



AN IDLY BEYOND FLESH^{AND} BLOOD

STEPHEN OLADAYO

OLADOKUN



ArtingArena Poetry Chapbook Contest
2023
WINNER

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Winner; 2023 ArtingArena Poetry Chapbook Contest

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Dedication:

To my late parents, Pa James and Mrs. Funmilayo Oladokun. And to every lovers of poem. May you remain the spark, flower & honey...

Author's note:

Poetry is like a talking drum; it is multifaceted in its interpretations, which is its beauty and uniqueness among many genres of literature. I believe a poem means what the reader interprets it to be.

In my opinion, the poems in this chapbook, "An Idly Beyond Flash and Blood," evoke feelings and reflections on life in general. I try to explore several subjects ranging from grief to death to love to spirituality to encouragement. For instance, I do not see death as a loss, but as a transition to another realm where both the living and the dead shall meet again.

The words of each poem are crafted to evoke thought on the self as well as affect our actions and inactions in the present and for future generations.

Despite the complexity of various subjects in the poems, I employed a simple tone and structure blended with vivid imagery to appeal to everybody.

Therefore, I hope that everybody reading the poems in this chapbook will find meaning for themselves in each of the poems.

Stephen Oladayo Oladokun

Blurbs:

Stephen in this collection is sleepless of the beyond. With that burden, he spontaneously flows through simple diction for even the poetry phobia to come to line with his collection. A generation like ours who lives in the shadows of the realities of life should come to the consciousness of our mortality as they digest this collection.

-Ushie Emmanuel Akwagiobe.

Director, Blessed Child Academy, Abuja.

Stephen Oladayo Oladokun's chapbook AN IDLY BEYOND FLESH AND BLOOD is a scented bud of grief conjured in resonating poetic beauty.

In this collection, the poet philosophizes about loss, life and the human condition. The poet is empathetic with his words yet soothes the reader and dares you to plunge into a feast of enchanting language.

-Ojo Olumide Emmanuel

Author, *How Flowers Pollinate Before the Arrival of Butterflies*.

Acknowledgement:

I am forever grateful to God Almighty, the Source of my inspiration. I also thank the editors of the following publications, in which these poems, under different version originally appeared:

- ❖ African Writer Magazine: *A Deep Shallow Tale* and *To the Land that Gave me Birth*
- ❖ The Shallow Tale Review: *Enigma*
- ❖ Icefloe Press: *An Idly beyond Flesh and Blood* and *The Tears of Forgotten Ghosts*
- ❖ Creation and Criticism: *Escaped from Abyss* and *Dinner with Lucifer*
- ❖ Duck Town Magazine: *Dinner with the Sea and the Sky*
- ❖ Diet Milk Magazine: *The Tale of our Burning Hair*
- ❖ Pine Cone: *Kontigi*
- ❖ Inksound: *Fate of Hard Trees*
- ❖ Sledgehammer: *Sweetness of Death*
- ❖ Fae Dreams: *Song of Victory*

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Foreword

Stephen Oladayo Oladakun's **An Idly Beyond Flesh and Blood** is not merely a collection of poems; it's a visceral experience. It's a descent, a deep shallow dive into the heart of human experience, where the mundane and the mystical intertwine, the personal and the universal collide.

These poems are rooted in the rich soil of his heritage, a landscape both physical and spiritual. Images of rivers, mountains, and ancient trees are interwoven with the spectral figures of ancestors, demons, and ghosts—the echoes of history and the weight of inherited trauma resonating deeply. The poems explore themes of loss, violence, faith, and resilience with unflinching honesty, often with a stark, almost brutal directness that leaves the reader breathless.

Yet, within this darkness, there is a fierce, persistent light...

Oladakun's poems are not simply lamentations; they are acts of creation, acts of defiance. They are a testament to the enduring human spirit, the capacity for hope even in the face of despair. The speaker navigates a world both deeply wounded and fiercely beautiful, finding moments of grace, moments of connection, even in the darkest corners.

