

BOYS ARE NOT STONES II



A Country Of
BROKEN BOYS

EDITED BY:

Jaachi Anyatonwu, Jamiu Ahmed, John Chizoba Vincent, Uchendu Njieonye
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TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	9
General Review Of 'Boys Are Not Stones I' Anthology	13
Revisiting Memories Of Boys Returning Home From Asylum	
Taofeek Ayeyemi (Aswagaawy) - <i>The Mirror</i>	21
Ayouba Toure - <i>Thesaurus For Boys' Body</i>	23
Tukur Loba Ridwan - <i>To Cry Is To Say We Are Not Dead Yet</i>	24
Emmanuel Ojeikhodion - <i>A Country Of Broken Boys</i>	26
Fame Odey - <i>Your Body Is Asylum</i>	28
Temidayo Jacob - <i>Boys Are Not Beautiful</i>	30
Fadlullah Balogun - <i>Nonage Shades Of Duress</i>	32
Iliya Kambai - <i>How Did You Learn To Hide Boys In Water?</i>	33
Akor Agada Nathaniel - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	35
Ibrahim Olalekan Adedeji - <i>Save The Boy-Child, Too</i>	37
Amaka Tobie - <i>Invisible Hymen</i>	39
Bello Abdul Hakeem - <i>Feel My Pain</i>	42
For Everything That Comes In Shape Of Boys And Their Tribulations	
Basit Ajibade - <i>Get Me Some Buckets</i>	46
Stephen Tooche - <i>The Boy Child</i>	48
Ugwuoke Barnabas Chimaobi - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	50
Adeoti Quadri Adekunle - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	52
Obasieze Samuel - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	53
Abdul-Karim Alhassan - <i>When The Tale Is Told</i>	54
Emenike Christian Chijioke - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	60
David Victor - <i>Boys</i>	62
Kikelomo Precious - <i>A Boy Once Said</i>	64
For Boys Fading Into The Dark Side Of Their Past	
Kolade Olawale Kabir Àdèlé - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	67
Jenifer Onyeka Nmarkwe - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	68
Christopher Fidelis - <i>Water Under A Stone</i>	70
Stephen Aluko - <i>I Have A Voice!</i>	72
Semilore Kilaso - <i>This Is How We Suffer</i>	74

Fagbeyide Bamidele - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	76
Salabiu Nurh Akanni - <i>Someone's Son</i>	78
Uchendu Njionye - <i>Maps</i>	80
Adebayo Mubarak - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	82
Ajibade Abdullah - <i>Boys Don't Cry</i>	83

Template Of Dark Memories In Coloured Verses

Abu Bakr - <i>The Night Comes, & I Am</i>	85
Adeyeye James Oluwatobi - <i>For Boys Like Me</i>	87
Faith Edoja - <i>Tell Dad</i>	88
Anthony Alexz - <i>We Are Not Monsters</i>	90
Olaniyi Olajide - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	93
Okam Cheta - <i>Boys Who Found Home On The Streets</i>	97
Izunna Okafor - <i>Because I'm A Boy</i>	98

Of Things We Tried To Love Holding The Smile Of Our Fathers

Abioye Treasure Samuel - <i>Because We Are Boys</i>	101
Adedayo Ademokoya - <i>Survivor In The Field Of Killing</i>	103
Adeyemi Jamuu - <i>Save The Boy Child</i>	105
Jenkin Benaiah - <i>For The Boychild</i>	107
Tanimonure Richard Adewale - <i>The Poetry Of A Penis</i>	108
Ajao Ibrahim Bello - <i>Too Sweet</i>	110
Ezinne Njoku - <i>The Boy Who Never Cried</i>	111
Bello Sodeeq Adekunle - <i>We (Boys) Shiver Too</i>	113
Ariyo Ahmad - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	114

For Boys Like Us Who Are To Come Again

Nnadi Samuel - <i>For Boys With Odd Numbers (II)</i>	121
Eze Peter Njoku Chimaobi - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	123
Christopher Maureen Amarachi - <i>I Am A Boy</i>	125
Oseni Oluwagbemiga - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	127
Nwabuisi Kenneth - <i>You Are God's Little Eyes</i>	129
Wellington Nwogu - <i>I Am In The Midst Of Fear</i>	131
Testimony Jesutofunmi - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	133
Olaitan Humble - <i>A Poor Boy's Catharsis</i>	134

For The Happiness Monday Took From Us But Refused To Return

Maxwell Onyemaechi - <i>Boys Have Emotions Too</i>	137
Grant Williams - <i>What It Takes</i>	138
Owolabi A. Olanrewaju - <i>Burnt Boys</i>	140
Muhammad Kabir - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	142
Derioteidor Kenneth - <i>For The Boy Child</i>	144
David Chukwudi Njoku - <i>Creativity Is Our Integrity</i>	145
Ashaolu Temitope - <i>Not Stones But Souls</i>	146
John Festus - <i>Little Dead Soul</i>	149
Nuel Uyi - <i>Come To Think Of It</i>	151
Danhunsi Olabode - <i>For Boys Who Are Broken</i>	152
Busamoya Phodiso Modirwa - <i>Real Boy</i>	154
John Ifeanyi - <i>Second Class Species</i>	155
Benaiah Jenkin - <i>Travails Of A Boychild</i>	157

Differences: Rising And Falling Voices In Dialogues

Nwuguru Chidebere Sullivan - <i>Mismatched Footsteps</i>	159
Aganaba Jesudubami Jemima – <i>Mother Lover</i>	165
Jasper Igwe - <i>Rain Of Sorrow</i>	170
Faruq Shitta - <i>The Stones In A Boy's Heart</i>	173
Ifesie Ozichukwu - <i>Broken High-Men</i>	181
Kelvin J.Shachile - <i>The Last Months Of A Boy</i>	185

Neglect And Rejection

Matthew K Chikono - <i>The Jacket On The Wall</i>	201
Precious Cole - <i>Boys Are Not Stones II</i>	207

Remembering The Days Of Reckoning

Hannah Peters - <i>I Died Before I Was Dead</i>	211
Chikere Bright - <i>You Are A Boy, Not A Stone</i>	217
Peace Ufedojo Haruna - <i>Rose In Rock's Clothing</i>	222

Closing Voices: Longing Thoughts

Ojo Adewale Iyanda - <i>The Joy Of Fatherhood</i>	233
Adesina Ajala - <i>Children Of The Rags And Bowls</i>	235
Adamu Danjuma - <i>Boys Are Not Stones</i>	239
Ehi-Kowochio Ogwiji - <i>Is Neglect Your Son's Nanny?</i>	241
Mgbada Chiemerie - <i>Dear Boy Child</i>	243

DEDICATION

...FOR THE BOYCHILD

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the presume indicative belief, and the universal conception of male predominance over the female counterpart had given rise to active voices from all over the globe; regarding gender inequality, unfairness and injustice contending the girl child across the nation. These gender disparities aforementioned include but not limited to: Right to education, right to justice against domestic violence, abuse and molestation, discrimination and child marriage. This persistent increase in awareness, campaign and support by the women right advocates and girl child activists had led to the epochal advancement of the girls growing massively to become intellectual women taking up the leadership, academic, technological roles and positions here in Africa and the world at large. This is quite impressive and highly commendable. In the pursuit of giving voice to the girl child, the world seems to have relaxed in securing that both genders (Male and Female) are equally improving. The society seem to have forgotten the boy child or not noticed in advent that they also exist, too, or apparently thought; “they should be fine” with the sham presumption and predisposition that boys are superior and stronger, hence they don't need the care and attention.

Presently, the boy child, especially the African boy child has been given less attention and support, thereby

making them less productive and competitive. Therefore, it's necessary and urgent that as human right advocates, we need to find a way of creating an enabling clause and structure by investing on the male child as well as the female child to balance the sloppy societal construct and other stereotypical conception. The act of creating a balance to the unbalanced gender favoritism has made some concerned minds and brave voices pushed for a "Boy Child Day" in November 11, 2018 to campaign for the boy child neglect here in Nigeria. The campaign, tagged; **"BOYS ARE NOT STONES"** was spearheaded by John Chizoba Vincent, Jamiu Ahmed and Jaachi Anyatonwu, among others — to create equal awareness and support for the boy child, too — and this is neither in any way to demean women liberation movement nor to create gender competition or wage war against the prevalent girl child activism.

The **"BOYS ARE NOT STONES I"** anthology, (published by ACEworld Publishers) a collection of poems, essays and short stories based on the discourse revolving the plight and quandary faced by the boy child was first opened for submission to poets and writers around the world last year. Pen wielders were pressed to participate beyond boundaries and borders — after all, true and selfless humanity knows no boundary — so alongside Nigerian gifted pens, the collection was esteemed to feature authors from Ghana, Zambia and South Africa. "Boys are not stones I" is now succeeded by **"A Country Of Broken Boys."**

The number of poets and writers who ardently contributed to this year collection of poems, essays and short stories merit a distinct coinage to modify their *heartistry* prowess. They do not only harness the shade of colours on the platter of rhetoric devices alongside impressive language and well woven lines — effectively used to exhibit their multifaceted creativity, but also, they have proven beyond reasonable doubt that they are fledged enough to air their views and express their griefs on blazing issues with one Imperative voice. Whether they write on boy child neglect and rejection, boys fading into the dark side of their past, boys who are to come, boys in solitude and other demons, or revisiting memories of boys returning home from asylum. And like moles, they all burrow and ply through hole of nowhere which lead to somewhere under their pen — laying emphasis on nothing other than the aborted dreams and sundered homes of a country of broken boys.

In a realm that tend to derelict the affairs of the boys or choose to turn a blind eye to their welfare, these *heartists* steer their pen like a rudder to stir the mind of their readers — that the boys are neither the stones the society portray them as, nor the rock life vicissitudes have metamorphosed them into, but humans just like every other people. That boys have their fears, doubts, emotional instabilities and insecurities, which could make them feel unsafe due to the excessive burdens they shoulder and high expectations they race to live up to. In

the quest of running to make parallel ends meet, some of these boys are often pushed into all sort of social vices like: thuggery, stealing, alms-begging and *almajirism*, sex addiction, gambling, chronic alcohol and drug abuse — peradventure, some may grow into a terrorist, terrorizing the peace of the society — which is a way of bearing the detriments of neglecting these boys. Sometimes, these boys are faced with constant rejection, failure, abuse, discrimination, bully, molestation, neglect and forlorn. Since, it's a taboo for them to cry or communicate their uneasiness in this realm, they often tend to man-up and bottle-up their emotions, to keep moving on with that fallacy of “I'm good” till they finally breakdown into shards of a broken bottle from the traumas and demons they have been living to tame. Some boys often become depressed or suffer from mental disorder which may finally result them into jumping down from a tower.

As a result of that, these *heartists* have turned their pens into a plectrum of logomachy, orchestrated to pluck the strings of hearts and become a heart rhythm — beating together as one powerful voice for those voiceless boys. The plangent tone of their words; more resounding than the cathedral bells beckoned to the world to listen to the silent cries of these neglected boys — boys who by fate and chance have become the victim of a broken country.

JAMIU AHMED

GENERAL REVIEW OF 'BOYS ARE NOT STONES I' ANTHOLOGY

Reviewed by Izang Alexander Haruna

Since 2012, every October 11th the World annually pauses to focus on the phenomenon of the girl child; concerning this development Wikipedia writes "The observation supports more opportunity for girls and increases awareness of gender inequality faced by girls worldwide based upon their gender. This inequality includes areas such as access to education, nutrition, legal rights, medical care, and protection from discrimination, violence against women and forced child marriage. The celebration of the day also "reflects the successful emergence of girls and young women as a distinct cohort in development policy, programming, campaigning and research." This development didn't sit well with many people who felt it ought to be a two-way traffic, that is, the boy child ought to be in the foray too. With action speaking louder than voice, a few bold minds pushed a campaign for a masculine equivalent of the girl child day; in Nigeria, Jamiu Ahmed, Jaachi Anyatonwu, and John Chizoba Vincent led the way and to propel the campaign to better frontiers initiated and edited an anthology 'BOYS ARE NOT STONES: An Anthology for the Boy Child' to commemorate 11th November 2018 which has become boy child day in what may be for Nigeria alone (leaving one to wonder the place of the

16th May stipulated by United Nations). The boy child day celebration is not the subject of review but the anthology above noted; as the first of its kind, it deserves special attention as the days have rolled by to signal 1 year since its publication under ACEworld Publishers.

I will here paraphrase McFarlan's words used elsewhere in a review and appropriate it in the context herein before going any further; this anthology is a difficult one to fold into a short review. The study of poetry is and should be a complex and dynamic discussion. The study of boys' well-being, likewise, should be deep and wide-ranging. This anthology elegantly gathers the seeds of those conversations borne of experience and fiction together through its well-appointed sections of poetry and captivating short stories.

If the anthology under review is to be captured in one heading then it cannot be any different that the "Boys are not Stones" title aptly given; if it's to be summed in one broad-stroke then we can say: 'this anthology is to remind the world of boys again, complaints by artists of different spirits and voices telling of memories and scars being bore by boys shattered in the street; it tells of tales of boys whose experiences are nothing near an enchanted forest of pleasurable taste but bitter than gall; therein is found replete tales of boys under the spell of old wine, boys who returned home as a breaking news, boys learning how to empty themselves in dirge; simply put, Boys are not stones is nothing but a written memoir of a

collective relating hanging memories in creed and supplication'.

"Nobody stares at boys anymore with eyes that cast colorful lights" says one of the poets, hence the need to remind the world that the boy child has as much plight as the girl; this is the central aim of the anthology, to give voice to boys robbed of their voices and broken in spirit through the scar filled memories gotten from the street that left them shattered, and like the suffering servant in Isaiah they are sons of snores and familiar with suffering, so disfigured that there is no beauty in their eyes/experiences to attract the gaze of the world, nothing enchanting or pleasurable; funny enough these boys are bearers of experiences totally ironical to the proverbial old wine- or should they wait until they grow old before experiencing life's sweetness? To do this then, as it is done, is to open the door for these boys to return home as breaking news, that type of heartbreaking news we receive daily from the local press; to ignore the plights of boys on the street is to give them a lesson on how to empty themselves in dirge as we see plainly in this anthology. We can't tire sounding the alarm that boys are not stones, we make supplication with the last breath in us not to be mere memories of hanging creed and supplication- creed not believed and supplication left unanswered.

Boys are not stones is a novelty as far as the theme of masculine gender venting its frustrations but it tells of

issues long old as man's existence; it is a literary library as much as it's a philosophical symposium as we see minds critically approaching the theme from various perspectives. The anthology is a secular gospel not at odds with the scriptural one, it is colorful rendition of the human rights once declared by the United Nations, it is a re-presentation of the ethical codes of cultures especially African. The anthology is a depositum of rainbow-like emotions as it is of styles, creeds, traditions and aspirations not oblivious of fears and cares which stirred every pen that graced the pages under review.

A structural appraisal will show this work -first edition of what will be an annual publication- to be simple and easy to follow; the poems come first while the short stories -both fic and nonfic- follow behind as if the poems are desserts by which the stories are granulated and assimilated. The genius of the editing team shows itself in the captivating subtitles used to break down the complex work, albeit the vast majority of engines come very simple. The printing and publication are well attended to, the editing vindicated by the clarity in content and visuals; it is nevertheless a low on the edibles for failing to provide an introduction to an anthology bearing internal aspirations as is the global best practice; it is easy to assume the editors took it for granted while forgetting that the work would be approached by novices in anthological reading. Introduction helps set the prism by which a work is to be understood even though readers are still at liberty to understand from other perspectives

but not on the sacrificial altar of the intentions of the authors.

By way of literary appreciation, the poems and stories cut across neophytes, average and a few experienced writers, maturity in content and approach and expression variety significantly yet the central aim was achieved. With almost a century of poems, we encounter poets of variety of traditions, those of free verses as those of metrical pattern and those of rhymes. Focusing on one theme, many renditions came through: we read of boys abandoned by parents, we read of boys harassed by hunger, we read of boys snagged by slum-life, we read of boys abused by close relations sexually and otherwise, we read of boys denied privileges by their socio-political leaders, we read of boys haunted by betrayals as well as those whose hearts knew pain on account of Loving their complementary opposites, the tales are endless. It is heartwarming to see that the chauvinistic and narcissistic labels that this anthology may face are defended by the featuring of feminine writers which show that this is not a fight against the girl child but an advocacy for a balance because to ignore one is to ignore both since a neglected boy will still be the predator of the girl. That the feminine pen advocates for attention on the boy child is a graceful touch this campaign has received. We cannot be ignoble of the complexity some poets rendered their works with, while being laudable for its metaphorical touch, it's prone to miss the hallmark of communication especially when the much younger ones take these pages up to flip. The

titles that posts gave their respective works are so inviting and serve as appetizers to fine meals to be consumed. The poems are easily a library of literary devices, the writers used them at will and this they did expertly except for a very few. What holds for the poems holds equally for the short stories, they are as edifying as they are piercing because of their dad experiences yet communicating of their intentions. The suspense came through as well as the choice of diction.

The aim of the anthology is not to exude poetic splendor only but more importantly to spark up discourse of issues treated for such is the threefold goal of literature: to entertain, to educate and to inform. It is the philosophical undertone and cord undergirding the anthology. Gender ideologists, parents, teachers, religious leaders, political cardholders, every stakeholder concerned has something to pick from this anthology both for analysis and for praxis.

In this anthology which sees writers convene from all zones of the country, we see the prominence the West has in Nigeria's literary spaces, we see the sign that Nigerians can come together to achieve something meaning, we see that every part has geniuses and can contribute meaningfully, we see that literature can stir a revolution of multiple dimensions, we see that the future of literature in this corner of the earth is assured. This anthology spread along over 122 pages, it has set rolling

a dice that may never stop until a perfect six-six is achieved. Happy reading!

**REVISITING MEMORIES OF BOYS
RETURNING HOME FROM ASYLUM**

i find it there welcoming me.
but then /
i don't want to become an angel / that's for girls /
i just want to become a salt in tasteless foods /
i want to become the yolk in forgotten eggs /
i want to look myself in the mirror / & see a god.

AYOUBA TOURE

THESAURUS FOR BOYS' BODY

a boy is a wind searching freedom
in darkness's mouth.

a boy's body is a grave he buries
himself whenever darkness undresses.

a boy is a clay pot kola nut;
he breaks into stanzas each time
Satan tries to dethrones God.

a therapist draws a boy's body
under a microscope [yet]
couldn't locate joy in his body.

a boy travels the sky/
to gift his nightmares
to a scorching sun; he returns,
but like a burnt monkey.

TUKUR LOBA RIDWAN

TO CRY IS TO SAY WE ARE NOT DEAD YET

Skin me alive & cut me open, take out the tissues of my heart & leave my voice to my throat. If you do not hear a cry from the core of my grandmother's soul, echoing as mine, then pronounce me dead to my legion of warriors. I am just a clay carved in the sun, left to harden with the bricks of life. You call that manhood, only for the pains I do not want to sing in falsettos, because I once lost my tenor to the hands of a flirtatious girl who thought me a boy & left my penis dangling in raging thirst for the lust of womanhood.

You say I must not tell with my eyes how it is to fail, but when I fail, my soul bleeds seas, & which is the other way out of my chest of seabeds, where there are many holes in my head? The eyes that sees deserve to be cleansed of the woes that betide the innocence of a boy, or tell me what makes a man again, when a boy could not shed away the waters of his past, his olden blood needing a new pigment of growth?

When you see a boy at the river bank of his face, allow him to dive into his own eyelids & play with these waters, let him the freedom of a parrot out of his cage, so he could speak to you & me how painful it is to grow, allow him to ask questions if to grow is what the sky needs to take his hands, so we can tell him that *yes*— the sky has lasers in the air, trying to stop us from

reaching, so to cry is to feed God's curiosity— to tell him if we are not dead yet, & willing to grow while living.

EMMANUEL OJEIKHODION

A COUNTRY OF BROKEN BOYS

The day you strolled into your mother's body,
you saw the image of a man sitting inside her.

You ready your mouth to ask her what you've seen,
she quenched you off.

That's her own way of silencing your visions.

Boy like you are like the end of a burning cigarette.
You were formed from a route less wind.

In a gathering of other boys,
they call you an incomplete body of prayer.

The one you say *fast, fast*
before your mouth journeys into a meal.

You wonder how your life takes the shape of a half
moon.

There is no portrait of a man in the living room.

You ready your mouth to ask her again what your father
looks like
She glows into fire & buries all her hands on your face.

Another minute, you pose before a mirror practicing
how
celebrities clip their lips.

The last one you tried left contours of slaps on your
face.

You prepare a shaking question to the world of how to
love and locate one's father.

