kuti. He was a talented instrumentalist and he was the pioneer of the Afrobeat music genre. Fela was also a human rights activist and a political activist. Fela is known for using his music to rebel against corrupt politics and to showcase the humor in African norms and cultures. Fela had 27 wives.

² Zombie is one of Fela's songs that mocked the obedience of the soldiers to the government.

³ Shakara is one of Fela's songs. The lyrics of Shakara brought humor to how people boast of their power in certain situations, particularly men and how they brag about their machismo.

Shakara – The Interpretations

Bororo: Yoruba word that means albino. Yoruba people also use this word to refer to fair skinned people.

Iyawo Ile: Yoruba word that means housewife.

Jaga Jaga: Yoruba word that means rubbish.

Jollof Rice: An African meal. It is rice that is made to look orangish with tomato paste, chicken sauce, and some other ingredients.

Na: Pidgin English word that means it is or is.

Shakara: Yoruba word that means pretense or showing off.

Wa: Yoruba word that means our or to come depending on the context.

Waka: Pidgin English word that means walk.

CLOSETS

Fear is a closet with my best dresses
hung on the skeleton of its shoulders.

It says I am pretty when silent.
It says that my tremble is good music.

COMING OUT TO MY PARENTS

When I told my parents, they opened their mouths as if I just pronounced their death sentences.

My father stood up and moved closer to me. I stepped back.

*Iwo naa? You too? Apostle must hear of this!*¹ He yelled as he pointed his right index finger to my face.

He turned to my mother and continued. *See your daughter, I sent her to school and she went to do something else. I have been suspecting her with all the nonsense wallpapers in her room.*

At that moment, my offense no longer mattered to me but how my father seized the opportunity to praise himself for single-handedly sending me to school which was untrue. My mother's awful silence at his claims angered me.

Cowering my head in shame, I felt sorry for my mother as my father blamed her for my actions by continually calling me "her daughter."

I wished the ground could open and swallow me. My wobbly knees didn't make the situation any better as they continually touched each other like two palms in church praise.

You too imagine! You left your pursuit of medicine to study writing! What foolish person does that after all the money I have spent eh? Ehn? My father repeated loudly.

He quoted his words in such a way that I was unsure if he was asking questions or making statements.

Sir, it is creative writing, not just writing. I said, with the thought that adding the word “creative” would make my actions more reasonable.

Will you get out of my sight?! My father said.

In excitement, I rushed out of the house toward Fela’s compound to tell him how the conversation with my parents went.

After narrating the whole scene to Fela, he praised my courage. He said that I was now becoming like him.²

Footnote

¹The phrase "Apostle must hear of this" is a quote from a video by a Nigerian vlogger named Eman Kellam. In this video that went viral soon after it was published on February 15, 2014, Eman pranked his father by telling him that he had gotten a female friend pregnant. Eman's father's reaction was highly hilarious as he threatened Eman with random ideas and phrases to prove the consequences of Eman’s actions.

²In the 1950s, Fela told his parents that he was moving to London, England, to study medicine, but he ended up attending the Trinity College of Music to study classical music.

*Our love continued with
the courage to do the
things that we weren't
supposed to do.*

IYAWO ILE

On some days, when Fela did not have to perform at a show, he came to my house. He enjoyed sitting in the rocking chair of my reading room. He would pick a random sheet of paper with rough scribbles of my handwriting, most likely containing a half-written poem without a title. He read whatever I wrote aloud while prolonging the pronunciation of his words and dropping them like falling stainless plates without stamina. *My woman carry watttaaah!* (water), he would say. Oh, how much I loved Fela!

One night, after a show, when he came off the stage, his body raining with sweat, he walked toward me. He whispered into my ears and said, Let us go for a walk.

We walked through our usual route to the park, but this night, Fela did not talk too much. He was unbearably quiet.

When we got to the park, Fela nudged me to a swing and I sat on it. He tossed the swing back and forth gently. After some time, he started speaking. He told me of the wife his mother found for him at home about eight months ago when he visited Nigeria, then he said what I was not expecting.

Fela was full of surprises and it would have been nice if it was I love you that fell out of his mouth

with his reckless words, but it wasn't. *She will soon put to bed*, he said, *and it is a boy*.

