

Poetry Series

**Tobi Adebowale**  
**- poems -**

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## Tobi Adebowale(April 2nd)

Born in Lagos, Tobi Adebowale hails from Ijebu Ode in the South-West of Nigeria. A lover of the Arts, avid reader and writer with interests ranging from politics, social issues, sports, religion to literary writing. Tobi started writing poems as a JSS3 student penning down his feelings about various issues. He was later to represent his school at local inter-school poetry contests, winning prizes and awards. Winning his school's annual essay contest further encouraged him to write just as falling in love in senior school inspired him to write more poems. Tobi sees himself as being multi-talented and is quite ambitious. He is currently a law student at Nigeria's foremost university, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife.

# A True Rebrand

Like a tongue  
Deprived of the teeth's company  
It lay sprawled  
Like it could do no wrong  
It wore a smile serene  
And a demeanour so sane  
That made me doubt  
If indeed I had reached it  
But I had  
And pleasantly invincible  
Were its struggling millions  
Its surging unapproved kiosks  
Its maddening buses  
And shifty hands stealing purses  
Also happily lost  
Was its love for confusion

So like an old man  
Tired of his wicked ways  
Oshodi watched with disinterest  
My daring regal strides  
That once drew its ire  
Oshodi lay passive  
Divorced from its devious spirit  
That hitherto fed me fear  
Seasoned with courage  
and bravery spiced with caution  
That old Oshodi  
Also taught me to rejoice  
every single day I  
walked past it  
without being pinched  
by its ever untraceable claws.

Tobi Adebawale

# An Apprentice's Song

On my exit today  
Master  
I recall with nostalgia  
My first humble step  
Into your intimidating workshop  
Half-trepid, half-smiling  
My feet trembling  
And my heart racing  
Contemplating the expected.  
Your experienced eyes  
Shot into my timid eyeballs  
Like darts  
Accurately hitting the bull's eye  
Shivered within  
And would have bolted  
But for the assuring hands  
Of my uncle  
Resting warmly on my shoulders  
He, with fatherly candour  
Claiming with all pleasure  
Told you to mould my future.

Worked to your plan  
Your errands I ran  
From your knowledge I tapped  
Rejoiced when you clapped  
Sad when your whips graced my back  
With many a ruthless smack  
Showing your mastery in the art  
Dwarfing the energetic efforts  
Of the senior apprentices.

All that is past now  
For today I sing  
Songs of freedom  
Not from slavery  
But from its similitude  
Freedom from servitude  
I sing a song

A song of freedom  
Freedom to have an opinion  
Freedom to act as a man  
Freedom!  
A new lease of life  
The beginning of my future.

Tobi Adebawale

# Drunk Sonnet

In seedy bars  
Men sit  
Clutching bottles  
And chatting raucously  
In ignorant arguments  
And bawdy narrations  
Of lustful escapades  
With gullible teenagers  
And cheap whores  
Truth be told  
Men wreak havoc  
But alcohol does much more  
Exposing their weaknesses  
And wrecking them.

Tobi Adebawale

# Fleeting Feeling

For long  
I wiled in solitude  
Till you came along  
To change my attitude  
Concerning this feeling  
That is never stable  
But ever fleeting  
And never predictable.

Inexplicable happiness  
Came with your presence  
But soon  
Like the moon  
Hidden by a dark cloud  
You went with the crowd  
And as you strutted away  
Your invincible high-heels  
Dug holes in my heart  
Letting in pain  
And letting out blood.

Like the setting sun  
With the shine gone  
Our romance went asunder  
Leaving me to wonder  
How come you were  
And then you never were  
I even ponder  
If good things linger  
For a little longer.

