

tares oburumu

someday I
will be
the shape of
my story

*A stellar performance. Tares
Oburumu returns us to truth.*
—Carl Terver

someday i will be
the shape of my story

Tares Oburumu

Copyright © 2022, Tares Oburumu

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

First published in Nigeria by Heiress
An imprint of Afapinen Media Enterprise
No. 2 Villa Suites Street, KM3 Gboko Road,
Makurdi, Benue.



glory to lagos

first glory – a shape of music

first music – a note full of water

first water – a boat drowns in the waves of a book read many times after a dream

first dream – my father who plays a harp & thinks about living in an island another word for paradise

first paradise – annie & toyboats

first toyboats – a painting of swans in the future

first future – notebooks & piano lessons

first lessons – the picture of the girl in front of the universe singing a note halved in two almost the drawing of islands

first island – mother & jazz

first jazz – sasha like a flower in field which grows as wild as the universe

first universe – hope. or what can equally mean light in the dark

first darkness – the distance between finima & the headlights

first headlights – new york city, a letter. or glory

first glory – last glory

for whatever was called father, as i am,

heavenly father.

father being the love of everything far away from home.

in finima town the word father, sometimes, is made water, & its shapeless silk of colorless habit
is made word. but i go lustral, i illuminate the sea, writing letters of

my unhappy days to an ocean of brothers

where you are a wave, an arc - a crescent, bent over the night, happiness & sorrow; the dirt

we make a country for, a brand of the old colony. i finally find

you,

quite British

in a sugar factory far from home - home - you say, is where they break bread & pour wine

enough

to keep holy the biographies we live. here, holy is the man who survives his own body.

holy is the one who preaches diaspora in the name of the Lord, God Lugard.

here, i found out that a shed of sweetness shelters you: the honey in your opinions,

the contralto stuffing your tongue with audience, the basil in your voice.

yet you sing off the roots.

i wait at that post-colonial English door, listening for an opening as the hours pass brilliantly by,

wondering what brought you this far. is it debt? let the money pray for us. sin? i will sing,

i will sing an emo for the government.

if it is the color of the villages in me,

then glory be to the yellow buses.

glory be to exodus.

first glory – a shape of music

isn't this love, that i love to walk into leavings before i burn? goodbye, night,
she says to the garden

set ablaze

by its own flowers,
as the microbus pulls up to motif. my little girl & sister, & i, trembling out of what
the green flag stands for to a field of water. behind us, these questions go up in flames:
me, bent - grass-deep beneath the green flag. me, bent - before a map as i do before my mirrors
looking to see if i am from a nation close to extinction. me, bent - in the middle of a house
infested with windows.

through their stereos exits i see the light the music,
white smoke, spreads its notes as ink over the city - inhale symphony -

then breathe, which is to say write. writing is the only way out, out of an amphitheater burning,
the only door open wild open in a closed country. there's no song
of the vineyard of ruin i can sing for you but this this, only this:
across the borders, i am a field of stars. step inside the chorus
leafing through my arms to the orchestra where we have come to, the pre-colonial communists

still fishing, like the blue sea's addicts, in a dead precolonial time.

step inside the music. & pray it is home, with bowls of piney lakes built around it,

for everything that burns. for everything that stays shapeless,

is the glory of water. & then you open my hand, fill its map with harbors for the boats
rowing to reach our salvation the lone town of finima. we arrive at the Grand piano in the year
of our lord Jesus Christ,

which is the riverbank.

you, keeping to the G major, i, raising a pitch to survive the song
we are played.

first music – a note full of water

the boats i rowed the slow child i was, to what i have become are shaped like memories,
or acoustic guitars mooring the music
of how we live in a field of water living on grass. the day of my light, like any day spent
in the dream, that i will become
starburst, moonshine, is this aureola i find in the live photograph
of baby-mother & child drowning by oil vessels; hands full of water, holding on to the net
catching six years of fishing.
above us float the national anthem - 1967s, future tenses, the luxury
in letting go -

nigeria is calling

first water – a boat drowns in the waves of a book read many times after a dream

we sit on what survives, only – on the ledge, talking about my father
who is heaven in a wild flower. the story is what the sea listens to
from a lake behind the pub where the roman catholic was born, i listen to his birth from the streams
flowing out of me,

reaching out for the shelf
a pinnacle on which lives the virgin mary.
hail marys are in descents; prayers, the gradations in step with the hope
my mother has created with the fishscales on her own hands, the biblical faiths.
hands turning blue when i give them to the waters under the waves, the miracle applauds

the amphetamine that shapes me into bird,
sublimity, a bottle filled with the length of River Ramos, orbit, capstone of... ascension.

