



LILAC SERIES
IKEMEFUNA AND OTHER POEMS

A Collection of Nature Poems

Fortress Isaiah Ayinuola

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**For men and women of all nations and creed who resolved, standing on
one voice: “We must re-green the earth!”**

“...If the mountain should soften its heart, adorn its self with green,
Become fruitful -

The sound of green footsteps in the rain
They are coming in from the road, now
Thirsty souls and dusky skirts brought from the desert...”
- Nadia Anjuman -

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FOREWORD

Dr. Isaiah Ayinuola Fortress has gradually, but consistently carved a niche for himself as a nature poet. He has presented us with poetry to sensitize us to our responsibility to regreen the earth and preserve our common heritage.

This collection, *Ikemefuna and other poems* which is within the Lilac Series comprises well over fifty poems, all of which bear on the need to build bridges, create boundaries and establish thresholds that would leave a heritage of prosperity for posterity.

The poet has spoken through the colours of nature, the eyes and voices of all creatures which by divine ordination are part of man's heritage. There are three major segments of the collection.

In the first section, we encounter the chameleon, the butterfly and the weaverbird along with other carriers of beauty. We behold the majesty of the lion king and salute the ebullience of the total man who is the pride of creation. We also link the pristine times with the timing of the crowing cock.

In part two, we live the seasons as we dance to the echoes of the deep. We savour the song and aroma of the harmattan with love as the rhythm. In part three, we encounter Ikemefuna, the legendary character, who by the judgment of time had to go down to appease the angry gods of the deceptive self.

The Ikemefuna metaphor is apt, as it explores the recklessness that has gone into our onslaught against our earth. There is the call to strive to keep our nations secure and united, where no man is oppressed. The presentation and style of the poems are simple with the message urgent and pungent. The themes are deep seated with the illustrations carefully made to appeal to our conscience.

I congratulate Dr. Isaiah Ayinuola Fortress on the success of his enterprise. I invite you all to share in the beauty celebrated here as we enter into a covenant to preserve our earth and make our world a beauty to behold.

Professor Charles U. Ogbulogo
Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies,
Covenant University, Nigeria.

PREFACE

In dream there are neither rules nor lines. Poems limited by rules and lines are neither inferior nor superior to a dream. These poems are of the most delightful dreams in the midst of the biting cold outside: the logging and the fog, the gas fleering, the gasping darkness and the grey dusky fallen leaves.

I was warm:

“Even flowery tree tops sprung up and we
Rested on them sometimes with the lightness
Of a cloud till the wind blew us away again.”

I dreamt of a green earth, a blue and a carbon-less sky and tried a poem upon it but nothing of what I felt in the dream:

O that I could dream it every night.

O that I could see it every day.

I dreamt of a green earth, a blue and oil-less sea and tried a poem upon it but nothing of what I felt in the dream.

O that I could dream it every night.

O that I could see it every day.

In these collection, nature poems fly on the wings of metaphor, imagery and symbolic impressions. Each poem flows as a river, from the turbulence of a rapid beginning, meandering gracefully around mountains and hills, down through plains and valleys of vegetation into the deep blue sea of life. Part one is a comment on the physical nature of fauna and flora; part two is a construct of nature of the seasons, the landscapes of life and dominion of human society represented in symbols and surfaces; part three are narrative nature poems and part four reminiscence on Love, foundation and roots; stem, budding and fruits; giving and eternity.

These poems, though, are mere dreams signifying nothing, I long to see each verse as I dream it. Dreams do come true.

Fortress Isaiah Ayinuola
September, 2013.

Part 1
The Cock Crows

Chameleon

On branches green.
Among leaves, you dissolve from prey-hunters
Who haunt your days.

Pray, I am no foe. Though my presence
Make you pause and stare.
Come, conjurer of colours, and do not fear.
I bring for you a gift:
Robes of rainbow and heart of love.
So, come. Here, I stretch out to you
My hand of pal-ship, a branch, green and fresh.
Gently, clinch to it and with careful steps come.
I long to watch you play with colours.
I love to see you change from green into rainbow full.

Now, rainbow dear, confide in me:
What powers have those eyes?
What secret in that skin?
Why the slow, careful steps?
What resolution in those firm grips?
Chameleon, shy little Chameleon,

On branches green.
Among leaves, you dissolve from prey-hunters
Who haunt your days.

Pray, I am no foe. Though my presence
Make you pause and stare.
Come, conjurer of colours, and do not fear.
I bring for you a gift:
Robes of rainbow and heart of love.
So, come. Here, I stretch out to you
My hand of pal-ship, a branch, green and fresh.
Gently, clinch to it and with careful steps come.
I long to watch you play with colours.

I love to see you change from green into rainbow full.

Now, rainbow dear, confide in me:

What powers have those eyes?

What secret in that skin?

Why the slow, careful steps?

What resolution in those firm grips?

Chameleon, shy little Chameleon,

You are a living rainbow.

You are a living rainbow.

The Butterfly

Don't go please don't go
Softly! Softly! Tender butterfly
Wait for me, please do wait for me.
Its the thorn again. Thorn in my sole.
Yours on tender petals and soft.
Don't go please do wait for me
Softly, softly tender butterfly
Wait for me, please do wait for me
Let's together explore your kingdom free
Let's together share the liberty we have in common.

Let's us together, on your wings and saddle of pollen display
The master strokes of the craftsman's finger.
Let us together, on your tender wings display
Your coat of many colours
Let us together count the colours on
Your tent of many colours.

Let us together count the colours of flora and choice petals
Let us together count the colours of the rainbow
Let us together celebrate and share in His pastime.
Let us together explore His infinite workshop.