Tobi Adebawale

# Gone Till October

The frenzy of wriggling old waists  
The frenetic swerve of nubile dancers  
In daring contests  
With stunning acrobatic manoeuvres  
Of brawny village studs  
Cheered on  
By the guttural voices of kinsmen  
And the entrancing beats  
Of sacred traditional drums.  
Even the dead reappear  
Decked in variegated costumes  
Bellowing guttural chants  
Of messages from ancestors  
While they shuffle clothe-shod feet  
To the beats of sacred drums  
Those are the sights and sounds  
That gladden our hearts  
In ways we cannot logically tell  
But for a while  
The inexplicable symphony  
Of these diverse spectacles  
Will cease for a while  
And return  
Riding on wind's wing  
When in October  
Our king takes his next wife.

Tobi Adebowale



# Green And Greener

Reminiscent of dark days  
When ancestors were  
Fettered and ferried  
Across oceans  
Into servitude  
In distant lands  
Pent-up compatriots  
Sleep at embassies  
Waiting to pay  
Through their noses  
For admission  
Into subjugation  
Indignation  
And discrimination.

With time  
They realise  
A bitter truth  
That greener pastures  
Are not grazed  
Freely  
They demand sweat  
And humiliation  
Even blood  
In moments  
Of xenophobic outbursts.

Disappointed  
Like the prodigal son  
They remember  
This green land  
They left behind  
And conclude  
That after all  
With the same devotion  
And energy  
Expended elsewhere  
They could do much  
In making this pasture

Much more greener.

Tobi Adebawale

# Living In Death

In their veins  
flowed the patriotic  
blood of ancestral spirits  
that laced their hearts  
with pain  
for their nation's gain.

In harm's way  
they chose to stay  
giving expression  
to many's muted speeches  
against political oppression  
that daily threaten  
their nation's well being.

Soles ached under feet  
minds faced the heat  
fists waved in agitation  
defying frustration  
and on history's page  
blood etched their rage.

In jail  
thinking brains  
graced by batons  
chose not to wail  
but envision pain's gains  
rejected compromise  
and chose sacrifice.

They embraced the earth  
with love in their hearts  
even for the piercing bullets  
gifts from bloody berets.

To MKO and to Bhutto  
To Giwa and to Saro Wiwa  
To Kudirat and to Luther  
Even to others

Accept this a tribute  
You live in death  
As ever lives the truth

Tobi Adebawale

# Mending My Zeal

As time flies by  
With each passing day  
The ice builds up  
And spreads sideways  
Widening the gulf  
Between me and my notes  
Long abandoned  
To dust gather  
As my broken zeal flees  
From the crushing ills  
Of the broken seats  
Its back cushion-bare  
On my back printing scars.

Even the fleeting light  
Has been put to flight  
By agents of misery  
Whose dreadful emissary  
Consoles me with darkness  
Makes a mockery of my candles  
In its business  
Of filling me with fears  
Of imagined creepy djinns.

Though my mind thirsts  
Knowledge taps under locks  
Break to pieces my zeal  
While my thoughts run riots  
Over the deliberate neglect  
Of the feelings  
Of the nation's youths  
And what becomes  
Of the nation's future.

Even if I braced the odds  
And picked pieces of my zeal  
To mend in the cold  
Of long deserted theatres  
I'd still wonder what to read

Since for long  
Resident surgeons are long gone  
To wrestle higher forces  
With a clueless umpire watching  
Leaving my idle eyes  
To feast on the empty pages  
Of cold school notes  
While I keep tabs on the news.

Tobi Adebawale

# Mortal Bravery

He maintained a distance  
Even from neighbours  
To avoid giving a chance  
To lurking creditors

All were bothered  
And they wondered  
Why a man his size  
Had to grope with cowardice

He would prove them wrong  
Only needed the chance  
So the feeling grew strong  
At every availed instance

Then he saw them coming  
Creditors formed into a mob  
Walking and running  
So he turned the knob

They broke in  
And he was there waiting  
Hanging from his red tie  
And again they wondered why.