I faked a smile to hide the jealousy that rushed through my thoughts. I wanted Fela to myself, but he belonged to someone else now.

It was a cold and windy evening so, I saw it as a perfect excuse to escape this conversation. I told Fela that I wanted to go home so that I wouldn't fall sick from the cold weather. He agreed and volunteered to escort me to my house which was five minutes away. We were silent and did not speak further on the news. This walk was one of shame toward the potential romance that I thought we had and Fela knew that too.

The night collapsed with me sobbing on my bed, still fully dressed in the attire that I wore to Fela's show.

Iyawo Ile - The Interpretations

Iyawo Ile: Yoruba word that means housewife.

PART 7

*Some of us never realized
that silence was a
testimony to our existence
more than life was, until
we were served on a
platter of words in poetry
and stories.*

IN MY SECOND LIFE

In my second life, I am an unedited
manuscript of your biography.

I am the blunt edges of your pages,
I am the dark ink of your existence,
I am the bent ears listening
to what people now think of you,
I am your semicolons in all the places
that you deserve to be ended in this plot.

I am the nakedness you imagined.
I available for you to touch
in a manner that you find undesirable.

I have been paid for
long before you discovered me,
although you buy me, I am not owned by you.

I am felt by the fingers
of millions who close the laps
of my covers when I am done
breaking their hearts.
I am available and vulnerable in their arms
but my synonym isn't consent.

I purse my lips for women
like me to draw breath.

I bend my hips and spine.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Children immune of my pain are birthed.
Holy and innocent, living in all the places
we haven't contaminated with our existence.

In my second life, I am the words
on your tombstone with a reference.

THINGS I WANT TO SAY TO YOU

I want to tell you that my rebirth is not a love poem or honey that will pat your dark motives and selfish desires on the head.

I want to tell you that when you came, I was an ocean of womanhood and regal queenship, and when I left, I was still the same only that, it took a while for me to realize.

I want to tell you that the next time you need inspiration to be a man, do not search between a woman's legs, you won't find what you are searching for in that house.

I want to tell you that my tongue still vomits traces of your name in trash bins, but no matter how much I let go, you never seem to leave.

I want to tell you that I have grown thick skins to cover all the places you left sore in my heart and body.

I want to tell you that the next time you feel insecure, do not come running into my mouth, my voice cannot accommodate people like you anymore.

I want to tell you that I have forgiveness stored in my bones for all the wrongs that you are yet to admit and the apologies you haven't given.

I want to tell you that my pain is building a tsunami
of words that will avenge me and wash everything
you think you are away.

THE CLEANSING

I wash myself fourteen times to be clean of you, yet, somehow you still show up when I have to meet with God.

At the church, I am drenched in the 100th of a river and told that I am clean. I eat the communion, but the bread tastes like you. The blood looks like relief from all the places I have cut.

I wrote a love poem at the age of fifteen. The title sounded like your name, so I scratched it out. I tried to kill my thoughts of you with words, but you showed up at the cross of Ts and the dots to Is.

For the sixteenth time, I asked myself if I could call it assault since we once loved each other. But I remember that God loved Christ enough to let him die for me. This poetry is tearing me into two, but it doesn't assure my resurrection.

The 17th sentence in the last spoken word I did has the word: voice. I swallow my words and use shame to wash it down my throat.

I call God 18 times. I think that it doesn't take that much for my mother to respond. I try to bargain with her. I tell her that I will go on if she makes the way.

The next time he sends me a message, I read it six

times and on the seventh, I tell him about the obituary that I have been writing for his stone heart.

I ask God to forgive me. I did not mean to go back. I don't wait for her to respond this time. I have eaten silence for long enough that it doesn't taste bitter when it comes from God.

At 20, I try to fall in love again, but I bruise my left knee. I don't know how to walk. I don't know how to fly.

It is the 21st day since my last period. I am anticipating my bleeding. I am impatient, so I write a painful poem and title it my name.

PART 8

*The echoes of others carved
out voices for us.*

AMEN

Sometimes, language is too fragile of a case to contain the truth and like a dead person being prepared for funeral, I watched her swallow her truths and wipe her lips with a wet rag of lies.

The first time my friend tried to tell me that she was sexually assaulted, she said it with a nonchalant attitude as if it did not matter. *You know, I almost had sex with my ex.* She said.