FAME ODEY

YOUR BODY IS ASYLUM

Somewhere
On the lines on your palms
Is a withered street
Which leads to your dreams

Home sits deep in your skin
Your body is asylum
Paradise is birthed by the liquid from your skin
Because you are a boy

Sometimes
On the cleft of your sinking voice
Shouting for solace amidst noises
Is a home, perching

Your preferences are mourning the morning
That came with beaming sunrise
But waited not to set you in the west
Your body is home, be a boy today

Home sits very deep in your eyes
Covered with detritus
Turning you into a bin of your being
But you're a boy

Sometimes

It is alright to melt under scorching tongues

It is reasonable, too, to float atop rivers

Because you're not stone

But a boy - an image of mankind

TEMIDAYO JACOB

BOYS ARE NOT BEAUTIFUL

whenever you mention beautiful things don't say
"boys".

because when did boys start becoming as beautiful as
petals?

because our mothers call us wonders that shall never
end.

because wonderful things do not make us wonder but
wander.

because we are mirages fading and waiting for miracles.

because we do not have and cannot sew coats of many
colours.

because the only colour left on our robes is dyeing
hopelessly.

because our presence is a reminder of unfulfilled
pledges.

because only tears run through our veins instead of
blood.

because our bodies do not accept pills to take away our
pains.

because our bodies only know how to welcome stray
bullets.

because our bodies are too small to carry mighty
descriptions.

because we are the ones who forcefully break heaven's
gate in a girl's body.

because a girl's body can over-burn us and tear our greatness apart.

because when we tear, they call us by our mother's vagina.

because we are the last of our kind before we wear.

because we become like the slack bodies of our ancestors.

because our bodies continue to war even after we rest in peace.

because when next you mention beautiful things you shouldn't mention "boys".

because. because. because.

boys never existed.

FADLULLAH BALOGUN

Nonage Shades of Duress

Dust has settled in my eyes . . .
What dust is this, what dust of blue omen,
What hurtful, apparent specimen?

It is the agony that breaks heart,
The agony of dark clouds mapped around getting
enceinte,
In the noose of expectations and achievements.

My body is not a ship just yet,
To cart and set sail the fantasies in my brain and heart.
But there's troubled sea under my nonage feet to tear me
apart.

Heart's lamentations of imperfection;
What appearance, to his body as me, benign,
Has done a deed not thought of in his timeline?

If I am brought to the borders of coercion,
I shall not become dust in the midst of stones.
And I choose not to be a stone when inside me are
bones.

I am a boy, a child and human,
And stones do not have hearts.
I deserve the love and care I was given from my start.

IIIYA KAMBAI DENNIS

HOW DID YOU LEARN TO HIDE BOYS IN WATER?

my body is a running stream
a smell of burning incense
my fragrance fade with the plate
of lost dimples in my mother's kitchen
like translucent glass - vacuity
like the night my skin was to heist God
of men's goodwill hidden in their loins
but found my gut singing lullabies
searching for stars in society's folklores
don't tell me how many times
secretly, I must mix wine with my tears
how I must stand like a mannequin - heartless
boys in Sokoto are not creatures of light
their sisters wear different smiles and dimples
and speak with polish accent, beautiful words
like chromatography
like conglomeration of colours
what will you give a boy sprouting in Zamfara
walking without feet, searching for songs in handouts?
how did you learn to hide boys in water
knowing they could float away?
boys pain and essence
drift from society's lips
they forget the rhythm of love songs
mothers deposit on our lips

they say boys must eat dust to become men
even in the mouth of an ocean
who formulated this theory of masculinity
not endangered by voiceless songs encapsulating
streets of battered and patched future?

AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL

BOYS ARE NOT STONES-

That traumatic experience took place again

The gluttonous river waiting for rain

Drank the juice from that helpless grain

Bleeding in the language of broken pain
Nobody knows the protagonist in that lust filled prose

Hurting the heart of the tender boy blooming so close

As she conquered his system crushing him like a dead
rose

Right under the shadow of his rich mother's nose

His body was the turf for her momentary relief

Coarse to shoot balls with the tricks of her mischief

Stealing every innocence from him as a loving thief

Whose kind gestures inflamed the fire of burning grief
She has stretched every piece of his peace

Just to reach the fountain of carnal bliss

Taking over the body that use to be his

Making him a home of hell's hissing kisses
His thoughts now sweep the earth with his tears

Since it seems like no one really cares

Giving room for the devil to sow tares of fears

With the demon drumming death inside his ears
The story of this little boy left alone

Is a plea to save that other one unknown

From being used and abused like stones

Because boys are real flesh and bones

IBRAHIM OLALEKAN ADEDEJI

SAVE THE BOY-CHILD, TOO

we are the blistered feet
squeezed within shiny shoes—
a pain the world expects not to see,
'cause they forget the boy-child cries too.

we are the daffodils
that grow near cracked concrete walls—
forsaken—
with no one to come to our aid
when our nectar is about to be sucked.

these cold, silent streets are warmed
by our giggles when we run around
in smeared pants—
we're the future behind bedraggled tyres,
we haze your gloomy present with dusts,
we mirror your past with benign brawls.

still, we've become the mosses plant
in the corners of your lush rose gardens—
too unnoticed to be spoken for—
you raise your voice only
when only pretty petal is plucked.

may we never bite back in fiery flames—
and our voice be heard before we grow,

may your homes and roses not be set ablaze,
but this boy-child cries, too; the world should know.

AMAKA TOBIE

INVISIBLE HYMEN

(The boy is voiceless, he whispers in the dark)

I trembled when Aunty Chioma beckoned
Another night of conscience pricking
Another night of insomnia.
Images of lust and addiction.
Constantly flooding my thoughts and visions.

She told me to suckle her milk bag
Touch and feel her under
Helplessly I obliged
Feelings are sweet and tempting.

Mummy knows not of this
Her shielding arms she lends only to Ada.
From the preying eyes of hungry molesting brothers.
Daddy's eyes he kept steadily on them.

Men do not cry,
I heard them say
They should be warriors fighting in this battle field of
life.
Fighting for everyone.
And they left me now, forgotten totally
In the waiting arms of a trusted house help.

I am that boy.
I could take care of me
I am strong and no one can hurt me.
I am that boy
I am a king on a throne
When girls are slaves
Paying homage to my
Reign.

But truth be told
I am weak in aunty Chichi's hugs and kisses.
I surrender totally as she takes away my innocence and
put within corrupt images
Leaving behind empty brokenness.
Not knowing exactly what it is I am doing.

I am that Man
Who detests these daughters of Eve.
Am that Man,
Lost in the things in between the legs of women
Lust is my nomenclature
Sin is my joyous abode
I am that Man
Who connived with revenge
That Hunter that destroys out of spite!
We are searching, dishing out heartbreaks to them
Delilah's living here on earth.

Please set me free now!

Try a little and remember I am human and never ever perfect!

Teach me also!!

I need to learn.

Do not leave me without

Those words of Advice, Without a proper mold.

Do not leave me to learn from my experiences

Teach me how to overcome them

How to love and to care.

Do not make me a Lord without a soul.

I am that boy

Whose story y'all do not yet know of.

I am the voiceless, _whispering inside the darkness,

Lend me your megaphone let the world hear me once again.

But, If not,

Help me tell them

That,

I am not made of stone

I shrug off ego and water do wet my eyes

Yes, yes! I do bleed! For my hymen is invisible....

BELLO ABDUL HAKEEM

FEEL MY PAIN

The ball of the eye socket,
A keeper of the emotions;
Please let it roll.
The tears are meant to flow
Let's unleash it.

Don't kill the emotion of a lad
It's a common deed that is bad
Able and active though we're
But remember that we also have heart.

"Boys don't cry" says the world
When we are not a statue, why can't we?
Emotions are meant for all
It's inevitable like a death's call.

Why won't I unleash the flowing sea?
Where my emotions are meant to flow
Let my tears drop like a forenoon drizzle
Let it flow and free my hearty shackles.

Men are not stones, we 've feelings
Let's drop the burden inflicted on our genders
We're neither callous nor wicked
We've feelings, let's show the world.

We've feelings, let our tears flow
Let our scream be heard
Let's be freed from servitude
Let the world feel our pain.

**FOR EVERYTHING THAT COMES IN
SHAPE OF BOYS AND THEIR
TRIBULATIONS**

ESEMUEDE CYNTHIA

I WAN REJOIN FLOCK

I get water for eye, I no bi rock
Na skin I get, no bi steel
Dis life na poor player
E drop rock wen I must carry for back
I dey sleep with blanket of bullet
But nobody dey reason me because
I bi boy, I fit carry am
I don get hunch back, I no fit raise face see life again
I get heart, I get emotions, I get feeling too
Dem no comot vein for mai bodi, blood still dey flow
No mata how leaf claim strongness,
Breeze go still carry am
Na why I no fit to cry wen I dey burn
Na why I no fit express am as e dey do me
Na why my tears no suppose fall
This sheep wan rejoin the flock
Na boy I bi, I no bi stone.

BASIT AJIBADE

GET ME SOME BUCKETS

O my life is like a thorny rose,
Beautifully harmful natural essence,
Nine bones, I have been tagged,
An identity I dare not forsake,
For in that my pride is engraved.

A story of many years old,
Dripping blood was a tiny little thing,
From the stuffy room in the suburb,
Oju-elegba!

Like an hard won victory, eureka!
As if my life knows no bad henceforth,
But with the needed cry I got down with it,
The last I am expected to get,
And the nine bones must con-form.

Days in the cold sun,
Days in the hot rain,
Steaming body of sweat.
Early morning erection,
Bottled up varieties of emotion,
Lonely days of longing for attention,
To the war-front was the message got I.

Little of a male they said is not enough,
Wandering through hills and deserts,
A journey and ego forced upon a nasty soul,
Continuous longing for the rainy days,
When the kerchief of the hand will work,
Work enough to take all,
The day when the h(i)-men of my eyes will break,
A day to dis-virgin the tearless eye,
Can it just come faster?

Account settled for all the figures,
Minus some, add some,
Broken heart and tales of disappointment,
The cloudy eyes conceive the shower of blessing,
Flood-y I know it will be,
And the yoke will be broken.

| Two, 2-two years of living,
Gave me many thoughts and tales,
Enough to bring the salty h-two-ohs,
But forced I am to keep them all in for ego and pride,
Enough is enough out of the enough,
A big rain of the eye looms ahead,
Please get me some bucket to fetch it.

STEPHEN TOOCHI

THE BOY CHILD

The boy child:
Not a scale in a thaw,
Never wears in the rain,
Is Durable and brave,
Alone, he associates and glows,
No season alters him,
He abides while time flee.

The boy child:
His voice echoes in silence,
As he carries Earth's past and present,
His baritone frequency,
Is been heard from a distance.
Like stones, words are thrown at him,
Forced to climb and jump the cliff,
To ignite and walk the flames,
To surf and dive the deep.

The boy child:
A gladiator who entertains,
With his life at stake,
In life's battle he bears all out,
The pelting hail,
The drizzling rain,
In softening him,
Never prevailed.

The boy child:
They say he's made of stones,
That when the prairie wind blows,
He seems not to care,
Despite objects hurled by air.
But when the noise fades,
He withdraws to his closet,
His personal demons to fight.

The boy child:
His kind are under siege,
Left to their own schemes,
Groped and blundered on life's way,
Fearful of themselves and thoughts.
Their urge for education decreases,
As drop-outs increases,
A neglected human he's become.

The boy child:
No longer takes the world against himself,
Neither uproot its root along,
For the stabs left on his heart,
His body, soul and spirit ebbs of emotions,
Cause boys are not stones.

UGWUOKE BARNABAS CHIMAOBI

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Take us not to boiling feelings,
We may cry of pain.
We've nothing more than that of human.

Boys are not stone!
We are not igneous rock from magma,
We also yawn and crave
For love too, don't wreak us.

Boys are not stone!
Our heart is tender, but also strong
More than diamond,
We have feeling of zero point too.

Boys are not stone!
Persuade us not with "boys don't cry"
We have bleeding heart,
Its pains tear our eyes for tears.

We, boys are not stone!
We are Adam of the known power
And lazy emotional Samson.
We have point of breaking down too.

Boys are not stone!
Love us too, we need petting too,

We can wake the sun
If we are treated above stone mentality.

Boys are not stone!
We are the grand door of the living
But weakest in interior.
We are not stone but fragile human.

Boys are not stone!
Don't murder us with family duties,
Don't call us on harsh
Time, our skin is not rough but like yours.

Boys are not stone!
Stop using us to crack shells of hardship,
Don't fling us into illicit lifestyle,
We are not stone.

ADEOTI QUADRI ADEKUNLE

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Tears are colour-engrossed broken names;
Of boys taught to be men at teen,
The nature of eyes is white like pure moon,
But, boys wear red eyes like flaking fire
For their body is made of wood and metal.
Boys are the light generated from the lamp
Of early days turned to darkness at dawn,
They remain the property of lust and lost at night.
If boys were to cry for freedom,
For their heart are crocked early in the morning,
When the cloud is not clear, the stars; stocked and stilled,
And the sky remains blue and pregnant of tears,
For boys are innocent of life and love,
After their maturity have grown wing.
Boys are the foundation of peace,
But the drum beats wilderness of survival in them,
Visit Lagos to see how boys die with their dream in them.
Boys are not stone, boys cry too,
And boys are child, too.

OBASIEZE SAMUEL

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Born with a manhood for a curse,
All their lives, they're burdened with responsibilities
And never-ending expectations, to live up to.
Their eyes never to be soiled as, "real men don't cry".
They die in silence, not to be seen as weak.

With societal pressures ever mounting,
their opposites feel they have it worse.
Because of this, they seek undeserving equality.
In this venture, men are stereotyped;
Having things like "men are scum" trend like hell.

Ask either gender, they'll claim to have it worse,
Obviously made from prejudice and may be bogus.
With feelings like their human counterparts,
sticks and stones may not break their bones,
But, surely boys are not stones.

ABDUL-KARIM ALHASSAN

WHEN THE TALE IS TOLD.

There is enough hullabaloo,
As lips are parted widely and,
All the white tinted yellow stones,
Are displayed to the perpetual tale teller.
To him, nothing sounds ridiculous,
Or was his grammar on the moon?
With Michael Jackson Thriller beat in his heart,
And with a blue face, he disappears,
Disappears to who cares where,
He is man enough, let him fight it.

When the tale is told,
Our parents care not about the exact hand,
The exact hand that picked the milk from
The refrigerator.
The perpetual tale teller suffers,
No matter the number of tales he offers.
You are the head.
How don't you know who picked it?
With his eyes shut and his head bent,
He makes peace for that which he did not.
Even animals know the head can't drive flies away.

When the tale is told,
They don't trust me with a tin of milk,
How can they possibly do,

When I speak of Aunt's touching?
Even aunty might not let me have those Christmas shoes.
I'd rather suffer in silence,
Than lose those branded shoes.
Dad already said I complain like a pink.
'You are not man enough' he said.
I know I'm a man but I'm not a stone.

When the tale is told
There are no endearments for him, the perpetual tale
teller.
No matter his ululations.
People of the precinct stereotype him as a god.
*'He has to stop being puppy, how can a pink break your
heart?'*
All men are players and he isn't an exception.
'Even the sun rays don't have the same heat'
Says the perpetual tale teller to himself.
And we aren't stones.

Our nanny was in my room late,
When all sounds were in dreamland.
'I need a massage' said she.
My room isn't a theatre.
No milk for me if I don't massage, she threatened.
If I tell mother about this,
I'll run the gauntlet for the massage.
Just a massage,
Now her hands are in my pants.
Why the groaning and other sounds making a cacophony.

*'It's all up and in.
Just go up and down'* said she.
I haven't heard of such massage.
The groaning amplifies,
Steps are heard from the staircase,
She dashes out of my room,
But leaves a red note,
'No one should know or else.'

Sun is up, I'm very weak,
I'll tell the cops, they are our friends.
At the station:
*'Boy, you went screwing your nanny and you're
complaining?'*
I have no screws in my room, I replied.
Leave this place at once said another.
They aren't friendly today.
What of grandma? She'll say it's a tale.
Uncle is busy, this case will be at the tail.
My teacher will only laugh,
'Be manly', he'll say
I'm a man alright but not a stone.

When the tale is told,
You are man enough,
Stay at home and let your sister go,
My salary is not enough
Next year you'll join
I, the perpetual tale teller,
Can't and won't opt to the decision.

Society is peeping,
Friends are giggling,
Foes are smiling,
My heart is bubbling,
With great speed and heat.
My head is throbbing.

When the tale is told,
If you love her, go tell her.
She'll never propose to you.
She'll join the odds, it's not the pinks work to propose,
It's the boy's reserve, so you go do it.
Wait, don't tell me you are shy?
Oh boy, you aren't a man,
I'm a man alright, but not a stone.

Even my friends think boys are stones.
Hear this from me, war,
We all have hormones,
We have no talisman for shyness,
Not to talk of pain,
We need a voice too.

She is a pink,
You don't expect her to go out in the rain,
Send her brother instead.
She might slip and fall.
What if I, her brother, also fall?
You're a man, you'd be up in no time.
I have no choice, if I speak my mind,

Rude would be my middle name.
I'll have to keep mute, but deep down, I'm no stone.
When the tale is told,
You got her tummy inflated,
Now you explain that.
Someone changed the signs to the washroom.
In a state of brouhaha,
I enter the female washroom.
With it sticking out of my pants,
I saw a pink and turning to leave,
She threatened to scream and one had a spray.
Dizzy, I felt and I later woke up naked.

Kudos, perpetual tale teller,
We aren't buying that tale.
Not until we get to the tail of this.
Pray you don't go to jail.
How can a pink abuse you?
Are you not man enough?
I am a man alright, I'm not a stone.

Even Jesus wept,
'no, it has a biblical meaning' says my pastor.
The book of john 11:35 is no tale.
Pastor is still wishy-washy about it
Humans we are, as you pink.
We aren't stones.
We talk of gender equality,
While we still see one as pre-eminent

From our homes to work places.
We praise the pinks and pour cold water
Cold water on the boys.
Is that gender equality.
What a man can do, a woman does better,
But we don't give all equal chances.
Where then is the gender equality?

Enough of my tales,
No one ever buys them
We aren't stones.
Ask George Washington about April 30, 1789.
A few drops rolled down.
If you are not satisfied,
Ask Abraham Lincoln about June 3, 1861.
Some more drops rolled down.
These are facts and not tales.
Even Tiger Woods,
Let's move to July 23, 2006.
Hyenas laugh most,
But they do cry.

Its time,
Let's pick up our radios,
Delete society's stereotype,
And make the world hear,
Make the universe know that we aren't stone.

EMENIKE CHRISTIAN CHIJOKE

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

We are not stones
But we are being treated as if we are only made of bones

Growing as a boy child
I saw everything grew wild
My gentle touch turned into piercing thorns
My soothing voice became loud - as thunder

I was forced to believe that I have to feel no pain
Even when I am bleeding tears
In my foolish quest of believing the assumption 'men
don't cry'
I have worn scars as ornaments

Who said we are gladiators
That we are built to fight sacred wars
And sculptured as barricades
In the name of defending our fatherland

We are expected to be the breadwinner
Even in the absence of a flour factory
We are being pushed to the streets
To fight against poverty without an arsenal of skills

How do you expect me not to burn
When I am expected to show forth light?

How do you expect me to be well
After dining with devil in hell?

Boys are not stones
Stop treating us as if we are only made of bones

DAVID VICTOR

BOYS

I know of a boy,
whose eyes are like mine.
Who was taught to never let those eyes shed a tear,
that the day they do, he dies.
So, he bottled up the pain inside,
as his eyes struggles to betray behind his smiles.

I know of a boy,
Whose skin are like mine.
Whose body glows like honey each time the sun shines.
But he was told that his body needs no protection as a
man
They said he was gold, to be tested in the fire and cold,
And so, for every crack, burn or bruise on his skin,
he thinks they're all part of the processes of his
refinement as gold.

I know of a boy,
With a face like mine.
Beautiful and bright like the morning sun.
But he's been drowning in depression lately and too
scared to ask for help.
They told him boys don't cry,
So even when he's weak, he still refuses to speak.

And as each day passes, he fades away,

Banished into darkness, never to be found again.

I know boys that have been psychologically molested,
Boys like me whose mind has been negatively infected,
Standing tall but with broken bones,
Breathing fine but just pile of stones,
How long will the society continue to break their souls?
When will these boys know love and be made whole?

KIKELOMO PRECIOUS

A BOY ONCE SAID.

Childhood:

When I was growing up, as a boy,
mother threw words at me like stones.
Father never used the word love
on me; he acted like it was a taboo.
My sisters were varieties of lazybones
handling over to me jobs meant for men.
Instead of love, I was taught to speak pain.
Deep down, father knew that wasn't discipline,
but another measure of torture.