Tobi Adebawale

# Playing Roles

Concealing their sufferings  
With superb acting  
People in our bursting city  
Go gently about their duties.  
Aside the home video stars  
And faces featured in soap operas  
There remains many  
Acting not for money  
For in the city  
Thousands are actors  
Working without directors  
Yet showing much dexterity  
In playing perverts on Friday  
And acting saints on Sunday  
In hallowed cathedrals  
Where night crawlers switch roles  
To play pious subtle souls  
Swinging gently to cymbals  
But on Thursday  
Dangle hotel room keys  
Before dashing secretaries  
Before going home to play  
The caring hubby  
In the cast of a loving family.

Tobi Adebawale



# Saved

His passionate calls I refused  
Yet He never ceded  
His calls to me were songs  
Playing on for me to dance  
Not to His adoration  
But in drunken derision  
His calls came with promises  
But I chose worldly fantasies  
Yet He kept calling  
And I kept dancing.

Like a recalcitrant kid  
Ignoring the elder's bid  
I chose to dare the storm  
And took a bath in the stream  
But then  
Then  
When the storms of life came  
Reality dawned on me;  
Weighed down by life's tribulation  
And the devil's affliction  
I heeded His call of salvation  
After realising my foolishness  
Amidst bitterness.

I walked into peace  
And an inexplicable bliss  
My rag changed into a bright gown  
A smile replaced my frown  
And in the Lord's embrace  
I perceived unrivalled grace  
Then rid of all pride  
I begged to be His bride.

Tobi Adebawale

# Sweet Relief

From my eyes  
Tears flowed freely  
While my manacled limbs  
Sang of pain  
Helplessly  
I gazed at the blue sky  
And then at the glittering plain  
Where I longed to be  
But for my restraints.

Milk and honey flowed  
It glittered and sparkled  
The plain was endowed  
A place my soul desired  
But for the inhibition  
A threatening gorge  
Ensuring a division  
Between this horrifying hill  
Where I am bound  
And the golden plain  
I only can stare at  
Even if loose  
My hands were not made to fly

Tobi Adebawale

# The Fizzling Sizzle

When it was new  
Her faults were few  
Her beauty shielded them  
And there was no problem  
Then things changed  
Thoughts re-arranged  
And she looked evil  
A scion of the devil  
He thought of divorce  
Then thoughts changed course  
So he showed pity  
To avoid bad publicity.  
But soon  
The door opened one noon  
To reveal two faces  
And bodies in similar laces  
It was clear  
He had confirmed her fear  
That he had found a queer treasure  
In polygamous adventure.

Tobi Adebowale

# The Hallowed Cave

Circled by many dreamy eyes  
Seated on raffia mats  
Waiting for the voice of wise  
Nursing hope in their hearts  
And anxiety combing their hairs  
His guttural chants went high  
Then descended with variant fears  
That gave their hopes wings to fly.

He cherished people's reverence  
And also in great measure  
He fiddled with their patience  
When they seek life's treasure  
Thus only the truly brave  
Went near the seer's cave.

Tobi Adebawale

# The Hangman's Noose

In mid-air  
It lies suspended  
With potent power  
Waiting to serve  
Its stone-faced master  
It poses  
Like the open mouth  
Of a cunning croc  
Waiting patiently  
For its helpless victim  
And when it gets him  
It acts like a robber  
Snapping  
Snatching the life  
Of unlucky convicts  
The hangman's noose  
Thick and round  
Hanging gaily  
Like a harmless swing  
Yet a frightening terror  
To criminal minds  
And horror  
Even to the innocent.

Tobi Adebawale

# Their Cries, Their Lies

When filled with bread  
In their homestead  
They send us mails  
To invoke our wails  
Wherein they assume  
That our lot is doom

One doom report  
Lures financial support  
To self-appointed experts  
Who dished out false alerts  
Collecting aids on our behalf  
And magnanimously give us half

Our senses are not too weak  
To perceive their trick  
But we'll make things right  
Rather than fight  
We will search for that will  
To correct our many an ill

We have a vision  
To back our rebuilding mission  
The past may be unpalatable  
The present just endurable  
But things will get better  
In a future not too far

We refuse to be discouraged  
By preying nations who have aged  
And now spread mails of doom  
To nations where they seek room  
For their chauvinist ego  
That just wont let go.