I watched as her facial expressions conflicted her attitude to this confession. Her cheeks were red and the edges of her lips sunk deep beneath her cheeks. Her eyes wandered and sometimes, laid fixed to the table across the room. Her feet dangled beneath the stool and her arms were folded on her stomach to support her large breasts.

I have known her for long enough to recognize her half-truths. Her heart is one that has been hardened by fire but would soften just by a touch, yet, I did not push her to confess further. Perhaps language was too fragile of a case to hold her truth, so she sought for alternatives.

The second time that my friend tried to tell me that she was touched, as she spoke, her lips became deflowered to guilt and shame.

Language perhaps failed her again as she repeated I didn't more than he did and swallowed his responsibilities like she inhaled air.

He tried to touch me. She said.

... and I didn't do anything about it. I didn't fight back or tell him that I didn't want it. I didn't allow my body to act upon the rushing thoughts in my mind at that moment. I laid still and his body on mine felt like sandpaper brushing off burnt residues off the face of a cloth iron.

The following week after her second confession, I invited her to spend the weekend at my apartment. We spent the nights watching movies on the long sofas in my parlor.

On Sunday morning, we listened to the news. This was the time that the sexual assault charges against Harvey Weinstein arose. The newscaster gave updates about the allegations and also discussed the #MeToo movement that swept through Twitter and Instagram.

As my friend listened to the testimonies that the newscaster read, she breathed heavy sighs that felt like Amen to her truth.

Sometimes, the only language we need is another person's courage to confess similar experiences.

WHAT I HAVE DONE THAT YOU WILL DO

As much as I allow this to be known or desire that it be shared, I continuously remind myself that – to give other people permission to see my perspective of these experiences doesn't mean that I give them the permission to analyze, correct, or pity it for me, then place it back on my palms as a refined version. I do not want to hear the “what if's” or “what about now” or even the “why then” or “why now.” Sometimes, silence as a response to my sharing will be kind and appropriate. Sometimes not saying anything at all will be the best comfort that you can offer.

Before anyone does that for me, I would like them to consider that I have taken years to do this for myself, and I am still doing it. I am still questioning my truth as much as I am owning it. I am still asking myself why these experiences have become unreasonably significant in my life while giving myself kudos for the façade of “moving on” that I have put on so well.

I am still asking myself why I find it difficult to “heal” and move on like other women who have had it worse. There are times when I feel like an ingrate to life for that inability.

I am still analyzing how I could have taken responsibility for my part of these experiences. I am still asking myself “what part is my fault?” and learning to not be placed in conditions where there

is a potential of being hurt again. I am still asking myself if there are things limiting my perspective or hindering me from choosing to analyze these situations more objectively.

I am still experiencing the feeling of immerse guilt which my childhood self had, while screaming to myself that I am grown now and should be able to “handle things better.” I am still telling myself that my resilience and emotional development as an adult should know how to handle what that child I was didn’t know how to fix.

I am still questioning if I am wicked for choosing to hold on to these experiences while “they” want to move on. Although I feel hurt by their actions, I am concerned about hurting their feelings now that I am acknowledging myself in an attempt to heal. I am still debating if I should just let go and shut up. I am still trying to convince myself that I am not stupid for thinking this way.

I am still trying to believe myself because I wish none of these were real. I am still taking intervals to read this piece repeatedly to find what I could have written “more nicely” or what serious and necessary details I am forgetting to add that I do not remember; because there was a time I also wanted to fade away. I am still asking myself if this is the most open version that communicates my experiences and thoughts well, compared to the other five or six versions I tried to share in the past seven years.

I am practicing my consent louder and ensuring that I am understood. I am learning to stand up for myself and also, to walk away from and for myself if I am not being listened to. I am also not allowing everyone to love me just because they can, they want to or it is their obligation. I have realized that I am in the position to accept or decline someone's love whether it is with good intentions or not. I have realized that at the end of the day, love can be a façade of bad intentions. I have learned to be grateful for the presence of their love and to praise myself for exercising my will to refuse it.

I have tried and I am still trying, and I would want that to be respected and valued. I am also still asking if this would be the end of it and I will truly move on now. So far, I keep coming back – not more often as I used to, and less emotionally than before but I still come here once in a while to remember my strength or acknowledge my weakness and find the right words for it.