Teenage:

Father named me an element of confusion
after he compared me with my sisters.
I was a boy molested in the hands
of those he called his family.
My heart was filled with the bitterness of a gall
My veins stretched through my body
searching for the boy in me in different places.

Adulthood:

Rage-filled mind; a shattered heart;
screaming to God for help in
cathedral of tears and agony.
Is it a crime to carry the body of a boy?
I squeezed myself against the hardness of my bed.

Boyhood isn't what I dreamed it'd be.
I suffered as a boy child;
nineteen years of torture leaving me
with an unhealable wound till date.
Years I learnt that inner darkness
has the power to consume outer light.
Years I learnt that hard words
sometimes hit harder than a punch.
Years I learnt broken mind can be healed,
but can never be fixed.

**FOR BOYS FADING INTO THE DARK SIDE
OF THEIR PAST**

KOLADE OLAWALE KABIR ÀDÈLÉ

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

We were father's eyes
after he lost his sight in the struggle for survival,
we were mother's arms
the ones she stretched to places
where even her legs were handicapped to walk,
we were dumping ground
where people drop their pains in exchange for peace
and still expected, our eyes to remain a desert
where tears are not produced.

Out of hypocrisy, they didn't speak,
Culture spoke in their voice;
Made us wear crowns heavier than ourselves,
made our skins the wall
who consumed all the mess spilled against our home
then initiated us into the squad of men
who welcome wars coming against our land.
We've endeavored so much pains with no gain in return,
We've cried so much without tears,
so, to anyone who is still in the dark age,
we are boy children, we are human
not stone nor plank of wood that has no feeling.

JENIFER ONYEKA NMARKWE

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

The so many fears of being male
Challenges scream you will fail
Everyone is expecting
The pressure is frustrating
Choked on all sides, it's a hard press
As you must continually impress
Without money in the pocket
You face emasculation
Just like the game of Cricket
Winning is the general expectation

Subtly forced to earn love
Your masculinity must improve
With the absence of emotional feelings
Or any soft-hearted inklings
You must not cry
Or shed a tear
But must succeed in every try
And always be on gear
To reach the mark
Or risk acceptance in the macho park
So, you strive armed with a fake mask
Pretending to be ruthless
All for the society's acceptable success
The pervert touch of your nipple
Does not attract a legal ripple

Any protesting is rebuffed
As sexual harassment is disbelieved
For how long you will yourself deny
Forgetting you are more than currency
But God's designed legitimacy
Able to protect and preserve
Even to love without reserve

But you can turn the tide in a flash
Refusing to be labelled by cash
Or objects mundane
That eternally end in a drain
Maleness is beautiful
When not ego full
Or fueled by performance
Instead of genuine acceptance
Of whom you truly are
Cos boys are not stones
Or cold as toppings of ice-cream cones

CHRISTOPHER FIDELIS

WATER UNDER A STONE

I know your eyeballs,
Can hold water like coconut.

I know no one laughs at you,
When an onion beats you to tears.

I know everyone laughs at you,
When a girl puts you to the ground.

I know if I shake your head;
I'll hear the sound of tears
In those eyeballs.

I know your eyeballs have no holes,
But I know they can sieve pains into tears.

I know if every child leaves
The playing ground,
You'll burst into tears
Like waterfall from a rock.

I know you can be as wet,
As a pebble under the sea.

I know you've been standing
A long time ago,

Like China's wall
Protecting your ego.

I know you crack inside,
But cover the wounds with cement.

I know your eyeballs have no holes,
But I know they can sieve pains into tears,
Like a rock crying without shame
When the rain comes whipping.

And boy, if the world stole
Your ability to weep,
Dig deep,

There's water under the stone.

STEPHEN ALUKO

I HAVE A VOICE!

I am a boy
I derive satisfaction from foolishness
Looks like the world is for play
Turning deaf ears to the faint voice of my mother in a
distance
Dusting off the pain of her hand smashed on my buttocks
I love me!
I am a boy!

Running around bare-footed
Laughing hysterically at old men!
Keeping my kite in focus
I love me!
I am a boy!

I wish to exercise freedom like the birds in the sky
I never stopped jumping in the mud when it's raining
I never stopped receiving harsh strokes of my teacher's
cane
I love me!
I am a boy!

Don't enslave me with your words
I am not a citizen of your feelings
You are not a citizen of mine too!
I love me!

I am a boy
Not stones.

SEMILORE KILASO

FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE BORN BOYS, THIS IS HOW WE SUFFER....

They say
He is made of stone unlike the other who is made from
dust.
He was told to be silent, because silence is peaceful
and
empty barrels make the loudest noise.

Like the ones before him
he was forced into false maturity,
dined on neglect and violence
with no time to drink his tears.
So he built walls with bricks of hate
and
tattooed his skin with scars and bruises.

Now you,
When he falls, help him up.
Give him soft cloth to mop his tears.
Don't let the societal wind make you
push a child into the jungle of broken "masculinity"

Boy,
do not let the society cease your voice.
Let the river from your eyes flow.
Water the ground, for these seedlings

depend on you to grow.

When you love,
fall into it, though your legs might break
you would find wings to soar.

Feel!
Feel every moment,
the sun is taking snapshots of you.

FAGBEYIDE BAMIDELE

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

The sayings of mama drove us out of the house
And we took our place with an unknown aftermath of our
walk
Papa has gone to dwell with his fathers
He cried while we set off on our walk
And Shook his head sadly seeing his crown set off.
There we decided to grace the blessings of the wood
And covenanted peace with its new dwellers
Not knowing that these greener pastures a tale of wild
powers,
Life's been hard going through the wood:
And we became wanderers in Thorn clothes
Not knowing how home was, though mama's forgotten
us
Yet we never paid her for hatred.
We then flutter out our nest and found a beautiful
dwelling
We were happy as brothers; feelings of happiness as we
sense a new life,
This beautiful beatific dwelling seems to be a bait;
though very attractive.
In our quest to make life more inviting as brothers
We were tied with strong cords so as to satisfying the
good Lord we met
Night prayers were sweet in bondages

And a touching heaven worship with the lips of our
mouth remained the best of strings you could play on that
weaker creature,

Night and day, we easily feel the sweet hotness of iron
turned to our face in submission to the word of our lord
– the other gender.

We became victims of sexual harassment and domestic
violence

And we're being tied in the mouth not to cry out during
the act

There we silently cry and our voices not heard

Cos the elephant-stumped-upon-society is a Thomas,
never to believe our words

We were driven out because we were not loved

We are not stones, because Stones too cry silently

We need love – we need an open heart of love

SALABIU NURH AKANNI

SOMEONE'S SON

I know.

I know I am the morning gong.
That plays at your door step,
The unwelcomed tone
Of your last night leftovers.

I know.

I know I am the unwanted news at noon
That breaks, scattering all around
Seeking your pliant audience
To fetch a little from the sweat of the sun.

I know.

I know I am the evening bard
That knocks your gate raptly
With the mystagog hymns.
Whose prayers target the increment in your pot.

Yes! I know.

I know I am boring.

I know I suck.

I know I can be a pest haunting undesignated attention.

But please,

see me not just as an emotional lunatic disturbing your
peace.

But as Someone's son too.
Someone's son who just want to live.
Live and nothing more.

UCHENDU NJIONYE

MAPS

There's no map to living
Neither a map to happiness
So, a boy wraps his peace
Around rolls of marijuana
Sit by a banana Tree
Amidst uncompleted projects
And a dream fading like eclipse
He breathes life into the wrap
And watch the fumes ascend with his worries into the
sky.

They say when the cloud masturbates when aroused;
He will continue caressing her skin till she cum.

There's no manual to living
Neither a route devours of dirt,
Say you find serenity among chirping birds,
Visit the fields at night
Say you find truth around calm waters,
Visit the stream at noon.

The world will remain a valley of expectancies:
Like a trained Parrot waiting to Mimic,
Humanity awaits a topic;
Something to wet their dried tongue
So never forsake the things that make you whole

Keep a diary if time permits

Give things their proper names

Visit the places you slipped and pick up the happiness
that fell

Remember names....

Names are the only memories that lift.

ADEBAYO MUBARAK

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

people never worry about the pain
hidden behind beautiful smiles of a lad
all what they wish to enjoy are his joy
as it rubs over them

as the flower that want water in the meadow is not notice
also, the pain of the man hidden behind the boy neither
but when the crescendo of suffering reaches its high pitch
and the flower wither away one dawn before their faces

their mouths would be fill with woes and cries
"it was only yesterday, we did laugh together"
but the pain etched in his heart,
away from all sapiens' glimpse - is what marred him

the failure he carries about on his neck
like the beauty pendant — bedecking maidens' breast
but his was like the boil on a goat's neck
always tagging along even to his death
would I have blame men, for his lacks of concern
or the lad for acting man, he never was?
nay, he was just trying to survive, to live
but the fog beclouded his view of tomorrow — that life
entails – living a step forward and a look backward

AJIBADE ABDULLAH

BOYS DON'T CRY

Covered with a veil of façade,
the portrait of his heart that sheds tears,
the decorum of his soul that breeds fears.

Boys don't cry;
A loud whisper of the society
that has left his soul dwindled
& makes him wear a garment of perfectness.

"I am a boy; I must not cry, it's for weaklings"
Yet, he is a prisoner of guilt,
Yet, his emotions get drown.

Alas! he is human too
& can be sad, imperfect.

Hence, if you see strings of liquid on his face,
show no wrinkle of surprise
For in him is an ocean of throes
For long craving for ways to flow.
& those drops of liquid on his cheeks
are not tears but death.

**FROM A TEMPLATE OF DARK MEMORIES
IN COLOURED VERSES**

ABU BAKR

THE NIGHT COMES, & I AM

all the boys I've met between the walls
of this town have tried, at least once
to tell me of how they wake every morning

with chaffs of nightmares crammed
in the corners of their eyes. nightmares
culled from the images of the men
that live in their bones. none of them

knows how or when the men got in
there but they believe they're there
because they were told so. & parents
are never wrong.

ask the boys why the images chose
to be housed in their bones & they'd tell you
it's so they could grow to be like them.

ask the boys what being a man is like
& they'd tell you a man is more than
a mannequin of bones wrapped
in a skin made of clay & seawater.

a man is a hill of dune shifting in the
desert wind but never gets close to
seawater because it correlates with tears.

& tears are not for men, or boys.

the universe opens it eyes before me
& i see the fear that sits in the veins
of these boys. too scared to be anything
than they were told to be. too scared
to ask questions; too scared to be boys.

when the sun folds its light away from the earth
& silence sits between the toes of the walls of this town
i bring to life little rivers through my eyes
& remind myself that i'm a boy & they too
will be, someday; when the night comes.

ADEYEYE JAMES OLUWATOBI

FOR BOYS LIKE ME

Do not fuel the fire in my skin
Of sorrow, pain, & anguish
Do not make me say my last prayer
Because here is a room of noises where souls yearn for
freedom
& every letter of my names
Is written boldly on the chest of trial - fighting for
survival
Who knows how I fight darkness in my head
Because every harvest floods sorrow in my heart
They call me a warrior. Because I am a boy. But every
war comes with bruises tied around my neck like medals.
Yet no one sees.
they say I am a boy with a body of stone because I didn't
break
No one saw my wounds
No one knows that survival is becoming a curse to me. I
stink. yet no one smells how rotten I have become inside

Do you not see that my blood too is red? I bleed too
Do not let this darkness consume me. Of uncaring
attitude
Because boys like me are not stones
We break too.

FAITH EDOJA

TELL DAD

I am no longer his little boy,
That life has made me many,
She has carved my cross which I miss carry.

Tell Dad,
I leave for a new place,
Where I shall thrive like an alien,
Strange waters and winds shall set my sail.

Tell Dad,
I am leaving home,
To somewhere far beyond reach,
A prodigal who might never return.

Tell Dad,
I left all he taught me,
In my foot print at his door mat,
Like water and oil that never mix.

Tell Dad,
I am a gladiator,
Fighting in the arena of life,
Going to die for glory.

Tell Dad,
I knew his battle scars,
For I now have mine,
Relic of wars and victories we bought.

Tell Dad,
I may not fall in love,
For deception and truth are night and day,
Like love and war that will never meet.

Tell Dad,
That his boy is grown,
Raised in the path of his foolish wisdom,
A prince of Gomorrah, king of Sodom

ANTHONY ALEXZ

WE ARE NOT MONSTERS

The art of war comes from peaceful hearts
not from the blood-stained grasslands.
From the songs wore on lips above shoulders,
From the lyrics of women who are wives
preparing to become widows or daughters.
Where vengeance is spelt with ones and zeros
and heroes are buttons creating quarantines.

Girlchild, do not listen to lips that want the milk
taking shelters in the comfort of your chest.
Do not believe you have to sell your dignity
to have funds to buy popularity.
Where indecent exposures are expensive
and your innocence is priceless still they price less
because cheap things make trade fair to be fair trade.

This war never choked nor spilled blood;
The death penalty is to drown in flood
behind gloves and curtains where light is blind.
Girl child, believe in your voice not your looks,
That awkward dreams blinded to your shapely curves.
Do not focus on Beyoncé whose hips are beyond
reach from skies with clouds you can't find in iPhone,
Clone your minds not to have attitudes that lack altitude.

Do not be vulnerable and let vultures
perch on your weaknesses with no witness
to defend your innocence from weak heads.
Girl child, education may have failed you but don't carry
over.

Please research and get to know us better
as we are businessmen in First Class dumpsters.
Our mothers were once passengers in that feminist bus
and they saw us as disgusting little monsters,
So, they scripted us out and casted us on streets.
We were mere wrapping for secrets and sweets.

Run away from dens of vixens and foxes
who prey on the views of picture boxes.
Do not pursue industries that give perverts indoor thrills.
Forget this society that believe one sided stories,
They never cared if Amaka was suffering,
They believed through faith that she was disappointing,
They never asked if she was stuck in traffic
or being struck by the highlighting of her mother's
medical fees.

Girl child, do not believe the lies you hear about boys
though in every lie there is a letter of truth;
But we boys are not monsters, we are mismanaged.
We can be good toys, too, not tools,
Functioning appliances, not always damaged goods.
We learnt to wear our feelings as electric cables wear
volts;
Our hearts are banks with scars as tenants of their vaults

Girl child, we are not monsters,
most of us are potentials living in dumpsters.

OLANIYI OLAJIDE

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Boy are not stones
Stones don't have bones,
Boys do.

Boys are not stones
Stones don't have homes
But boys do!

Boys are not stones
Stones don't moan,
Boys do-in secret.

Boys are not stones
That should be use
To crack nuts from kernels
Or hit the gate of fortune

Boys are not stones
So, don't throw them
Into the deep sea of pain
To test its depth.

Boys are not stones
Don't throw them
At the rooftop of
Responsibility

Where sun and rain defecate on them
On to eternity.

Boys are not stones
Why should they carry your inscription-
A load many hardly survive

EKOW THE WEAVER SHE'S WORLD

He is dreaming no more
For he was waked in dreams
The other dawns
To follow Papa to hunt
Abena can do the snoring and dreaming
It's only a lazy boy
Who wakes up to sunrise

Odikro the King
Is ruling Oman
Through Ohemaa's dictates
Unless he wants to sleep
Without climbing into her heavens
When the earth becomes cold

His heart is hardened
Not to fear
His eyes not to shed a tear
He walks to his fears in fear
Shedding silent tears that break the soul
He will grow to break their hearts
So, they can proudly say "all men are same"

She is using what she got
To get what she wants
So, he is also cutting his tail
To grow breast and hips

To get same price as her
He is now a she
Using what she got
To get what she wants

Boys are not stoness
Boys shouldn't be stoness
But boys are stoness
So are men
They are rolled down the hills
Yes! a stone to catapult her targets
It's a SHE'S world

OKAM CHETA

BOYS LIKE US WHO FOUND HOME ON THE STREETS

Our skin emits fire and water
for we are made of Passion and anything that flows,
The street becomes our home the day we see how far
home is from us;
We leak our sores so they could easily become scars,
the ones that remind us the root of our source;
The street is where we found home the day we saw
nothing served on the plate of fate,
Nature fulfils her laws,
So, this Street is our voice and family;
We are the ones who bear a burning furnace within our
eyes and dripping affection inside our hearts;
Path-finders of the jungle,
They see the world on our tiny shoulders,
and play blind eyes,
Then wonder how we shoulder the universe with no
effort,
because we tuck our tears right inside the fleshy part of
our eyes,
it only flows in the dark,
So, the world must not see;
We marry and tame our fears,
Now our fears fear us;
and that is the mark of the street's off springs

IZUNNA OKAFOR

BECAUSE I'M A BOY

They say I am bald
I know I am osseous
Indeed, I am a pewee
Nature has not made me so
But man's inhumanity to boys
Simply because I'm a boy

I became bald for loads
Bony for the sake of hustle
For they say I'm born to struggle
Nature has not made it so
But man's inhumanity to boys
Simply because I'm a boy

I wander in the jungle alone
Tearing the earth with bone
They say I'm meant to tole
Nature has not made it so
But man's inhumanity to boys
Simply because I'm a boy
I'm banned from crossing
the walls of college
Where my sisters are fed with papers
I'm hauled to the crust of Ladipo
For they say school is not for boys
But to sweat in order to be a man

Simply because I'm a boy

In tattered rags I'm forced to shrithe
While my sister afloat in vogues
They say fashion is not for boys
Nature has not made this so
But man's inhumanity to boys
Simply because I'm a boy

I feed on remnants
Crust is my daily manna
I'm ravenousness they care not
They say boys don't feed well
But nature has not made it so
It is simply because I'm a boy
Because I'm a boy
Yes, I'm a boy
And so, what?

**OF THINGS WE TRIED TO LOVE
HOLDING THE SMILE OF OUR FATHERS**

ABIOYE TREASURE SAMUEL

BECAUSE WE ARE BOYS

They will tell you not to cry/Not to look/ into your mother's face/

With what turns you & your body/ into a dark room/& into silence/

/&because we are boys/

We should not open up our bodies to let loose

The demons that eat us up instead we should

Allow them hit on our brittleness?

Leaving us in wreckages?

We are oceans; our favourite room
is silence & Often time we
wish to wash ashore

So many things that hold us in captive.

& Here again/Like a bird in a cage/they will want you to sing/ /But No one cares/

if your songs are dirges//& that too is because/ no one listen to the bird's lyrics/

Our fathers do not smile or look

onto us like mirrors again. They

don't plant our feet on those dry parts again/instead/

They throw us off our nest as chicks &

Watch us seep into what we can't handle.

[They are saviours of themselves alone] & we should

Not be looking unto as Judas'

Because we rebel only because we lack directions.

/not every song a bird sings sounds sonorous/

ADEDAYO ADEMOKOYA

SURVIVOR IN THE FIELD OF KILLING

Boys are soldiers. Loyal to their hearts
I've rode with them to see their trembling hands
Men are jungles of thoughts separated from
every sprout of feeling. They are watered with
numbness not to feel a thing.

Boys are rocks. Their shadows kept me cool
Under the feathers of their arms I slept all
night. Unshaken fortress in the time of battle.
Men are diamonds that cut through every carbon
of obstacles. Always finding a way to keep shining.

I went to a funeral and I heard people telling the boy
Be strong for your mother and siblings. Truly, he was
but nobody ever asked whether he was strong for himself
or had the scale to carry the weight of the world. As long
as he is strong for others, it is enough.

I heard a father tell his boy, *you're a soldier and soldiers
don't cry.*

The father shed a tear in front of his boy one time and
when asked

Why he was crying, he said with trembling voice *I'm not
crying, my
eyeballs are just sweating.* What a sweat!

Then I witnessed a master telling his servant, “you’re going out there
Remember all I’ve told you. You’re a diamond that will rip open every
Challenge. The power is in you, just move on”.
He moved on to be the master of his own fate

Boys are allowed to be and feel everything but not emotions
They have been taught to kill and remain assassins of emotions
And the older boys lied to the younger ones to carve them into
A sculpture of painless model. Boys have emotions and they have eyes
That can cry. Let them use it. The weight of the world on their necks
Is enough. Let them drown in their tears for once.

For boys who seek solace in the pool of their salty waters
I congratulate you. The tears are worth it. Cry and be free
For those of us who don’t know how to draw a drop out from the
Well of our eyes, I pray we heal and shed every skin of numbness
Layer by layer. Yes, we are diamonds to cut through and across challenges
But every finely cut diamond needs gold to sit upon.
Emotions are our gold
Let us feel them.

