

When I'm Eighteen



David Ishaya Osu

poems

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PRAISE FOR WHEN I'M EIGHTEEN

In *When I'm Eighteen*, David Ishaya Osu wittingly merges personal history with a familial tone and tills their intersection into a breathing ground for the kind of poetry that infuses the reader with the precise measure of the poet's experiences, with boyish innocence where everything can be a dream and every dream is an experienced reality.

This exquisite collection implies that, to define is to imprison, with poems that yearn and revel in the disruption of a demarcated freedom. Here is a neat universe, of everything beautiful about a poet's mind, where a mother's mouth is a treasure-box brimming with love. The future is not far, it is here, crafted with the dexterity of the poet's imagination.

Saddiq Dzukogi

Author of Inside the Flower Room

BREAKFAST TABLE

Mama serves us coffee
at night. Not because

she wants us to stay awake.
Everyone brings a dream

to the breakfast table. Face

your food, you are
still in the room

enough not to lessen
your body. Of course

I am here anytime
to make more for you

and your friends
and the distance

between houses
is love

HOBBY

I started painting at nine
a girl who still loves
sky blue and lemon

tea. I'd do my nails
and use water to
know more about

my body. Only at night
did I begin to want
to leave. I'd raise

my hair and hide
my pencils inside
and try to finish

the apple. The moon. The girl.
All of us one time
didn't know where

the door was; I
felt like loose beads.
Like a candlewick I fell

BICYCLE

she is not leaving the sofa for tomorrow
—talking

to a box made by mum suns only at the garden
one kite to another, orange, green, red, we dance line to

lily around the clock is nobody's future went outta vase
the shadow stroke is the time to finger two wires

—taste
the glow inside your scar was made to shine

MAMA SAID

I
make books
with plum

a pie
rainbow
tea—
this was
how hard
light & lovely

mama said
bolts & boys
should be

PERSONA

| | | |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Cut to the centre of memory even if it is pink | On my birthday, mama joined a song to my drawstring | Give me sleeves for a week |
|---|---|----------------------------------|

ALL ABOUT YOU

something pink, something juice
all about you
something you—dark room, wet
dreams, thunder song, rain
—something you: close
to the centre is
a cry, a beam, a team
of rising roses: but blades
find friendship, deep
deep, in the style of silence
entering wine—something pink
something juice, all
about you, something
you: her voice
is between the sky
and the waves
of belly blue
something pink, some
thing juice, all about you

DREAM

i woke up from
a dream, crying
and asking for

water—last time
it was ice cream
and new papers
father bought
for my birthday
he said, build

aeroplanes and
watch your dreams
fly: the house

was quiet, the
trees were not
—when is daddy

coming back, i leaned
into mother touching
her breast as if

i forgot something
she kissed my nose
and went to the door

the rains were here

INNOCENT

sunshine, flower
the time is now

friend—the road
began that day

dark and light
everyone smiled

and said his
voice is innocent

through and through
the field kept us

dancing and
rainbow—there

was nowhere else
but mother

FAVOURITE

black
was the first

glitter, from
a bed painless

i gaze: there
she lays like

a waterbird
calling deep

a flesh in
time and

tomorrow, i
thought i was

the one in her
hand and not

that yellow
cup—place

your eyes
to her heart

i said and
kissed my

favourite
colour again

PRESENCE

we were free chores
we were coming back

we were on paper
we were not in love

we were far from berries
we were night chores

we were waiting for rains
we were breaking mirrors

we were keeping eyes
we were hungry alright

we were taking noses
we were staying in pictures

we were in time
we were from questions

we were hearing rocks
we were after sleeping stars

we were missing big cups
we were crying keys

HALLUCINOGEN

down the stairs
sad the moon

we named
the cake

after two
candles—sky

and blue
the door

with you and
me; we walked

out of the garden
to another song

there was nothing
but birds inside

their eyes

GREEN TIME

place it, moon
by moon

the piano
played itself

—you sing, and
the door opens

this good garden
we call Green time—

and no curtains

TOGETHER

with songs, everyone
picked and picked: Ada
said, I wish maths is
as sweet as mangoes; we
laughed and told her
to become a farmer
or ask her teacher
to use fruits for algebra. It was
a sweet evening, as
every kid in the hood
had gathered in our lawn
when the clouds started
their tongues—ours
was to sing and
jump and wait
for mangoes
and rain to drop

FAMILY QUESTION

A family of
four: an ex secret, a doll to share

new moons with, a sky-blue diary and a door
—nobody does the sign
of the cross during sex; a braid

of moonlight and
shadows direct your head to a pillow, and next

to your window hangs a raindrop ready to touch
your heart; even a rat cannot feast

on a field of vows; can I go out of this life,
you ask

DREAM

The dream that goes
with a vapour, kitchen to waiting
room to vroom
— love is when you drink a sour orange and

still call it orange. Dinner doesn't hurt lent

that dream that lathers
in black and white waters, making

a road for relation ships
— no flower says goodbye to

a butterfly nor a moonwear. Love cannot be paraphrased

BOYHOOD

Boyhood is a long wagon
heading always to a rain forest—dresses mean characters

with a play of blues

you can walk through the valley
of shadows of love

of spiders
breaking a night into two moans

AFTER THE STORM

After the storm, she went out into the night cold and cried:
come, come star, star, touch my eyes and give my dark pond
light.

that night the lightning didn't stop until she said: thank you

DONE

twice & swim

it was from my mother's
mouth i first saw a kiss: your

name is in the bible, she said
& opened the curtains

show her your navel
twice & run

away from
dreaming, just

cold the root
the coal

burning
in my black

box is my blossom
& soon—she peeled

a pear, placed it
on my silver tongue

twice & said: your
bed is not a mistake

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Ishaya Osu is a poet, memoirist and street photographer. His work has appeared in *Magma Poetry*, *Poetry Wales*, *The Griffith Review*, *The Oxford Review of Books*, among numerous others. He is the poetry editor of *Panorama: The Journal of Intelligent Travel*, and a board member of Babishai Poetry



Foundation based in Uganda.

David has an MA in Creative Writing (with distinction) from the University of Kent.