The Weaver Bird

The green rain forest statesmen are fallen
Under saw and logs.

The weaver bird has lost its voice in parliament
Of the woods to the winged elephants:
Swallowed up in their hollow flowing agbada-gowns and airs,
Pot-bellies and pepper soup, stars and razor-starched khaki,
Resource-caps, seven in one titles and retinue of praise singers.

The weaver bird fled her home, away, far, far away from stumps
Of fallen iroko and the grinning teeth of the saw-machine.
The weaver a refuge on a lone tree in a forest of zinc-roofs and concrete.
With sterling lyrics, the weaver soothe hurting nerves and thaw stony faces
Into smiles.

Suddenly, the bulldozers came swaggering in with trunks of steel
And down went the tree.

The one eyed weaver bird has lost a home and two weaver-lines.
Limping and clinching onto life, she tenanted a corner of our store-roof
And built for herself a new home of saw dust, papers and blood
from fallen feathers but far away from plucks and fingers of children who
frequent petals, away from curious lovers in garden of bees, nectars and
butterflies.

The gods are dying out fast. A wasted generation is giving way to a spillover
Generation. The limping weaver bird and her lyrics held on to life. Showers
From her nest, new songs of stubborn hope over flow store-roof, spilling over
down the land and its echoes meandering a thousand hills.

Oil Tree

Oil tree, oil tree!

Your roots are deep in the heart of the rock
The storm will come; surely, the storm will come,
But remember your roots are deep.
The wind will come, sure the wind will come
But remember your roots are deep
Your roots are deep in the heart of the rock.

In the heart of the rock
In the heart of the rock
Your roots are deep in milk of the rock

Rock-milk, rock-milk

Oil tree, Oil tree!
Your roots are deep enough to stand
To withstand the storm
To withstand the wind
Your roots are firm in the heart of the rock

In the heart of the rock
In the heart of the rock
Your roots are firm
In the wine of the rock

Rock-wine, rock-wine.

The Araba

Kowo, kowo!

araba o womo, oju ti iroko

Kowo, kowo!

Bring down the Araba!

Bring it down from the roots.

Bring the chainsaw for the stem

Bring the bulldozer for the roots.

Reduce its pride into a log,

Its roots into ashes for the wind.

Let it come down,

with a thunderous crash!

But the mighty Araba refused

to stoop to a fall.

Shame, robe of shame for the big Iroko

Fall, fall, but the Araba refused to fall

Shame, robe of shame for the big Iroko

Kowo, kowo!

araba o womo, oju ti iroko

Kowo, kowo!

The Burden of an Ass

The ass and its masters

Burden...

Soul and body bartered for
a morsel of grass.

Soul and body sold for
a morsel of grass.

Spirit sold into shackles,
No room left for Will to ponder,

But to low and bray
for a morsel of grass.

To low and bray,
after a morsel of grass.

The ass and its masters
Burden.

This burden, just for a morsel of grass.

My Little Summer

My little Summer is black

As black as winter

When it barks, everyone shivers

As in winter when dry leaves

Fall by the force of the wind.

When he sees a bone

He looks up to you

As spring looks up to summer

Then, my little Summer will be as

Warm as summer.

The Lion is King

The ground scratching harassment

Of the goat is vain

He cannot wear the crown.

The king's steps are majestic.

The fire on the cocks head is vain

It cannot match the flame in the lion's eyes.

The lion is king

The cow...

The day of the long knives: palates and stew of hides.

The night of the long mares: dreams and fleet of horns

The cow is all hides and horns.

The total man...
A cart of fruits,
The horse and its rider.

The cock crows...
The sun steps out
In flowing rays.

Poverty of money...

Squirrel shells empty of nuts-

Anything anywhere, except joy.

Deep and Blue

Deep...

The blue sea

The blue sky

Attitude ...
A two faced coin:
Regret and dream.

The Clock Lied

When the clock crows the coming of dawn,
The clock lied: "it is the eleventh hour."

When the sun rises at dawn,
The clock lied: "it is the eleventh hour."

When the sun is overhead: the clock lied:
"It is the eleventh hour"

When the cock goes to roost: the clock lied:
"It is the eleventh hour"

In death, the clock is not like the parrot
In death, you read the parrot's silence.
A living parrot repeats what it hears.
But a clock tiks and toks! and tiks and toks!

In Search of Nectar

Like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon
Transformed into a butterfly,
I feel like a butterfly.

Away, away, little butterfly, from this shattered
concrete garment that entomb these colours.
Away, away for nectar.

Caution, caution, little butterfly,
In your search for nectar:
Beware of thorns, briars and fangs.

Away, away, little butterfly, for nectar.
Caution, caution, little butterfly, in your search for nectar:
Flowers and thorns, nectar and shackles,
briars and chains, fangs and petals.

Part 2
Seasons and the Landscape of Life

Echoes from the deep

The deep calling to the deep.
From the belly of the blue sea,
From the belly of the blue sky.
Tidal waves, lifting up and casting down
Wash, wash...wash!
Thunderstorm, clapping, wraps of thunder
And showers, showers...showers!

But

Humanity stands at the cross road - bewildered:
Casting down or lifting up.
Humanity stands at the cross road – bewildered
Casting down or lifting up.

Echoes from the deep calling to the deep, calling...!
Wash, showers...wash!
Showers! Wash...showers!

The mountain and the hills have ears.
They echoed every sound from the deep blue sea
Wash...wash...wash!
They echoed every sound from the deep blue sky
Showers... showers...showers!
Wash... showers...wash!
Showers... wash...showers!

But

Humanity stands at the cross road - bewildered:
Casting down or lifting up.
Humanity stands at the cross road – bewildered
Casting down or lifting up.

