



poems

*NOTES
AT THE*

34TH

BRIDGE

OLETU OGHENENYORE C.

**NOTES
AT THE
34TH
BRIDGE**

OLETU OGHENENYORE C.
(Nyore Note)

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DEDICATION

...to my Dad
Isaac Oletu

&

to my Mom
Charity Oletu

*you set for me the template
to be who i am becoming*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have repeatedly heard that no man is an island; no one is the sole custodian of knowledge. Every writer is product of accumulated help, no matter how small the piece. Thanks to God Almighty for the gift of the pen.

My profound thanks go to Oyin Bimbo, a friend, my chief editor/publisher and the entire ArtingArena Publishing team. Thanks for scouting and believing in me.

My parent and siblings (Patience, Lucky, Wilson, Edith, Bella). I feel joy when I look back and see you all behind me; you remind me of what family is.

I thank Joy, for being the strongest woman I have known beside mom. And Miss Itunuoluwa, for the love. Tares Oburumu will be a song that will long be on my lips.

My spiritual parent, Evang. Nicholas Gboage and family. I live by God's grace and your prayers.

I appreciate my readers immensely, without you, my pen will go stale and my muse will grow wings.

FOREWORD

I am glad, and it is indeed a great privilege to have read this collection of poetry. I can't be prouder as well to have a part in the success of this book and also in the vivid growth of his bard with the name Oletu Oghenenyore C. The growth I speak about is as well graced with a touch of undeniable development. Just as they say with wine and time; he is getting better with time and not just time – *his head aches from reading, and his finger hurts from writing, but for you, his readers, he presses on without fail.*

The poems are written with an intuition that comes from within. If I am to guess, the man that the poet meets while compiling this poem is an inspiration. I don't know how helpful he was but this collection is complete; an accurate work of art with all parts of it passing a message in the tone of the poet's persona but somehow relating to us all, as the reader.

Oletu has one more time written a mystery that connects the struggles of time at hand and the effects that the respective struggle had and is blazoning on his character and our characters. Also, he didn't falter in supplying us with the key to demystifying it in the flaps of this book. Hence, it is not a morsel too large for the heart's mouth. All we have to do is pick the keys up and let our eyes catch them while our heart receives them.

Notes at the 34th Bridge ain't just a book, but a mix to look into and check how you're faring in life.

Happy Birthday to the poet. This is his gift to us all.

Oyin Bimbo
Founder, ArtingArena.
Author of *Vanishing to Remain*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Besides being thrilled to present my third chapbook, '*Notes At The 34th Bridge*', today happens to be my birthday and my publisher so make it that the book come out today. Its 2 am, as I read the final draft before clicking the OKAY button, I begin to imagine the colour of January 20. This book is a labour of love, born from my reflection of life after meeting a thirty-four years old man, I asked him for wisdom and he took me down his chronicles.

The '34th Bridge' is just one of the many stops on the long highway called life. While the man I met is yet to know what the '35th Bridge' will carry, he feels the 34th is a place of contemplation and reflection, a place where he could escape the hustle and bustle of daily life and find solace to peregrinate round his memories and reflect on how life has been to him for the past 34 years. Has life been fair or harsh? Has he succeeded or still trying?

In the book, I tried my best to personalize the poems in a bid to become the man I met. He will be glad I did that to hide him and while I assume his flaws and mistakes. On the other hand, I enjoy it much because the man has helped me to figure out where I stand now in life. In some poems, I was critical, in others, I tried to offer a glimpse of hope and reaffirming to the human spirit that being resilience will pay off soon. My bad were that I cry woe too many times. For me, it was a struggle of self-awareness.

This book is not just any book but a metaphor for birthday. I hope '*Notes At The 34th Bridge*' will inspire you to find your own place to meditate on how far you have come, where you are now and check how far you are from where you want to be.

Let this be my birthday gift to you. I hope to get a gift from you too; my DM is not far away.

Thank you, for always wanting to journey with me.

Sincerely,

Oletu Oghenenyore C.

Okutukutu, Yenegoa; Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

20th January, 2023.

