

Poetry Series

Elnathan John
- poems -

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Elnathan John()

A writer and lawyer, he has recently published a collection of short stories. born in kaduna, nigeria, elnathan has been involved in giving free community service involving legal and social aid through his project, the Legal Clinic. He works presently in Abuja

(s) (T) Ripped

stripped
tripped
ripped

torment,
lament,
she is...
not she...
yes, she!

torture
passing-
not stopping,
not staying...
waving-
not touching,
not holding...
staring
at me...
no! past me.
Sad
for me.
Laughter
not-
for me,
by me,
with me.
Away
from me
I am
Stripped
of her
Tripped
by her
Ripped
without her...

Elnathan John

A Lullaby

sleep my kid, sleep my child
run fast in your dreams, run wild
dream of lakes full of milk
dream of beds soft as silk
touch the clouds, hold them close
smell the heavens with your nose
smile and play, sing hurray
sing, for night won't cover day
child there is no hurrying
mama won't say come back in
take your time, all is yours
watch hyenas and jackdaws
close your eyes, shut them tight
mama's kissing you goodnight

Elnathan John

Blasphemy

Some historians say
Many years ago
The seed of confusion
And division
And hate
Was planted by God
Who had a quarrel with one man
Who tried to reach him.
They say he scattered men
And their languages ...

So, perhaps it's ok
If Luo kills Kikuyu
If English kills Irish
If Hausa kills Igbo
If Serb kills Albanian
If Jew kills Arab...

Forgive me
Dear God,
For blasphemy

Elnathan John

Boundaries

You just whipped me with the ropes
That lined the boundaries
That our fathers chose
You whipped me hard
And asked if it hurt
But I know and I think you do
That you would love to let me sit
And whisper stories of things that never were
And mock the boundaries of our fathers
And cross them
But the air does not blow
What direction we wish
And we cannot hold the rain in a cup

I know I cannot sit or let you sit
I've lived long enough to know
That the rain and the wind
have minds of their own
but if you will let me
we can squat and play,
dream of crossing boundaries,
hope our brothers don't see us
and grudgingly separate at dusk...
if we cannot find meat
mushrooms can serve
if we cannot feel the wind
we will blow air from our mouths
if the rain disappoints
we will collect dew at dawn
but only if you will let me
and not whip me
with the ropes our fathers chose.

Elnathan John

Danse Macabre

the breeze blows a crippling cold,
caning my naked nipples and nose
I listen for a sign:
there is no wisdom in the wind
only weak and withered women-
the whole human species-
we-men, weak men, wo-men
crippled, crying, crawling... cringing
in fear of our foes and frosty fathers!

we want to be free
to savor the sweet sensation
of being alive, truly alive
alas! we are albatrosses aimed
by hungry human-hunters
whose wicked schemes make us scream...

the west is cold, the east burns with fire
and home is a hopeless mess
I shall sit out this dangerous dance
on broken bottles and red-hot coal
I shall cover my naked nipples
and rub my nose
and listen...
not for wisdom in the wind
but for that eerie sound
signaling that sad end-
the way it all must end!

Elnathan John

Dinner Time

DINNER TIME

□

Do we sometimes bask in our delusions,
And become tourists in lands that never were?
anon.

I am not fooled
By this cool wind
In my face
I know that what I ride
Is no horse

This swing
Takes us
High and low
Forward and backward
Nowhere, fast

It'll soon be dark
Daddy wants you home
There's a tall guest
For dinner,
For you

It's in your eyes-
You'd rather stay
But you are a good girl
You should go home
For dinner

Send my regards
to Uncle Ralph
Tell of us, if you can
and of the swing
I now ride alone

Don't look back
I have no last request
I won't ask you
Not to leave me here

You've been out too long

You'd best be gone
Dinner is served
I won't walk with you
Halfway home
And watch you disappear

I won't stand, teary-eyed
Wishing you could stay
I'll drown my soul
In the odd creaks
Of my offbeat swing

I've no illusions
Of space at the oak table
Besides, I reckon
the exquisite meals
Might upset my common stomach

But please
Don't think I do not bleed
I hate myself
For getting used to wine
I cannot afford

Be kind to me
Don't make me say goodbye
I can't afford memories-
They are too big
For my little heart

So run along my dear
Don't shed a tear for me
Don't keep them waiting
I can hear Uncle Ralph calling:
Your dinner is getting cold!