OTI QUEEN UGOCHI I AM A BOY

A boy I said, not a toy
I am human,
flesh and blood
I'm not the one to toy with
I'm not the one, to annoy laws
breaking their hearts with weapons
of war, blood and bone

I... AM... A... BOY
A boy I said, not a decoy
you use, or deploy
For rigging of unity and peace
I bleed too, of course

I... AM ... A... BOY
I have resistance to pressure
but I'm not that hard
Just see me through my flesh, blood and break-able
heart...
It's not that hard

I... AM... A ...BOY...
not the AT machine
Lecturers like parasites
feast on their host
A mint before a pass
It's either corruption or failure

well, I choose none of the above

I... AM... A ... BOY...

I am no goy
at tunnel's end is joy
subjecting me to long fermentation
at the end, I'm soy
you eat me beaten and sour

I... AM... A... BOY

Human and perhaps, Roy
I do not embody a trifle of emotion
For I let it occupy the depths
Yet, you taunt, hit, beat and kill
you taint my heart with hate

In the end, I'll corduroy
over the swamp of life
letting others stamp on my back
Bleeding to death before I break

I am me, with convoys of neglect
by my home, state and government

It's not that hard
I am not that hard
please give the boy a hand
of friendship, love and help
I... AM... A... BOY

HENRY ODILIGI
TO THE BOY CHILD (BOYS ARE NOT STONES)

To the boy child sitting alone,
Thinking all is lost,
You've been hurt by everyone —
Yourself included,
But would you rather die?
No matter the bubble stirs of your trouble
Embrace happiness

To the boy child who feels depressed
To the boy child with a broken heart
Sometimes you think suicide is the best option
And then you feel like signing those goodbye caption
But would you rather let anxiety embrace you?

I'm only a boy
I'm not a stone
For boys not stones.

ADEYEMI JAMUU

SAVE THE BOY CHILD

Save the boy child
Tame his anguish from his tears
Drowning the pages of passion in his broken heart
Into turbulent waves of its oblivious water

A Boy is not a stone
His skin is not wood
His eyes also soaked in tears
His mouth cried for help

A boy is not an erected statue built from scruffy pebbles.
The boy skin is not padded with wood
His Eyes also speaks language of wet emotions
Leaving his mouth with echoes of helpless sound
Like the bark of a dog that doesn't move ears

The sky is within his fondling fingers
He touches the sun and his flesh incurred the wrath of its
fiery light
For pain presses its pang into his fragile skin
He's dying on the street daily like soundless echoes of
closing market

He can't race on broken glasses
That sprinkled on surface of the floor

He is the entrance door that passes pains and relief in various homes

He is the night that lid with darkness and stars

Please unveiled his darkness and get the stars he holds

He is the pillar that grasps castle of agony

He rises like dust raised by twirling wind of dawn

And sink into spring at dusk

With his battered skin looking like a moonless night

His lung feels the impression of thirsty

His skin seek caress not brutality

He feels the winter and summer

like another blooming flower

He need loamy to support his blooming

He needs to be pitied within his uncared cities which have framed him and bestowed him folly words:

Like a boy, he needs to be stronger

A boy holds his tears of emotions for others

A boy carries his cross alone

A boy stands in warfront to protect his sisters and mama.

Boy aren't stone, unleash his bottle of pains to set his liquidity free

Free him from a slavery market that patronized his emotions, feelings and freedom

JENKIN BENAI AH

FOR THE BOYCHILD

Dear Boy child,
It's okay to cry
Don't hesitate to let your emotions show
For you are first human.

Let your mind run wild like mustangs
Throw caution to the winds
And spread forth your wings
The sky is yours to ride
Be strong, you're mother nature's pride

Dear Boy child,
It's okay to feel butterflies
Let your heart flutter
Breakaway from your cocoon
Make love and be merry
Let your mind wander
All around earth's corner
Be limitless like space
Take leaps not just paces
The world is yours to dominate
Boys are not stones
A song never to be sung in muffled tones

TANIMONURE RICHARD ADEWALE

THE POETRY OF A PENIS

friendship is this archived journey
that takes a virgin on a dream
far from an organ's stark blindness,
far from a sleeping sin in skin,
far into ecstasy's slavery.

years sit the painful tale of one
grown with sex as oxygen; what
a hunger as a taskmaster!
search for sweet forests, plunge, enter;
per second, minute, still hungrier
of friendship's gift cursing louder.

boys are not stones; yes! how they throb!
they jump up long at curse of curves.
but kill them not! go back to time
when innocence got caught a prey
as housemaid's pleasurable rape;

or when best friend taught 'soapy' fun
as 'inside life' of sex at first
attempt; then pass to 'toasting' girls;
graduate; first class in bed business.

boys are fire hot and so ravenous
of parent's stark blindness; yes! sure!
a son is struck of lust's matchstick

and burns his blood so bad and sweet
under their nose with no inkling!

a penis pen this as waters
heavy in heart of dear brothers
who burn as slaves to ecstasy,
who are cruel chained as sex addicts.
please kill them not! hear very loud
their poetry screams of "*help me out!*"
boys are not stones of rapist name;
search deep inside before you blame.

AJAO IBRAHIM BELLO

TOO SWEET

Too sweet,
Black boy from the lower Ninth
Swollen face,
wreck bones,
no sleep at night.

Too Sweet in an adult prison
Trumps America charged him treason
Giving Nova Bordelon a reason,
To write and act every season.

For every black dude -
In the lower Ninth, booed,
By the call of Racists,
And the cruelty of the Police.
A moment of an extraordinary poignancy
A pregnancy,
For the black writer's pen.

I leagued with Nova's voice -
In a fictional re-voiced
To un-voice the fiendish despot
Marring our society's melting pot.
Black boys like Too Sweet,
Deserves everything, if not two, but sweet

EZINNE NJOKU

THE BOY WHO NEVER CRIED

All my life,
Every single day
I hold this in.
Covering it over and over again,
Like a Bandage, over a wound
That is never going to heal.

All my life
Every single day.
I ignore and push down
That which is natural,
As breathing or smiling
With tired hands
I've buried it, throwing sand
Over a hole, that never seems to fill up.

All my life
Every single day
I've been told
To beat my chest
To show no pain,
Even when the cut is deep.
To give answers,
Even when I have questions
To never ask for help
Even when the load is heavy.

All my life
I see that I am who I am.
Born into a gender two letters short
Placed on a pedestal, that has me afraid to look down
Placed on a height that has people
Unable to see my scars
And I've got many, deep and damaging
But scars unseen are scars that do not exist
And who I am
Is someone who should not have scars

Though, I stare stoic and straight faced
Giving forced salute to this norm
That has me unfeeling.
That sees me as a force,
That cannot be abused or hurt or damaged.
That has me bottled up like a volcano
Pushing down this overflowing wave that forever
threatens to spill over.

There's a part of me that longs to wail,
That longs to feel the salty wetness on my cheek,
That longs to descend from this pedestal,
And embrace this emotion
That makes all of us human.

A part of me that longs to say
I'm no stone, I'm no rock
Feel my heartbeat
Watch me bleed, see me cry

I am knocked down
I am abused, I am damaged
I get hurt, I feel pain.
Don't make me bury this any longer
Lest I forget how to unbury it.

They say a man is not weak.
But I'm drowning in this illusion of strength
That say that a man should not cry
I say Jesus wept
So why can't I?

BELLO SODEEQ ADEKUNLE

WE (BOYS) SHIVER TOO

The last time Papa complete the sketch of those taking
his semblance

He forgot to create any loophole

In his diagram

Refined colours he'd make use of - Black and white

Black: too deep to have an iota of shallowness

White: a crystal of plain ink, too clear to conceal taint

I imagine if creature like us - me & Papa, don't have flaws
but he said we have & they're outnumbered

Just that our portrait is too good to reveal one.

some say we reflect the image we look up to

when we stretch out our hands to heaven,

They say we're a mini-version of him - God

and they call us god.

I hope the hellion here will see God's forgiveness.

Because they've actually name us what we are not.

We're just brave warriors that have fought in deadly war
But still survive amidst its turbulence.

Anytime we drew the line of battle, the inner us shimmer
but we betray our soul with that firm look.

Lingering to that sturdy verse:

"Everything is okay".

Papa couldn't tell us about the hell erupting inside him
Though before he speaks we are aware of the terror
inside,
molding into fortress of pretense.

We are birds of the same heritage, we think alike.

Mama always give all shield to my sisters - both younger
& older.

Even Papa will still garner mine & give it to them
Telling me I am meant to be strong & batter hardships'
face

He said he didn't mean to hurt me but can't bare leaving
the heritage of his household for someone twinge by
cowardice.

They believe we are above being protected
& think we aren't that fragile to cry.

But deep inside our eyes are flames of agony
Sprouting from the dell of yesteryears pain
They deprive us the right to cry because if we do
They say we are not what we are meant to be - Men.

I wish they see how we jolt in the dreary arm of struggles
I wish they know what we pass through in lands rigged
with pains
I wish they understand our plight & acknowledge how
our heart sake in times of odious challenges
Because we(boys) are not stone, we shiver too.

ARIYO AHMAD

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Who can demystify wittily how to win our battles.
When our nomenclature is exchanged with cattle.
And we have steadily being always gentle.

Who downgrade us as a suffering busy beetle
For that is a belittling labelled title.
Let us iron out the solid chronic issue.
Boys are not stones, listen to my epistle
And brake like coconut, drink the water to settle.
Boys are great mind that only sage can ravel.

We arise as winner from the great battle
From the facade of life, we have tour like pestle.
Enemies seek to grip us and dismantle.
Boys are not stones, they are survivors of battles
They have feed on the sun and dine amidst jungle.
The car vrooming on the road of life, boys hold the turtle.

The ship of life on ocean, they hold the paddle.
Why are boys kicked away like plastic bottles.
And the groan to survive in this life's hurdles.
Boys who get neglected like a spoilt noodle.
Yet, they always stand firm with extreme subtle.
Aye! Boys are not stones is my title.
Let's provide shelter for boys that became brittle
It is nigh time for them to hold unto success mantle.
Boys are not stones is my title.

**FOR BOYS LIKE US WHO ARE TO COME
AGAIN**

NNADI SAMUEL

FOR BOYS WITH ODD NUMBERS (II)

A boy at 21, is a fallen angel waiting for pension
the only wage he ever receives are the wages of sins
which is hell; & the way he did not carry God in his pay
cheque

he discovers 22 wrapped in his uncles & their fake
promises.

& how they omitted a part of his account details
& how i wouldn't linger on this topic; or go into details.

At 23, a boy's grown beards aren't a proposal to puberty
but a lifetime commitment to responsibilities
to those things that makes him respond fully to liabilities.

he becomes his father's wrinkles scrapped into nude
confusion
a bikini of rage strapped to the coffin of his chest
takes the shape of a life jacket lynching his pubic hair.

Age 25 and 27 are odd numbers hoarding the odds of life
he becomes the throwback of his humble beginning
& to say he is successful at this point
is to uncover what he was from the very beginning.

A boy at 29 is a legion of hardship sniffed by a celestial
body

into debris of bills & debit alert
in his case, he says God should plead guilty
forever creating him without having a work permit.

EZE PETER NJOKU CHIMAOBI

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Hold me close to your heart
Let me feel loved in your hands
At least twice in my life time
Don't think I'm all strong and mighty
My soul bleeds too

I can be down emotionally,
I can crave for a wet lip to kiss,
I can be naught and horny
Pardon my wrong...
Forget not in a hurry.
Boys are not stone
There is some nature
Calls I must not decline

My inamorata buddy
Fox ship I abhor...
I do rather elucidate
Than to perish in silence
Ooh what a weak creature?

Naturally brave
Full of muscle.
With a cemented face,
Wearing no smile.
Being so mean.

Just to preserve ego
And to acquire human respect.
Living with a broken heart
Beyond the powers of cardiologist...

Lest you forget
Boys cry, too
Boys are broken, too, and down trodden
Like a rubbish
Don't think boys are super human
Just know:
Boys are not stones

CHRISTOPHER MAUREEN AMARACHI

I AM A BOY

I am a boy
Call me a boy
Yes! Out of the earth's dust
I was molded and equipped with specialties
Like the potter who made me

I am a boy
Brilliance runs in my gene
Originality, I'm been crafted
With yardstick of incomparable value

I am a boy
Despite the high machinery I'm built with
I have feelings... Yes!
Feelings like other humans

I am a boy
Argue with the streams of flowing tears
That runs down my cheek
For they scream silently aloud
But, I alone, hear their painful plight

I am a boy
Thrown into a world of silence
Because I've been painted "*strong*" right from my
mother's silver bowl

I'm also human but...

But... I just jot and title my painful pains in my heart

OSENI OLUWAGBEMIGA

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

The burden I feel
Of the pressure within
Transcending the physical,
Overpowering the mental
So much stress
So much pain
Man needs some rest, but none we get.

Life is full of risk,
Tomorrow isn't assured
So, take it easy, for
Life still goes on
I shouldn't fear the consequences
of the risks I take
They might make or break my very soul
Yet the fear of poverty and hunger keeps me
Far from bliss and close to fizz

Promises made in the twilight
Broken in all innocence
For man must grow.
So, we face the severity
with all dare and no remorse
A lane leading to destruction
Threaded plangently
For it might house salvation

I have it not figured out
But I can't be weak
For I have to give the eyes on me,
something beautiful to see
Expectations - I have to meet.
All my emotions and concerns foregone
A cycle I can't break from
All the losses have reasons
Prepping for the right season
Yet the failures keep beaming

I have to fall to rise up,
make mistakes to wise up
Do they care how it feels?
Or they'd just judge as it seems?
Being at my lowest
In my solitude it comes at me
Broken into soft tears
Ripping souls into shreds
Self-pity takes over, where love should have been
They don't understand anyways
All the bright pictures I paint become faint.

Money, Religion, The law and decisions
So much oppression, pains and depression
Stuck in a matrix I can't escape from
Keep looking strong
For they can't see
My broken-down self and
That's me.

NWABUISI KENNETH

YOU ARE GOD'S LITTLE EYES

You don't know who you are, but

You are a god.

You are those birds they say glow the fingers when waved at.

You are the little names written in the eyes of the moon.

You are a madman, not the kind you

find around dumpsters, it's the one you'd become,

The one that finds comfort behind closed doors.

With scratches of papers, ready to be painted blue, black;
with soul's noon.

You say when you see the moon you shine.

When the cactus grips you,

You let go of it there.

Yet, you grow gloomy and obstinate here;

around the four-legged, decked wood in your study
room.

You won't cry,

You won't bleed nor break, of course:

You are a boy,

You are God's little eyes.

You are to paint the pains behind your mother's portrait,

You are to tell the world the rage

You saw in your father's palms; clutching a stabbing
knife. Yet,
Your pen kept gouging out doom.

From your eyes, leaving you cry, wailing inside like a
castrated he-goat.

You had told yourself you won't do this,
You won't cry, but how did you fail yourself this time?
Why did you let it flow?
Why did you confirm your neighbor's suspicions.
They say it runs in your veins.

Agwu, not madness, but
Agwu a brother to madness.
You do it instead, like you always wanted.
You paint your insides on scratches of torn papers; a
darkling pain.

You struggle to survive.
You swim energetically, in doom and gloom:
You are a writer,
You want to tell a wonderful story.

WELLINGTON NWOGU

I AM IN THE MIDST OF FEAR

I am a black boy, brutally
Battered by the sun of several
Seasons: my heartthrobs with
Grunts of groans and throes

Laced with woes: my skin
Wears a garb of glitches;
My head wears a crown
Of spikes and worries

My fraught feet fall whenever
The wind whirls or whistles
And I whine and whine to ears
That hear but listen not.

I am a black boy of broken bones
Trampled by elephants' feet
I wail and gnaw green grains of pain
Being stripped of my darling dreams

Heavy hands of stubborn mountains
Wear my striving strength, and do you

Not see fellow fatherland boys beg for
Crumbs from greedy tables?

I am an infantile yearning for
Morsels to slake my starving
Stomach but even scraps, I say,
Even scraps are scarce to see.

I am a black boy, brutally
Battered by the sun of several
Seasons: my heartthrobs with
Grunts of groans and throes

I am in the midst of fears, helpless
I am in the midst of fears, hopeless
Gawking at blinking stars and a
River of tears flow in my eyes

And here, a hell-laden homeland where
Cold fire flares and flares and flares, and
My still standing eyes gawp at mysterious
Misery that encircles my staggering soul

I try to shove off the shackles that curve
My infant's waist but I fall still whenever
I strive to stand straight and into
The hand of fate, I handover my being

TESTIMONY JESUTOFUNMI

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Boys are not stone
But a shrapnel of death, which death
Can no longer hunt.
Boys are not pebbles
But debris in the sepulcher of war.

The shards of the broken image of their father
They call boys,
For at the end,
All feet's must be soaked in father's prints.

In the haze of reality
Each boy must run into his father's coat
For there lies the wing to his broken soul.
Boys are stones but pebble that beautify the shore.

Boys are not stone
But a glazing shell in life round portrait.
A hell of language
Where esoteric wordings loose grip.

I was once told by the man
Who coined my name?

OLAITAN HUMBLE

A POOR BOY'S CATHARSIS

Alackaday, poor boy!
With irksome thoughts lingering in your head,
You search thoroughly with watery eyes and hazy
thoughts,
For nuggets of wisdom; of truth.

Poor boy, lo!
With your heart shrouded in dark clouds, you wonder,
Why you can't be like the bird—free,
And your plights, banished into nonexistence.

Oh, poor boy, oh!
You suffer no delusion
Of being negatively ensconced in public consciousness,
As a specimen of unspeakable vices.

You are pooh-pooh'd,
For you are susceptible to a number of social vice
As a perpetrator, not the victim, alas!
Poor boy, how poorer could you be!

You are always the perv, rapist and thief,
You mull over the ambient temperament
Towards the gender of your being, and come to the
furtive conclusion,
That your only crime is being a boy child.

None other than you, poor boy,
Is seen as he who cries not after a heartbreak,
Or depresses not after a trauma.
None, poor boy!

Boy, you are the supposed sapiens
With no Achilles heels;
The bad, the ugly,
With no vantage of the Cimmerian masses.

Dear poor boy, hear me!
You have no wrongs to right, or write,
And go into no abeyance
As you tell your truth.

Dear Cimmerian masses,
Give no room for excrescency and regard not the boy
child
With delicious -filled tendencies,
As not to end up dragging the Pandora's box.

**FOR THE HAPPINESS MONDAY TOOK
FROM US BUT REFUSED TO RETURN**

MAXWELL ONYEMAECHE OPIA- ENWEMUCHE

BOYS HAVE EMOTIONS TOO

Boys are not a pair of compass,
draw them close & show them directions.
Give them a reason to live
& erase not their sense of belonging.

Boys are reservoirs of memories,
with ugly past and piles of broken childhood.
Give them a way of escape iced with care
& abort the birth of a disjointed boyhood.

Boys have feelings yearning to be heard.
Listen to that boy close to you, dance to his heartbeat
& soon, you'll bring out the best in him.
Boys have emotions too & I have seen many crying.

GRANT WILLIAMS

WHAT IT TAKES

Trained to steer *hardship's* rudder,
To mock fear & shudder never:
In my body is a buddy;
A little boy playing coy,
A Baptist drowning feeling
And words that confess their fillings —
Their sins.
My father's a macho priest,
'You are no star in this milky way'
He yells.
'You are a cosmic seed,
A sun.
Never eclipse your disciplined rays
With puny moons.
For pain is blasphemy.'
So, I absorb it
—o
Be a man!
I inscribed it
Patient(ly) inward m
In wards injured and
Saint tenses of masculinity.
At least it's what they
Say it takes.

Some nights, glue is god.
Sniffing is worship
To be most high,
To be man,
To numb the pain of humiliation

Some days I feel
Alien in this pressured body
Seeking the solace of Mars,
The cheers of stars. &
I find it in the first cigarette puff,
The first kiss betwixt hips.
The guzzling of multiple
Bottles (of
Star and Hero)
To become both
At least it's what they
Say it takes

GONE like bullets,
I'll be.
Boys like us are weapons
Fine artists of civil wars;
Drawing first blood.
The world will remember us;
How they made us stones
Maybe only when they lay flowers
On ours. At least it's what they say
It takes
And I gave it all.

OWOLABI A. OLANREWAJU

BURNT BOYS.

My brother died on the Calvary of broken home
His body became a shadow
Black, even on sunny days
My Father told me 'boys are irons'
Maybe he doesn't know, they rust
My Mother said 'boys are stones'
Perhaps she doesn't know, they break.

I know of irons
Melted into ions of confusion
I know of stones
Carved into shapeless figures
I know of dreams
Burnt into ashes
On the altar of helplessness
I know of desires
Broken by trust.
Every market day,
A boy's body burns like firewood
His soul, a burnt offering
Amidst cries of agony
His tears darken the skies
Of love he never had.