CLOSE CIRCLES

When I lost hope in searching for the woman in me, I picked mirrors in the faces of other women who may not have looked like me but who felt like I did. I used my ears to travel these women's journeys through the stories unknown, untold, unbelieved, and misunderstood.

The notes I picked became a bouquet of voices, making music that mop through passages of life where these women once walked and lived. These women, ignited by the friction of their old paths and chorus of their new voices became of rainbow-like beauty, even for their storms.

As I write, their stories become voices, yet the depth of their experiences are soft chokes that prevent the voices from being heard. They gather, yet each one of them feels like another lonely person in a crowd.

They feel like letters that make a word whole and at the same time, words with spaces that break them apart in this brief sentence of life.

In my weakest points
when I shared my pains
with other women within close circles,
they opened up to me
about similar experiences
to comfort me.

In my process of healing,
I realized the irony of the strength I gained
from knowing that I am not the only one.

Contrarily, I became angry
because I am not the only one.

*Silence and shame are like
disrespectful visitors who
don't give you a warning
of their arrival and indeed
feel at home when you
make the suggestion out of
courtesy.*

*When we suggest that
silence is feminine, we
make unnecessary shame
feel at home even at the
least of actions considered
human for the other sex.*

PART 9

*After all, our lives are
fragments filling empty
spaces in the puzzles of
others and becoming
mosaics only when we
found ourselves.*

PACKAGES

The farmers keep delivering my eggs to the wrong address.

I hear my neighbor mumbling near my mailbox, but I do not care to listen. He is an old man. He is funny and he has scanty gray hair strands on his head sticking out unevenly like an overused broom-stick.

My mother-in-law nags that I watch too many movies. She says perhaps, that's why my ovaries are dead. Although I listen to her, I do not have enough happiness to argue with her.

Sometimes, I dream of her. I see her sucking my blood. I see her wrinkled face and almost bald eyebrows transforming to youth. I see her eyes becoming bold and fierce with thick dark circles around them. I see her smoothen fingers around her hair; long strands of braids, about 52 of them, tied in a bun on her head and her waist; slender, her hips; robust to carry twin children on her sides.

My husband comes home midday, sweeping the garage floor with his brand-new Benz. He pats the bonnet after shutting the front door on the left. He calls her Lucy and he does not look at me the same way he looks at her with smiley eyes above his pointed nose and thin lips on his almost oval face.

He is also 5'8", so it is safe to say that I look up to him. As a housewife, what other things can I aspire to do than watch movies, arrange furniture, and have my mother-in-law sweep sorrowful words into my thoughts?

I suggest to my husband that he registers her with the knitting club at the library and he does. She skips her meetings all the time and blames it on her developing dementia. I wonder how she continually remembers that she has dementia, yet forgets her sessions. I never bother to ask.

She walks over my husband's words and responds to me the few times I speak to him in her presence. He doesn't complain. He stays still with his hands dangling near the pockets of his trousers like the balconies outside project houses in New York City.

Sometimes I imagine my thoughts to be cars parked close to him. Close enough to feel and see through the windows of his heart, yet, too far away to touch.

I have not told him that the last pregnancy test I took resulted positive and that I am two months gone. He does not suspect anything.

I have not told him about the admission to the private college or the interview proposal to discuss one of the pieces on my blog. He doesn't even know that I have a blog. He is unaware that I have this much to myself.

He watches me intensely at night while I pretend to sleep. His stares pierce me the same way I pierce the sky when I look at it, but he doesn't find anything. He sucks in only what I choose to tell him, the same way he sucks a cigarette.

All the memories we have shared chip off the cigarette's lit end. They die down to ashes. He doesn't remember our anniversaries, my birthday, or the first date we had when he parked his car near the edge of a cliff, knowing too well that I fear heights. He doesn't remember the imagination that we shared while we rested our necks on each other's shoulders.

He doesn't remember how we painted imageries of two energy-filled children running around our bedroom while we snuggle in each other's arms, in the morning.

Sometimes I wonder how I have endured this much. I think of how I have swallowed my anger in silence every time the farmers mailed my eggs to the wrong address. I think of my happiness as a broken branch from my body, bound to a strange tree. I am sad that it is broken but I am equally happy that it is growing with someone or something who can nurture it sufficiently, someone with the experience of growing things that don't die prematurely.