Songs of Harmattan.

The rain came too soon.
It kept us away from the fields.
Away from our hoes and cutlasses.
The fields are wet and green
Fuel and rum are in store.
fuel kept us warm and lost in dreams.
Liquor filled us to the brim.
Our ribs often stiff from dry laughter.
Outside, the Harmattan sang, warningly:
“All that the mirage is worth is its distance
From the eyes. In time of plenty, they glitter”
Lent is near.
Harmattan came and went unheard.
Once again, her songs came through
Our eaves. Singing dry leaves dropped warnings
On our roof top unheard:
“the life of the winged termite is shortened by
Folly, with eyes wide open, into the blazing fire
It plunges headlong.”

The quickening rhythm

Since God established creativity
Creativity has never gone on strike
The woman her weaving
The spider its web
The bird its balance
The sun its warmth
The cloud its rain
The river its flow
The sower its seed
The tree its fruit
The soil its womb
The soul its will
The spirit its eternity
The body its return
The shadow its secrete
The word its flesh
Since He established creativity
Rhythm as never gone on strike

Love Is the Game

Love is the game that two can play and both win.
But with discord, hurting and hating,
It is defeat galore for both players.
For every action,
There is an equal and opposite reaction.
Love is the game that two can play
And both win.
With discord, hurting and hating,
It is defeat galore for both players.

Adie balokun
Araorookun, araoraadie

The fowl perched on the line
The line is not at peace
The fowl is not at peace

Adie balokun
Araorokun, araoraadie.

Love is the game that two can play
And both win.
With discord, hurting and hating,
It is defeat galore for both players.

Adie balokun,
Araorokun, araoraadie.
Adie balokun.

Because The Land Is Fallen

The land drew us to himself
Everyman that tried to rise fell to the ground.

When an aircraft soar for the top of the cloud, it nose-dive
down:

Because the land is fallen,
The people fallen.
The people are drawn to the land.

When the seacraft surf for new coasts, it sank below the body-
floor:

Because the land is fallen,
The people fallen,
The people are drawn to the land.

When the landcraft snort for high grounds, it came down in tumbling
crash:

because the land is fallen
the people are fallen
The people are drawn to the land.

When the suckline takes its first chew of crawling out of the box, it returned to its
Suck:

because the land is fallen
the people are fallen
The people are drawn to the land.

When the toddler takes its maiden sole-steps, faggot-limbed, it returned to its
Knees:

because the land is fallen
the people are fallen
The people are drawn to the land.

Because our people are fallen
Our land is fallen:
Our land drew our people to itself.

He came wearing gloves

His hands hanging by his side

I gazed at his wooden face

Where warmth has a place

I searched his heart

Where cold has its sovereign throne

I moved closer to receive him

Extending my plain hands of fellowship

For nine score minutes, my hands stood waiting, hanging.

When the veiled hands lifted,

It was stiff, lifeless and rigid.

I grabbed it and clinched it, it was cold and empty of warmth:

Even in its dress of colours, but I held on to it. He shrunk at my grip

I took a step closer as one holds onto life.

Hoping that the longer I held on, some how

Life should find a path through the gloves,

Into his frozen heart, thawing the veil of flesh...

Oh! The foolish Wizard

Oh! The foolish Wizard,
 How he loved his little space
Of waves and quick sand.
 He built on it a hut from feathers of owls.
A home overlooking the Gulf of bats.
 And he said, giggling to his soul:
 “He who loved his wife loved himself.”
 Like insanity let loose,
 He wooed the Pacific and courted
wild Katrina.
 Oh! The foolish Wizard.

From Dawn to Dusk

The door to the house remain
Under lock and keys: Chains, bars and shackles.
Daddy is away to work
He will not be back until midnight.
Mummy is very supportive
She too is away again to work:
She must need keep the home fire burning.
Her boss is there to wait on,
Serving tea and smiles till late evening
Wages are attractive and there is a task
That must be done
The only warmth that keeps the home united
Is the frozen smiles from hanging family pictures.

Leftovers are scarce for the guard dogs
With mournful howl, listless and lonely
They arose and return to their vomit.
Scaling the walls into the streets, foraging
And scavenging the open gutter and over flowing bins.
Sandwiches, burgers and take-away abound
In the junk coolers. Glued to the TV screen
They glut every program.
Yet there is the hunger and the longing.
Curiosity lured the children to moon windows
They left home with doors ajar, tip toe,
Pass drunken boots and giant iron gates
Into the streets, paved with stone flames
Dry weed and fire bursting into ecstasy. Nostrils and powder
Spirits and highs rise and falls, veins and needles
Voices and company, darkness and shadows of footsteps.
The children hug every warmth in the streets
Under blind, fallen street lights.

The Dilemma of a Broken Home.

From dawn to dusk
The door to the house remain
Under lock and keys. Chains, bars and shackles
Daddy is away again to work
He will not be back until midnight, perhaps.
Mummy is very supportive
She too is away again to work
She must need to keep the home fire burning
Her boss is there to wait on,
Serving tea and smiles till late evening
Wages are attractive and there is a task
That must be done
The only warmth that keeps the home united
Is from frozen smiles from hanging family pictures.

Leftovers are scarce for the guard dogs
With mournful howl, listless and lonely
They arose and return to their vomit,
Scaling the walls into the streets, foraging
And scavenging the open gutter and over flowing bins
Fending.
Sandwiches, burgers and take-away abound
In the junk coolers. Glutted and glued to the TV screen
And the damp walls, sweet as hard as rock in the children's mouths,
Yet there is the hunger and the longing
Curiosity lured the children to the moon windows
They left home with doors ajar. Tip toe...
Pass drunken boots and giant iron gates...
Into the streets, paved with stone flames...
Dry weed and fire, nostrils and powder
Spirit and highs, veins and needles
Voices and company, darkness and foot steps
The children hug every warmth in the street

Under blind fallen street lights.