seafaring at nights.

i have been offered this hallucinations – a mix – wine + wine + wine + wine + faith + wings,
drink of the chalice your own doctrine they say i am equal to an angel. *walk by your mother to
church*

& learn how to fly, says simon, the psalm 121 is a rose in her hands, lifting her eyes above the liquid
hills.

i love the white albatross they come clear, even in a storm. i love human behavior so much,
it makes me drunk.

nothing is prophecy unless it has a future, & my mother is always in the offing, always in the ocean
of her fishing nets & the new testament. where i see the hurricane on the beaufort scale table
of water,

she sings the hallelujah. God breaks his boat in two. father! she calls me by my earthly name,
hold this boat my life with
all your life.

i pray to my books, do not let my mother drown. i put my life around her like arms wide
as love after death. i swim. i dream. i slave. i violate, carrying my mother across her grave.

i open the waters in
me,
a howling seine, screaming from her depths, take me.

first dream – my father who plays a harp & thinks about living in an island – another word for paradise

always, i step in & out of the universe to love you, you not close enough
to reach this infinite hand i have long stretched across an equal infinite song to find me,
son of music. i am depths of feelings & burnt histories away from you, oceans
faraway, blue curls nearer than any other color loving you in the way
the water loves its own salt. but i keep to the mirror of my own heart made in the image of a doe;
i know how long i have been lovely, staring at the orphanage the flophouse this art a wild prose
place of my birth where a flag stands defiantly its white light
burning the earth into a green country the ordinary heaven hard to build, breaks easy
with public wallets. i see you from where the years between us were null & dark to when
the sun spoke its own dark love into color, to light;
there you are; a shape of soli, the Kalamazoo's short stories long began with pedals:

1st pedal: first of his 47 strings

shapes of the broken sentences you lift,
eyes close, you raise the still water
to hold the dream in one string
then bead it over us; 4 brothers
& 3 sisters, you build
by destroying the old future in us: the new orchestra

2nd pedal

you lift your foot, heavy with rhythms, off the little stage, or nest,
& here comes the white albatross the wind riding it, the season.
under this heaven, a trawler is lit by its own power;
mother & i, careening our wooden ship spooling nets
with origin & heirloom sand. it's in the way i modify her with new love,
the way i look at the oil vessels floating around us, the way
we sail back to sea, almost eternal, the way he plays
us to the fishing lines; his hope for the days better than a day.

3rd pedal

when you ask me to make music for the dead i repair my life, i remake the harp,
flow through the present into the strings in his hands, fall through images
of the life after into question, *do we exist?*
the day of your death, like any day; stills the kingfisher

a city on the map of bramble leaf the planets form stanzas around this poem
this sun i write in gold, the flowers still beautiful around us, they
surround the coffin. the family multiplies the traffic by seven
times the centuries. the clouds, painters of the sea never rest their hands.
the egrets still fly in formations. & i keep crossing the same river the same way
they keep their oars white in the sky, as i do dip & flap my paddle against the water.
forgive how i bury you, brother. mother sets free the barracuda from the hook.
she says it could be you, coming back to us, you always do
when the music stops by the beach, where we sit in it, mending the nets, repairing our lives.

4th pedal

tam samuel – name: andante the call moves
among its own notes, sunlight arcadia, like wind over shrubs, light over star.
do you ever think about mary's fingers strumming exegesis?
the bridge comes clear as you touch the middle
of the music where my revolute spine fortifies me.

i carry my mother offhand, on horseback, not to cross it.
there's no place for us in the promise. we have chosen to sit
in the darkness of your concert & island & see all the light that surrounds us from the galax
which is infinite, which is the true flower.

5th pedal

around the aubade is a small nigerian town almost a hospice almond-green.
around this small grave live the southern moths. to keep them moths,
you hold out a string to paint each with its own music-light because
the streetlamp is put off, almost eternal. *how do you classify the song?*

earache earmuffs ear + distance, + what?
if the country wasn't a post-colonial flower, *what would you have planted in its stead,*
national atrophy? at least, heaven is here the burg your dead son waters.

you could see my mother farming her endless love of you in the chorus.

love:

moon
over
an
unequal
endless
window.

