

NIGERIAN NEWSDIRECT CHAPBOOK SERIES
WINNER 2022

HOPEMONGER

Olumide Manuel

NewsDirect

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NIGERIAN NEWSDIRECT CHAPBOOK SERIES
(WINNER 2022)



HOPEMONGER

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OLUMIDE MANUEL

HOPEMONGER

Do not despair, my soul. For hope has appeared.
— **Rumi**

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HOPEMONGER

Lamentations 3: 1-28

OLUMIDE MANUEL

OF SILENCE

silence of the night bus & silence of the dream haze & silence of the wet moon gleaming through quiet grass & a greener silence & silence eating through a generation & silence at the tail of failures & silence pinned into truths & silence policed by lies & silence before thrones and mobs & a sheltered silence & a horned silence & the cancer of silence & silence that wears a black body & silence without grace & silence inside graves & silence exiting into walls & silence ropewalking sentiments & a silent decline & lights-out silence & a dialogue of silence & the father's silence & a silent prayer & silence in the heavens & silence of the cooking pot & a stormy silence & silence of the hour hand & a silent decay & a desperate & an interjectional silence & the soon & the never silence & silence in every before & the after silence.

HOPEMONGER

LITANY OF SOON

Soon may the wellerman come...

the soon
song/ hanging in the neck/ of the flute
is the ace poem I've been waiting for/
like the residual of a beloved's kiss/ soon exists in promises/ the space/
the guise between the when
and never/ soon is a seed/ some soon
are sooner than some soon/ and some soon never come

the soon song/ is the procrastinator's anthem/ also the faithful's
badge at the divine
silence/ /I palm my devotions with
faith/ till thy soon comes/ I concrete every promise
wearing a wind of prayer/ till thy soon comes// not knowing when
or if this seed will outlast
the pinkness of my tongue/or what
bone will hold the last ligament/
like a flag/ I'm waiting for salvation/
till thy soon comes

JUNCTURE

This body at the mouth of bloom
entered its tomorrow to make a river
out my past. I'm towelled in the karst
of my father's efforts at success, the
stumble he sat inside to sun a path
for his seeds — a seedsman with socks
of thorns; a lost harvester in the dust
of droughts — I saw his loneliness and
it was not attractive. There was a boy
thriving on his wound, and a bristled
song is how he goes well into the nails
of nights, scaling as he dreams, growing
new skin. Sleeping as he peels, unlearning
a shell of life. But I do not know how to go
from my wake. I'm not a boy anymore,
and I'm terrified of making mistakes.
How underreckoning is it that age makes
the difference in the pricing of life?
If this discussion is not a black market
I'd have shown you how my father's
sigh is heavier than mine, and his laugh
has more colours than the world can contain.
It's a thing of age & graves. I'm at the juncture
of being a father too, so I recognise this anxiety.
Maybe one day, there will be dreams I can't hold
back from sinking, sinking without remorse.

(FATHER, I AM SO FULL OF GLASS)

There's a bleachfield of hope in the void mirrored into time, and there I stand as a single bud, a thumbnail amid stars, a folium of a song under the wet tongue of an empty space. All the nights I drowned into, bookmarked a cocoon of light into my body, ripples of fleshed survival, tiny whispers from tomorrow — the silence in my life is a brown forest. As a promise, I'm aging too fast. I cannot bear the eye of a mirror. But what eats me more is not loneliness. It is the futility of dreams. I, too desire to redeem my past with my future, to shatter the glassy asymptote that stretches my daily joy into a fleeing river. Yet, what kills me heals me, for I bloom as much I wither. Father calls it adulthood. I smile as if I understand.

RECIPE FOR HAPPINESS

it is no easy feat to fold cheerfulness into a body besieged
by gloomy silence, especially one that builds up like a kind of tumour.
sobriety has always been the dark wisdom of souls that have become too inward,
too deep, too self-sacrificing.

Nietzsche said the recipe of happiness is a yes, a no,
a straight line and a goal
but it is never that simple, is it?

I mistake growth for joyful coincidences.

yet I have had joy float past me, & I have overgrown the altitude of some joy,
forever humbled by how limited we —I and the minute joy—are.

Rumi said happiness abounds in the sweet perfume of God, and a drunken soul
has to be oblivious. Mary Oliver, who is shelved across him, disagreed softly,
saying the balance between felicity and grief is the units of memory stored in
gratitude,

that if my silence breaks out, I will recognize a dawn
in its blessing of newness, the grace of healing and how the small miracle
of sitting inside their thoughts & words
is indeed enough reason to brew happiness inside a tumbler, and cup
its bloom inside my belly for as long as possible. And it is the un-strugglesome

quiet of this moment, bottling gratitude into itself
that made me say to them — it is good to be here. so good.

let us make three tabernacles, or three benches in the morning
overseeing the kitchen counter of happiness.

one for Nietzsche, one for Rumi, and one for Mary.