These children in scanty wears
(With the inscription “bosi corner”)
Lurk around damp corridors... panting
And waiting on... and loitering with roving loins
Every step “yanga toloto”
Taking lung full of every approachant,
Racing for car headlights or just waiting...
Just waiting...
Mere school children waiting patiently
For some sugar ‘daddy’, or ‘sugar’ mummy
Or ‘honey uncle’...

And here he comes! The killer virus himself,
With a carefree snorting strides of empty
Swagger, with jingling wrist and ankle bangles-
Chains and shackles
A sniff dog set to unveil innocent virtues
Here he comes! The killer virus himself,
Encroaching into virgin fields, distributing
Drops of aids of death.
Like the Shar of China, he donates AIDS to
The fatherless- homes, the orphanages and easy-widows.
Here he comes, in silken tinted ‘yopy wears’
To take a daughter to shelter under the fading moon
(Shrubs and thorns, but far away from his broken home,
of graves and bones.)
For a warmthless union with the living

Shattered sour and in stupor the children wandered
And staggers unsure of which way to go.
Longing for home, they retraced their steps
Towards the cold hands of a desolate home -
Empty of warmth:
The dilemma of a broken soul,
The dilemma of a broken home
The dilemma of a broken land
The dilemma of a broken world, in search of humanity.

The World is Smaller

The world is smaller than sun rise
The world is smaller than sun set
The world is smaller than tale by moonlight.
The world is smaller.

The world is smaller than the Kings palace.
The world is smaller than our village square.
The world is smaller.

The world is smaller than my father's farm.
The world is smaller than my father's foot.
The world is smaller than his eyes.
The world is smaller.

The world is smaller than my dream
The world is smaller than my eyes
The world is smaller than my ears
The world is smaller.

The world is smaller than the toddler's palm
The world is smaller than his thumbprint
The world is smaller than his fingertip
The world is smaller.

The world is smaller than the dew of inspiration.
The world is smaller than imagination.
The world is smaller than abstract-words.
The world is smaller than concrete-words.
The world is smaller.
The world is smaller?

Ornate and Simple...

Two blood sisters

Ornate is flamboyant and pretty,

Simple is natural and beautiful.

Both children of art and taste.

Thirty Pieces of Naira

Thirty pieces of kisses and
The log, the log in your eyes!
But turn, turn again.

The spikenard or the speck in her hairs,
The noose of ashes or the necklace of oil,
But turn, turn again.

Thirty pieces of kisses or your feet in oil.
But turn, turn again.

Go to a place where you can weep freely

Go, go to the home of the sea and watch her children deep at play, go.

Go to a place where you can weep freely

Go, go to the wise mountain, where eagles nest and reign, go.

Go to a place where you can weep freely.

Go, go, meet the water-fall, where youthful zeal freely

Speak to turbulence below, go.

Go to a place where you can weep freely.

Go, go to that part of our earth where ants, in season or no

Mend fallen foundations from rubbles, in service, in industry, go.

Go to a place where you can weep freely.

Go, go to a child of two and let your ears stoop and listen

To songs untouched, pure as spring, go.

Go to a place where you can weep freely.

Go, go to a place where you can weep freely, go.

If All Humanity Were Mankind.

If God created all humankind men,
If all ^{men} were men,
Who will enwomb the seed
of human recreation?

Then seed time will cease to be.

How can we be at ease?
If our nests hanged from
a tree with rotten roots?

Then fruitfulness will cease to be.

Where do we stand?
On what will our weary soles rest?
Where do we set our remains, our spent tents?
If the earth became the sun?

Then the earth will cease to be.

A Lament for Concrete Jungle

(The epic eco-battle)

In this concrete jungle, it is grey for green
As the weaver bird flew past the streets of Sango.
Chandeliers and concrete walls
Have taken the place of moon and stars.
Grey-path-ways and stained walls
replace woods, trees and flowers.

The epic eco-battle for green or grey rages on:
The man is dying, aged trees falling, the sea-horse limbless,
And the cricket bewildered into silence.
The epic eco-battle for green or grey rages on.
In this concrete jungle.

A common fire

Our common fire, once kindled, burn and die.

There has never been a common fire.

The home fire burns up to the door and die.

There has never been a common fire.

Snakes from the same bowel, fight their battles alone and die alone.

There has never been a common fire

The nepo-tribal fire burst from the countryside,

and ravaged our common conscience,

there has never been a common fire.

The blessed fire burn up to the holy gates, and die there.

There has never been a common fire.

The youth-fire burns up to lofty dreams

And die there.

There has never been a common fire.

All things common, once kindled, burn and die.

All things common, once kindled, burn and die?

All things common, once kindled, burn and die.

Music of our circle

When the tone of sapling spring takes the dry air
March with caution, into full ripe summer:
Flirt wisely with flamboyant summer.
Her singing colours may blind you and make you forget
The coming fall.
The fruits of our summer have enough for reflection.

When spring beckons
Delay not but march
When autumn knocks
Flee not but march
Summer come and go
When these seasons play their tones
March, brother march.
March, sister march,
Do not fear the barking of autumn
In her bosom the fruits of our summer are secured,
Safe from the teeth of winter.
Do not mind the bite of winter:
In the dearth of winter, there are enough for reflection.

After winter spring, and our seed shall stir again
With the rising sun,
Thaw the teeth of winter and set our seeds free.