Tobi Adebowale

# To Cordelia Tanko

Recall that blazing afternoon  
When you and the sun boiled with rage  
And for reasons I did not envisage  
Our bond was severed that noon  
And sadly I left for home  
Waiting gloomily at the bus station  
For the next bus going my way  
I got a seat beside a fair madam  
Who when I let out a cough  
Showed much concern like you  
Thanks sweetheart I remarked  
It was you I had thoughts of  
Her face rang an alarm  
That told me what was amiss  
And I offered apologies  
Feeling irritated  
As the bus erupted in laughter  
I decided to get out  
Cordelia I erroneously shouted  
Trying to call the conductor  
The laughter grew louder  
Dubbed a clown by a lousy lout  
While his friend talked of psychosis  
I ignored the jeer  
To the conductor pushed my fare  
Waiting for the bus to halt  
And immediately hopping out  
Shouting Tanko  
In place of thank you  
Even forfeiting my change  
I walked on  
With their laughter  
Ringing loudly in my head  
And my blood boiling in the sun  
Beloved Cordelia  
Your outburst was at work  
But I `m left to wonder  
If that was a good job





## To Cordelia Tanko 2

You got my previous piece  
And did not respond  
Please respond to this  
So my mind can taste peace

Yesterday as I set out□  
To meet with a job scout  
I knelt to knot my shoe lace  
Then thought of your smiling face  
And of the words you would say  
To wish me a pleasant day  
I knew the day would be colourful  
And it turned out wonderful  
One nice job I sought  
Nine better ones I got  
So with grand poise  
I made the best my choice  
The moment was great  
But I could not celebrate  
I imagined you joyful  
At my being successful  
We would then fix a date  
For us to jointly celebrate  
Like couples on holiday  
Then I stopped to pray  
That Cupid shoots you again  
With arrows of my love and pain

Said my prayers at night  
And dimmed the light  
But as my head hit my pillow  
Thoughts of you began to flow  
Bringing back one evening  
After we had been dining  
You wished me night's bliss  
And blew me a kiss  
Then I found myself in dreamland  
Where you were also on hand  
Cordelia

In sleep or awake  
Only you I see  
Just one thing I ask  
Please come back to me.

Tobi Adebawale

# Trapped

I can't comprehend it  
I thought I was untouchable  
But now I am at sea  
As to how it came to be  
And like a shark in a net  
Threatening it to tear  
My bones almost jump  
Out of my skin  
With perspiration wet  
As the thoughts come by  
At a speed so high.

Overwhelmed  
I surrendered  
Before the time came  
Reneging on my vow  
Giving the world a clue  
That I'm also sentient  
And not impervious to feelings  
Such as this  
Slowly sickening strange emotion  
Called love.  
I've fallen into a pond  
Where I can't swim out  
And for help can't shout  
But this  
Is where to be trapped  
For here is the sea  
Where it's better to drown  
To not keeping the vow  
Don't feel let down  
So don't cry for me  
I will just take a bow  
For here  
I'm happily trapped

Tobi Adebawale

# What I See

Shocked  
and teary  
Swimming in pain  
My bulging eyes  
roll up and down  
in disbelief  
at what I see  
For before me  
Stands a pitiable sight  
A mass of bones  
lightly covered  
by dry flesh  
Cheekbones  
sharp and pointed  
Exposed ribs  
like claws  
of a ferocious tiger  
Bulging tummy  
in shape of calabash  
punched out by starch  
weighing down  
on scraggy legs  
hanging from  
a lean waist  
What I see  
is the dodgy craft  
of an economy  
wild and gloomy  
burst at the sides  
What I see  
is me  
A scary reflection  
in life's mirror.

Tobi Adebawale