I tell myself that, tonight, I will tell him everything. But something in me feels like I am selling myself

cheaply to the devil.

As I speak to my husband, he doesn't flinch or blink. His eyes stay glued to my body like it is one of the cars he is about to purchase.

His reaction invades my confessions and he looks like the man I first fell in love with, again. He seems like the man whose eyes longed to behold me, whose palms craved for my body, and whose ears hungered for my words.

He looks like the man that went missing the first time the farmers delivered my eggs to the wrong address.

RAINBOW CHILD

I was dreaming for eyes
that did not have a chance to see,
buying a world that did not survive being
outside my body,
naming a future with hopes
that you'll come to inherit it,
dancing, to sooth your cries
even when I had not heard your voice,
and becoming enough for you;
a woman that I never was for myself.

*She is the type of woman
who needs to deliver
herself first before others
can be birthed through
her.*

PART 10

*I ate these words until
silence no longer had a
place to live in my voice,
then purged my feeling,
just enough to cleanse
myself of shame.*

A TABLE BEFORE ME

As a woman, I did not prepare myself
for this long to not serve me first.

I will not present myself on a table
for your hungry ego while I feed on
the crumbs of what you think of me.

I deserve myself and I am filled
with all the satisfaction
I can get from loving and having myself first.

HUNGER

Hunger is what makes unpleasant meals
taste good in one's mouth.

I starved for so long
that when you served me a plate of silence,
guilt, and shame,
they tasted really good to my thoughts.

MY VOICE HAS FOUND LOVE

My voice may not sing thunder, and it may mellow like a whistling wind, but when it speaks, it crumbles whatever stands in its way.

Unlike before, it no longer needs permission to use itself and be itself. It no longer answers to silence or darkness, and shame façade in religious humility or a pretense of what a woman should act like.

My voice may be like a pin drop, but it is competent enough to pierce bubbles of insecurities and the comforts of people whom it has become unafraid to love or hurt.

When my voice feels like it, it rests on the plantation of my uncivilized tongue to tell how I indeed feel and it does not apologize for its honesty.

My voice is classy but it rides in things that money can't buy, so do not disrespect it by asking it to wear unearned respect, cheap egos, and miscalculated machismo.

My voice comes from a stubborn belly that refuses to tame itself to fit into unreasonable sizes or into the mistaken measures of what your mind knows to be pretty.

My voice is the red lipstick to my womanhood: bold,

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

fierce, unwilling to shrink and unwilling to die for beautiful roses of likability.

My voice has found love in my lucid thoughts. They marry over and again in these congregated words, poetry, punctuations, stories, and in myself.

HERE TO STAY

I did to my body what a pen does to paper, tickled it with beautiful words of love, admiration, freedom, and hope.

I made my body a muse and allowed its blood to penetrate pages until I spoke a holy matrimony of me and myself alone.

I drew my body close to me. I said that it is the sky and this day, the storm is over and the rainbow has come to stay.

DARKNESS

When you made a night out of me
the moon came to crown my head
and the stars became my entourage.

You tried to hide me with darkness,
instead, you made my presence
even more glamorous.

My intuition is preparing a meal for the next time that you decide to stroll into my feelings unannounced.

Time has nurtured the branches of my innocence that you cut off, to hold new leaves and birth fruits.

So, when you show up, I hope that your mind can handle the maturity of my self-esteem and growth in all the places your intentions severed.

In this eternity of newness that I embark on, the winter you clothed me with sheds and my spring lays an entrance for the coming warmth.

I digress.

I have packed all the luggage of memories that you left behind and I have placed them at the tip of my pen.

You no longer deserve an entrance, let alone a seat at the table of who I am.

Upon receiving love and kindness
from blessed people
in the most beautiful forms,
I have raised my standard of being
as well as my expectations of acceptance.

I have become more conscious
of what flows in and out of me.

I have come to realize that
there is no excuse to settle for
low-budgeted respect,
hand-me-down commitments, or
cheaply dyed attractions that will fade
in the wealth of the ocean I am.

I have become strong
in the knowledge of myself.