*i wish i can
but it won't let me go
the more i try
the more i squirt*

*the more i want to quit
the more i bleed
o poetry, the god of words
thou hast possessed my soul*

*my head ache
from reading
& my fingers hurt
from writing
but for you my readers,
i press on without fail.*

*not all heroes wear capes.
i hope i be a secret sunshine
to light someone's darkness
without the walls hearing*

*& if i die,
when they bury me,
i want to be cremated
& kept in the library*

that way, i will remain alive.

~ Oletu Oghenenyore C.

THIRTY-FOUR

thirty-four
still have the same blind on my window
writing poems from the heart
the only way i can be, & say what i see
& feel

thirty-four
still don't know what i'm up against
but running has made me good
yet hungry i am cos my gun yet loaded
oh, i hope i know what i'm doing sooner

thirty-four
don't know how to please everyone
cos we all are mind-changing
but not gonna stop
my belief is all i've got, all getting me going

thirty-four
written over two thousand poems
none is a classic yet, just chapbooks
less sleep, few drinks, stopped smoking
plenty of breakups, still single after thirty-four Christmas

thirty-four
still on, no dying yet
Nobel prize in mind
but the pulpit too has called; priestly calling
i can be the next Desmond Tutu or St Francis de Assisi

thirty-four
i hope to triple this number before i fade
with plenty of lessons to share
& regrets to teach;
thirty-four is less than a day; looks like yesterday

thirty-four
has been a long day

HOW THE BOY BEGAN

in here is the map, a map, not of how mistletoe became
the Christmas tree, but of mother & i & father.
the story began around the April of 88, i would swim,
just water with dad's paddle, breaking the egg mom
was carrying to become a life. the memories
of the seed sown result in this oak that appeared
in the January harmattan of 89 & still growing.

i survived the smokes & escape
the hands of coffins plenty of times
hoping to wake up one day
& find everything as it is supposed to be.
a day that is yet to come after three decades
of planting, uprooting & replanting myself
in Nigeria & some good African states.

i closed my eyes & saw a perfect man
whose greenery is well cultured. but
every month of every year has
a stone press to it, everything has that little
reversed button here & there
impeding locomotion.

i'm glad
dad set me by the foot of the river,
a book & pen he hands me & said
sonnnnnnn... sail... be greater than I,
find the source of God
& grow into a belvedere for the cold birds &
here has turned everything that is within it
to poetry.

*STANDING ON DAD'S
SHOULDER TO MAKE THINGS
BETTER*

if you know where i come from, you will know being dead
& being living are synonyms. it depends on the altar
preserving that pump inside of you. now, i can't spell
the difference after seeing these four hundred & eight moons.
but i know death is an ounce heavier than sleeping.
i know cos thrice have i fainted.
one time in dad's shop & twice at home.
every day, i caress the dictionary of success
to find the right meaning of words like life; class; rank.
being a harmattan child, the anthem
of my childhood has been Christmas, but Santa
has never filled my stockings with goodies,
not even a toffee. i grew instead in a country built by others,
ours has looked anything but a city of smoke.
anything dad touches vanished.
so i became a poetic farmer
to plant fertile words to feed us & retire the worms
from ravaging our family.

*THE COUNTRY I GREW UP
SEEING
WAS NOT THE ONE GRANDMA
TOLD US*

& here, there are many sad stories, ones far
from the dream script of Lord Lugard & his amalgamation.
dreams were high when the Union Jack bowed to us,
cheers fill the pavilion. every lip in the countryside
was synonymous with laughter. in the creek,
Grandma plans to retire rich for her grandchildren
but the sons of perdition have sown discord before
nineteen sixty-six & spook everyone's dream.
when i was told to pray, i never knew why
until when the phrase 'God forbid' became a chorus in the land.
instead of arms embracing in love, we carry arms around
to draw blood. now children hung their books & thrash dreams
to hustle with their fingers on the glass box that talks,
they would PRESS, they call it pressing something to meet ends.
& the righteous ones who could not press sing dirges
as anthem for the country. we beckon
aliens to aid us, a refugee we've become in our land.
meeting in schools, mosques & churches is now Haram.
our unique playgrounds are now a graveyard.

my country has become a place where evil is rebranded
& all things die except the political stomachs
that gets pregnant with every changes in government
with no deliveries.

i was born to know the cardinal point as
east is money
north is food
west is friendship
south is home

but the country i grew up seeing is
east is cessation
north is death
west is waste
south is marginalization.