When spring beckons
Delay not but march
When autumn knocks
Flee not but march
Summer come and go
Winter come and go
When these seasons play their tones
March, sister match
March, brothers match
Do not flee, do not delay.

For ever with you

Radiant Love,
Set me free from this damp cellar.
Let me find a part into the warmth of your arms.
We should walk hand in hand,
Along the boundless street of your sky.
You and I, and I will not turn back.
You will not send me back to the cellar?
Where I see nothing but walls.

Radiant Angel,
Let me discard this cold cell and dissolve.
Lead me into the warmth of your heart.
We should walk, hand in hand,
Along the infinite street of your sky.
You will not send me back to the cellar?
Where I feel nothing but pain.

Radiant, King,
Let me discard this shelter of clay, bones and blood.
Engulf me with the warmth of yourself.
We should walk hand in hand,
Along the path of the infinite glory of heaven.
You and I, and I will forget all that was behind.
You will not send me back to the cellar?
Where I taste of nothing but sweat and dust.

I stand to conquer

The lot before me is the infinite desert.
The infinite waste that lies between you and I.
If the wind uplift the sands and the sun bake the earth
under my feet,
I will tame the wind, I will conquer the desert, I will overcome,
I will stand unshod beside you.

The lot before me is a mighty rock.
The vast rock that stands between you and I.
If its crown rest in the chilly cloud and its stool annex
Half the earth,
I will not stoop in fear
I will overcome the rock, I will conquer the rock, I will overcome
I will stand unshod beside you.

The lot before me is the infinite sea.
The boundless sea that lies between you and I,
If its waves roar and its deep threatens to draw me in,
I will not turn in despair.
I will face the sea, I will conquer the sea, I will overcome,
I will stand unshod beside you.

The Pillar

The pillar of straw that I lean on for support, ^{is not steadfast,} but cannot,
When it falls on me, surely, it cannot kill me.
And when the foundation is firm on the rock
What can the storm do?

What can the storm do?
The mighty tree laughs roarily
Into the face of the storm.
What can the storm do?

What can the storm do?
The storm that kills the Araba
The storm that shreds the Iroko

The mighty tree in the hand of the Sculptor...
Is like a scepter in the hand of a lion,
a willing rod sent out with tongues of fire.

The Wish of a Comet

Little folks down, down below.
Here I orb, bright in space but yet
In darkness stray.

If I should one day wander
Into your human realm of clay,
If I should one day be stirred
By some power of chance to comet
Down, down towards you.
When my flesh shall sparkle
As it rends to shreds,
When time rends to shreds my glowing garment,
Then little folks, do not in awe stare at me.
But if my vehicle should spare
Even a piece of my garment,
Then on my remains let this stand:
“Here rests a star who rode from dusk to dawn of life
in a flash of lightening

The toddler is king

When ever the toddler came visiting his realm
Make space for him, make clean the high ways
The toddler is King
Clear bins and pans, bits and pieces of dirt and dangerous objects
From every corner of his highway, here and there,
Objects that could harm its tender limbs, hoof-knees,
The kings eye surveys every nuke and corner of his roomlet-kingdom
Make straight the way, the toddler is here, the king eye explores every bit of its
kingdom of wood of furniture, toys rugged or concrete partway.
Make way, for the toddler king is here.

Let the mother lioness keep a watchful eye on crawling toddler king
While the baby lion explore new territories – from ants, millipedes, wood-land and
savanna:
thickets, thorns and shrubs; monkeys hopping from tree to tree,
mountainous elephants and ants do not escape the toddlers kin

Every object is an object of intense admiration for his tender hands
And his mouth easy tool for what the hands and eyes is not sure.
The toddler is king.

Part 3

His Feet Sang With the Earth

Ikemefuna

I was three, when Ikemefuna was born. And
nine when I took my first unsteady steps into the literary realm.
I heard for the first time, Ikemefuna's cry for help,
When the teacher read the lamb's travail to us in class.

When Imuofia remembered sacrifice,
the gods remembered Ikemefuna and pronounced death:
Ikemefuna must die! They croaked in one voice.

The elders lied the lie of a return home:
The nine elders, their whispers, throat-clearing cue,
The sacrificial lamb and a pot of palm-wine.
Surreptitiously, his little feet and his heart sang
with the earth a song of home coming.
I was a part of the leaves that sang:
Sang with his feet, sang with his heart, sang with the earth.

I was only nine but I heard the whispers of
Conspiracy against meekness and innocence:
"Have no hands in your son's death."
I was a part of the fallen leaves that rustled
under their crooked foot-path as their bare
soles pounded the earth.
I was a part of the fallen leaves.

When "the Ides of March are come,"
Alone, in the enclosure of the deep forest
And by the clearing of the elder's throat,
I was a part of the forest leaves and I heard
the elder clear his ancient throat and
They "let it come down" as rain on Banquo.
I was a part of the forest leaves.

A father must not be seen to be weak.

Ikemefuna, in horror, turned to his father for protection,

But “Et tu Brute?” Ikemefuna’s father, as bold as steal
and fearless as a cat, his hands spoke for him.
He cut down the child that calls him father,
I was a part the forest leaves and I saw him, as
his claws spoke for him:
He tore down the child that calls him father,
under the pot of palm-wine.
I was a part of the forest leaves.

A father must not be seen to be weak.

I was only nine and a part of the forest leaves.
Now, I am fifty-three, in this present dispensation,
I can still hear Ikemefuna’s cry for help,
Whispers still lock in dark places, shadows of cold hearted men,
I can hear the cry of Ikemefuna in these children, bewildered
Youths turning to the elders of state for meaning to all these madness.