Elnathan John

Exit

I think it would be nice to know,
The way from this earth I would go;
The way I'd bow out of this stage
Whether with pomp or else with rage...

Will I among martyrs find my grave,
Will I die a warrior, brave?
Perhaps a car will crush my skull
Perhaps I'll crash into a wall
Who knows, perhaps some disease
Shall sweet breath from my nostrils seize
With others drown and sink below-
is that the way that I would go?
Will I go in a mighty plane
On a business trip to Spain?
Perhaps someone who hates my pride
Shall poison me with cyanide
Perhaps I'll be on the wrong side
And slaughtered in a genocide

I'm not sure if this makes sense:
If God holds a press conference
I'd ask why he made black and white,
How he feels each time we fight,
What man's sickening existence means,
Why sons pay for their fathers sins...
But most of all I'd love to know
The way, from this earth I would go

Elnathan John

Handprints And Dead Birthdays

I

It is only now that I see
The handprints all over you
Astonishing how quick I swallowed
Those sweet lies
And kissed those lips
Of filth and deceit
I should have known
From those sagging breasts
I should have seen the handprints-
Bold and several
I should have seen that
You let them all loot
Innocence from your treasury

Now I see and its funny-
As you disgust me-
That you once took me to peaks
Of breathlessness!

II

I should be marking your first birthday
Anytime soon
Well, I neither got to know if you were
He or she
Nor did you know me-
Only that dark slimy hole
I found out
When you'd been flushed down some toilet
Never hearing your dulcet giggling
I met her
Writhing in pain and she said-
She had to tell me
How she couldn't keep you,
Of the mistake of making you
I only heaved a helpless sigh

I don't see her anymore
They say she's a dark queen

Well I'm glad nothing binds us
I only wish that somehow
I got to know you...

I'll mark the day, anyway.

Elnathan John

Mutation

you used to dream
of kings with balloons and candy
you used to dream...
and i would laugh

you used to speak
of painless circumcisions
and of doves, white doves-

while we both could see
the dark hollows of mouths
while we could perceive
the odor of charnel houses
and hear the desperate beating of hearts

you floated on your dream-raft
and i laughed!

now i see you-
you have learnt much:
to tell sincere lies, smiling
to sit in dark rooms
that reek of bullets and ballots...

you have eye bags now-
you no longer sleep
you can now suggest
for plan b
a smart solution
like chaos...

Elnathan John

One Hour Thought

4.30am

It's in the debris of my heart
Dinky in all the mess
I find it's not been torn apart

It's all here like in a waltz-
The raindrop that never falls,
The bud that won't become a rose,
All dancing here, and close

It's in the debris here-
Every single chilling fear,
The limits never dared,
Those amen's never said...

5.30am

The calls to prayer fill my ears
Poco a poco the darkness clears
But not the debris in my heart,
Not your name, whole, intact!

Elnathan John

Playing God

PLAYING GOD

Only God...
Could love you for yourself alone...

EW. B. Yeats

□

I roll over from daytime sleep
And wipe from my eyes asinine dreams:
Of

cars not made and human wings
peace, trust, immortality
being an Irish rock star, rearing snakes...
you loving eternally-
the naked, limbless... just me.

PS.

About the last one
I reckon it wouldn't be fair
to expect you
to play God.

Elnathan John

Post Mortem

I would like to exit this dreary stage
With regal pomp and feral rage
I would like the audience and stage players
To utter my name in all their prayers
I would like the world held in awe
As my epitaph leaves the trembling jaw
I would like them all to stare and wish
They never thought I was rubbish
I would like to abscond with every smile
And leave the world with an ominous gaze
I would like sadness to be rife
As a price for observing not my life
I would like a dark cloud to loom
O'er the horizon in impending doom
Infusing hearts with stygian gloom

Let them live in torment till each one dies
Hung by a rope with bulging eyes
Till each one pays for his sin
With his blood and that of his kin
I would love the mouth to burn
Of any who praise me while I'm gone
But who watered down this passionate fire
From my head to my pen and rising higher

For each word of mine they did not read
A thousand fleas on their blood will feed
Until they see their foolish blunder
And retreat to live as hermits are
Reciting my lines each day in caves
Revering my word as though it saves
And when thus they have lived out their days
My spirit's anger shall cease to blaze.