ELEGY TO MY LOVE LIFE

all the girls i've met unite with my heart, they would
come in chocolate or strawberry packs but
i've failed to grow up — more like a boy than a man.
midlife just about starting. this season, i will name it summer,
it's quietly beginning — so one sees the sun's shining,
but i don't see many sun-filled days.

it is a strange situation, being young & wild, &
i want what everyone wants plus things they don't want —
i shouldn't have been a wild collector; losing out all now that
i want one for a keep.

the sky shouldn't be grey always, so the grass doesn't dry out.
i crave one to sit with but one with no trouble. sorry,
the number i just dialled is not available. we build;
we don't just find. & when one comes by, we sit,
we talk about everything —
then we eat. the food is always us.
they've always wanted it anyway; dry grass loves fire.

i've imagined — how two people can lie down on the bed —
they talk about it & know they're not ready
yet, but they do it. *no be juju be dat?* life's too short
to be used as a trial round. i know what wrong moments are,
i can't keep being a child. i should have known much by now,
i left being a child for a long time.

girls too hate to settle except in need of Mr Right.
no wonder litters of wedding invite flood
my writing desk & mom's asking when to hand
out mine. my case is a rock reeling off a mountain
& i am standing underneath. no more game time.

i vowed one time that there will be no touching
except we were folding the blanket in the morning.
yes, until the norms are fulfilled. but don't ask me
how it went.

i hope as the summer starts, i find another hand
to hold my hand, one i will talk about everything with.
she's around, i can see her, but can she see me?
mom, dad, wait, we are coming.

AFTERMATH OF OUR POLITICAL CHARADE

it has long been on my mind but fear,
yes fear of talking.
yesterday i saw the trouble tomorrow;
if a prophet has no honour in his home town, then
a paperless poor wise man shouldn't be heard.
trouble tomorrow? when today has been sky bright clear?
We woke up with great expectations
& a wind from the government house hitting;
different cycles brought different winds.
dad taught me how to use the wind vane so early.
see, before you see the effect, you first feel the wind.
look, look at the country now, do you think it started today?
no, tomorrow's problems start today,
we just haven't learned this.

yesterday, amidst the festivity, the whole future escaped
into foreign coffers. now a messiah is needed sooner
to retrieve it.

the economy shudders; businesses crash
maybe the wind did more than was expected.
& animals invaded the offices, imagine the
the cartoon story we hear on national tv,
is this what i will tell my children?

what if the day after tomorrow did come?
will the sky be the sky we have known? or
this night will continue to kill these rising stars?
one by one, the lights the youths fight to put on
is going dim.

thirty-four
is time long enough to tell my fears.

BEFORE MY SUNSET

long before the sun will set,

i usually stroll round & round the village.
my diary has become a calling
how does one take the bull by the horn?
at the same time as the sun's setting,
joshua prayed & it stood still.
Hezekiah moved the sun backward by ten degrees.
i have to stop time. the clock just clocks thirty-four.
it's almost midday. shouldn't i give life to this tree
so it stops shedding leaves before it's time to shed leaves?

about the fire, i have been my dictator, producing
my match & fuel. but
what is taking long before i spark? it's nothing,
this fire, when it blazes up, when i set myself up,
they will come to watch me burn; from this creek to the world
but i heard fiona, the small chess queen from kwate ask:
coach, am i ready? i should be, at a score plus ten & four.

hmmm... no better time to start than now.
but i'm a lone ranger, an amateur in this thing —
well, i don't have to end as they are saying.
the leaves are gone, but the root still stands,
if water is around, it will again sprout.
Tares Oburumu will tell me, read, write, read & read more,
the words will flow to you like waters seeking balance.
he's right. words have become well in him.
he has proven it. i will follow his trail
& that of derek walcott & ocean vuong
& louise glück & you & you

so when the sun is down, you will weep, raking my ashes,
you will pour me back to the earth & my works will come alive
like shakespeare to thousands of generations to come.

getting set to set myself ablaze now
before my sunset.