Now, I am fifty-three and the deafening war cry is marrow deep.
And a father must not be seen to be weak:
“To keep Imuofia one is a task that must be done”!
I was a part of the forest leaves and I heard
The lies: “No victor no vanquished!”

But now, I am fifty-three, and fathers see nothing wrong cutting down
children that call them father.
Must we cut them down? When we hear our children’s
Cry: “Help me father, they are killing me!
Must we cut them down?

Must we cut them down?
In this forest of deceit, jungle filled with hyenas,
Children crying: “help me mother, they are killing me!
Must we cut them down? When we hear our children’s
Cry: “Help me brother, they are killing me!
Must we cut them down?

Oh my heart!
When I was nine, Ikemefuna died and things fell apart,
Now, I am fifty-three and as ageless as the evil forest.

No more surreptitious whispers and clearing of throats...

In this anathemic doldrums of suspicions,
I will be glad of another Achebe.

Oh, my head!
Now, at fifty-three, the hyenas are out:
The hang-man's noose, the noose: neck-lace, ashes.
The lions lurking and stalking in the shadows
The lambs are gone into hiding, hungry.
Grasses are grey and scarce as the writer's pen
and the poet's head, chains.

Oh, my land!
Now, at fifty-three, no longer at ease,
because the centre refused to hold:
The arrows of gods piercing the delicate peace and
reducing the noble's mansions into rubbles.
Flooded valleys submerging anthills of the savannah.
Kid and adult-nappers, oil-gods belching fire
across the Delta waters: greasy streams, nightmares,
daydream-booms, rings of cartels and barrels of doom.

When Imuofia remembered sacrifice,
the gods remembered Ikemefuna and pronounced death:
Ikumefuna must die! They croaked in one voice.

Now, I am fifty-three and the deafening war cry is marrow deep.
And a father must not be seen to be weak:
"To keep Imuofia one is a task that must be done!"
I was a part of the forest leaves and I heard
The lies: "No victor no vanquished!"
"No victor, no vanquished?"
But I was a part of the forest leaves!

His Feet Sang With the Earth

Daring indeed

A mere child of six

Standing in over sized cloths, she stood unsure
before the towering wealthy gate, oblivious of
the mute but intimidating threats of danger signs

Hanging from the mighty barbed wall:

‘Out of bounds’, ‘Beware of dogs’...

Unmindful of this, the child remained standing.

Hunger and the pandemic are as close to him as the back of his hands:

First it was Daddy, then it became a game of ‘who next’?

He stepped through the gate ajar -

Trees and shades in patterned-rows:

Apples, pineapples and oranges, water melon and thirst.

The gentle breeze plucking fruits...,

Bark! bark! Bark! growled two fleshy mongrels

They sniffed at a fruit and turned away, on the heels

Of some fallen leaves...,

Peck, peck, a bird sank its beak into a ripened flesh,

And out it flew with short sharp freee! freee...!

Flowers and colours and butterflies,

Roses, bees and lilies, pampered with care.

The weary little boy drank and chewed his dreams patiently.

The old weathered gardener, bend double, tending

broken stems and grafting buds like kisses.

Humming “what a wonderful world” under his breath

and counting his days on his finger tips.

He sensed the boy from a far and straightened himself to a bow.

His compassion caught the pleading hunger in the lad’s sunken eyes’

And a fresh vigour of love stirred him to the child.

His aged steps embolden the little boy as he intoned softly

With eyes to the ground, his little fingers tending a petal of Lilly.

“Can I have some fruits and flowers for mummy, please?

She promised to tell me a new story tonight.

You can come and hear her too, if you will.”
The gardener gave him nodes of fruits and flowers.

The little boy with giant stride of six, left for home,
Open to the country side: here there are no flowers,
No fruits, no gates, but broken walls, stunted roots, and grey grasses
And little fresh graves adorn the only foot path.

Grasses and thorns on house tops,
Delicate and green. The dew of heaven touches these ones first,
And when the rains come, they
Leave furrows and gullies down the withered valleys.
Stunted roots, and grey grasses
Clinched like bugs, to the weary breast of the earth.
Downhill, he danced towards home: “Home, sweet home!”
His little feet singing with the earth.

Like a cool evening breeze, he blew past children,
aged grannies and nannies: neighbours that hung
about like fallen hamartan leaves.
His feet light on the earthen stairs that stands on gullied foundation.
He opened the door gently, for it is weak,
Its bowels loosened by termites.

Singing his entrance, “Fruits for mummy...” he sank beside
the wooden bed, which is now as weak as faggot.
(The same bed on which HIV and four of his kindred had shared)
“Keep this one, oh Lord, from this scorch that we may live...”
He heard her mutter softly. And as the little boy, gently
Placed a fruit to her mute lips, she went limp.
He knew the difference: the absence of smiles, the silence of death.
The fruits dropped from his meager fingers and rolled towards
The door. Now alone, he held on to the flowers for warmth.
The gentle wind outside wailing through the whistling pine.
Its humming sobs cracked open the fallen door.
Suddenly light flooded the lonely room as the gardener and his son
walked in.

Under The African Sky.

Like locust, consumption hovers over head, with arsenal droppings,
Aerial bombardments, with death on its tail, on a people
Sleeping under the full sun.

Ravaging and maiming the country side with its scorch-
Earth claws: Tearing and wearing the African sensibility.
For the deadly lack of light, the enemy moved in with ease
On wings of ignorance and poverty.