Elnathan John

Raindrops And Rosebuds

Raindrops and showers
Rosebuds and flowers
Can you see it changing, forming?
Do you see it becoming...?
Can you hear my heart beat
Like a pestle crushing wheat?

The wind today blew hard and long
As I lay listening to a rock song
The raindrops dropped and grew into showers
And I wished that I had a mystic's powers
I wished as I saw in every drop, your face
That you were like a flower vase
Where I'd keep the wild flowers of my heart
Or that you were a work of gothic art
Stolen from Europe in the Middle Ages
Bought for the price of a hundred men's wages
To adorn my home, eternally
Standing right next to my effigy

Do you feel it, just like me,
Can you feel it, can you see-
How the air ripples as my heart beats?
If I were Shakespeare or John Keats
I would say it better in verse
If I could lay upon my self a curse
My craving would be but for you
To roam the earth a wandering Jew
To see and smell and hear and touch
Be it a little or be it much...

Can you see it changing, becoming,
Do you feel it forming...?
Raindrops to showers
Rosebuds to flowers?

Elnathan John

Song In Four Parts

SONG IN FOUR PARTS

I

Mock my dreams
Tread upon my soul
This cocoon is not what it seems-
You cant see through the hole

Send me off
Wish me good
But trace these steps-
Watch my dust become fine wood

Walk past this spark
Don't mind this zeal
But watch your back-
The fire that grows is real

II

Dear Mater, O Mater
(I Latin the word)
Thank you for the water
That you gave by God

But Mater, dear Mater
I wish that were all
I wish it didn't matter
At all, at all

Those tempers, those brawls
With Pater et al
And things that I wish
Never to recall

III

Dear Pater, O Pater
I branch from your tree
Thank you for the roots
That nourished me, free

But Pater, Dear Pater
My leaves have changed hue
I feel and now I say
I will never be like you
And Pater you try
But a lot had occurred
While those voices rang high
With each bitter word

IV

This dance is my dance
Only I can perform
Who dares stop this dance
Will start a storm

I damn all the drummers
and distrust the singers who sing along
I pity the dancers
Who dance not knowing the depth of my song

When I from this murky stage go
Into the hushed night
My head shall not hang low
And my spirit shall shine bright!

Elnathan John

The Torment Of A Bystander

The night felt right
For low tones and whispers
A perfect night
for lovers and deep sleepers

That night was right
for locked arms and a leisurely walk
a perfect night
for lovers to talk

I saw them ahead
The lass and the lad
And I dreamt in my head
Of the love that I had

The two turned right
I wanted adventure
It was a lonely night
To follow was a cure

A small hand toiled
To wriggle out in haste
A large hand had coiled
Round a well shaped waist

It was no normal hand
Was thrice my own in size
His frame was also grand
To be still was to be wise

But then it was no game
The lass, she screamed in pain
I knew quite well his aim
And it went against my grain

He bared a mighty phallus
Searched for an orifice
And with such brute force
Made sure he didn't miss

Would I be a Samaritan?
Or just another Jew
Would I be a brave man?
Or vaporize like dew

I lingered for a moment
Then checked my strength reserve
Its funny how it all went
Together with my nerve

Though pain suffused my heart
And screaming filled the air
I played the cowards part-
Well, life has never been fair!

Elnathan John

Umma's Truth

Racing,
Stopping,
pulsating...
It's me thinking,
Of the soft evening breeze
that's Umma's voice
blowing my pressures away;
Of the caressing morning sun
that's Umma's smile
soothing my nerves;
Of the movement of the graceful swan
that's Umma's gait
intriguing my mind...
It's just me, dreaming!

Today Umma will leave
On a fast plane
And confirm a hopeless truth
That cannot set me free:
Umma cannot love me!

Elnathan John

Will You?

Will you walk back with me
to my matchbox home?
Will you walk
not because I want you to see
the towering trees
and beautiful birds
but because
I cannot count the cash
for a posh Porsche?
Will you walk without
holding in your hand
flowers and French fragrances,
only stale jokes, hollow laughter
and a thousand bare proclamations of love?
Will you hold my hand
not soft, not supple
but callused
from hoes and cheap detergent?
Will you think and dream of me
without my exotic gifts
adorning your room?
Will you let me take you out
after months of saving
in a rickety taxi,
Will you?
Or will you be rational
and settle for the spruce gentleman
I hear honking outside?

Elnathan John