This chapbook is a testament to the power of poetry to illuminate the human condition in all its complexity and contradiction. It's a journey into the depths of the self, a journey that demands attention, reflection, and ultimately, a renewed appreciation for the profound beauty and enduring strength of the human heart.

Prepare to be moved, challenged, and ultimately, profoundly touched by the raw, unflinching honesty of '**An Idly Beyond Flesh and Blood.**'

CEO

Editor-in-Chief

Oyin Bimbo

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A DEEP SHALLOW TALE

there is a deep shallow tale on my tongue, a bitter sweet on my lips.
i do not want to pen this on tablet of thorn, but on pages of amaryllis.
//father's hen has swallowed a pin but on my neck sits the flint.//
the village river, today, has taken another count & grown fatter,
as I squatted to embrace shadow of neem & watch mountain kissing
the sky in romantic scenery, a vulture greeted from shying sunlight
amidst crooked branches. Spare my portion, sang a raven from dancing leaves,
an army of ants on naked road, marching to where my buttocks almost kissed
the earth to feed on daggling body above my head. //forest too, has taken
another count.// I held air in the tail, sucked venom from anus of wind &
licking dust. I paused at crossroads... the village river is thirsty
// for blood not water// & Malabar Almond rejoices for lack of children
in our huts. Have you seen where mothers eat their own placenta? But here...
we are lost souls at the edge of an ocean without life jacket & Our fathers
sit on our graves // where they bury us alive.// As the forest hungers
so the village river thirsts.

ENIGMA

the sun gently touched my skin
under the canopy of sycamore.
at the tweaking of bamboo trees,
the moon opened my eyes to stories;

of a crippled man
on the top ladder of life

of a kind woman caught
between sweet teeth of sorrow

of a sturdy warrior
killed by an ant

of a mighty labourer
without bread on his table

of countless living deads;
ghosts walking on the streets

of unseen beings without veins

ruling over blood and flesh

of unspoken words

louder than a moving train

of a chronic sinner

preaching repentance to saints

of a grade-one lunatic

selling cure for madness

of a blind man

leading a troop to battle

of a pregnancy

aborted at hot noon

of a giant star

set at mid day

of a war won not
by weapons, but praise

of children older
than their parents.

the world is like a bat
it turns upside down
at the call of sunlight.

A MELTED HEART

i am a bee among colourful flowers.

i produced thickest honey

that glued my legs and wings together.

i am a rare almond.

from my body a stick of matches

that set fire on my branches was gotten.

i gave birth to the feeling

that taunts my marrow.

like a clay pot butted against rock,

i am broken into pieces

by your heavy image

that i carry on my head

AN IDLY BEYOND BLOOD AND FLESH

a demon knocked at my door—today, yesterday... like a creditor
chasing after a debtor. together, we rode on wind & lightening
to somewhere beyond the reach of blood and flesh. the moon hid
behind gray cloud, candle light faded away in the hands of old ladies
& a ghost in my father's clothes called for romantic dance. i saw
our ancestors roasting corns & dancing to crack-crack-crack
of gnats' wings—mystical drumbeats. a flute, hissing in the hands
of a cat as an ibex purred familiar song where their feet had first
hugged a naked road. my unborn children, holding plates of leftover food
peeped behind a thick veil in a land where the sun & the moon wear
same regalia & their footsteps thudded on their mother's belly like a fall
of a giant baobab. i beheld my mother's sagged breasts in the mouth
of a foreign dog & looked at the demon in the eye & saw a piece of orange
hanging on his fangs like bat on palm tree. it wasn't the real demon, but his brother.
for he kissed me at forehead then brought me back to my igloo
where a piece of me laid like a log of wood. i felt a gentle paw on my cheek,
cold water in my eyelids & i gasped for air—it's only a step between past and future.

ESCAPED FROM ABYSS

i thought i couldn't be but the worst

for all i had had been lost;

parents, friends were all gone

what miracle death had not done?

i grew wild like lips ready to kiss

on my tiny body even the sun hissed

i explored my environ like gun boom

that I might merry in my doom

my song, my shield and my own bowl

created deep wound within my soul

so i painted my walls with tears

as I held the future in terrible fear

but when i ate the lines of the Holy Book

my eyes were cleared like the water of Ancient Brook

for in its heart i found His name to hail

and now i am writing a better tale.

