

BOYYZ

A young boy in a red superhero cape stands in a dark hallway, looking towards bright lights at the end of the corridor. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being a bright, starburst light at the end of the hallway on the right. The boy is seen from behind, his red cape flowing. The hallway has dark walls and a tiled floor.

T O O A R E F L O W E R S

POEMS

O L E T U O G H E N E N Y O R E C .

boyz
Too Are
FLOWERZ

Oletu Oghenenyore C.
(Nyore Note)

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DEDICATION

to
Ifemetem Evans
(the boy who was believed to be a man before his
birth);

to
my brothers: Lucky and Wilson
together we create sunshine despite the rains

&

to
the boys
who hold the rope of manhood before they
becoming men

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AUTHOR'S NOTE



Notes for this book began in 2011 when I was living in Accra, Ghana. I had travelled, trying to be a man—a man I am still becoming. This is one of my hardest books so far; how does one speak on a theme mostly not worth hearing; on a person or people perceived as always too strong to break yet dying—the boychild? I juggle the UN calendar to see if there is space for the boychild but I find almost little to none, so I made this book, *a labour of love*, to speak, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences with readers.

The inspiration for this book came from my journey, as well as the stories of others who have faced similar challenges and tried to triumph, plus reading Jaachi Anyatonwu's and every pro-boychild poems I can find. I hope, that this book will serve as an eye-opener that the boychild, is a specie that also needs comfort, guidance, and justice when needed and an inspiration for those who may be struggling with similar issues.

The poems here are me and other boys begging to be loved and heard; allow us to cry when we need to, and give us a shoulder when we ask. We only look tough on the outside. After all, you have believed we are stones because you want us to be, yet we break at night trying to make ends meet, especially for family. Imagine the look on faces when a boy says he was raped by an aunt or uncle, it's unbelievable. So, we shy away from talking. The first poem '& I Can't Question The System' is me trying to ask but not asking questions really. 'Now I Know It's Called Rape' happen long before I know the word: RAPE. I have been there, too, the effect is that I am shy when talking to ladies today. 'Straight Question' is how I escape.

This is not all to it, a sequel is coming. Till then, thank you for taking this journey with me.

Oghenenyore C. Oletu

Warri, Nigeria.

2023.

& I CAN'T QUESTION THE SYSTEM



should i be happy with them for
calling me a saviour when i needed one
& their cheers
drove me to the archer's arrow?
now the crowbar gauges my patience metre
with the strength of my ball
'cos a boy is supposed to be a society pleaser;
a stoic walking barefoot on coal;
masked with a smile

man up! man up! man up!
this song is on every lip every time i trip;
who told them boys are stones;
who told them we don't break
or we don't need a break
to let out the salt from our eyes?

this status quo has turned me a misnomer
& can't anymore build my boy-time dreams
of talking with doves; walking with my own
under moonlight; writing in my treehouse
somewhere down the countryside
with the wind, creasing my hair.

i die in silence to remain alive
i wave off depression with a finger
but it's my undergarment, oversized
suffering misconception, why do they feel
i'm a robot running on oxygen?

i'm angry at the goals society set
rules birthed by our ancestors, not minding
how far & well the future will be
& i can't question the system
& that makes me sad.

AFTER SCHOOL WHAT NEXT?



some yesterday's past,
one of those days he became a star;
he clinched his school papers,
the best there is, & arms wrapped him aplenty,

tears welled up his eyes
mama too cried but was proud
as they sang praises to God.
his spirit sang in amplified voice, days of
trekking academic corridors were over.

but the labour market is another matter
from office to office; trips downtown,
clutching those certificates with wet eyes;
he sees himself acting a script staged by the leaders

the call for prayer wakes him every dawn,
turning on his naked stomach... *raba... saleke... ribaya...*
he prayed too, in tongues,
following the church people.
not too far too was the horn-speakers
blaring from the mosque
Allab-u Akbar
with hope for the day.
but like every other day,
dreaming of survival. he's only glad
to be alive again!

another day to him meant
another opportunity, that way
he fuels his hope
to defeat the demons of surviving.

NOW I KNOW WHAT IT'S CALLED



i was five, i still remember
 how aunty would force us to sleep when it's raining
 she would cover my sister
 & two brothers separately
 that type of covering given to dead folks
 in the hospital
 & ask them not to come out
 (& when not raining, siesta is good
 she would tell them).

we would cover separately
 at a corner for a special kind of sleep
 like a sheep, i followed her to her altar
 we lay, first, side by side, like a couple
 of plantains on a bunch.

soon, her hand would slide inside my briefs,
 juggle my balls.
 i would wonder the name of the game.
 i would wonder what the umpire deems foul play
 the custodian of the balls
 stands as if to defend the territory
 we never kissed
 but i did touch, sucked
 on those juiceless oranges.