A boy is like a raw rice,
Place him on fire,

A pinch of freedom
Some cubes of compassion
An iota of self-reliance
Some drops of love
Makes him into a complete man-
A delicious dish.

MUHAMMAD KABIR

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

Hey Stranger! I beseech you come closer,
Pass me your ears, listen to my story.
I was born with a healthy soul,
Succulent flesh, agile bones,
Strong muscles that runs blood through my veins,
Felt proud of my physicality and masculinity.

As I grow, so rise the expectations,
Society made me a wandering shepherd,
Meant to grub for greener pasture,
To fill the belly of my sleeping flocks.

My life is judged and valued,
Based on the appearance of my herds.
If Fat and Fleshy, I am a success
Should they look weak and fragile,
Then my existence is judged negatively.

As my shoulder became broader,
So, the tasks became heavier.
Androgyny duties was placed on my head,
Which I must accept without being sardonic.

Oh Stranger! Look me attentively,
My bald head and the faded skin,
The shallow eye, The protruding cheekbone,

The thickness of my palm, coarsen of my feet
Are all testaments to the struggles I have endured.

My liberty slipped through the door,
The moment I was pronounced a boy.
Gender that I once thought was a blessing,
Is now proving nothing but a curse.

DERIOTEIDOR KENNETH

FOR THE BOY CHILD

*I need people, we need people
Even though not you the society
That "boys too have senses"
"Gender bias" on -
"Masculine" or "feminine"
It is a destructive criticism.*

*Boys are not mountains
We have fears, and fear for our fears,
We felt, too, the torture of loneliness.*

*The days our eyes tear like rain
Are more farther the days and days
We makeup smiles on our visage.*

*After hard labour and beaten
Aren't you a boy, Are you a girl?
You are not supposed to cry!*

*Yet, boys too, have senses
Like the five sense organs
That every other being have.*

*Boys are not mountains
We lads are as fragile as eggs too
So, Incubate us with love and care.*

ACHI GP NUEL

WHAT IF DEATH CALLS ME?

What if death calls me?
And you never realized I called it
Because I'm tired of living a hypocrite?
A perfect stone mama gave life to with culture.

I love dolls, but I must play the ball.
I never get to choose my choice.
A choice cheerfully chose me before I was born.
The penis has taken sincerity off my fun.

I am told that crying is for Cindy,
Billy only fumes and wails.
But what if it presses the liquid of my soul till waters
flow?
I should just live in the comfort of the pain 'cause stones
don't cry.
My humanity is a pebble.
It is rigid and moves about when force kisses it.
Maybe that's why I don't reason outside the dictate of the
force —
A force enforced by the grey hairs which made me a
stone.
I am seen as the bone when I am everything flesh.
I may not tell you that I don't enjoy the test I've been
enmeshed, but just listen to your soul which never lies,
'Cause it tells you that boys are not stones.

DAVID CHUKWUDI NJOKU

CREATIVITY IS OUR INTEGRITY

We're born with ingenuity,
we relish beauty of humanity,
standing tall amongst shreds of pains,
for in it we birth our gains.

Our future is bright,
not even the threat of society
can stop our bound goals of posterity,
we're born to make greatness a lifestyle,
we pride in our dignity,
holding up the lines of vision
to birth a new way to lead mankind
into the wealthy place of creativity.

In us nations are created,
we don't cry foul
nor bow to failure
rather we harness the failure
to create and build a country...

Our words are impregnable,
they're not of incapable
neither ones of shamefacedness
but ones of righteousness...

In our growing up
we see tomorrow,
with a great mind
of navigating into the galaxy of stars.

Boys are not mean,
neither are they coward
but of bold concept,
willing to sacrifice
for others well-being.

We create,
we disciple,
we admonish,
we hate injustice,
we love to be loved,
we're born with genuine inventions,
we deserve better,
we're not a waste,
neither a bunch of idiots,
NO! Never are we.

Creativity is our dignity,
in our hormones,
all creatures are born
and life is given them.

Boys are not stones,
they're not stupid,
nor arrogant

but patient
to bring out the best
in all challenges of life
with a godly character.

ASHAOLU TEMITOPE

NOT STONES BUT SOULS

Mother once murdered our thought
And buried it at the baled brain of our Abraham

She once said; we are body
Designed for journey in a "forest of thousand demons"
&
We are born to fight for a burning abode
So why will she place herself on blazing metal for us?

Street once buried our soul, even when silence never
consume us
They offered us cane to flog our age
And they say, they want to infer a factuality
Maybe they have forgotten that we aren't stone but souls

Every time my mind is impregnated with immense
burning thought
The thought of death echoes at the back of my room
without Mama shade
& The thought of fox that visited me last night without a
voice of hospitality
If truly we are stones
Then, there should be weaved lines of bereavement
plastered on our heart
But since it is a broken tune of weaved lines
Then make us a shade

Count us our every drop of tears
Hold on to our dreams
And make our voice triumphant
For we need to build a haven of smiling homes
& also, be made as a yielding body
That also need to be wet.

JOHN FESTUS

LITTLE DEAD SOUL

Inside a park with crowded spaces
Is a little boy who exists only in chains
In the midst of a cold, dark room
An elephantine shadow of his own tears
Inside a drop of water
He's looking for his voice
Not with hope of screaming
As none would care to hear
Not with hope of speaking
As none would care to understand
But to make a ring of it
Round his pretty little fingers
Which reminds him of his little dead soul

NUEL UYI

COME TO THINK OF IT

Dad,
I admit
I've failed,
failed
and failed my exams
countless times
at school.
'Tis true
I've been
coming home
with poor grades.
But come to think of it,
you never ever buy me
any textbooks and workbooks.
How am I supposed
to have time
for my studies
when you and my step mom
plant
a tray-full
of bananas
on my head
immediately after I arrive home from school!
and then you throw me
into the hostile embrace of the streets and highways.
And yet because of

my bad performance in my school work,
you always compare me
with our next door neighbour's son
who happens to be my classmate
and at the top of the class.

I might have failed you as your first son
but if truth be told, dad, you failed me too.

Now you're whipping me and telling me not to cry!

DANHUNSI OLABODE

FOR BOYS WHO ARE BROKEN

at times, some things break boys
beyond repair,
cut some strings off our guitar &
make our voice sound like a broken piano

then we write few lines about it
and call it sad poetry
because to hide our fears and tears
we must first clean off our stench
because boys are meant to be waters &
waters don't rust.

but sad poetry is really not your tears
it's your shadows trying to reflect
when you pass through rivers
that holds broken memories

it's in the breaking skin of our Fathers
how he calls our name only to find nightingale singing
sad poems don't have to cry
they just have to hold your bones.

a butterfly is flying next to you
be timid, be brave, be weak, be strong
be anything you want
one day, you will heal and find peace.

BUSAMOYA PHODISO MODIRWA

REAL BOY

Let's play house
But this time stay at home
I'm not asking you to be a woman or a man
Let's just be human beings

This time when the wolves come for the children
Be the first to break the wail
Wear the sackcloth and mourn

Do not be the machete beaten against the ground
Frustration channeled through hardness
Even in softness you can be a real man

More like a real boy
OK with the gift of softness
Of kindness to your body. Real

And when the room turns dark
And tears well up about traumas years old
Don't lock yourself in
Knock on my door we can share my light

You have always been a real boy
Even with this much softness on your hands
This much tenderness in your heart
You are no Pinocchio

JOHN IFEANYI

SECOND CLASS SPECIES

The grace of facing every new dawn,
Re-ignites the burning fire of fears in us.
The insatiable meals from our bent backs,
Left the sun with no joy of setting at dusk.
In toiling, we drank our sweat & blood.
Darkness is our greatest stopwatch,
Lest, we may work without ceasing.
Yet our doomed status never changed.

Generously, we sweated for the goodness of all.
Trading places with the saviour on the cross,
Yet no one felt the bang of our beating hearts;
A heart yearning for tender ears to whisper to...
Rather our souls in need of cuddling & caressing,
Receive the pricking of thorns, mercilessly.
Amidst our struggles for eternal satisfaction,
Joy grew wings and flew far away from us
We now wallow in the second position,
For we are the second-class species!

BENAIAH JENKIN

TRAVAILS OF A BOYCHILD

These days I've watched the sky mirrors my world
And I've watched it rain cats, dogs and even elephants
sometimes

Wish I could do the same

Let go of these thoughts that have clouded my mind
And dragged me into this ever-deepening gully

Can't run to Mama

She sees me as her rock can't turn to Dada

He says I'm a man now

So, I return to my lonely bed

No thighs to sigh on

Pillows; too cold to cuddle

So, I laid down

A pathetic balk

Knocked cold by life, love and everything

Sometimes, I feel like talking

But, to who?

Now, I feel like crying

But, I'm a man

Can't let my weakness show

So, I took to the ropes

And gave them a final show

"Boys are not stones"

A song not to be sung in muffled tone.

**DIFFERENCES: RISING AND FALLING
VOICES IN DIALOGUES**

NWUGURU CHIDEBERE SULLIVAN

MISMATCHED FOOTSTEPS

Something that lived in me called me son from the gap at the edges of his mouth, and every gaze he fixed at me, tore every bit of me apart, into bits of dust down there within my soul.

The flicking flame burning in amber colour raced across my throat, with every of its pace having 24 bags of self-hatred for my existence. Waves of anger recoiled back like a cassette player underneath my skin, with each wave enchanting an inaudible exit song for my existence.

I do not blame anything, not even the civil war going on within me, not even the number of times that I've failed MBBS exam, nor my father that will never understand that. I may not be good in medical science but that does not in any way dispute the truth, that I do poetry with ease and write stories like the moonlight god.

I started medical school the day I ignited the flames of wits underneath the scrotum of nature, before my father's watch. Then, I would tell stories that occurred in the past from the future before my peers. But none of these ever amazed my father, instead, he would pat my shoulders and tell me; *"Onwudiwe, leave storytelling for the idle men. Men from our lineage are known for their exploits, and that is why I want you to become a doctor"*. Being

that boys like me were taught how to easily hide their tears inside the breast pocket of their pride, I accepted my father's directives with all alacrity-- without a pinch of doubt. Although I felt some sort of disagreement between my mind, body and soul. Nevertheless, I needed not to care much for such disagreement inside of me, knowing too well that I was supposed to shove my fear and disbelief under my armpit just to be strong like the boy my father trained me to be.

Years raced with the hands of clock. Each year that passed after my entry into the medical school blurred my eyes from seeing what tomorrow holds for me. My year one was a silhouetted mirage of success at noon, year two was a liquid block of a pass, since my father through his large pocket had a hand in melting what was supposed to be a solid block of failure. My year three's first semester was a leaping success without a foot and now MBBS result is dripping in toxic fumes that I must inhale, to please the trachea of my disjointed future. Because I can't stand a chance of telling my father that I failed again for the fourth time in a row.

I remember the moment in my year two when one of my entries into poetry competitions got me a prize of one hundred thousand naira. The moderators of the competition were amazed at how a medical student like me molded beauty from poetry with such expertise. They even asked me what I was looking for in medical school with this my flawless talent in literature. But I shoved the

truth underneath my breath with a wry. I never told my father about the prize because I know what his reply would be. Of a truth, my father on hearing such story would subdue my peace with a stare that had hands smeared in clotted blood.

I remember the moment in my JSS3 when I was awarded the best graduating junior student in literature. How my father boiled in self-centered rage on hearing the news of my award. He even questioned why it was not under Basic Science that I got the award. But right here, I'm mourning the broken petals of a flamed future doused with the water of subjugation. I mean, what is the dividend of life when dreams are caged in the prison of parental choice and our own choice compelled to crawl under the belly of broken dreams? That I failed for the fourth time, isn't it enough reason I should listen to this voice of death luring my soul to witness the eternal epiphany. But the fact that my purpose was eclipsed in translucent cobwebs that hovered around the naked moon and prevented its ray from reaching my night and that living on, was an option that tapped empty breath from me like the efforts invested in tapping blissful air from a rotten corpse. Of course, there was enough reason for me to honour the invitation of death this time, since my father persistently chose to teach me the mismatching rhythm and steps that suited the broken dance of a disjointed dream.

After seeing the result of our MBBS exam pasted on the notice board this evening, I came back to my hostel with eyes filled with sawdust of failure and palms bruised with sharp edges of fruitless trials. This time, I was so determined to chop off the head of my life, for my life in the first place had no head. I made sure Okwudiri, my direct hostel neighbour did not suspect any of my drafted move this time, for I needn't a saviour anymore like he was, the last time I tried threading through this murky pathway. Already, I had it on the floor of my heart that I would unwrap my decision today by 2am, when everyone would be deep asleep. At my exit, am sure everything would still be the same. If anything would change at all, it would just be a little readjustment in certain things like: my father will no longer have anybody to yell at for being a habitual failure. My mother will not have anybody to subdue into abiding by my father's egocentric directives. My lecturers will not see any other me again who they will recycle in rhythm of salty advice, just to remind him of how much he is squandering his father's hard-earned money for a mirage of hope that he will never attain.

Smearing this land that held my broken purpose with the content of my skull will be the best way to appease my soul. At least, I will be at rest when am done satisfying the thirst of my soulless breath with the dust of earth. Earth on its own may, thereafter, swell up in sagged belly to purge out my carcass, and my eyes may not even sense the fulfillment of my father's wet taste bud, and my

mouth may confess the comfort in 6ft beneath the earth. My nostrils may not welcome the rusty oxygen trapped in between lumps of packed soil. My ears heard this voice again calling me to join the eternal song of epiphany. Then I hurried my breath, for I needed a world where I will muddle my future in the bottom of my purpose. In death, such comfort was a surety.

I was still listening to my soul and the voice luring me to the proposed comfort, when I checked my watch and noticed it was already 1:50am. It's almost time, I mumbled in despair within myself and stood up to end everything I had that related to life. I thought of using a Sniper but remembered that it may be a painful route to death. Then I thought of hanging myself but remembered how choky it was the last time I tried it. Then, a tender voice from the inside of me whispered to my hearing, "what of jumping down from the last floor of your hostel?" It was a beautiful suggestion, I thought aloud. Since it was my wish to smear the floor of earth with the content of my skull, jumping down from the last floor of my hostel would be a perfect choice. So, I took a piece of paper and a pen to the uppermost balcony of the hostel I lived, making sure that my footsteps walked along the pattern of dark silence. When I got to the point from where I would exit from life, I starred at the empty cloud in search of the comfort in my enclave that I would behold soon, and immediately, hot tears raced down my cheeks. But through one way or the other, scattered patches of smiles escaped from my lips. Why I was

crying and smiling at the same time was what I don't know, but whatever the reason was, I was already determined to join the route to my redemption which death assured me.

The last thing I owed my father before I made the Chioma Ajunwa's sort of jump from this place was a note written in dripping tears, so I went on and left a bleeding note for the one who broke the appendages of my dream and went on to tutor me on how to mismatch my footsteps just to suit the taste of his own expectations. The note read thus;

*"Father,
It's so good that I've found out in the end how to live on my own, and how to bask in the sun of my own enclave, where I will thrive in the path of my purpose.
I'm done failing habitually from the mismatching rhythm and steps, you taught me.
Next time, teach me to chew cud, but don't compel me to chew from an exact leaf.
Goodnight!!!"*

AGANABA JESUDUBAMI JEMIMA

MOTHER LOVER

I became my mother's boyfriend when I was a little over twelve.

I developed rather early and very rapidly than my mates; so, I like to think it is okay. I always want to think it is okay because I always want to defend her. I've told myself I will defend her till death...till they all die—the discriminatory society and world—and we both lay down to rest peacefully beneath the ground, holding ourselves in hand, not as “mother and son”, but as “woman and lover”.

The day the busy bodied *Iya Risi* took her to the hospital, because she said she was acting funny, I wanted to cut off the woman's flat nose and use it to cook *ewedu* soup. I wanted to ask her how a woman recently widowed ought to behave, if not funny.

But the woman dragged us to the donkey-looking doctor all the same. I stayed outside with *Iya Risi* while he conversed...or, rather, talked to Mama for a long time. We went home later and Mama started taking some pills daily.

On nights when she screamed awake, sweating profusely and calling dad's name, I would run to her bedside to see

the pills on the table where she had left them probably after falling asleep, or simply deciding not to take them. She was like that sometimes—deciding to starve me of food, to lock me in the toilet to sleep, to push me away when she had reached heaven... She pushed me away when all I wanted to do was lie with her all night and hold her as her *husband*.

I have my nightmares too, but I don't tell her because she's the sick one; the sick ones should get care, and not the other way around.

In my dreams, I see him—the way his eyes seemed to burn when he was set for her. I hear the *thud-thud* sounds as he hit her against something or hit something against her, whichever one was faster at the time. I always wake up sweating and panting like he used to, because he would be short of breath and needing his inhaler.

I would fall asleep again and, this time, I would find myself outside their bedroom peeping, and hear them make out after what had happened. She would be making ecstatic noises, already accepting his unspoken apology. And even in the dream, it would break my heart as it had broken both of us in real life.

He dealt with her but knew how to make her keep on loving him. And so, he played her soul and body well. And... she hid her bruised face and heart excellently.

So...When I was a little over twelve, the month after she started taking the pills I felt were a huge waste of swallow, she woke from sleep screaming. She screamed and screamed and wouldn't stop until I cradled her head in bed and soothed her with endearments *he* had called her in good times. She still loved him so much that it worked. She soon held my eyes and touched me in a “woman and lover” kind of way. My body responded, and she taught me how to use my fingers... Till now, it always ends with the fingers because she likes to believe she is sane enough to not do too much, too much of an abomination.

But I'm all in—I try to make her see. I am hers for the working.

I love her so much, but it seems I can't protect her from him in death, just as I couldn't in life.

I singlehandedly thought it would be good for her to permit both of them to be apart for once, and for all.

So...on that day when I was a few months to twelve and I heard the *thud-thud* behind the door, I knew what would happen next, and so I hid his inhaler, even the whole pack he had somewhere on the fridge.

I ran to my room and started counting...

By fifteen, I heard mum come out and run through the house, obviously searching for something.

I kept counting...

By fifty, she was driving crazily out of the compound.

I didn't stop counting...

By eighty, father stopped gasping, and the house went silent.

I'm fifteen now and my love for my *wife* hasn't waned a tad. I still pleasure her body and try to please her soul... But, I see the way she looks at something beyond my eyes, and I know she is seeing someone else...missing someone else.

I wonder, sometimes, how else she would want me to show I want to care, protect and love her like she deserves.

Many nights, I cry and cry till I fall into a wistful sleep. Sometimes, I look at her pills and wonder how much will be tantamount to overdose. But...I look at her face and ask myself who would *husband* her if I'm gone to the other side to kill father all over again.

I can barely live, but I remind myself that she's sick; I need to take care of her. She needs me and my fingers. So, I sigh and keep giving her the pills and die inside because she can't be all of mine.

I burn and wilt and pardon her for it, because sick people should be taken care of and not the other way around...

Though it's not like we aren't both sick.

JASPER IGWE

RAIN OF SORROW.

Chima sat under the shelter of the porch of a battered, zinc shop while the rain thumped heavily on the roof. He was shivering and his eyes had become rather bloodshot from cold. There, beside his outstretched tiny legs, with his hands tightly enclosed between his thighs, was his sky-blue, plastic bowl that had about fifteen sachets of water. He had run into the shop when the rain had shown no sign of stopping. There was no one there and he knew the owner-he passed there often- and was certain that she would be in her church, Seventh-Day Adventist, with her three little children and so would not come to the shop that day. He wouldn't have dared to come close if she had been there. Nwanyi Ojii was known to be a very mean woman.

Sitting there like a helpless prisoner, he stared hard at the rain. In his eight-year-old heart, he willed the rain to stop to allow him go home, back to the warmth of their room. Another wave of cold in his body made him quiver. His nostrils caught the scent of fresh grass and the smell of dry clay. He was sure that his mother and two elder sisters were reveling in that warmth. At this moment of reflection, his eyes became misty. Lot of questions swam in his head.

Why must it be me? He wondered. His mother never sent Chioma, his eldest sister, or Daberechi, his immediate elder sister, to hawk sachet water. They all stayed back in the house to manage their petty business of selling peeled and unpeeled oranges, carrots and cucumbers to passers-by in front of their house. Sometimes, he had wished he was a girl too so that he would not have to roam the streets every day immediately he comes back from school.

There had been times when his immature mind, which had been forced to think maturely sometimes, had wondered if men were created to be camels- upright camels.

“Don’t you know that you’re the only man in the house?” his mother had snapped at him the day he had refused to go and hawk, insisting that he was tired. But what is wrong in being tired? He had asked himself. That day, he got much of scolding and shouting and less affection and care.