DINNER WITH THE SEA AND THE SKY

i would sit by the blue shore
watching a long arm of sea kissing the sky
as wind danced upon waters
father would point air in the eye:
that's where people dine with the sea & the sky.
i would watch ship battling with tide
sailing passengers to dine with the sea & the sky.
when it returned from voyages,
i would smile as passengers alighted from
dining with the sea & the sky.
then, on Monday morning,
as the sky was shedding tears on earth,
a black bird sat on our roof to sing ladies' song,
a bell at the mouth of our cathedra tolled to & fro,
mother's eyes grew twice their sizes
& turned red like hot coal
her voice choked as if a jack sat on it:
your father has gone to dine with

the sea & the sky.

Gone!

Gone?

Gone...

i cried he didn't take me along

& sat where almond and cherry held

hands in fellowship

waiting for my father to come home

& welcome him with a smile from

dining with the sea and the sky.

there's a running river in my head

a horse galloping in my heart

i was cut in web of thought:

either to write you a dirge or a lyric

but, your eyes, too staring to sleep.

not like other passengers,

you had gone to dine with

the sea and the sky!

I shall keep watch by the old shore

for the ship to come and sail me home,

where the sea & the sky dine.

THE TEARS OF FORGOTTEN GHOSTS

the sky blinks an eye & roars &
tears cloud apart to grace wild flowers
on the soil that welcomed our fathers with opened arms.
i feel a conk on my head, a groan in my throat &
their hoarse voices grasp me like hunter's trap:

children of the black soil, ashes of wailing flame,
you set up an anvil then
crush your heads on it with a sledge hammer
& tattoo your bodies with your own blood.
you are drowning while dancing on ocean—a
baptism into a new birth—you say.

& I, lost at sea:
shall we find our bones in the heart of sea?

not today, not today, gloats a dead skin from our

armpits, blessed are the bones buried in the sea.

from across the narrow sea to the head of baobab,
their wounded footprints roar on face of waters:

children of the sun, black warriors in dark coats
marching on bleeding soil, find me fire without ashes
but, you, you are burning on waters leaving your
nakedness uncover, you've barbed your hair &
left your head bald. tell me, ashes of the wailing
flame, black warriors in black coats, as we are
sewing beads around waist of whirlwind, shall
we find our voices in the air?

THE WAY UP IS DOWNWARD

having sojourned on donkey's back
dined with sharks in the heart of sea
feasted with vultures to form clique
i saw people with no fate
a nation with no eyes to see
blaming fate for their faith.
mystery wrapped my eyes in new birth;
i saw a censer of gold
dangling on fate from old
pouring blessings & curses on earth.
yet, another mystery I saw
as I carved life out of ancient tree;
a voice dancing for loss of glee
glowing like ravaging tongue of fire
majestic like golden hand of sun on shire
fools paid to watch and merry
but the wise watched to tarry

then set to work his claw.

again, I buried my head in the dark

that I may know the secret of wealth

but the act of success is not stealth

if we hold on to our barque.

so I searched through the wind

i listened at noon to the moon

& I found the world in swoon

‘the way up is downward,’ Said the Wind.

DINNER WITH LUCIFER

on a dinner in hell with Lucifer

shield of faith, I fastened very high

knowing hell as cool as aquifer

thrice, heart spoke, but to conifer

sip me a little, called Lucifer's eye

on a dinner in hell with Lucifer

my tentacles, too strong to quaver

so I thought, till my soul was set on fire

& my burnt hair scented like fresh aquifer.

there wasn't room to decipher.

there wasn't time for Lord's prayer

on a dinner in hell with Lucifer.

i pondered, 'Devil is a crucifer'

but Lucifer was too truthful to lie.

he gave me nail & voice & said, 'crucify'.

twice, I should 've stopped being a- bluffer

for faith was no bird to fly.

i wished I were as wise as Junifer.

no water but blood on a dinner with Lucifer.