I would go on top her,
 VC of her private University
 i delivered lectures aplenty
 but what was the subject?
 that's hard to recall

BECAUSE WE ARE BOYS



because we are boys
same things hurting our feet
make us creep
out daily, to seek
respite for our tummy's sake

because we are boys
the song of comparison
is used to break us
when targets aren't met
hustle boy, hustle
money is the senior

because we are boys
we cast not tears anymore
when we meet in the evenings
we no longer share
memories of lost dreams
or pictures of endless streams
rolling down our cheeks;
only concocted joy over bottles
oh, the smiles we make up!

because we are boys
demand is, we should be trees of hope
else we end up single
& laid to rest in unmarked graves...

AFTER THE WAR



wounded dreams mend
flowers grow over ruins
the grave is the boy's best bed.

BOYS TOO ARE PRINCESSES



dad called me a map
'set an example for your siblings,' he says.
he didn't tell me the hills have rough edges.
now every part of me has a story.

society called me a stone
they failed to be the insect to bloom the flower
God purpose I be.

religion called me a nation
& tailored me with standards
from their many Books,
a set of morals we all fail at but i am judged
for sinning differently.

boy too are princesses
if viewed like the rainbow,
you will love them
& lighten their distresses
you would love to hear them
tell vulnerable stories, unedited
you would not judge them
by how much of dreams have become
smoke & ashes

THE CLOWN IN THE CIRCUS



always, i seek to imitate the steps of my father
to earn many applause
was that not why he gave me his name?
always, i am turned on
by the deafening chorus of
'a child ought to surpass his father'
but all i have read is verses of disappointment
accompanied by the humming failure.

over the years, a clown has
been living in the circus called me.
a big joke
i made out of myself.

i failed to master fate
like every other boy being moulded
to fit the man's world.
i inaugurated my own streams
the fountain in me now flows ceaseless
i desire warmth, instead, my heart freezes

i hewed down the clown in me
& traded dad's dream for the ink.
i became a writer,
compiled notes
embraced thunder
& the applause today is saner, better

AT THE CROSSROAD

(to every trying boy and man in my country)



at the crossroads, there was
 really no road home, just terror &
 blackness, father dissolved with the metals
 that year was when the throne sought renewal;
 election year has always been insane.

grass is the painting of his new home.
 how long has he changed habitation?
 not so long to Nigeria but so long for me
 i barely escaped expiration, twice, thrice,
 maybe my last prayers were answered

yet under the rain of stray bullets
 we reconvened like fish mongers after a few calms;
 boy has to be boy, else,
 the house will sleep like a lagoon every day.
 God forbid. but what if i lose my head
 in this survival mode?
 it doesn't matter 'cos i've died
 thousand times before:

i died in the morning of job-hunting
 i died at noon proving myself to a selfish world
 & in the night with salt molecules in my eyes.

i died of blame, of being called lazy
 hence the endless monkey smiles
 disguising my cheek

& to marry Daisy
 & not be called impotent or crazy
 i die seeking solutions to the curse on my gender
 i will fall & die again & again
 if I may, to prove again & again
 that boys are not flowers
 but stones.

IN THE NAME OF SURVIVING



scars are testament of heaven-wonder
that we survived
after wearing multi-faces
to be many things at different times

we called ourselves after many things
chasing absurdities
to be among men with glory
that is, chilling with the big boys
but aren't we mere numbers after death?
tell me your great, great, great grandfather's name
he won't have been forgotten
if he had written his name in gold.

I KNOW OF BOYS



i know of boys
 who are aware of the odds against them
 but choose to play, civilization says they must

i know of boys
 who build other people's dreams
 with petals from their dying roses

i know of boys
 whose knuckles have become steel
 but didn't practice boxing

i know of boys
 who like St. Christopher carry others on their shoulder
 yet shelter starving siblings & parents

i know of boys
 who stomach the debris of life in the day
 & towel their eyes in the night

i know of boys
 who have lovers they smile to in the street
 but will be single till grey hair storm their chin

i know of boys
 who say 'good night, see you tomorrow'
 but remain standstill; for them, there is no home

i know of boys
 i know boys
 I know.

I AM JUST A BOY



i am just a boy
learning to imitate
that black boy on the democrat poster,
he made his family proud
& Africa was happy to have their son
in White House.

i am just a boy
counting my footprint
like my elder brother & the one after,
we are each trying to be the first
to wipe tears off our village
& make our hut a storey building.

i am just a boy
measuring the air i breathe,
hoping to keep some for tomorrow, if it would come
i am just a boy
trapped in my identity
my sin is my gender...

BLACK ICONS

(for those unlike Nelson Mandela)



hey African rulers
& your cohorts
i respect your geniuses

you taught us to laugh
while horror stare us in the land
& i can't write about them
i shouldn't abuse my freedom
hence i be called a monster
courting insanity in prison.
let the truth
& my carcass
play reunion in the grave.