Jointly, they ransacked homes and break earthen-hearts.
Street corners are bewildered with naked flesh.
Shots and needles are no shield against the scorch.
HIV's on rampage - to strike and waste.
Now, the schools are empty, street corners overflow
With shadows and fear, sun set with sunken eyes,
Grey skull bones and ribs grinning painfully,
Chest and bowels eaten up and ravaged, spittle
Dry and staccato of wasting tobacco-tuberculosis.

Bony hands of grand Nannies filled with spoon-shovels,
Waiting longingly with bowls, beside dehydrated water tapes.
Their ancient rheumatic-eyes, wet with fresh tears and sweat,
Sweet memories of rosy days of youth gone, of brides and grooms
Of flower girls and kisses, of babies and toothless tender gums,
On nipples and belching between milk and smiles: pride of
motherhood.

Now, Undertakers, black, with lines fully booked.
With soily hand gloves, moulds and shrouds, and wrapping shawls
For small, medium and large bags, bundles of cold sweat, of stone
Children, of dreams prepared for ant festivals.
The cots are empty, bowls empty of handouts. The land is eating
Up her own children: Her feathers, like dry leaves, fall about
Her bony feet, exposing her surviving quashuakor children.

But see! The sun is out again, warm with life.

The river still flow, in our veins rapid spring.
I can see hope, I can see traces of rain cloud,
gathering under the African skies.
Let us together receive these drops of life.
For those whose hands are down, let us receive,
These drops of love, for tomorrow, the sun will be out again.
The river will never cease to flow our way.
The rain cloud will gather again. So let us,
Let us reach out as one
Let us give with one voice.
Let us sing in one melody,
The song of life, under the African skies.

Flowers and ashes

The birth of dawn caught us
Sinking our teeth, deep into the earth.
Down, down we hogged,
Raising gold-tents from earth-dust.
Down, down we durst,
Raising mansions from clay.

We adored these treasures with rapture rear.
With ravishing devotion, we adorned
Our tents and mansions,
Unmindful of the passing storm of time:
Noon, twilight, dusk and night, and
Homeward we must again.

Our tents and mansions we must leave behind:
Ornaments that must sink,
Down, down six steps, into the bowels of the earth
Ornaments that must crumble
to dust and go with the wind.
Flowers adorn landscapes of waste.
Clay and ashes beget flowers.

Through glutted valleys, stunted savannah and thirsty dunes,
We groped and for several seasons we soared...
Traversing thirsty valleys and vast planes
of desert of darkness.
Suddenly, like a flash, the sky, radiant,
Summoned the clouds (that hung over our heads),
The winds came and left in a storm.
The bloated monster-cloud burst, heavy with rain
And several seasons knew plenty.
But home is not yet.
The gold mine we left behind nudges us with retreat.

Home is not yet.
Home is many more seasons away.

Home is many more seasons away?
Home is not yet.

Part 4
The Lion is King

Your Roots are Deep

Oil tree, oil tree!

Mama

Your roots are deep

Your roots are deep in the heart of the rock.

Oil tree, oil tree!

Mama,

On the rock you stood with roots deep and large

Roots that suck from the nectar of the living

Water,

Your fruits prosper with wine, your shoot reach

For the sun,

Apple of God's eye

Oil tree, oil tree!

Mama,

Your roots are firm in the heart of the rock

Your roots are deep enough to stand,

In the teeth of the wind, and the howling storm

Mother

Now the angels have stirred you across the great river,
Into the bosom of your lord.

Your feet have found the leisure of angels.

Your ears are refined for melodies for above mortality.

Now, your heart is one with Him: your master and lord.

Queen mother, mother of Kings,

The lamb-hearted mother of lions, even David

Mama has crossed the great river into glory.

Like Ruth, she found the water of life that flows in Naomi,

She sold all Moab and her gods and bought the rock in

Bethlehem-Judah

Mama has crossed the great river into glory.

Oil tree, oil tree!

Mother

Your roots are deep

Your roots are deep in the heart of the rock.

The Oracle Called Mother

She is the earth,
She is bone, offspring of clay and wind.
She is the earth,
When she looked back her children followed
in steps.
She is the earth,
When she ate the fruit, her children suck
fruit-milk.
She is the earth,
When the fruit she ate turned sour, the
dwelling of her seed became the hard ground.
She is the earth.

She is the shield of wings and feathers
over her seed, against swooping beaks.
She is the earth.
She is the earth,
The deity that swallows her own children,
She is the earth.

She is the earth,
When the passionate warmth of her lover-sun
Hovers over her river-chambers, and the ecstasy
of cloudy romance, rumbles of rain storm:
she is the earth,
She drinks the showers and brings forth up-springs of green.
She is the earth.

The oracle called mother,
She is the earth.
The orisa called mother,
She is the earth.

I Long to Look into Your Eyes

For in your eyes I can see
the love and the tears of joy.
I long to look into your eyes -
For in your eyes is the reflection of the mighty king.
I can see the longing just to please Him always.

I long to look into your eyes -
For in your eyes I can see
the long suffering of a mother.
I can see a longing to enter into His rest
from a long and thirsty journey.

I long to look into your eyes -
For in your eyes is the delight in patient waiting for the coming king.

I long to look into your eyes -
For in your eyes I can see myself
I can see a son given.

I long to look into your eyes -
For in your eyes I can see the fingers that will not break a reed
I can see a lamb slain for the transgression of humanity.
A quiet spirit whose voice is not heard in the street.

I long to look into your eyes
For in your eyes I can see the spring of living water.

The virtuous woman

I came in unshod
and found the bride
about her master's business.
She brought in love-flame
and lighted all the candlesticks.
And light was enthroned
where darkness once held siege.

The flame licked up the shadows as
it gained possession of the sacred room.
The flame swayed and flickered gently
to the sustained lullaby of the wind,
But her curved palm came between
the flame and the wind.