A CITY PAINTED WITH CHOCOLATE

(for Itunuoluwa A.)

i think we should have been floating
like a ship on the water, but the people
at the waterfront of certainty will spoil our story.
they say i do not have a digger yet to carve my dreams,
no dig out my dreams.
elsewhere, you, a city, painted with chocolate,
rest, unperturbed.

in you, i see a dagger & a flower. What for?
to kill doubt & plant trust? you're learning fast.

yonder is far, & the bridge is not ready. you hold
the vision in your hand. wait, you said, don't hurry.
i will wait too. i will wait for you. i hope
no man picks you up
before my train halt
cos gold is still gold even under the earth.

since the casket has miss me thirty-four solid times,
i think, you, are, where beautiful things happen.
be my paradise & i will hold my mic & sing
after all said has been done in the village laboratory.

*WHAT I CAN SAY ABOUT LOVE
WHEN I ONCE FOUND IT*

my love for her, akin to a gazelle, fierce
& sweet, my lips ache to make our bodies complete.
i plant hope on the mountains, where blades
of grasses fear to tread. it's so tantalizing & true,
making my heart race & senses anew.

my dad spoke about the rapture. its pleasure
is divine, & leaves me in a trembling state of mind. the fire
within me is ever so strong. in one another's arms,
we should belong.

when will this heat of passion burning so bright,
be quelled? no desire here can quash the nights but her
that's living beyond the gulf of my heart. bodies
move in perfect harmony, in wild abandon,
they surrender there. but mine is wisp & smokes.

our souls, at a time connected as one, we thought
to surrender to this blissful future fun. cos the passion
ever burning, so divine, will forever remain
between you & i. but you've far ran away.

SOWING OAT

(for her, J. G.)

one day,
i took my paddle
down the river. the water
peaceful & calling,
i've swum there before.
that day
i dive in long before
i remember the life jacket.
a maiden's net held me
& my paddle balanced
& a fish swam in.

she was happy
& took the fish home to heal.
wait, did i just invent my shoreline?
the last time i saw them,
the fish has grown
what a fine print i made of her petals
& she's happy
& she wouldn't let me
cos i'm still half-moon.

i'm sorry i'm not there
to assist
but i will keep telling the world
i've met the strongest woman
after my mother.

WAS IT ME THAT NEVER DID TRY?

(for myself)

flying fish,

 sunbathing,
in its glory. two sparrows
 sat on the twig, counting
the snowflakes, as they fall.

how the sun

 recedes for the moon, a moon, that
sometimes, is shy... to come out, like me.
 at least, it

 comes out sometimes,

 but me hiding, i have

my

 reasons:

what if, i retire to start & then lose it all?

what if, i write & record that song & no one wants to hear it?

what if, i never win the Oscar despite my performances?

what if, i never sit on the board after giving my all?

what if, i ask her out & she says no with my daring courage?

it's more than

 a talent call

 & response to a thing. my fears:

i can't launch the ship i spent my life building, the sea
is beautiful but tempestuous. i can't chisel the rock, what
if, i never find an angel in it? yes God gave me a wing
but men aren't birds to dare fly, why dare?

what if, i am holed up because i never did try?

what if, i had buried myself long ago?

what if, i...?

what if?

LIFE IS RUNNING AWAY

fleeting,
the fears in me have piled up, the height of Goliath,
sizes, shapes & colours; ages & stages
we journey on the runway with life running away.

i pause once in an airport, at a scene, walking
side by side, like a split screen, a man old enough
to be my father grasps his son old enough to be me
walking. i wondered what it will be like if it was us, me & dad
or my son & i.

the torrid crowd streaming the terminal, busily moving
towards their destination. i wish i know where they
were all heading: to offices; to families; to vacations;
to the grave? some coming in, some going out;

some have reached their final destination, & others
just beginning their journeys, many miles
ahead. & on the mirror door, i saw myself,
what is my journey? where am i?

once i was too old to be a child yet too young
to be a man. & now midlife's calling, i will be
too old to be young & yet far young to allow
the sign of ageing to bind me prematurely.

life, slowly, is running away; crisis, identity clash.
i spent my teenage years finding myself
only to use midlife to wonder who i have become.
still on the rocky road, dead night, with no light or map

to guide. no signpost. no one to ask
& life is running away.