6th pedal

for farida james of an imagined orchestra

in an evening walk in december, the rain falling in broken glasses,
a piano like an umbrella from your past
came to play its favorite roof over you. i remembered The Dead,
Joyce's transparent music through which we were all titled after the grace
& the reflection of the world: an expanse that descends through the clouds.
there was so much Christmas in you that when i picked up my little lights to meet you,

i found mother in the rain, pairing threads to dress the day.

7th pedal

"play island," i say, & i forgot to ask, before i remembered the shore you thought was a boat.

you played the waters up to the brick walls, up to the room housing the link between me
& the invisible hallows. between symphony & the clear silence that we were alive,
so close to the flowers the glitter of the gravestones. or diamonds?
the years flooded the harp & your absence. & in the morning of your dream, before the music ended,

we woke up, floating in each other's arms, past paradise: mother & i

first paradise – annie & toyboats

far from the Tjama Groove, old enough to go far out
into the future on a boat; the future being a place where people
believe they are angels sailing towards no horizon – yet ever
expanding the white egrets a receding soar, the orange
sun broken in two by a thread of cloud, the rogue sea
throwing up her arms against her lovers, the lights riding
the oil vessels; seeing all these, all these responsibilities
from nature to man, we row, fishless, through finima's dusk
to the towhead. while there, the tender need to give to hunger
what doesn't belong to it brought us to wood, matchsticks
& fire. & fire, too, like hunger, grows by tending. we gathered
round it, like poets round words, & the warmth of long sentences.

we should not have been here, half historical in the faraway blue,
said one of us, whose genius blooms when seasick. i offered
my heart with its functions: the sails it hoped for, & the depths
it feared to reach. i went down the deep ends, calling after my
own ship which has been my jinni & loveliest of seafarers.
the novel was: the future exploded as sudden as the glory
of a cigarette butt smoked over an oil field. surrounded by the glory
of the economy, i swam into you, as far as i could, to allow myself
a piece of drowning. in a story at the end of water, maybe you didn't
drown. maybe i drank so much of you, to keep you as water & heaven, one
i carry to all the places we have been: childhood, sorrow, gravestones,
& elsewhere.

first toyboats – a painting of swans in the future

have you ever stopped a flower from getting intentionally bright? & how glorious have you been expressing yourself in a dump? the hibiscus grows even from a distant & rotted time.

get a poise. & let the camera, your heart - trigger-sweet, click.

here's a photo of all of us: a little heap of music seated on rock facing the vast country of water.

her petals eliding sunlight. the darkness of her feet makes clear the waters on which they have erected

the roots. in the delta, south of the brambles, when you step into the water, you become water.

she sits faraway in another color, something more photographic than the portraits of her eyes;

she sings of jadun. kelly. days in progress. geography. north of nigeria. adjuncts. mooses. rumi rowing

the boat of his death, love's coffin, through the small american rivers . *who, living the dream,*

doesn't carry his own grave on the hair? his halo? this is the horizon

you have been running after; the bridge between poetry & the sky. if you see the fishers going out late,

know that the apocalypse is nearer to the riverine towns than the angels flying over the limits

they have been given as manana & bouquets. it's time to tell the story for which i have been given
a solomonic vanity, two fingers & a screen, life & death enough to satisfy me. she looks far out
to the fishermen. one must have seen so much water as there was gills to keep him swimming,
looking for the origin of water. *father! father!* the music, like glass, breaks into her throat. she
recognizes the sour-stained history that was her father using his hands the way ducks use their oars.
the waters in him screaming her mother's maiden name. love comes in solids, liquid, &
transparent things. it's on this height she drifts in glory, practicing the future where my mother
should have known how beautiful her eyes would have been, if they were fixed on a book, wild open.

first future – notebooks & piano lessons

we are dancing again after the civil war, alice & i,
in the oil field where a lonely sonnet still exults
the bombed tryst – a hut which once stood, erect,
on water. her beauty comes supple, comes spiral
with every step, bends as grasses happy with the wind
raising an alto over them. one foot on an island,
the other a root dipped in water ending on rhymes.
this is how she falls in love. she hums Beethoven
from a distant sea, places a throb around my waist,
& says, do not forget the revolution. today, it sings
from a house without a roof, half of the cannonaded
sun going green in yellow frames in it; portraits of an army

hammered out of a necessary squabble. we did not see
the graves but we are living in them, far better than the dead,
far better than the fibre-boat erased by bullets off
the river. i am the boy, brown as the grand piano,
walking the shore, primed for what survives after
the music-bright gunboats have played JS Bach's fugue
over the small towns by the streams, affected by the graces
of the serial sonatas. the black bullet hole in your leg
could not stop us, as i run out of the country, losing faith as
one would lose certain disposable objects, to meet you
coming down from the arms which bore you beyond the reach
of the war. here, we have danced half a century away, & this is how
we learn the art of the future: we hop.