Chima had lost the tender care and affection due to him as the last child two weeks after his father died. He was only six then. He had forced at that tender age to become acquainted with the harshness of street hawking. His negligence was towards the fact that his elder sister should have been the ones out in the street. Were they big for nothing? But, mama would not hear of it. Whether or

not he suffered or stressed himself out was not really her concern.

One day, he said peevishly to himself, he would find out what law said that boys should be stones. With that anger in his veins, he ran into the rain, bearing his bowl of sachet water on his head that looked a little big for his neck.

“Buy your pure water!” His voice shot through the rain.

FARUQ SHITTA

THE STONES IN A BOY'S HEART

She was weak that night. I remember her telling sister Tope over the telephone how her head ached--as if there was a can-snap in the interiors. She couldn't cook as she had always done every day. The rooms were in dirt. Even the little rats got the chance to eat the rags in the entrance of the sitting room. Her eyes were pale, there was fatigue written all over them. Even her tongue was red.

This looked strange. Mother had always come from work with smiles on her lips. She'd kiss our cheeks from the eldest to the youngest. Her lips, soft like water. She'd begin to dispose the luggage we would have collected from her on seeing her from afar. Sometimes, she would buy us shoes, sometimes, the latest wrist watches we would have always craved for. Sometimes, clothes. Then, she would begin to narrate how the day was: how today 's work was smooth, how business went well, and each client that had come, that day. How some had tried to dupe her, and those trustworthy ones, too. Then, she would shower, having being greatly tired. She would cook. The kitchen is a base she had always been, after work, making our noses a net that's ready to get ripped off from the balls of her soup.

Today was different. It was the opposite. She called me and began her speech. This was what I never expected.

This was a letter of a twist in fate. Mother gave me sour tears. An eternal.

"Son,". She coughed, lying on her sick bed in melancholy. *"Since your father died, I have promised God to always carry your burden. I have always made sure to give you the best, that had made me buckle my shoes, gave whatever it is to make you the successful sons your father and myself have promised to make you."* She stopped, looking at my face with pity. I knew the end had come. *"I ran from left to right just to make sure you never lack. To make you and your brothers reach the peak of success "*. I had three brothers. *"And as you know, you've always had the best. For now, I am going, though not willingly"*. I saw a tear drop. *"your father needs me where he is. Make sure you live our dreams. Your brothers are your burdens. Carry them well."*

She bid us a forever saddened farewell.

That day, we knew what it takes to be orphans, with no hopes. We never knew where we would start from. There were no trusted family members to run to, no friends we could abide with, and even no benefactor. Since the knife that pierced the boy's hands has done his wishes, solution is what matters.

I made up my mind to make this story a happy one. Aunty Tope, my mum's younger sister urged us to live with her and her family. They were five. Her husband and her

three children. The first of her kids, a girl of fourteen was within the age limit of my third younger brother. Her second born was a ten -year old boy, while the last girl was five. There was no choice for us. After all, a bagger dares not choose.

The first night was cool. We ate good food, with cold soft drinks. Our bed was soft, tender like a babies' heart. We were treated like gods. We felt we were under a world where love lived. We shared love, our minds poured out everything.

My immediate younger brother was Adelani (We have wealth). A boy of 17. He graduated from secondary school the previous year. Tall and dark, with pink lips. The next 'jagaban', as I would call him, due to his stubbornness was Adeyimika (Wealth surrounds me). Fourteen, and an SS2 (Senior Secondary School 2) Science student. He told me he had passion for Medicine and Surgery, strong love for Physics and Biology, that made him the only science student as at present. *"All is well. Just know what you do"*. I will always sing into his ears. Now to the baby of the house. The gentle Toluwani (It belongs to the lord). Easy going and brilliant, a JSS2 (Junior Secondary School 2) student, who was planning for an Engineering course for his Senior Secondary School. He was the prospective Senior Prefect of his school. So, for me. Ademide (My crown has come). I am a twenty-year-old talented poet and writer. I planned to study Law in the university before death took sweet

mum. All hopes were at the Lord's hands for now, 'cause the cloud looked bleak.

Our sad story started one day.

Sister Tope was a trader of provisions (Noodles, Spaghettis, Sachet Tomatoes, Salts, Oils, Sachet and bottle water and all other provisions). She never ran short of business for a day. Her market had always been good and bright, she sells her goods with pride and succeeds in them.

Then she came one day with a most obnoxious policy. Who will ever think of her with such an act, telling me to hawk Sachet water in motor parks under the scorching sun? Everyone would have gone to their respective places of works: the students, Uncle Bayo, her husband, and most of the neighbours. I would hawk from morning till late night. She would lie to her husband and my younger brothers that I was at the shop. My head would ache, reminding me of the fierce eyes of the angry sun. My legs would fail to play along with me, and my body would turn hard, unable to carry itself.

"If you should make anyone at home come to notice this, you will know the aroma of hell that day". She always threatened. Her anger boiling like fire.

That was how she started. I remembered one day I couldn't finish the prescribed sachet water she ordered

me to sell at the garage. That day, a fight ensued between a bus conductor and his driver. There was a great battle between the two personalities. There was gun shot in the air, bottles broken, and blood, the atmosphere was too deluging. There was no one for me to sell to: all passengers, and traders had run for their lives. Or who will see the devil, and not run? The market had been scattered. We could only see a handful of people still running for safety. For me too, I managed to still accompany the little purple plastic I had always been using for hawking.

There was panting in my chest, sweat in my pants and fear written in my face.

"Don't tell me that! How could you come home without exhausting your goods? That's disrespect. Oh! So, I'm too small to send you on errands? Oh! Because you are now 20, you are now too fucking old to be rebuked? This is a story you will never forget!"

That day, I was stripped naked. After all, a beggar, like me had no right to choose. She had one *koboko* (a rope-like cat leather instrument used for rebuking stubborn ones), it was three faced, soaked in cold water before lashed on my back, tying my hands to a chain-rope. She added salt, so as to make the texture of the phase smooth. She gave me fifty of it. I knew hell that day. I was weak. So weak to the extent that I couldn't carry my hands. I began to see the devil in her. It wore a black long

garment. His teeth, brown, galloping. His eyes were red like those pepper in our society market.

After thirty minutes, I swear to God. The devil came out in her image. She held my hands, cajoling them as if I was a baby. She held them tighter. I couldn't get hold of them. She left me, stood in front of me. I saw the devil. She had changed from her lilac gown into a mini skirt and a spaghetti top, displaying her breasts. The nipples were gossiping out from the windows of the short top. Then, she began to wiggle her waist. It was curve, the hips were round like a motorcycle's tyre. She wiggled her waist curving it meticulously, with the help of her buttocks. I guessed she had gone to put off her panties.

"What's this ma'am? Uncle Bayo is on his way home. If he should meet you like this, I'll say I warned you".

Though my breath had been blocked, I tried to kill the devil in her.

"So, who asked you to speak? If I should hear a word here, you will be in another soup!".

I was weak. I couldn't argue.

She dragged me forcefully on her matrimonial bed. It looked as if her libido had risen. She began to strip herself off. The top, and the skirt that wasn't secured by panties.

"Ma'am!"

Her hands covered my mouth. They started caressing my inner world. She had disposed them off earlier on when she was giving me the beating.

No doubt I was naked too.

"But ma'am! My mum is your elder sis!"

"This is no time for history boy".

She raped me.

Sweats became scars on my body. They turned permanent.

Her husband came in that day. This was another hell.

"Wow. Good. After coming into my home with your useless, rotten, airhead, birdbrain brothers, to take hold of my foods, and shelter, my wife is now the butter your bread longs for!?! With all my kindness, mercy, and good attitudes towards you, oh! my wife is what you will repay them for?"

"But sir, she raped me"

Laughs so heavily; *"Rape a twenty-year old teenager? How stupid do you sound?"*

"Sir... " she cut my sentence short.

"Honey, this rogue is a male bitch. How could you imagine him invading into my privacy when I was having a shower? He came in unnoticed asking me to lie on the bed. My matrimonial bed!". She cries deceitfully.

"I see, darling, there are this ungrateful and hopeless orphan, whose parents willingly abandoned."

"They are leaving my house today. I won't listen to fake tales. Today, or death!"

"Our parents in heaven. Save us. Your children are now a tale in the mouth of devils. They are the cast away lost bird whose master hated for his honesty. Why not save your kids from the vicissitude of life? Their future is a bleak mirror whose owner has abandoned."

We left Aunty Tope's home that day, kept wandering on how to understand the meaning of this complicated, nebulous, and weary riddle they call life.

IFESIE OZICHUKWU

BROKEN HIGH-MEN

You couldn't have forgotten that night if you tried. You didn't try, trying would mean remembering and you wanted desperately to forget. You were at that point in life where everything rang true. But eleven wasn't much of a formative year, especially since you spent the preceding five years with the bunch you had. Samuel stole everything from cash to the bottle tops you all played with on smooth cement floors. Chime can name all the girls in the class if he bent and looked through the end of their pinafore dresses. *"It is his super power."* Samuel says. You didn't believe him either until you saw him that evening with his hand in Ebere's shirt. Their tales were enough to catapult you into adulthood. But it did not prepare you for this.

Your guardian lived with his wife and two kids in a bland two-bedroom apartment. Their living arrangement was antithetical to what was obtainable in your home. Your parents slept in the same room but here, the man had his own room while his wife slept in the same room with the kids. You shared the room with the man. It all began straight away.

How old are you? He asked as you sat on the leather sofa in the living room with *A Lucky Chance* in your hands. It

was a damp Saturday morning and the rest of the family had gone to church. They always go for sanctuary cleaning, they never take you along. Your guardian's wife always tried her best not to acknowledge your existence.

"I am eleven years old sir". You gave yourself kudos for saying it just the way your teachers had taught you to.

"Has anything ever come out of your penis?"

You didn't know how to respond to that. You weren't sure you understood the question.

"Sir? "

He laughed.

"Have you released sperm from your penis before?"

"No sir."

"Hmmm." He pursed his lips and didn't say anything else. You went back to your book, following Chisa as he navigated the raging storm that is uncle Kulu's wife.

Let's try to change that.

Your head jerked up when you heard him, he was standing just behind you now. He bent and laid his hands on your chest. You didn't know what to think. Your heart did a mile a minute threatening to burst out of your chest. He ran his palm over your chest, then concentrated on rubbing your nipples through the brown T-shirt you had on.

"*What do you feel?*" He asked slipping a hand in to make contact with your skin. A tingling sensation coursed through you at the touch of his hands.

"*Erm...*" The voice of his wife greeting a neighbor jolted him and he was back in his seat in a flash. You didn't know how he did it, but he moved with the dexterity of one who had full sight.

Later in the day you will hear him talking to his friend as they lounged under the guava tree. The words you heard made you pause.

"*When I had my sight,*" he said. "*I had a guy. He knows I like to catch them young. I don't take one, I never go with one. I have too much energy in this body to spend it all on one small child.*" His companion laughed heartily and called him *agudo!* Their words reminded you of Chime and his raunchy stories.

It must have been 10pm when he came into the room that night. There was no light and you had slid to the edge of the bed as always. His hands scoured the length of the bed until they found you. Then they travelled all over your body for a few minutes.

What came next was like the movie scenes your sister skipped with the remote so you don't have to see them. He rubbed oil on your upper thighs and told you to put them together then he stuck his penis between your

thighs. He proceeded to move his body up and down as his taut penis slid in and out between your thighs until he trembled on top of you for a second. He must have grown tired because he slipped off you and lay on his back, his breath coming in short gasps.

Are you asleep? He asked after some minutes in which you didn't know what to think and the wetness under your thighs wouldn't let you close your eyes.

"No." You said. You were too busy wondering what just happened to sleep.

"You must tell no one what happened here tonight. You hear me?"

You nodded. You didn't even know what it was that just happened.

But it happened again.

And again.

THE LAST MONTHS OF A BOY

KELVIN J. SHACHILE

I remember it was when there was a smell of ripening bananas in the backyard and the winds were blowing so violent in the early months towards the end of the year when the thought of my moving into the servant's quarter first came from mama. My family was expecting my aunt who was coming to spend few days with us in Kakamega. I heard mama say she was pregnant and she needed to be closer to a good hospital. The second time, it was from Jonah, a master of odd jobs in the estate who advised mama that I had grown and needed some privacy. I heard him say that and I was afraid that mama would quarrel with him, but she didn't. She laughed and said she would think about it.

Few months earlier, I had woken up and noticed a wet patch on the sweat pants I slept with, I didn't mistake it for having wet my bed. I felt it slipperiness but didn't feel nauseated. There was a kind of feeling and eagerness in my feeling. I wanted to touch it even more and see how it was that I had finally had the first fantasy of my life. I knew well that it meant I had grown as my biology teacher had taught us. It seemed to be part of the few marvels I had been dreaming about every day since the first time Sammy, my classmate and friend had said of it in our rare conversations we had been having since we met in the creative writing class last year.

The second time I noticed the wet patch, it was on a Sunday morning. Mama had come to my room to wake me up “You’re getting late for church.” She yelled, pulling my duvets and there she saw it. She tried to forge softness and quickly pushed back my duvets before I could really know she had seen it. I twice felt embarrassed like she might have been. My steps from my room to the dining were light and I felt as if I had lost weight. Toast felt like sponge and the tea with milk nauseated me, I ate nothing except for a glass of juice I took in a single gulp.

Even as papa drove our family car towards Kakamega Central Seventh Day Adventist, I noticed the change-- in the way they exchanged looks and talked less. That day, I didn’t attend the pathfinders’ service--a children service in the Seventh Day Adventist; instead mama whispered to my ears to join the group of youths that sat at the far end of the church compound listening to the teachings of the Bible.

The girls and boys looked anxious to have me, I noticed the confident stare from the girls than the boys, as I joined them. Mama excused the facilitator and they conversed in low tones before the facilitator walked back and welcomed me to join the group. She (the facilitator) reminded me never to miss church service now that I had grown.

Later that very Saturday, I noticed the change in the house, as Aunty Grace, who helped us with house work was asked to teach me how to wash my own clothes. Mama also asked papa to be so close and teach me what was needed of him. Mama promised to keep an eye on me. So, I felt I had made a big mistake for having had what mama saw that morning. My mind changed and for the first time I felt I needed some privacy more than that I had been guaranteed in the house.

The following Sunday, mama called me into the living room, before she left for her women's guild meeting. I walked downstairs with shame and felt embarrassed that I didn't want her to see my face.

“Good morning Justin. Have you had your breakfast? Grace told me you haven't walked out of your room since morning. This is so rare of you.” She said as she moved to hug me. This time, the embrace didn't lock her as it always did, it was a brief and light hug, I moved back my heart racing and faked a smile.

“You don't seem to be fine” she muttered.

I wished she could have asked it as a question so that I could nod and end the story, for I really didn't have something to say.

“I am ok mama.” I responded and faked another smile.

“Do you need any of the boys’ things? I can pass by the mall and get some for you.” She said.

I shook my head.

“Ok, I will get you what I think you need for now. Go to the dining and take your breakfast. Jonah will be coming to do some digging in the backyard. I know you will enjoy his company.” She said and walked out.

When Jonah came, I noticed there wasn’t plenty for him to do. The backyard was still green and the grass still well mowed, the frangipanis were blooming, the hibiscus, Ixora and the unhealthy roses were happy in the early morning sun and the vegetable garden had no weeds that Jonah would uproot. He spent the first few minutes testing if the pipes that watered the garden still worked, before he went ahead to check if the lemon and orange bushes had some fruits. He plucked some avocados and pawpaw too, before I took the fruit basket from the kitchen counter and took it to him in the backyard.

He got my attention at my first step in the backyard and did nothing thereafter. He smiled and put down the long pole he was using to pluck the pawpaw.

“Hey, my good friend.” He started. *“I can see you have indeed grown.”* He added before taking the fruit basket from my hands.

“I have been growing since I was born.” I said this, feeling irritated and for once guessed either mama or papa had told him that I had experienced my wet dreams.

“Not that, I mean, look at your chest, the tiny thing has disappeared. Look at the biceps. Muscles are building, you should have also noticed the cracks in your voice. I feel good that I can see the boy I have been teaching life grow.” He said, I smiled. *“Tell me, you know I am the only person you can feel free to share your words with. I am a man and your friend too. Have you started seeing any girl yet?”*

“Mmh! I don’t think.” I said and felt embarrassed.

“Ok, have you ever dreamed anything to do with a girl?” he asked and the pictures from the dream I had the previous day reverberated in my thoughts, I nodded.

“What did you see when you woke up. Some water on your trouser?”

The question made me feel silly as to how Jonah was talking to me as if I was a small child who didn’t know anything, but at least he asked and I asked if it was wrong for my mother to see it.

“I don’t know, but you need some privacy now. You need to reconsider whatever you engage other people in now that it has come to this. Don’t let you mother or Grace

wash your clothes especially your boxers and briefs. Try to make a life of your own on things to do with your personal and intimate matters.” He said.

He didn't do any digging or slashing, instead after our long conversations he told me to be a careful boy; before he carried the fruits to the house and Grace paid him, after which he left. I went and locked myself in my room and stared through the window. Outside the sun was getting overhead. A knock came on my door, at first, I thought something had accidentally knocked it but when I heard the second knock I went to check. It was mama.

“Here are few things for you.” She said handing me a bag.

She also asked me to be locking my door especially if I felt my things were not safe. I nodded before she left for her room.

The bag contained a dozen of boxers and briefs, vests and new bed sheets, a pair of pajamas, deodorants, hair removal cream and some lotion. If she had not seen the wet patch I could have gone to ask her what those things were for, I already had enough boxers and briefs, I had not body odor and didn't need the hair removal cream yet. There was a note in the bag.

“I know you have realized that you are now a mature boy, please conduct yourself with care” it read. I smiled and dropped it in the bin.

Everything after this weekend changed and the house went cold; there was less chatting and more reading and watching. Mama stopped coming to my room as frequent as she had been doing before and papa always wanted me to tell him something every evening as we met in the corridor from the living room towards my room. He also said that I could ask him anything I wanted to and insisted that for some time I had started to feel uncomfortable. Aunty Grace didn't ask me why I washed my own clothes as she had been doing every time I washed my socks after school.

One evening after doing my homework, I felt thirsty and went to get some water in the kitchen where I saw her at the sink washing the cutlery we had used for dinner. She turned, smiled before asking me what I needed.

“I need some water aunty.” I said.

She got a bottle of water from the fridge and a glass from the cabinet. Before she handed them to me, she said I should feel free to share with her anything I felt I couldn't tell my parents, that she was willing to help. That was the day I got the chance to ask her the big question.

“Do you have a son, aunty?” I asked.

“Yes. I am a single mother. My son is in secondary school in the village. I will ask your parents to let him come and visit you during the holiday.” She responded.

“Ok, is he older than me?”

“Yes, he is, almost two years older than you. He has even grown few beards.”

“How do you feel when your son grows and becomes a young man?” I asked. She looked at me, at first, I saw the relaxation on her face melt.

“It feels good, but it also frightens me. It feels good that somebody will be there to secure you and provide for you in your old age, that grandchildren will come. But fright comes with growing, sometimes it exposes them to the danger of the world. Teenage boys are so vulnerable to break into these vices you hear of--drugs, crime and irresponsible sexual activities.” She said and turned to go on with the washing.

“What do you wish your son will never do?”

“I wish he never smokes and drinks alcohol, I wish this drug thing should not get to him; so I wish that he will be contented with the less we have. Crime won't pay.” She swallowed hard. *“I wish he also understands responsible sex.”*

She stopped, I felt embarrassed that I had heard her say that.

“And so, I say, that you need some privacy, I will even have talked to your mother, you should move to the servant’s quarter. This age is a vulnerable age that even if they keep an eye on you, you need some space to grow.” That froze me, I thanked her before heading back to my room. I heard mama walk downstairs towards the kitchen. Minutes later, I heard him thank Aunty Grace.

“You have done something I had feared to do. At least he knows something little.”

And so, the days that followed, life was filled with change and new beginnings; I took some time in the bathroom, I always looked at my chest and felt it’s bulging; I observed my face and felt the roughness of the small pimples that now ruled my face. On few situations when I felt mad, I could hold my genitals and wonder where they had got the energy to grow. I felt strange like a visitor in myself. Everything else between me and Sammy changed too. He no longer told me about making mud car toys, instead he once showed me a piece of polythene paper, with excess jelly and its smell nauseated me.

“This is what we call a condom. It is used during sex to avoid contracting sexual transmitted diseases. But I urge

you not to engage in any sex at your age. That can be very stupid. Wait until you grow.” He said.

“Why are you telling me this?” I asked him feeling twice embarrassed.

“Because you’ve grown and you need to know.” He said.