PAIN OF A SORRY CITIZEN

if i tell you how much i miss Ghana now
only my lady, Miss Hakika
from the north can understand;
having been under falling metals
hitting them like sulphuric asphalt.

the saying 'home is the best'
is not for someone from my village
here we confess some home
away from home is better
& this is no fluke.

if my tall daddies in the rock can be shocked
when we are being bombed
& all in their minds is securing the next election for their party
you should know the giant slump
after the last patriot in the rock died —Abacha.

shut your trap, don't give me a lecture
military regime better than civilian
at least we dine with evil wielding guns
at least we know what we were against
unlike these bloody civilians
play-acting saint movies
but looting our resources
milking our bag with senseless policies
& killing us & being shocked by the news.

coup is the way out
to force austerity on corrupt stomach
sending these idiots fleeing abroad;
better to know we're under a despot
than be with a pretentious pastor
who the devil himself fears

PVC

pvc –
people versus corruption.
we are not voting,
we are only selecting
the type of corruption we want
but
we are still learning
to select the lesser evil
among the evils
marketed by the fingers behind the wheel.
in Nigeria,
democracy can be defined as
'money of the people
stolen from the people
to buy the conscience of the people'.

THE MAN I WANT TO BE

VERSUS THE MAN THEY WANT

ME TO BE

like the mole, i burrow under specks of dirt
sorting the secrets i kept locked
deep within myself many times.
in that cave, i wondered who can handle me
i'm this fried, & lost:

trying to find the father in me for him
trying to find the husband in me for her
trying to find the friend in me for them

men don't admit to losing this game
yes, we men barely admit to having lost
because pride sits on the fence of their brain
yet the consequences freeze them like snow
further & further down the hole

like the mole, i go underground &
nibble at my secrets, i kept them locked deep
within myself many, further & further
than I could be reached
except for God's help

BUYING TIME

yes or yes, like
waters, eroding the banks
of the river, the time & times has taken
its toll on me,

gradually, i'm losing my
Schwarzenegger body
for a melting chocolate bar,
lost grounds may be recovered

but not time. i
won't sit in denial
& watch my life evaporate,
watch me take charge &

bounce back better.

CHOOSE WHAT YOU FEED ON

IF YOU ARE GOING TO

SURVIVE LIFE MANY STORMS

i once heard

life is what happens
when you are busy
making other plans.

grab a coffee &

take a sit,
don't let it happen
without you noticing.

happy moments

& rehearsed them when life is hard
pay attention to every moment
preserve them into memories.

FINDING MY FATHER TO BE A FATHER

(for a boy I called)

time
will take you
& make you grow
but how do you become a father?

biology
will give you babies
but how do you father them?

you
may kiss the bride
is but a step to the journey in view.
can you master fate
you've never witnessed?

i
regret to be
the unavailable stranger in your life
i
was the first man
you met but didn't meet
the first you knew but didn't know.

when
you go to bed tonight
i remember you are one of them
that stays in homes without a father

SOLACE

who am i?

i'm that boy
who in the pool force
the beach ball under
only to float in secs
like a man gasping for air

don't laugh, that's
my pain & regrets floating,
joy too has floated but less often.
& for those few joys that've floated

i am more grateful

WHY SCARS?

the past is a password
a key, encrypting before
& interpreting the future.
it explain the present
a reminder of how we got here.
scars, lessons
exploring how far our lives
have travelled.

STILL LOOKING FOR ME

(for myself)

...weeping may endure for the night...

darkness descends, there & then
i do away with the pretence
& think it through
if the joys i shared
under the sunlight
were worth it
or i just had
to be
a man.

night time,
truly makes
people honest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Oletu Oghenenyore C. (*pen-name: Nyore Note*) is a vituperative rebel-poet, activist, storyteller, author, content creator and an aluminium fabricator of Urhobo descent in Delta State but lives in the Creek part of Bayelsa State. If he is not reading and writing, then he is watching a movie or taking a walk or busy chitchatting about anything on or offline. He loves to write of happenings around him. His works have found home/forthcoming in many anthologies like 'Black is Beautiful', 'Thirty Shades Of A rose', 'Once Upon A Time Tale Vol 1', 'African Child Anthology' and online journals like ArtingArena, Poemify, The Yellow House Library, Williwash Blog, African Poem Archives blog, Stripe Magazine, etc.

He is the author of two chapbooks plus many others to come. He can be reached via

Twitter and Instagram: @NyoreNote

Facebook: @NyoreNote @Oletu.Oghenenyore

Email: oletuoghnenenyore@gmail.com

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

[Life In The Crucible](#)
[Because You Want Me To Talk](#)

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

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