MASK OF []

If a mask is also
a face,
I'm still counting
the
rotted things
comfortable
in the void
fresh grave
throats.
How
many
violent
hole s
absorb our
that fears
were too large to control?
the end
being witness
is one
of the joys of life I wear.

Original text from *A Black Spirit Memoir, Deity | Dear Eloghosa*, pg. 56. *Akwaeke Emezi*

IN GUISE OF NIGHT

A crescent moon hangs here, hope a rope
Swinging left and wrong in the wind of uncertainties
Fireflies ascending and ascending
Lamps leaking a lullaby of litanies
Yet the skies never shoot a star
The night holds a guitar with broken strings.
In still rivers, my eyes are the finger
That drums against the symphonies of nocturnals
But it's too dark to see the shapes of grief
Making homes out of my body.
My girlfriend once tried exoneration in a vigil of candles
I passed out before she could undress.
In the dreams where I run towards sunrise
There's this half-burnt palm tree, its branches weeping
Into the feet of a brown owl, its silhouette
Gleaming in a moonglade of a gutter water
Reflecting me in bad light; wearied nose masks
Body placarding rusted bullets & penury
Soul in the tired colour of unscarred wounds
And I kept muttering
This is not me this is not me like I'm trying to believe it.
Like I'm trying to dream new dreams in a bad dream.

DISCOTHEQUE

Beneath neon lights flickering the excitive pops of fanfare;
booze and girls and spirit— black boy's war.
I sway in a discotheque, drinking 504,
dangling betwixt a loose mouth of nightmare
and here— a district in hell. Rainbow upbeat
funk drops like pills, incoherent joys, as retweets
of retweets of reddit memes — I don't feel lost really.
Just somewhere between there and discovery.
I'm trying to keep up with the map but the music slurs
my charge like an android, meat romance,
leeching thrips you cannot strip off on any dance
altar, shedding spirals by slurps by slurps.
And I hate that I can't deplume my grief off my laughs.
I hate it that I pity my happiness. But I like
this reverberation of souls to level up with the frenzy galore
It's only retro wisdom to be young and wild and nowhere.
Time has given no other chance, so I trance
on by slurps by slurps by slurps.

RIPCORD

A butterfly brushes
against a bony cage.
Stay dead, I breathe it.
The smooch of hope
is nostalgic to me
like a bird carrying
a twig in her beak;
like how the broken
offers the best counsel
to the near-breaking.
Now, if you will,
call me a heathen,
but I know there is an act
to endurance that profits
its curse— the absolute claim
that endurance works out
all impossibilities, that
patience can soup rocks,
that in the end, the yoke
breaks, yet most times,
it's my broken body
I harvest at the end
of my waiting season.
The body, the future
yoke of wars and
soon the heart grows
into a gravestone
that outweighs all
the bycatch of surviving.
So to say, living is a subtle art of dying.
Too many layers of death to live through.
There is another truth: hope is as potent
as love, as poisonous too.

OF SLEEP & DEATH

What is it that makes sleep different from death, the smoke from the heap of ashes? I've always suspected that the not-knowing we came from will swallow us in the end because knowledge is such a long neck. It is as if there is a blessing of forgetting upon the hull of every life, a mystery of beginnings. Every moment being a door in these infinite circles, but, which came first; light or darkness? a song or the long silence? I've imagined walking through a star in my sleep to a past life of speck & dust, of plopping around, some wild horse running through brooks & rocks or a baby blue butterfly in springtime. I'm not sure I will believe it. If I bisect my imagination, will I find truth in it? What are true visions? What are sweet hallucinations?

ECDYSIS

I take every wound to be a blossom
 even the ones lacerated from a kiss
 & salt-frilled embraces the contour
 where the core paints its ovule of friendship into ichor—
 tracing the verge of my last wound
 the lovely mango mud-grown bubble
 fitted inside a parenthesis of comfort a dark matrix
 in what love roams under the shadows
 the brightest light— the glass of our convo
 easily broken into portraits of delight & limbs—
 nude like an engorged dawn flickering under expiration
 till its fever breaks down the tempest christening
 the agony in blissful tale soon the mango skin
 jaundices against iced moments melted desires held in juiced
 tongues departure had lingered from the first
 sight / we know/ but we held its breath in our raw throats
 & when it came we did not struggle
 we let absence mirror itself sing itself to our skin
 like a newborn baby
 in the mouth of sunset an ecdysis becomes another name
 for heartbreak—
 a missing mango for a promise
 of buds.