LIKE ANY BOY



around me, i see seagulls without wings
 trekking in downward draught.
 their bodies move
 in circles
 like butterfly strokes of a swimmer.

their lofty views dissipate
 & i can't tell what they are—bird or mammal.

like any boy
 their patches of grey colour
 match the gloom of a cloudy sky.
 watching seagulls
 once made me smile all day
 but these, only shred that smile
 'cos they look clueless.

i watch closely,
 not to mimic their suffering
 but like any boy
 i had to practice
 moving without headlamps—
 success is improbable.

i pray one soars high
 overhead
 & circles the shore
 tilting upright, right & left
 like a kite rising
 in expanded air
 but where would the wings come from?

a boy is a broken reed
 sitting by the Niger tributary
 not far from River Nun
 he hugs his dreams, standing
 half way up the huge concrete wharf,
 arms spread to wind,
 like any boy—

sure, i'm practicing to fly.

TRUE BEAUTY



sometimes,
this boy
feels like a god
riding the bumpy road of life
with no cape, just black and white

his true beauty
shines bright at night,
when tears tattoo his cheeks
unknown to greeters
in the day.

LOSING MY IDENTITY

(bring back Afrocentrism)



i grew up a boy of plenty things
i ended up a man of one thing
but the futility of life soaks it all
so, i be again, a man of plenty things

in poetry, i can be all in one
be poor and lowly; rich and haughty
illiterate yet wise; learned but foolish
others as myself; myself as others in ink

my poems come in Adwoa's Gá or Ewẹ
i can write in Mbeki's Zulu tongue
who will appreciate Mandi's Fanti language
you won't read any except it's in Elizabeth
English

o, how i love Ngozi's Ibo
& Babafemi's Yoruba
i can rap with Oghenenyore's Urhobo
but your mockery erected English walls

STRAIGHT QUESTION



Butterfly hangs like adder
From my nectar
And I pose like the great Alexander
Waiting for my heart to be conquered.

I look at my coffers
As a good analyser
What I saw bent my speech
It wasn't much, I mean nothing much
Yet my binoculars pitch you as my match.
And my mind moves in Brownian Motion

Excuse me Mhiz...
What if I go back to Eden now?
I will ask God to transplant you there
'Cos man isn't allowed to be alone there.

If I may but make just a request
Will you be the feather hanging on my
heart
Lifted like the eagle soaring daily with me?
I want to pitch my tent with you.

This is not a poem
Though written by a poet
Will you or will you not be mine?

THE BOY IN THE MIRROR



i miss my smile, the one
the mirror showed me
the one lost when I stopped being a boy
fake smile is now a fashion
i wear daily as challenges pile up
each passing with its style

the boy in the mirror seems happier
than the moody man standing before it,
his eyes fair and bright
like a swan perched besides a lake
but this man wear wrinkles
underneath the smile
of the mirror boy

the boy in the mirror
should help this man build the tower
slow, tall but strong
the boy in the mirror
should teach this man before it to smile
over his aches and pains

LOST BOY



a lost boy is a supermarket store,
a loser smiling to man up the men's aisle
wild. astonished. raging.

people burst balloons after party
but i drink pain on rampage
instead of champagne
christmas is the last thing on my to do list
journeying on the side road
with a broken map collected
when I left home
longing for fairy tales & firesides

back pain is weightier than backpacks
it's been long sunlight hit the hillside
it's been long i saw carnivals & playground

20-10-20

*(for my fallen comrade at Lekki
& every victims of police and politicking brutality)*



what a memorable day

for wanting to speak
of the ill choking 'em
they were gone
with the gun
with no conscience
bullets on innocents
& the green & white
was never lowered

if I should paraphrase Shakespeare,
the wealthy thieves
have more dignity in death
than a pious poor.

we sit, wail

SYNONYM AND METAPHOR



TEACHER: Welcome to English 101

STUDENTS: But we did this last semester

TEACHER: Yes, let's just do a revision

STUDENTS: Okay sir

TEACHER: What is the synonym of betrayal?

STUDENTS: Brotherhood

TEACHER: What is the metaphor for success?

STUDENTS: Look at Ejike, is he not your mate?

TEACHER: Another word for boys

STUDENTS: Stones

TEACHER: Rewrite the phrase 'don't be a sissy'

STUDENTS: 'Boys don't cry'

TEACHER: Synonym of applause

STUDENTS: You-can-do-better

TEACHER: Thank you, class dismiss

STUDENTS: Hurray...



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oletu Oghenenyore C. (pen-name: Nyore Note) hails from Delta State but lives in the creek of Yenegoa and loves writing of happenings around him, as they are. His works are in/forthcoming in many anthologies and magazines like 'Black is Beautiful', 'Thirty Shades Of A rose', 'Once Upon A Time Tale Vol 1', 'African Child Anthology' 'Breathless' and online journals like ArtingArena, Poemify, The Yellow House Library, Williwash Blog, African Poem Archives blog, Stripes Literary Magazine, etc. He has authored many chapbooks and many others to come. He is currently working on a full collection.

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OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR:

Life In The Crucible
Because You Want Me To Talk
Notes At The 34th Bridge
Life In The Crucible 2
Because We Are Stateless
Boyz Too Are Flowers