I have realized that there is no drowning
in the atmosphere of love
that God has for me
neither is there a drought
in the unlimited sunshine
I desire for myself.

I now understand that not everyone
that comes into my life,
is meant to stay.

Some are just tourists
seeking for parts of me to purchase
with their feelings.

Some just come to touch
but not own.

I have learned to love myself
enough to know
that I shouldn't make a home
for someone who can't
make a room for me.
I have stopped the desire to be filled
by people empty of love.

I have learned that
when people realize that they are empty
and can't fill you up,
sometimes, they try to shut you down.

Like the night falls
for the day to rise,
I have fallen in love
with myself and risen
beautifully from it.

In love with Christ,
he became the wings
that shielded me
and the wings
that let me fly.

Loving revealed itself
through the eyes of many stars.

It delivered in different
forms, shapes, and sizes.

That my loving was strange
didn't mean it wasn't true
or that it wasn't good enough.

It came from an honest place
which mattered.

I realized that
finding someone
who loved me
did not relieve or replace
my responsibility
to love myself.

I have stopped filling cages
with honey.

I have stopped pouring myself
into people without
the capacity to
contain me.

I always remember
that I'll never be enough
for a bottomless person
neither will I be for someone
who hasn't become whole
to contain my outpour.

Some of us, like the ocean,
can't be filled with
people and things
neither can we be contained
by them.

I had to earn myself for so many reasons, one of which is "to eliminate that feeling of not being good enough to be earned by other people."

This taught me not to give myself cheaply to others.

I am,
and that is
enough!

By God and Christ,
I was worth dying for
before anyone that
broke my heart came along.

Still by God and Christ
I was worth living for
when I became alone.

PART 11

*Sometimes, silence is a
bandit of happiness that
looks too pretty to be called
a thief.*

LOSING IT AGAIN

Just when I think that I am progressing
in my feelings, my thoughts
become a slippery carpet
pulled from the bottom of my sanity
and I am back to where I started from.

I am back to looking in the mirror
and not wanting to see the person in it
looking back at me.

I am stuck in my throat and my voice
is waging war against my tongue.

I am more but not feeling enough.

My fingers are swimming
in the ocean of my face
and I am drowning
even when I know how to swim
and even when I am supported
with lifeboats of:
it's not that bad,
breathe in, pause for four seconds,
now breath out,
and you'll be fine,
or just suck it up,
when I am running too late
to the workstation of my happiness.

Unlike many fairytales,
in mine, the best endings never begin
and the best beginnings end too quickly.

I am an alcoholic of remedies.

I am near the point whereby my pains
no longer hurt as much
while simultaneously,
my emotional remedies
are losing effect.

I am overdosing
on therapy,
on religion,
on friends,
on loneliness sometimes,
on being busy,
on poetry,
on me,
on being present,
and it's not making any difference.

Falling:

Reading this is all I have needed
to know that the space between
a heartbeat and the next
is high enough of a cliff
to jump and end things.

Arriving:

No one told me that
my time on earth
might feel a party
that life planned
and invited everyone else to
but I forgot to arrive at.

Leaping:

On some days I wake up
feeling like a promise
laying on God's tongue
and waiting to take a leap
out of her mouth.

Drowning:

I've known to not jump
because I do not know how to swim
in this measure of uncertainty
but I do not know how
to prevent myself from drowning
in my own tears and more,
upon the realization -
I am a trap that I might escape.

I am holding myself together
between palms clasped in prayers
and a tongue drenched with apologies
of where I have been and who I am.

I feel undeserving of forgiveness
for someone else's sins.

My love is like a prodigal child with feet
weighty of shame and pride,
not wanting to return to me
even when my heart is waiting
arms spread wide for it.

The Silence We Eat – Oyindamola

Unlike other scars that I have had,
this healing does not include a bed of roses
that I should lay
or lie
until it becomes true.

It doesn't work like the magic
I once believed that I am as a woman.

*Eating silence always
gives the illusion that we
are full.*

Thank you for coming.

There is a message in the next page.

Dear Reader,

It means so much that you picked this book to read and it means more that you saw its ending. I hope that you enjoyed it and consider it well written for the purpose intended.

Please share this book with as many who would care to read it and particularly females whom it may help.