such daily diamonds that flow from here to light the mesh.
the maze is my little life, bent like the question mark,
a roof over my little sister a loud example of loneliness.
my mother says the city doesn't belong to a woman,
who, broken by public work, gathers her pieces beneath a man.
& i do not know. but i know how i have ceased to grow
from these dark waters into a boy.

flourish in loneliness & music, leaving the old flag-waver
to his anger - scattered here & there like Easter eggs.
maybe we can get a photo of the osprey. the last
time we appeared in a battlefield with gravestones
keen as talons, we were as young as conscripted babies.
in black & white, our fathers looked hardly out
of their eighteens. every child was professionally
arranged, all prey, smiling obediently except you:
in the right side of the photo, my fingers draw on
your forearm a barren oil field, your hands closing
together in a secret dig. over the years, this photo
had been the legend of the music industry. the stars
had all sang it, once or twice. despite the rumpus,
& the notes ferried in a boat to syma, no one could find a copy.
but here is a copy: mother & i, in a hold & jazz.
one of us, i barely see, is pointing from what's an
isolation at a falcon lifting a ripe olive, asking,
is that the revolution?

first jazz – sasha like a flower in a field which grows as wild as the universe

a field *is an answer* *to the flower* *asking,* *why do we glow?*

& the answer never comes,

the answer never comes,

never comes ...

never comes ...

never comes ...

never comes ...

the question is a black hole.

& there, is bomadi.

bomadi

a field - my hands as bright as petals are crescents rising to her jaws.
her lips, like passion fruits, cut simply in half pinks, simply open the doors. & i,
the entrant, have all the gifts for the night. love coming through the lights.
the love that cannot be made without the glory of the eyes watching it.
at the end of the room is the endless photograph
of our universe; the boy i have become, wrapped
in the arms of the hagiography i seek, the girl
a humble-bee bent like a question mark,
in a colorful inscription of honey under the drone
i always think to be this music spooling silences like nets around me;

are you pregnant for us?

is an answer - if the field outside the maternity was a theatre,
& i am a burning rat torched by the world torched by the cost of living it.
if the flames were waves, & you are the ocean, what in the name of our Lord, Desire,
is our first kiss; this beautiful storm all electrical, all symphony.
in another frontier, the colors ultra & bleeding closes, i could see the moon,
a voluminous manuscript edited by mary as her first & only child bathes in English,
water washing the language. the story is: i don't understand the ijaw word for newborn.

to the flower – named after the movement of the slow seals washed off the shore,
i walked home that night, surrounded by rainwater, drunk with nightfall.
i put down the man & gin i was at the door as she opened to me the day's petals
brimming pearls. *forgive me for coming*, i whispered. i sat on the edge where the bed
ended. i sat miles away from when Sasha slept. if the child ever dreamt of a father,
could it be me? if this little girl ever dreamt of growing from my shoulders, could the curves be
large enough to hold an ocean, the love i rowed from one coastal town to the next nostalgia?
there on the link, a field of guilt wide as two decades far apart, i stretched the poem
that will touch your heart, again. again, i couldn't reach it, as i was already gone to sea,
to find the depths & pearl them, not for your mother who goes extinct over & over again.

asking – we were part of a long line of cars & buses before a river that had no bridge.
i was taking you to a place that had no home, just a small bed to share the small dreams
you had with my sister who had already mothered a country full of four daughters &
a small vault for keeping a good record of the economy growing from the green of the flag.
before us, a long vehicle exhaled a curtain of smoke dark as the night. *keep the windows up*,
i called out the driver on whose two fingers a cigarette burned, which reminded me
of the sand & wooden bridge your mother, with love & matchstick, put to flames.
did we ever make it to the blue clouds?