The flame gaining confidence steadied
And brightened up to reveal the bride's
calm cherubic face: the opulence of inner grace.
Surely, this is the secrete place of the most high.
And standing before me is the virtuous woman.
I looked into her eyes and in those childlike eyes
I saw the mighty king.

The Release of Eagles

The season of release is here again
Everywhere looks fresh, radiant and evergreen.
The fruits are ripe for shaking.
Harvest is here! And
The mother eagle is about to stir up her nest again.
On the release of the sixth eagles:

May his enabling grace water this green pastures.
May the mountain top of Canaan drip with new wine,
May the hills of Covenant University flow with milk
and its brooks overflow with the quickening grace from
The living water.

Congratulations! Congratulations!! Congratulations!!!

Who can stand Him?

Who can stand the lion King?
When He came visiting,

Olorun o se gbija
Eniajulo la gbija

When the king came visiting
Dagon's den cannot contain the lion king
When he came visiting
Dagon fell face down shattered

Olorun o se gbija
Eniajulo la gbija

When he came visiting
Laban's god was dumb. It
Could not protest the humiliation
Between Rachel and her camel's back.

Olorun o se gbija
Eniajulo la gbija

Insanity let loose:
Acting and taking God for your kid brother
Is vain...
Olorun o se gbija
Eniajulo la gbija

His Dominion of Love

His rain on the human race

 Rain on the fauna race

 Rain on the flora race

His mercy rays on

Green race

 Black race

 White race

 Green race

 Yellow race

Spring race

 Summer race

 Autumn race

 Winter race

Harmattan race

 Rainy race

Pain race

 Conscience race

 Broken race

His rays are constant over the work of his hand

Constant

 Constant

 Constant...

You Must Return Home

The spirit must return
To the Eternal Home.

I have spoken this in proverbs
I have spoken this in compassion
I have spoken this in stripes
I have spoken this in brimstones
I have spoken this in swords.

I have sent the eagle's kin
I have sent the ant's wisdom
I have sent the ostrich's folly.

But you are inclined to sorrow,
inclined to the dark alley.

But do not judge us by the standard of your wisdom
Merciful One
Do not judge us by the standard of your knowledge
Compassionate One
Do not judge us by the blast of your nostrils
Gracious One
For we are mere mortals

When the Spirit is Done

And its time to say farewell
to the house of clay with
laments and the kisses of adieu.

when the spirit en-soared aflight the eternal-craft
Then commit this breathless broken vehicle
Into the mother-earth a day before eight...

Because the journey to a finer spirit as just began
Do not lament but put your own house in order.
For the time to say farewell is near.

When we run together and won the prize,
Then we won the prize,
Then I won the prize.

When we succeed, I succeed
Body, soul and spirit
When the home succeeds, then I have succeeded

When we succeed, I succeed
Body, soul and spirit
When the community succeeds, then I have succeeded

When we succeed, I succeed
Body, soul and spirit
When the nation succeeds, then I have succeeded

I am a drop of water
I am a part of the body of water
I am part of its calm
I am a part of its turbulence
I am a part of the tempest in the valley

I am a part of the living water.

I am a drop of blood

I am a part of the body of blood
I am a part of its calm
I am a part of its turbulence
I am a part of the tempest in the vein

I am a part of the quickening blood.
I am a part of the quickening win
I am a drop of water in the valley
I am a drop of blood in the vein
I am a drop of wine in a vase
I am a drop of oil in a vessel
When we run together and won the prize,
Then we won the prize
Then I won the prize.

I Saw His Face

I saw His face
From a cleft of a rock
I saw His face!

“I will put thee in a cleft of the rock...
Thou shall see my back parts; but
My face shall not be seen.”

I saw His back,
From a cleft of the rock,
I saw His back!

“I will put thee in a cleft of the rock...
Thou shall see my back parts; but
My face shall not be seen.”

I saw His back,
I saw His face
I saw the face of the mighty king.

Flaming Crown

Who are there mighty men?

Coming into the house of our God?

With starry and flaming crowns in their hands.

They seemed like little children, by speed and steps

And the heaving of their breasts, but the Oil on their

Beards forbids me...

Their radiant eyes are of the order of the lion and the lamb

Of Melki, the tribe of a more excellent way.

Sowing and Reaping

Eternity is a paradox...

giving and taking and giving...

lunging and leafing and lunging...

inhaling and exhaling and inhaling...

seeding and harvesting and seeding...

Sowing and reaping,

eternity is a paradox.

This collection, *Ikemefuna and other poems* which is within the Lilac Series comprises well over fifty poems, all of which bear on the need to build bridges, create boundaries and establish thresholds that would leave a heritage of prosperity for posterity. The poet has spoken through the colours of nature, the eyes and voices of all creatures which by divine ordination are part of man's heritage. There are three major segments of the collection.

In the first section, we encounter the chameleon, the butterfly and the weaverbird along with other carriers of beauty. We behold the majesty of the lion king and salute the ebullience of the total man who is the pride of creation. We also link the pristine times with the timing of the crowing cock. In part two, we live the seasons as we dance to the echoes of the deep. We savour the song and aroma of the harmattan with love as the rhythm. In part three, we encounter Ikemefuna, the legendary character, who by the judgment of time had to go down to appease the angry gods of the deceptive self.

The Ikemefuna metaphor is apt, as it explores the recklessness that has gone into our onslaught against our earth. There is the call to strive to keep our nations secure and united, where no man is oppressed. The presentation and style of the poems are simple with the message urgent and pungent. The themes are deep seated with the illustrations carefully made to appeal to our conscience.

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