You may post your feedback of the book on social media, tagging me on **Instagram: Oyindamola Shoola** or **Twitter: Oyindashoola** and informing your followers that it is available for them to download for free as well.

If this book specially highlights or relives a burden in you or means something personal that you would love to share, feel free to send an email to **Shoolaoyin@yahoo.com** and I will respond as soon as possible.

Thank you, again.

Best,
Oyindamola Shoola

THE AUTHOR



Oyindamola Shoola is a writer, book reviewer, feminist, and blogger. She is also the Co-founder and CEO of Springg Literary Movement, a non-profit organization dedicated to curating, revitalizing, and transforming the New Nigerian Generation in

writing and literature. She is the author of *Heartbeat*, *To Bee a Honey*, *The Silence We Eat* and *But Here You Are*.

In 2017 and 2018, she was named one of Nigerian Writers Award (NWA) most influential writer under the age of 40.

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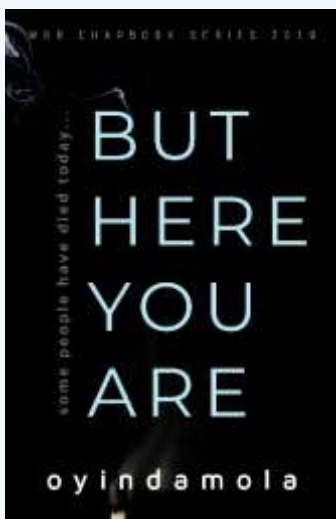
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**PRAISE FOR
BUT HERE YOU ARE**

But Here You Are is a rainbow of words that voice the perspective of women and explores the issues facing them in our communities as social evolution questions all our belief systems. Oyindamola also questions the role of religion in the midst of it all, especially

regarding the psychological effects and mental health issues brought upon women by the challenges they face.

WRR Publishers

Download Link: <https://www.wrr.ng/download/but-here-you-are-oyindamola/>



**PRAISE FOR
TO BEE A HONEY**

This collection proves how poetry's scope isn't limited to heart or soul but can interest aesthetics, mind, and critical conscience as well. Yes, you'll find feelings and even doubts, frailties, and pains, inevitable in any honest soul

digging. But the Author's poetry is imbued with such a deep, lucid, untamable analysis of the mechanisms behind our way to be, whether as individuals or as elements of bonds and society, to provide a challenging and thought-provoking reading experience on many levels.

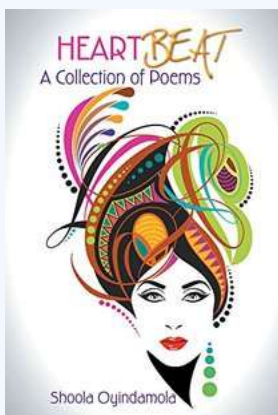
Daniele Bergamini

Author of

Chants for Love

Purchase Link:

<http://www.shoolaoyin.com/to-bee-a-honey>



PRAISE FOR HEARTBEAT

In this intriguing debut, Oyin has mirrored the horror and beauty of life. She is one who is not afraid to express her genuine feelings, no matter how unconventional. She has captured the pain, sadness, pleasure, joy, nostalgia, depression and

love which fills the common human heart.

Kanyinsola Olorunnisola

Author of

In My Country We're All Crossdressers

Purchase Link:

<http://www.shoolaoyin.com/heartbeat>



PRAISE FOR THE SILENCE WE EAT

The Silence We Eat is a poetic-prose that is not subtle in its telling. Oyindamola Shoola has once again skillfully and effortlessly given a voice to the silent stories of many women; the story of places we have walked and our body has survived; the trajectory of silence and how it leads us home – finding our voices. She has shown us that often silence is deafening, detaching, choking, empty, and fading but then, it becomes finding, rediscovering, healing and wholeness. Oyindamola Shoola, with this one, has proved she is not about to stop being loud with her writings anytime soon. Overall, The Silence We Eat is a book I wouldn't have had written in any other way. It's a celebration of our body, strength, survival, and growth as women. For me, it says silence is how we learn to become loud and loud is how we become free. Silence is how we transition to becoming.

Ebukun Gbemisola Ogunyemi (Ibukunwrites)

Purchase Link: <http://www.shoolaoyin.com/the-silence-we-eat>