HOPEMONGER

EVERY BEAUTIFUL THING IS AN ELEGANT INTERACTION

no single part makes a sound by itself.
a vacuum is a song that cannot sing itself.

so a rain could have fallen as silently as a thought,
unhinged, pouring sleety like grief washing
away the silence of broken dreams & ghost towns.

and a poem, like my favourite notion of self
is a form of commingling, an ongoing interaction,

stirring, stringing, strumming, swirling.
and not putting these conflicts casual— the smell

of mud after rain, the rushed steps, the clasp
sound of umbrellas, the vibrance of wet hibiscus, & of

the grease staining the tarmac with a wounded rainbow,
the silhouettes of cold little birds on saggy electric wires;

the carefulness and recklessness of words,
of puddles, of clear air & of strained sky—

everything is vibration.
every beautiful thing is an elegant interaction.

including the silence nurtured beside a poem.
like one moment is whispering nothing to another &
another to another & another

till the whisper finds its meaning in silence
till the nothing vacuums into a body of meaning.

OLUMIDE MANUEL

ARS POETICA

I am safe in my fears, in the knowledge of phobias,
allergies, the boundary of my quietest wants.
I am safe in not-knowing, the silkweed of ignorance
that blooms in the dark, shame is not much shame
if one profits in its self-reductionism.
I am safe in my low self-esteem, the suppression of
hopes, buried into dreamgrave of my shallow breaths.
I am safe in my lack, in words & in wealth, the limelight
beams like shards, so I am safe from the dreads of popularity.
I am safe in sobriety, in the littleness of words, and
in the safe house of poetry. Metaphors camouflage me,
& I hide my small mind under the apparels of hyperbole.
The beauty of protagonists, the vice of antagonists,
and the near-invisibility of some characters, all belong to me
But I'm safe from judgement in the ways I confess my sins.

HOPEMONGER

this year, my hypocrisy grows.
you cannot imagine the weight
of lies i'm comfortable with.

at dawn, I call them hopes.
at dusk, they become jokes.

dull knives of comedy, shelved
in my chest. it becomes a little
hard to laugh like i used to,

yet I can't unlearn my addiction
to the passivation of casualties.

it is a survival tool. it is what
I teach my students. it is what
I will preach tomorrow—

you will be okay.
everything will be fine.

MOONWALKIN'

the moon fetters the music in me,
so much that I find a fiber of peace
in it — fountain filling the valley
of sighs; light plateaued the calmness
I guise with glee, so when grief
looks upon me, I look anew.
I am the identity of joy borrowed
into moondances—
the expanse of sky can't even
fit the frame of my mind, & how
little of the world do I see at once,
now tell me, how big can a worry
be, besides the echoes of stars?

HALLELUJAH, DISAMBIGUATION

Hallelujah, a sheaf of songs, a psalm of hands, sometimes
 I'm full of your rains, sometimes, of old skeletons in a pile
 of sighs. The testimony of a black survivor is a bruised glory,
 nail-petalled but wet with grace. I'm amazed at how its
 wound folds the sun inside many moons, fountains the
 perfect healing from its festerments, and still defies the
 umbral retelling of traumas, and their embouchure that mars
 a song at the rung of an angel-kissed dawn. Inside a morning
 bloom & blobs of dews, I name every distortion a mortise
 because my lord knows carpentry, and if he hands the
 hammer I can erect my poems on a lake of mirrors, and
 if they shatter, if we crumble, if I'm
 lurching for peace in bed of nails, *the song is hallelujah still.*
 When a limping quarter of a miracle tugs under the autumn
 of my soul, I'll find your rainforest and plant my moist
 spicules into your belly, o starved hallelujah. Take this,
 eat. This is the broken body of my thanksgiving. Everything
 in me sings regardless— the bony languet, the knife-eyes,
 the dry songs and prayers of parvanimity. Even my
 silence, when not in dregs of awe, is full of dread.
 God is perfect, and I know it too well, yet I am not sure if
 my grief will ever come to its full circle, but my praise will
 surely go on and on.

MALARIAL HALLUCINATIONS

Apparitions with opened arms lead
debouchures into spectral aches

& void arches, a heavy dry kiss leans
into this cranium, blooming like a nova

falling like a meteor, I hate when the inside
of my eyes becomes the inside of a wound,

wet, a gleaming discotheque, a district in hell
pockets the fractals of magenta klaxons

I always safeguard my own distrust
—this is no little thing, nah

this is my father's masquerade with his chaotic
garb of colours pulling the sun

every colour has a tooth, each pair of teeth
grabs a pestle, each pair of teeth

gnashes my name, I'm somewhere out
of myself, I'm somewhere floating

past myself in a wilderness that calls me
her bride, the embrace that holds me

is callused with anguish. I witness
in that lucid dye the locus of the struggle

between the quinine and the yellow herb,
mother says all works together for good, I

don't argue. I drift.