On another instance, Sammy asked me if I had a girlfriend. I said yes, for it was on the first phase when I had started to feel I loved Maureen, my neighbour. He wanted to know if my parents, specifically, my mother knew about my relationship with Maureen.

“I don’t know if they know. But I don’t wish them to know.” I said.

He smiled and told me he had a girlfriend too but didn’t want his parents to know too. We laughed and went on with our weekend strolls in the town. On the last time we were together, he promised to take me on a surprise visit to a sacred place.

The place turned out not to look as sacred as it seemed when he told me of it. It was a building still under construction. The place looked horrible and abandoned, it smelled a strong stench and was too silent. At a closer distance, he pointed to a room where few young men of my age seemed to be sharing something. After sometime, the stench became stronger as smoke rose from the room.

“What are they smoking?”

“Some freshener. Would you love to test?” Sammy asked.

This was unexpected, the best I could do was to remember the face Auntie Grace had the day I had asked her about her son. I didn't talk to Sammy, I turned and picked my way back home.

When Mama realized, after some day that Sammy and I were not getting along, her eyes became much clear and she studied my every move. She occasionally checked my school bag and once asked me if I ever heard that boys write love letters to girls. I said no and she smiled with shame.

She always paid impromptu visits to my room and checked among the magazines I had on my study table. She removed some, mostly those of musicians and other celebrities and stocked my book shelves with Christian books, magazines and books about adolescence. This made me lose my joy.

“Auntie Grace, please ask mama to bring back the books and magazines she removed from my room.” I told auntie Grace.

Auntie Grace smiled and told me all she was doing was for my good and meant no harm. I didn't like her response for automatically, it meant she wasn't going to ask her to

bring back my books and magazines. She even asked Jonah to ask me if I had a girlfriend. Since I heard her tell him that day, I didn't join Jonah in the backyard. Instead, I stayed indoors the whole day.

“All this action movies should leave this house. Get more of children movies, animations and Christian movies.” Mama told papa one day she got us watching an action movie together, and papa laughed before saying they needed to talk.

I understood, and it was that day that my creative writing lesson got a chance to be part of my life. I stopped going downstairs to the living room to watch, instead I read fiction and wrote stories. Though mama checked out the papers on my table every day and read through them.

“Why don't you talk to Sammy these days?”

“Nothing.” I responded.

“You boys, you had a fight over a girl or something?” she said.

I didn't smile, I frowned and walked out, leaving her in my room. That day, I returned home when Papa was in the living room watching the 9pm news. He welcomed me back and asked me if I had a problem. I didn't respond. As I walked towards my room, he pulled my shirt and a hot slap landed on my cheeks.

“How dare you walk out on me, when I am concerned about your well-being?” He roared in my face. I wanted to answer him but aunty Grace quickly held her hand on my mouth and asked papa to cool. She led me to my room and said she wanted to talk to me. I said I wasn’t in the mood.

“Can I bring your food here?” she asked.

“No, I don’t feel like eating.” I said.

I closed the door behind her and locked it. The next morning, I went to school early and no one noticed me. I came back early too, before mama and papa returned and asked aunty Grace for some food. I didn’t eat dinner with them, aunty Grace served my food in my room.

“Don’t take any food to him in his room anymore. Whoever wants to eat should eat here on this table.” I heard papa say and my blood froze.

Days that followed were full of drama and more series of confrontations. Aunty Grace’s love and tender words only made a meaning to me. She told me that mood swings and resistance were part of the journey, but she wished that they never rule me. I greeted mama and papa the next morning, before going to school. Although I didn’t hear them answer the greetings, I felt as if I had apologized to them.

Jonah asked me if I had a girlfriend the next time he came.

“I know your plans. Your tricks are known. Tell whoever sent you to ask me that that I am her son. She should be the one to ask me that.” I told him.

Aunty Grace heard it, and when I walked into the kitchen to greet her the following day after school, she wasn't in her right moods. I wanted to ask her what was troubling her but the smell of garlic in the room nauseated me. I was about to walk out when she called me.

“Wait, what you did yesterday was wrong. You should apologize to Jonah.” She said.

I shook my shoulders.

“You will have to swallow all that pride and ego, if at all you will want to trudge through this period of your life smoothly. Thereafter, have somebody to talk to. Will you have all of us to be your enemies just because you are growing?” she added.

I didn't want to stand there and make her more upset, instead, I walked out and locked myself in my room. I expected her to bring me food in my room as she always did, this time nothing happened. Papa and mama didn't say a thing when she told them I was upset. The following day, I vowed to be good; at least to have my breakfast before school.

So, when mama and papa visited my room yesterday and asked me to tell them anything, I said to them, “*Grandma lied to me: that boys don’t have anything to disrupt them as they grow.*”

Outside the drizzles started and it was time for my siesta.

NEGLECT AND REJECTION

MATTHEW K CHIKONO

THE JACKET ON THE WALL

There was an iron hook nailed on the wall where the jacket hanged on the circular wall of the hut. It was now coated with a thick layer of dust, showing that it had been there for ages; three generations to be precise. The grandfather brought it home, given to him by his white boss as a retirement package for the 50 years he had toiled on the boss's farm. He never wore it, he gave it to the son to wear on his wedding day. The son had worn it on his big day, cleaned it and hanged it back on the wall. Every single day he had gazed upon it with pleasure and had let visitors adore it. He had left it for the grandson to inherit.

Well, the grandson was a different breed altogether. He didn't actually want or need it. During the decades it had hung on the wall he had just gave it a handful of glances. He did not appreciate the cloth or the tailor's hand that had sewn it. He never took it off its hanger. He did not think the colours, brown and old, were modern enough for his fashion tastes. He believed that the jacket was ancient and useless. True, the jacket might have been ancient but like all ancient artefacts it was wise. They might have thought it had just been dead and still on the red bricked wall but it was a lie, decades had passed and it had grown eyes. It could see and had seen.

It has seen the grandson grow up from being a mere boy to a young fine man. It has seen the young fine man bring a wife into the round hut. It has seen the consummation of the marriage under the rotting thatching grass. It had seen the young woman eager to please her husband, scrub the walls, polish the floor and dust every inch of the room every day. It has seen the wife bore a beautiful adorable boy. The jacket had felt the happiness flow in the house, obviously after the screaming woman had stopped and the little boy had cried for the first time. Most importantly, the jacket was there when the grandson became father; one that knew his duties and responsibilities.

Gathering dust on the wall, the jacket had turned to observe the family every single day. The family was happy, it might have thought. The father left every morning to work on a nearby farm. The mother would wake up and prepare breakfast, usually millet porridge. The son would wake up an hour or two later, hungry as always, he would gabble gobble down the porridge and be out of the house quickly never to be seen until the next meal. He had plenty of friends and every single day wasn't enough for them to play together. The mother would then start cleaning the house, humming a tune she only knew. Peace and tranquility would flood the room and for a moment the jacket would be glad to be rotting away whilst hanging on that wall.

The father would return home early evening, the mother and the son waiting at the door with some smiles on their faces. He never came empty handed, either he brought home a banana or orange for the little one. The boy would devour the fruit while sitting on his father's lap. The father rarely noticed how fast the fruit disappeared, he would be busy telling his wife how his day had been. They would eat their evening meal then enjoy each other's company for few hours by songs and stories before they hit the sacks.

The first time the jacket noticed that something was wrong was when it got dusted twice in a single week. It was years later and the boy was already in school. The wife was angry and whenever she was angry she cleaned the house like a mad person, wiping and shining every rusted metal. She did not hum or sing, this made the jacket think of the worst. The husband was there lurking behind, trying as much as possible to get out of the broom's way. For three days, the jacket examined but did not understand the new game.

"You have to go and look for another job." The wife finally said, *"or at least beg your old one back."*

The husband nodded in agreement. He put on his hat and stood in front of the hanged jacket wondering if he could take it too. In the end he decided to leave it preferring another blue one which wasn't warm enough. He left without uttering another word.

The sound of rain outside that night made the Jacket feel homely at least. The wife and the boy waited expectantly for the father's return. He did return a new man, changed in many ways the jacket observed. His clothes were wet, torn and soiled and they smelt of piss and shit. His breathe stunk and the smell of alcohol was almost impossible to miss. It was new, the father had never got drunk before. The boy was confused, the mother shocked and the jacket puzzled. It wasn't that bad though; the husband was in joyous mood. He was singing and dancing, kicking and hitting the air. The wife and the son did not cheer or join in.

Then it happened.

The father's leg connected with the wife's stomach and before she could scream his fist knocked on her face shattering a couple of teeth and breaking her nose. The wife fell on the floor with a loud thud. The boy ran to his mother and knelt beside her.

"Don't ever tell me what to do in my house," the drunkard heaved, "you hear me? You worthless woman!"

It tried to look away, the jacket surely did. Fist and kicks landed everywhere. The father did not care if it was the boy or the wife, all were goats that needed the discipline long overdue. Sure, the jacket could see, but it didn't mean it had eyelids to close its eyes from seeing the unbearable. Few days later, it was forced to watch and

watch the gruesome act all over again. Only that this time, the father wasn't drunk and there was a lot of blood afterwards.

It became a norm afterwards.

The boy sat alone in the hut, the grounding and rumbling of his stomach reminding him that the consumption of food was necessary for his livelihood. The mother was gone, not to be seen anywhere. The jacket noted it had been few weeks since the first incident of broken bones. The continuous battering of the woman either had landed her in hospital or back at her parent's house, it was not sure. He was now alone--the boy, hungry and no one to cook for him. He was toying with a spoon hoping and praying that food would appear miraculous on the plate, but it didn't. He slept on an empty stomach. The father didn't notice, if he did he didn't care enough to do anything about it.

The boy did not hum or sing to the jacket when he cleaned the house. Waffling and sobs is all what the jacket heard when the boy took the mammoth task of scrubbing and polishing the house. The jacket almost felt something, pity maybe, for the little boy taking on the chore beyond his age and stamina. The father encouraged him to do better, his ways of persuasion more horrendous than the devil's. He spoiled the child with the rod and spared him the love he deserved.

Some nights were better, the jacket believed, the father didn't come home drunk. Those nights he didn't hit the boy or shout at him. He brought home girls (women maybe). They were polite to him, the women, but they were so many of them that he couldn't keep track or reciprocate their kindness. Some of the girls left when they discovered the boy hanging around the room, they would not perform their services in front of a minor. The boy saw it all, so did the jacket on the wall.

The old brown jacket did not wish so see anyone, it had seen enough. On this certain day, it tried to shut it all. The boy sat on the floor reading the label of a blue bottle. On the floor lay his school report book with dazzling fails. The Jacket examined the boy's face, intent was pasted on it. The boy wondered if he should swallow the contains of the bottle with water or just wait for the father to kill him himself. The jacket hung on the wall, dead and still, watching everything with its blind eyes.

PRECIOUS COLE

BOYS ARE NOT STONES II

Even the mighty fall, the strongest get weak and the immortal wish for death. I have always believed in the notion, "protect the girl child". These lines take me on a journey to my memory of rose gardens, reminding me of crumbling thunders of seas, of emotions buried beneath, hurting me inform of night mares every time I shut my lids. There was a boy child who was unarmed, exceeded unarmed, exceeded his thresh hold, protecting family and trying to live up to standards.

His name is Jidenna, my supposed hero and knight in shining armour, my fortress of safety. Darkened skin, courtesy of the sun, source of unaccepted Melanin. Jidenna and I, were the red and blue for a perfect purple. I was his princess he wouldn't want to shed a tear.

His world began to turn around that morning I overheard papa telling him to live up to expectations and be a man. Comparing him to our neighbour's son Okechukwu who has planted a mansion in his father's house, icing the house with a brand-new car. I could feel the long silence between them, like papa was scared to speak on, to compare, to tell him what the society expects from him at his age. I could hear Jide's heartbeat, like he's got a tachycardia.

I could see those tear drop leaves his eyes, warming his frozen cheek, a warmth of a constant reminder of how much a failure he is.

Jidenna hustled from dusk to dawn, to meet up with papa's standard, to get him his own mansion, and for me his little princess, dress in rags, while I dress to steal the limelight. Things were hard but Jide was super strong, did all sorts of menial jobs for small chops.

I watched him breakdown, Jidenna exceeded his threshold, his limiting of retaining pain, his determined stone heart was broken into irreparable pieces. Life wasn't fair, but mercilessly tortured Jide's hope and dream, striping him off from him his last shield of defense.

So many words were spoken in tears. Amidst all, Jidenna never broke down in my presence.

I could trace the paths those tear drops took, concealed in laughter, I could perceive pain in his voice with each word he speaks and I could see a fainted hope with each breath he took. There's no such thing as a real man don't breakdown, the sword that pierced through his granite shell was sharp enough. The weight of the burden was killing and it burnt Jidenna, melted him to ashes.

Jidenna was lost to jungle justice, the quest for survival was high, expectations must be met, he was pushed to the

wall and was wrapped in crime. Today I walk through memory lane, somewhere in the innermost recess of my mind, a wheel was turned forcing open pages of our stories, as his familiar voice touched my subconscious, reminding me of everything he went through. Yes, something clicked my brain, my memory volt, with a brightness searching my skull, moving it like a cranky abandoned machine that has not been oiled for years. It hurts really bad, wrenching my body system with a shaking, painful cut that made me cry out.

Papa shouldn't have taunted him with those words Mama would have stood and protected her son, a praying mum not a nag. The society shouldn't have seen him as immortal, all this threw him off balance and I couldn't be his salvation. And Jidenna was gone, a dark heart with pure and sincere love. Today I will mourn him with shades of red and white. The red of his bleeding heart and the white of his innocence. And I will offer the world the ash of his burnt flesh, moist with the last drop of his tears in a plate of gold. So, the boy child will be protected, they're not stones. They're Humans, they crash when they breakdown, bleed when they fall.

They're permeable, my Jidenna was and was wrapped in crime.

**REMEMBERING THE DAYS OF
RECKONING**

HANNAH PETERS

I DIED BEFORE I WAS DEAD

Today is Saturday.

Cynthia is in a near-coma sleep on my friend's bed. We have gone six rounds already since early afternoon that she came. I want to do. Again. I will go check on her and if she is not up to it, I will call Chioma.

My name is Ubong. I am nineteen and I cannot go a day without sex!

Let us go back to the beginning, to where it all started.

It is a rainy Tuesday afternoon, after school, two days after my eighth birthday. I am home alone and lonely.

A one room apartment in a face-me-I-face-you compound in a rural part of Akwa Ibom state is where we call home. Many other people live here, including a pastor and his family. His son, Ukpono, who is about the same age as myself, is my friend. We play together a lot. His sister, Emem, who is older than him, is not my friend. She likes to boss me around, so I do not like her.

Uncle pastor, Ukpono and Emem have gone to church. Uncle pastor's wife, who we all call mummy is just

returning from market. I run to go and collect her bag and I tell her that every other person in her house has gone to church.

“How about your mummy,” she asks.

“She went to my aunt’s place,” I respond, walking closely behind her with her handbag.

“Your daddy has not come back from work?” she asks, even if she knows that my father is never home before 9 0’clock. He drives keke.

I nod my head in response before I remember that I am behind her, so she cannot see me. *“Yes,”* I respond.

We reach their apartment and she collects her bag to remove the key. She digs around for a while before fishing out the key.

I am about to turn back when she says, *“come inside.”*

“This is a good day” I silently say to myself.

I am elated because I know I will eat biscuit. She likes to buy biscuit for me when coming back from work or from market.

Silently, I follow her inside the one-room apartment. It is slightly dark and stuffy inside but I don’t mind; I will get to eat biscuit. I stand at one corner of the room and patiently wait for her to unpack her bag.

She only brings out a few things from her bag and then stops. She looks at me as if she is just seeing me for the first time. I don't understand but I still stand.

She walks up to me and touches my "*pim pim*" through my panties. That's what my mother calls the thing that pee comes out from. In surprise, I use my hand to try to cover that area of my panties as I move backwards. She moves towards me and holds my panties, trying to remove it. I am confused and shy and I want to run away. She holds me when I try to turn around.

"Don't you like it?" She asks.

"Mama will beat me," is all I can think about and I tell her so.

"No, she will not." She sounds so sure that I try to relax even though I don't think what she is doing to me is a good thing.

Before I know it, she pushes me down on their bed and removes my panties. Her hands cover my '*pim pim*' and presses it. It hurt, and I try to make her stop, but she would not stop. She removes her clothes and asks me to touch her breasts. I don't want to do it, but she forces me to do it. I am very happy when she finally stops and asks me to stand up and wear my panties.

“Don’t tell anybody what happened here today,” she tells me, her face stern.

Too afraid to speak, I simply nod my head. She gives me akara and a fifty-naira note and I leave.

Mama comes back shortly after and I decide to tell her what mummy pastor did to me.

“Mama, mummy touched my pee pee,” I say hesitantly. She is standing with her back to me but she suddenly turns when she hears what I say.

“Which mummy?” she asks.

“Mummy na. Uncle pastor’s wife.”

The look she gives me is one I usually give when I watch a cartoon in our neighbor’s house and I see a creature suddenly developing two heads.

“Common shut your mouth! You don’t know what you are saying.” She moves close to me and drags my ears and says, *“make sure you don’t tell anybody this nonsense you are telling me now. Is that clear?”*

Of course, it is clear from the way mama is sounding, so I nod my head.

One week has passed and mummy is touching me again. She always buys me lots of biscuits, afterwards. She also gives me money. No single day passes without her calling me to her room when everybody has gone out or she comes to my house when my mummy has gone out.

I have grown to twelve years and I now like it when she touches me and asks me to suck her breasts. Nobody knows what we do inside her house when she calls me to come inside. I have not told another person about it because I now enjoy it. Mama didn't believe me the first time, so I have not mentioned it to her again.

Uncle pastor is packing out of our compound and I am very sad. I will not see my biscuit and sex mummy again. I will miss her because she has taught me a lot of things. Since mummy left, I try to remove my mind from her, but I cannot. Every day, I wake up and hope she comes to see me, but that never happens.

I start to experiment all the things mummy taught me on other girls. I only have to buy them lots of biscuits just like mummy used to buy for me and they will agree to lie with me.

Even though I am afraid that Cynthia is not OK, my body is still telling me to call Chioma so that she can satisfy me.

Cynthia is not breathing well when I check on her. I begin to tap and shake her frantically but she does not get better. Now she is not breathing again. I am calling her name but she is not responding. I am hopeful that it is not what I think. The concoction I gave her, which I usually take, must be the culprit. How will I explain it to her people?

Right in my arms, she breathes her last and her body goes limp. Fear has wrapped its arms around me and is threatening to strangle me. Like a pack of cards, my life has crumbled.

Three weeks have passed. I have been charged to court. They say I killed Cynthia and sadly, I cannot argue. The urge to have sex has fled from me. It has left me to face my cross alone.

Cynthia's father is a politician and I know that I will not get out of the cold cell any time soon.

If mama's tears could turn back the hands of time, it would have done so. A drum of tears, at least, she has produced. She wishes she listened to me, but alas, wishes are not horses.

CHIKERE BRIGHT

YOU ARE A BOY, NOT A STONE

Growing up as a boy, I tried at the peak of my best to fit into a view that just like myself, every boy is fed with, the old hand-me-down view of a boy with super human qualities, those qualities that chill our innate soul till it's num. I, like every other boy was told that crying was a show of weakness and strength was acting indifferent, remorseless and apartheid. This made me scurry through every day trying to be whom I was not, trying to be a real man.

Boys of which I can attest to, have become an imposter and a total stranger to themselves, all in the bid to live up to external expectations and belief. Quite depressingly, when the human nature tries to reveal itself, it is stiffened, we withdraw into the shadows, cry into the dark where no one will see the tears drop down our cheek. This I vouch that as a fact, I have been caught in this web that the society has woven.

By the hair's breadth, to become who we were not born to be, we seek means to live up like that ostentatious thinker who is set out to do anything to please; we set out to act thick; we set out to act tough. Look what it has brought; rape, bully, cultism and a thousand more ills. That boy that is told "*you're not man enough*" instead of

"acknowledge your uniqueness" will do everything to prove himself, that's the same record that is playing on the gramophone - we are told we are not man enough, and we want to be man enough.

Through these hurdles, regrets and pain dawn on us in our times of silence, when we are alone, the pain of all the acting, the rape and the conquest we have wined in to prove ourselves all come rushing into our minds, by quick thoughts. We want to stop it all; we commit suicide, which by opening up and showing that we are human we would have prevented. But like Aladdin's genie, we by all means want to keep our lamp golden, while we are vanishing by day.

Who believes that a boy can be sexually abused? Who believes in boy child molest? Obviously, it's been washed away by a thousand myths. It is now believed that a boy can't be "molested," they say, he had sex and then the myth, "he enjoyed it," they even make fun of it, crack jokes about it, and believe that a boy who doesn't see it as fun, is simply not a boy, letting him hang and dry up in depression, pain and guilt. But, it's still about a molested boy; it's still about a broken boy; it's still about a violated boy; it's still about a boy with human qualities, not a superficial function of thoughts and beliefs.