TEARS OF A GHOST

i held life on my palm
to view the globe from my abode
only to see bomb in naked air,
hot coal hovering over my head
bald for thousand years of eating books.

i travelled back to the starting point
before a gift from China was received.
my tiny legs walked on hope
as countless mouths awaited my favour
amidst several ropes on my hands.

i stood upon water & fire
in a garment soaked in oil
from fighting a war I never created.
i cried joyously in the dark
my swollen belly pleased eyes

& African map, clearly drawn on my face.

yet, I'm ray of sun on dark ocean,

the leg that carries the future,

the lamp at gloomy tunnel

& eyes are watching my dying light.

when I'm finally gone, tell the globe

i sacrifice my blood for her soul.

THE TALE OF OUR BURNING HAIR

we lay our eggs on stream before all birds
of prey squawking for our seeds. I see demon
lurking under mother's bed, missiles dancing
in bare air, a spider backing a scorpion to war,
cockroaches taking refuge with fowl, death raising
a toast & my father's ghost shaking hand with our
last born. I rest my head on pew beside my brother's spirit
they peek at us from behind a wheel, tongs jubilating
in their hands- they are ripen for burnt offering- they say.
our blood, sweet savour unto the lord shall it be upon
the earthen altar that cooked our brothers and sisters.
our women, leading unusual procession paint their lips
with red clod as they carry their children head less from
dancing flame & count their kids in ashes.

KONTIGI

i'm sold out at no cost
as an ornament of admiration.

he keeps me in a bright dark box,
places me in his arms,
ceres me like a doll
and kisses me like wine.

i'm to him, a Kontigi
he plays to ease his nerve.
my sweet groan, a delight to him.

SWEETNESS OF DEATH

i was burnt to ashes

by the golden ball [above.]

like a candle, i hawked fire.

my skin [even] melted in snow

as i bent my back to whips of rain

i spit to slap the sky [above my head]

but on my face landed the [white] foam.

i was crushed under cold hand of the moon

& war within my ribs drove

away appetite for pepper soup.

i was caught in cobwebs

[even] the earth prey on me in prayer

& I merried in sorrow[full] tone:

that I wouldn't behold pleasure of

this unpleasurable world till I close

my eyes in dreamless sleep.

i buried my being by seashore.

like a tree beheaded at midday,

i rouse from death[a spirit of blood & flesh.]

a rose plant grew from my grave

it sent out scent like jasmine

to preach the gospel of my resurrection

from east to west & north to south

i'm dead [already,] i can't die [again.]

TO THE LAND THAT GAVE ME BIRTH

aroma of roasted corns
woke me from bamboo bed
birds chirped over my head
under cold hand of harmattan
& i beheld mountains extending
hands of fellowship to the sky

cry of a mortar & pestle deafened ears
from afar – a call to feast on mountain
& men armed for war – straight
to the wood to keep our race alive
& fresh wine, gulping from Iyamopo Hill
would be ready to cut my kinsmen's throat
after the battle.

i heard egrets beating drum in
new horizon – they had travelled
through the edges of the world
singing praises of our ancestors

& when i opened my eyes,
i was cut like a mouse in Hunter's trap
between teeth of sweet memories.
under the great baobab that gave me name
i beheld the sun beckoning on us to wash our
garment with black soap & erect our flag that
has long prostrated like agama on mountaintop

my throat choked & i gasped for words
i searched for my voice amidst
my kinsmen but... gone!

so, I've woven this poem gaging out
of my fading vein into a chaff
that wind may carry it to the highest heaven
& tell the world we are born of the sun & moon
& our black garments make no difference from
any white garment in blue sky.