ODE TO DAWN & THE COFFEE JUG

i like how my coffee tastes like loneliness.
the irredeemable kind. i'm poetic enough
to believe the moon sits with me sometimes—
in the saucer; on the desk; the onion layers
of internet tabs; the view leaking across
the patio when the morning is still a yoke
of nightly bodies — two wounded moons
inside my head howling to their eastern cousin
and how quiet is the call? it cannot break the trick
of the coffee, it cannot break the smile slopping
at the wound of the dawn. i'm right there
scrapping at the callus of rest; longing after the fractals
of wholeness beside the lip of my glass jug.

HOPEMONGER

DANIEL RICKY

my feet kiss the wet ground of surviving, recalling the warmth
of a dream in sepia hues. a bird returns with a catapult's bruise.
a bird carries a twig in its beak. one of the things that sustain a soul
is gravity— in it the gratitude of rising again. in the projectile sling
of sun, I pocket hard days in a shawl, obverse the body that surfaces
when nights walk into me, a cauldron of caffeine, souping hope.
i'm not tired of believing, my faith is becoming too familiar
to let go. little Daniel Ohikhenya had to curl into the nostril
of an aircraft to fly. trusting his gut, he stole into the hangar,
arms extended with titanium grace, & the rest made news. listen,
risk is alive in every seconds & there's a desperation that anvils
out a miracle. the table hasn't lost its wheel but is that an illness
taking the guise of caution? how malicious is the comfort
rooting us in half-blooming mediocrity? let's skyline a dream
against rough edges, lurch into sleep after a poem with God.
when the dawn creaks, we grind again & again.

DREAM HOUSE

Above the mantelpiece is a star, small enough to fit inside a clock
When it jingles, it twinkles. When it twinkles, it is another new night.

The house's foundation is a little above the mesosphere, and nothing
to worry about the cold, I have a star in a clock set above the fireplace

doubling as the fire throne. The moon is a stone throw from here, being
a hot soup on favorite nights, I go there to shout, howling against the quiet

of my soul, wearing beads and a wave of silky expensive wrapper like
a king, regal and composed in camaraderie with the woes of hard hopes.

Most times, I sit on the verandah with a hook and a prayer line, fishing
for dreams, not the ones half-eaten by birds and heat but the living,

fresh buds from the upward thrusting of the god who also lives beneath
my dream house. Sometimes, I'm lucky, I catch some as big as a storm

and I fold them gentle enough to fit under my pillow. By this I teach
faith to my bones, to trust the clock, the storm, the foundation of

this house, on which the stature of a king is built into the star.

WHOLE

I osmose
these losses
into a song.
I river the full
moon out
of my prayer mat.
The proportions
of citrus in me
gland two mysteries
on a lipped-hand
clasping desires
till my insides
become the mirror
of a flaming skin,
and the margin
of their kiss
is undefined.
Every polarised
groanings are cells
of an old wound,
but here I kneel
into the dawn,
standing on rumble
of words, falling
under the weight
of hope—the yearly
sorrow inside
the mustard eye
of mitochondria.
I faith a cycle
of sunrise here,
a tissue of blooming.
The honeyed communion,
that the nucleolu of
my lord's presence
may wash over me,
and I'll be made whole.
& now, in this tiny
moment of my wanting,

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I am whole.
Whole in the loss.
Whole from the loss.
Whole in the whole.
Whole in & out.

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OF BEING

everybody falls to ruin
of glory is stagnant &
if I should teach palmistry
I'll say no tomorrow is
stumping, that exhale dreams
of the sun, into whose fiery
is collected. you've heard that
talents, but this I tell you, harbour no fear,
in this life, we will fall, fail
diminish the beauty of being
the fireflies and the moths
tomorrow has its woes, but yea, why should you care?

eventually, the telltale
backwards at times.
in the shade of humour,
given to the stars, the bumping,
into the projectile
yellow body every weary bone
the cemetery has the most
and die, and it doesn't
here, in the flesh.
holding your eyes to the moon.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olumide Manuel, NGP IX, is a writer, a biology teacher and an environmentalist. He is a nominee of Pushcart Prize, and the winner of Aké Climate Change Poetry Prize 2022. His works have been published on Magma Poetry, Trampset, Uncanny Magazine, Agbowó Magazine, Up The Staircase Quarterly, Frontier Poetry, and elsewhere.