In the course of an uncertain and surely un-peaceful river of life for a boy, he encounters torrents of depression, pain and guilt, caused by the scars of his past, scars that

haven't healed, pain that he struggles with by day, struggling hard to live a normal life after his life experiences, which like myself, finds it hard. The scars that grace his morning, makes his day a struggle, and cries him to bed. The scars that leave him wondering and wandering in his thoughts. The solace of his heart is in his sobs, his eyes knows nothing wealthier than dropping tears of pain, of guilt that tag him "filthiest" and of depression that strands him in thoughts of helplessness. Life turns stale and full of pressure and smile and happiness seems elusive, but like always, there is light... At the end of the tunnel.

Self-pressure has a bit been undermined a problem of a boy, the self-imposed pressure to do what others are doing because we think it's right or has become popular and trendy. The pressure we put on us to fit which often turns out a debacle. We pose on us pressure and it bends out our skin. This internal pressure and the external peer pressure leads to a myriad of wrong choices, and by these choices, we create a recumbent society, full of vices that we created. Peer and internal pressure has brought a bandit from us, and this stereotype to become trendy could only be fixed when we all do remember that harmony with whom we are and not a volume of external expectations will create an equilibrium, internally and vice versa.

A first step to talk of addiction would be phenomenal, as boys suffer addiction to many ills, pornography, drugs,

alcohol and a host more, trying to break loose is to us what a prey is in a spider's web - get more entangled in the process, no practical route to be free and live a healthier life, no one reaches out, because they think we are tough and won't get anything out of the invest of energy. But this is who we are--the simplicity of nature but fed to a gallery of people's thoughts. A boy once said to me *"I really need answers, I am addicted to a lot, and it seems I won't get over the vault of depression and pain it has brought, I really need answers"*. But who is there to answer the deepest questions of his heart? The worries that rest in his inner circle of thoughts?

Though it's not our desires to be chilled to numbness, it has turned that permission has not been sought for it.

They say the darkest hours come before the dawn, and these are the darkest hours of a boy. But what is his dawn? The dawn is the truth that he is human and not a stone. He is broken because he is not steel-- broken to know what he is made of. He is pained because he is alive and not just pretending. The dawn that his tears are not weakness, they are strength and they are his survival souvenir. He is not a people's-view-programed gadget. He is a "real man" not by the idea of whom a real man is, but by the truth that being you, is being real.

"Boys will always be boys" that's erroneous, boys will be human, *"boys don't cry"* that too is erroneous, boys cry and it's OKAY. I see you withdraw into the shadows

where no one will see you cry, I understand how much you feel crying is a weakness and you shouldn't be proud about it, I understand how hard you work to fit for a real man, I understand how hard it is to let the past go, I understand how hurt you feel by the memories, I understand the pain of molest, I understand the pains of what you are going through, But here is a message for you, *"The scar is not weakness, it's strength. It's your survival souvenir."*

PEACE UFEDOJO HARUNA

ROSE IN ROCK'S CLOTHING

The school bell rang loudly causing the quiet class erupt in noise, Ayo quickly carried his school bag and walked briskly out of the class. He was worried about his younger brother whom he was sure hadn't eaten lunch. Walking out of the school, he saw Chukwudi in front of an eatery with his friends. Chukwudi was the son of a multi-millionaire so he spent money recklessly unlike Ayo whom like a few other students attended the school on scholarship due to their academic credibility. Ayo got twelve A's in his Junior School Certificate Examination as a result, the school offered him scholarship.

“*Ayo!*” a soft voice called followed by the sound of hurrying steps. Ayo stopped in his tracks and looked back to trace the source of the voice. It was Ojoma his classmate, she was also a scholarship student “hey I just wanted to...” before she could complete her sentence he turned and began to walk away, she always tried to talk to him, this scared him so he either ignored or avoided her. Ayo was an introvert in simple terms, he liked to be on his own and he often separated himself from people.

“*knock-knock who dey here?*”

Ayo made his way to the door and opened.
“*Good afternoon Sir*” Ayo greeted prostrating.

“What is good about the afternoon eh! You haven’t paid your dues; don’t you know we have to contribute to carry out projects in this neighborhood?” the middle-aged man with protruded stomach and an oily face asked.

“I know sir but I don’t have money, I haven’t even paid my brother’s school fees. Please, when I have the money I will pay” Ayo pleaded.

The man cleared his throat and said *“you better do so”* and he walked away.

“Who was that?” Shola his elder sister asked *“it’s one of those agents that disturb people’s peace”*.

Shola hissed and spat in a cup making Ayo scrunch his nose in disgust. Shola noticing this slapped him. *“You must be stupid for that!”*

“What was that for I’m I the one that got you pregnant first you are spitting in our cups now you’ve started slapping me, don’t get me angry” Ayo warned.

“Ok I’m sorry but you know I’m pregnant...by the way I’m hungry”

“Hungry? you just ate lunch, you even ate mine with yours” Ayo complained.

“It’s the baby” Shola said.

“Tell the baby to eat its placenta!” Ayo yelled wearing his shoes.

“Rubbish!” he cursed, slamming opening the door and slamming it behind him.

After thirty minutes of trekking Ayo reached the house where he worked, to Ayo if hell was a place on earth it would be that house. He cleaned the house and put everything in place, his master often went to work early and returns late and tired, leaving his wife alone at home.

“Ayo please I need you upstairs now!” the voice of his mistress rang from the room.

“Yes madam” Ayo said and ran up the stairs to meet her.

When he entered the room, she was wearing nothing. He quickly turned his face away.

“Come here. Why are you acting like you haven’t seen it before”?

“Madam please I can’t do this anymore I beg you pity me” Ayo pleaded with tears brimming in his eyes.

“Do you really want to keep your job?” She asked rhetorically before forcing Ayo to the bed.

“*Goodnight sir!*” Ayo said to his master before leaving the house.

Immediately Ayo stepped out of the gate he burst into tears. “*Wetin dey do this one, you no know say na man you be? Stay there dey do like woman*” a Police officer said with a gun hanging in his shoulder.

“*Go to your house immediately, or are you looking for someone to rob?*”. Ayo wiped his tears and walked home quickly.

“*Where is Tolu?*” Ayo asked angrily. Shola stood up lazily.

“*I have no idea. He was playing here just a moment ago*”.

Nothing could explain how confused and nervous Ayo felt at that moment.

“*He is just three years old where could he have possibly gone to? You didn't have to do anything but watch him and you couldn't do that*”.

With that Ayo set out to look for his little brother.

It was 11:00pm, clouds had gathered and it began to get windy still Ayo hadn't traced his little brother, he was scared more than ever before. Dejectedly, he walked

back home. There was no police station in the area and he didn't have enough money to transport him to the area where the station was situated.

Immediately he stepped into the house he felt small arms wrap his waist “*Brother Ayo*” a familiar voice said, it was Tolu. Words could not explain the relief he felt at that moment, his hammering heart calmed immediately. At least he Tolu was safe, Ayo would have a long sleep that night.

The next day was Saturday, Ayo had over slept. He gasped when he saw the time, he was terribly late for work, he washed his face and brushed his teeth but something was strange, the neighborhood was very noisy: quite noisier than usual. He stepped out of the house to find out the cause of the ruckus.

The people were gathered at the entrance of a dilapidated shack which stood close to a maternity hospital. It was where a close friend of his lived, when he got into the shack his heart stopped for a moment even in the midst of the noise, the world felt silent. He could hear his heavy breath and tears slipped from his eyes.

“*Ahmed...*” he trailed, his body was dangling from the ceiling.

“*Ayo!*” Farouk called running to hug him. “*My brother is gone!*” he cried.

Ayo knew it was suicide and he wondered why Ahmed would want to take his life, he knew life was hard for them but he never knew it would warrant suicide, Ahmed was a very cheerful person who seemed not to have a care in the world. Ayo was heartbroken, his friend hugged him tight for comfort. The two cried in each other's arms for a long time.

By noon the crowd had dispersed. Ahmed was quickly buried as required by their religion. They both sat in silence, Ayo had even forgotten that he had work to do.

“Farouk, sorry about what happened” Ojoma said entering the shack, Ayo shifted uncomfortably. He was always like that whenever the opposite sex was around him he was finding it hard to trust them.

“Thanks” Farouk said wiping his tears. *“I guess he couldn't take it anymore.”*

“I don't understand” Ayo asked confusingly, Ojoma settled on a stool close to them.

Farouk stood and pulled his trouser, a shocked Ojoma reflexively turned her face to another direction.

“Jesus!” Ayo exclaimed staring Ahmed, Ojoma couldn't decipher what was going on, so she looked at Ahmed and shock sealed her lips.

Ahmed was wearing a diaper “*I...I am incontinent, Ahmed was too*” he said in tears.

“*How did this happen?*” Ojoma asked worriedly.

“*We have no money to pay for this shack, so the owner of this shacks comes once in a while and...*” he trailed and burst into tears

“*Oh God!*” Ojoma exclaimed “*You mean Mr. Bello did this to you?*”

“*It's disgusting.*” Ayo spat. “*But it's not just you. My boss's wife does it to me almost every single time I go to work.*”

“*You should have reported this to the police*” Ojoma said.

“*I did but they said it wasn't serious. They told me to consider myself lucky a woman was giving herself to me.*” Ayo said.

“*You can't do this on your own, my dad needed help too and an NGO helped him rehabilitate after he fell into depression due to the fact that my mom left us. If you go to an NGO they can help*”

“*But I need money and her husband pays me well.*” Ayo said. “*Also, it might get to the news and people will mock*

me for being weak, I'm the man of the house I have responsibilities”

“I would've love to, but society will segregate me because it's a taboo” Farouk said.

Ojoma shook her head sadly.

“So why did your mom leave?” Farouk asked.

Ojoma sighed deeply. *“She found a better man”*, she replied. *“Dad's business failed, things were really bad as dad was soaked in debt, my mother was used to a flamboyant lifestyle, so she couldn't take it and one morning we didn't see her anymore we only saw a note, dad was so heartbroken”*

“Sorry about that” Farouk said.

As months passed, things got worse for Ayo as the abuse became more frequent. This was because his boss travelled abroad. Ayo's mental health seemed to deteriorate and he began to stay away from everyone.

“Ayo come to my room”, his boss' wife ordered, Ayo didn't move, he just continued cleaning the house. This angered her, she gave him an unexpected slap. Ayo almost cried. *“If you try to do it again I will report to your husband”*, he threatened

“Do you think he’ll believe you? It’s best you shut up”, she said dragging him towards the room.

Ayo was totally confused when they got to the room, the crazy woman undressed and advanced towards him. In fear he pushed her, she fell and broke her neck. Ayo looked at her lifeless body in fear and ran out. Unfortunately, that incident changed his life.

Ayo was arrested, charged with rape and murder. No one believed his side of the story. This got to the news ‘HOUSE KEEPER MURDERS BOSS’ WIFE’.

It was on the headline everywhere. He was convicted twenty-five years with no trial.

All these things happened like a flash of lightening but all Ayo could think about was his siblings.

Ojoma was in her room studying for a test when her father came into the room.

“Someone is here to see you”, he informed.

“Who?” she asked curiously.

“Farouk”, he replied.

She met Farouk sitting nervously on the couch. *“Hey!”* she greeted, Farouk responded cheerfully.

“I saw the headlines”, Ojoma said.

“Ayo didn’t do it.” Farouk said sadly. “It was an accident, he explained it all to me.”

“I know Ayo wouldn’t do a thing like that”, she muttered.

They sat in silence for a while before Farouk finally broke the silence.

“That day my brother died you spoke about an NGO and how they can help, well...I’m ready, at least to avenge my brother”

Ojoma's lips curved into a smile, she knew they would go through trials and rough roads but one thing was sure, Justice must be served.

CLOSING VOICES: LONGING THOUGHTS

OJO ADEWALE IYANDA

THE JOY OF FATHERHOOD

These words are my desire, libations, incantations, sacrifices; because it is one of my life commitment written on paper. I hope this river of words won't only pass through the backyard of your hearts but get you flooded by it.

Few months ago, I was with the kids I tutor in their home. Suddenly, they started jumping when they saw a young boy come in with a load. "Uncle, please excuse us, Baba has come", they chorused. Before I gave my consent, they have fled like a spanked child. That moment was gold for me, it was so emotional seeing those kids with so much love for fatherhood.

Maybe because I don't have such experience, maybe because I am not expecting it, maybe because I don't see such happen often, but I was more than impressed. That moment, I have to rededicate my being to my resolve which is *"a broken boy like me must do everything possible to heal, and not producing a broken boy like me but a whole man"*.

Can we all make this resolve together? That we will be committed to the healings of our broken soul even if it

will cost us to love those who hate us, forgive those who hurt us, let go of our addictions. If we don't heal, many boys will remain ill.

Can we decide to really stand up and invest in the life of those boys whose souls have been lost on the street? Whose soul have been soaked in hopelessness? Boys lives matter. Boys are not stones, they are souls and they need salvation.

Let's pour ourselves out like a drink offering till us, the boys on the street, the boys at home, the boys in the prisons, the boys unborn enjoy the joy of fatherhood, the communion of being secured.

We are boys, we are not stones, we are souls that need salvation, we want to become good fathers in every hood of our nation. Peace.

ADESINA AJALA

CHILDREN OF THE RAGS AND BOWLS

I stretch lazily from my blanket, spring from the mattress and succeed in dragging my sleepy self to the balcony of my rented apartment.

"Zo" I call and beckon to one of them. A handful had clogged outside of my home in the wee hours of the morning in aimless congregation. I call to one, but about three flutter upstairs. They hesitate entering my house. I oblige the one I call.

They pounce and grab the waste bag.

I squeeze twenty naira into the hand of the boy I called. I do not bother what becomes of him and his friends; whether they one another's noses before they arrived at an apt sharing formula. *E no concern pesin.*

I watch them trudge a path, before they fizzle out of my drowsy gaze to an unknown dump site.

This is how I become the prime culprit in the crime this essay is poised to curb. These children of the rags and bowls— *Almajiri* kid are fame punctuation in the tragic prose and the dark poetry of northern Nigeria. The phenomenon is a bad, festering wound with putrid pus and stench due to its bad nursing by people who share

same gender with the victims, we who by the sentiment of being males, should rise with collective anger and unbroken resolve to put an irrefutable full stop to this ugly narrative in our society.

Almajiri are " 'Migrant students' sent from home to learn Islamic teachings." (Almajiri Child Rights Initiative). It 'derives from an Arabic word, rendered "*al- Muhajirun*" in English transliteration.' (Wikipedia).

The scalding thing is, *Almajiri* phenomenon is a fastidious cankerworm that feasts on the boy child only. Boys ranging from 5 and 19 are abandoned by their careless fathers— yes, fathers— in the pounce of Quran tutors in places unfamiliar to these kids. These ill-fated boys are left to crash in the air of circumstances under the disguise of becoming. What they eventually become is never a resemblance of things desired. They flock the streets of northern Nigeria like lost sheep and culminate in eyesores and unscrupulous characters in the region. They end up learning the Quran, with broken psyche. They become our nagging nightmares; the kind that wakes you gasping with sweats breaking from your brows.

The intent of this essay is not to assay the sad tales of the *Almajiri* boys, but to assail and interrogate the roles of every stakeholder along the chain of this cruel structure. This structure that has since outlived its times and served its moments. It scares to note that the *Almajiri* system, as

it currently operates in the northern region of Nigeria, owns it permanence to the male force: A father brings his boy to the mallam who maltreats him and slur him into a society where some males manhandle him further — like I did in my opening story— with the government, which is male-dominated, further maligning him with the dearth of political prowess to alter his course for a good cause. For instance, recently, the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEC) former boss blamed the tragedy of our *Almajiri* brothers on the 19 northern governors who left the former president Jonathan's initiative to integrate them into western education. Professor Ahmed Modibowary words were, "The state governors left the schools unoccupied, abandoned and vandalized because most state governments refused to even take them over, not to talk of fulfilling their own obligations contained in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Federal government." This is a region, where like every other region in the country, military and civilian reigns have largely been in the reins and helms of men. Antithesis. In 2006, 1.2 million *Almajiri* were found in Kano alone from the only census ever done, we can infer that millions of these boys roach the width and breadth of northern Nigeria in rags, clutching bowls, rhyming alms songs, running obscene errands and living a twisted fate met on them by us; folks of same XY chromosomes. Perhaps, it's so true that the pest that destroys the vegetable lies clandestinely in it. While it sounds understandable that the female folks do always put blames on the males on policies that affect them, how do

we resolve the fact that this same patriarchy blamed by the females, has watered the roots of *Almajiri* phenomenon down ages? How?

For humanity, country and God.

ADAMU DANJUMA

BOYS ARE NOT STONES

In this 21st Century where every leader is clamoring about globalization, many voices have risen from different walks of life to advocate for the cause of the Girl Child across the world, as if the Boy Child doesn't deserve same.

How many times many a young boy was molested? No one dare say a word of consolation to them because they are considered as strong as stones which confine them here and there.

The boys, too, have also been sexually harassed and are still enduring innumerable abuses both in school and at home. Groups of young boys walking around the streets and boulevards to seek alms are also an integral part of the society.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has killed many. Among them are the Almajiris, and other lovable young boys are many amidst these challenges and deplorable living conditions. Boys are not lazy, but they find it difficult to go shopping or spend money lavishly. They often hustle to make their days on the surface of the earth count.

Boys are indeed not stones. Rather, they are hardworking individuals, treat them with utmost care and listen

silently to their pleas. They cried but their eyes never translated the expressions of their heartfelt. Even if the world put its problems on their shoulders, they still find time to listen to their fellow of the opposite sex.

Boys are not stones but indefatigable farmers.

Boys are not stones but impeccable partners.

EH-KOWOCHIO OGWJI

IS NEGLECT YOUR SON'S NANNY?

I do not want to make a list of the bearded babies I have met. But there are many men who carried too much of their childhood to adulthood. Men, whose muscles and broad shoulders are just a cradle for overgrown babies who do not know how to grow. The reality of bearded babies is something we'll be dealing with for a long time if we allow Neglect to be the nanny of our boys while we are busy grooming the girlchild.

What I am saying is that we need to strike a balance. I understand that we want to murder patriarchy and all of its allies. I understand that feminism has met the open arms of many a mother and it is the gospel of liberation for the womenfolk. But if we fail to carry our boys along, we are making locks without keys. That is why balance is pivotal to the advancement, we seek for ourselves and our unborn children.

Parents need to know that boys do not have reinforced irons instead of bones. They need to know that; male children must be allowed to enjoy the nursery bed stage of tender loving care before they are transplanted to the harsh conditions of manhood on the trowel of responsibilities. They need to know that boys crack. That boys break.

Just as they rock!

This, up here, is how we can stop parents from treat one child like eggs and the other, like tennis balls!

MGBADA CHIEMERIE

DEAR BOY CHILD

Dear boy child,

In life institute, you're no substitute. On this path you trail, exist oceanic portholes, gigantic walls modeled by the society. With open hand and grinning face, they will welcome you to the world. But, before you master your numeracy, they will shove to your face their manly constitution; comprising of standards you must live up to in other be acknowledged.

Boy child, I write to inform you, not to misinform you. To educate you —that daring to be different is not an act of cowardice, that stereotypes should be your greatest rivalry and finally to stay watch of the devouring paws of matriarchy and patriarchy.

Section one, sub section two of their manly constitution reads 'boys don't cry'. They sell this idea so cheap that even the little boy in the village who hardly can spell his name could afford it. However, that is a façade birthing emotional deprived boys. You must decide to stand out. And stand against such stereotypes that masquerade your emotions. These anomalies have been normalized, so when you stand to counter them. Never expect a standing ovation; the blindfolded majority will throw stones at you. They will cast eyes of aspersion on you and call you

weak. Most importantly, you should know that definition of weak is not a boy with emotions but a boy immune of emotions; resistant to care and attention.

In addition, as you grow into the man of your dreams. Patriarchy will come to serve you its sweetest misery ever. With costumes from your favorite cartoons, silver spoons and white linen and in company of beautiful maiden; he will bring to your table his appealing bitter nuts; crack it open and your tongue will become immersed in tyrannical supremacy Seducement. The 'S words' made flesh and dwells among us.

Finally, watch out for the paw prints of matriarchy. She comes without ringing door bells. She bundles young men to the altar with the shackles of pregnancy. Watch out for the jezebel of male extinction. Watch out for radical feminism.

Take care.

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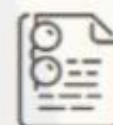
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