FATE OF HARD TREES

when we left our ancestors' land to wrap our feet
In foreign soil like cricket, mother spewed out dark
ocean from her belly & we sailed on its waves & tides. We plugged
our ears in the air, a neighbor echoing unfamiliar song
of our tang led beard and bushy hair—madness she said,
but we were learning the ways of new birth. Father sat
on couch, watching agama affirming his thought as we
navigated our paths through the smoky land. His eyes kissed mine,
searching for a piece of cake in my bones—another seeds
of sycamore have been stolen from him. From naked road
to the one in black gown, our dying souls hung on whirlwind
like bats on palm tree. We hid our fears behind the garment of smile
& worn our brothers' skin of east with their ghosts.
we, the hard trees must not shed tears. The sky spread her wings
over us, a single mother with four mouths at hand hawked water at call
of the sun & body at call of the moon. Here, no fathers but men
whose blood scent fresh liquor—the hybrid of Baobab & Leadwood
rotting on the fertile soil. As we plugged our roots into the strange soil
to have a taste of water, a woman jumped in front of a lorry, they said

she was learning to dive on soccer pitch & her headless body was gifted
to her husband—a hard tree that must not shed tears.

THE POEM I LOVE TO SING

i love to sing the poem
that sparks in the eye of river,
the tasteless tale on foreign tongues,
dark verses in tinted stanzas
gushing out of my veins.

i love to sing in poem,
of voices echoing across
the dead sea that swallowed our
fishermen at midnight then
sent us their footprints on water
& sew us their blood, a black garment.

i love to sing the poem
of skulls feasting behind our abode,
memories planted in vases like roses
of feeble hands that once shot
deadly arrows to dissidents' camp
of limp legs that once danced in full view of the moon

on this land we now grow grains for gin.

i love to sing the poem

of pregnancy gorged out with spear

to appease the gods of foreign lands,

of men castrated for their colour,

of mouths padlocked in sugarcane plantation,

of shadow riding on black horse&

of pieces of cake exchanged for a bottle of gin.

i will sing this poem in song,

even when my voice is sour;

of our children dancing in the flame at noon

& how we sailed across the sea barefooted.

this is a song they sang in 'Babylon'

& i shall forever hew a piece of it in my skin

SONG OF VICTORY

i stand like Robin on this giant wall
firmly erected on pretty black soil
clothed in glorious colours like pall
and glowing, glittering, blushing like blended oil.

i look at the journey from a far
and darkness illuminate my thought
but as you are walking on crouches of Alpha
i remember a song we were taught:

staring as day rises from slumber,
as sun triumphs over thick darkness,
as moon rules though stars are without number
that is a reminder of greatness.

so, I charge you to wake the giant in you
your Anchor will cause mouths to boo
for in His hand rest true victory.

An Idly

Beyond

Flesh n Blood

The End

About the author

Stephen Oladayo Oladokun is a writer, photographer and educator from Nigeria. He is the first runner up of ArtingArena Poetry Chapbook Competition (2024). His works have appeared and forthcoming on Afribary, Fly on the Wall Poetry, Queenview Magazine, The Shallow Tales Review, African Writers Magazine, Milk Diet, Ice Floe Press, My Woven Words, PEN Nigeria, Melbourne Culture Corner Review, Corona Blue, Sledgehammer, INNASAEL Journal, Creation and Criticism Journal, Duck Town Magazine and elsewhere. You can contact him on Instagram as Oracle_Voice and on Facebook as Oracle's Voice and Tweeter as OraclesVoice1 or at stephenoladayo45@gmail.com.

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Together, we create. Together, we shine.

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ArtingArena is a creative sanctuary where African art, literature, and design converge. We exist to celebrate the voices, visions, and vibrant expressions that define our continent — and to share them with the world.

Founded with a dream to make creativity a shared language, ArtingArena offers a stage for poets, storytellers, performers, and visual artists to shine. Our platform publishes inspiring works of fiction, poetry, and essays; hosts interviews and contests; and spotlights artistic talents shaping the future of African creativity.

At our core, we believe that every artistic expression — word, sound, or color — carries power. Power to heal. Power to challenge. Power to unite. Through our growing community, we nurture that power and give it a global audience.

Our mission: To promote African literature and art in all its forms, inspire emerging voices, and connect creatives across borders.

Our values: authenticity, excellence, inclusivity, and artistic freedom.

A note from the founder:

“ArtingArena was born from a love for words and the desire to see African art breathe freely. We are building not just a platform, but a movement — where art speaks boldly and beautifully.” — Oyin Bimbo, Founder & CEO

Join us. Create with us. The world is your canvas.



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