why do we glow? – someday i will love you
how i love the infinitely blue allium, diamond
of the field inside, dirt of the garden outside, born
of a green radiance. what's the worth of a woman's

life in finima? i parsed the evening news on the TV,
till your mother rose up from her ultra-patriarchy,
to where i had cuddled you with feminine hands,
flowerette, the girl of surgical beauty.
we left the Abrahamic hospital behind, & drove past
the old colonies, the houses run by Adams,
the sidewalks filing in & out of Edens, the apple stories.
at home with a world trying hard to renew itself,
trying hard to prepare the earth for the newborn,
when they asked me to say your name, i named you
after God: outré angel, a recherché collection of light,
of the roses' bloom, sea-blue woman – *endless, endless.*

a country walks into the music unaided, but well before the music
ended, a suicidal writer, fluorescent, flares up in new flames, with
no water in sight, & begins to set his desk where no one lives but friends
of his indigence. he puts his words to oaths, & though all eyes were on him,
they did not see the music. it is not clear if he is an answer to a summon,
though clear to him how he writes on his grave, already built with mansions
each with its own oaken windows invisible to criticism. i am old in all this, &
spindly, living on a plot of grey life that, backlit by the streets, i become
a twenty-first century margaret kennedy's mote moving through shafts
of sunlight, dancing to what is a slow progress from our linear colonialism
to a colonial llano, perhaps it's a prose forest. one of my arms rises, as if
it leads an orchestra of leavings, as if by raising itself, a flag will not go down
to lekki as what surrenders. i move with it deep into the music, & stop in the middle
to think, for a while, about where i am going. *am i leaving for a life?*
i look like angels, like boats departing on 3am lagoon, which, to those
standing faraway in the color of night, appears to be still between water & music,
between what sails into a house built in the future tense, the substance
of the things i do not know, which are as wide as the knowledge of the things hoped for.

first darkness – the distance between finima & the headlights

*the nobel prize for the application of words in the service of man
& the lower animals, quite desperate in their search for happiness,
to show how unhappy they have been for 2020 years in spite of
the heavenly bodies hanging over them, was awarded
to Louise Gluck*

“for her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty
makes individual existence universal”

a statement my mother lifts on her head
& holds it there, like a halo, a tray full of sweeteners: grapes & apples,
with both hands.

i take up my haversack from the ground gelded of grace, & follow
from behind the nidus, to the end of the shoreline nesting the shorebirds
which sing of mercy; a certain mercy found in water. i stand, suffering next to her,
as we wait for the kayak that never arrives, except a moment's rush
of thin lights that, annotating the journey, bares the oil fields which,
faraway & so close to us in a little corner by the forest blurred to a ridge
of sand - point of departure, are arranged like the hanging gardens of Babylon.

i keep to her solid conclusions & to the root of her feet, that individual suffering
can be made universal by visual intimacy. we see & wait, as we stand on
“in the beginning ... *the earth was without form & void,*”
unlit, eternal, heads facing the deep north, aiming at the rays swift in their anchorage.
though my mother believes in movement, believes in things that can be taken
from the end of the ocean, like the fishes, to where they are going,
we live as still as lake water.

first headlights – new york city, a letter. or glory

dear tares, my life, full of lights, is my television. at nights, i watch it with sasha, asleep in the soft
of my heart. in the day, i carry it everywhere the human condition is made visible
in a relatively small theater. everything becomes creatural wherever i walk on; i live. wild. august.
dated as far back as the tribes of arabia.
nomads. gatherers of hope, (distance) & i,
spread from the brushstrokes in the hands
of Van Gogh to the maps
drawn with lines of absolute white,
dotted black - here in Queensbury, there in the river town of finima.
& i, a plat of dream in all of them:
patriot, exile, isolate in all of them;
quiet & enough to be globed in a room

shaped after a nest hanging from a lone
branch of maple, writes to you
about a man of thirty summers, about my penumbra. about home. transmissions. friends + people.
geography. flags. anthems. riots. mastery. colors. colors. *wherehave i seen my brightness?*

here, i live in my hands. do not type my solitude.

no be everything you touch go come in contact with your loneliness.

my sorrow was as old as two decades but i lived happily, & happily
i wore the night to the city's subway. a kind of new water flowed from one
miss moly who lived in elegies an hour next to me - a poet enthroned on high
concrete & glass overlooking the Hudson. her beauty charged with electric currents
opened the floodgates for me. write home, she said, & i saw the African i have long buried
in the long buses, the color of morning, riding off to school, the roofs made of clouds,
the pigeons laying a piece of bread over another, the susurrus of trees, the gift of paintings,
the transparent music, the transparent flowers, the miracle of light, the mesh of the ordinary.

i wake up to new york city the glory of the TV taking over all the colors of my room
south of the river niger, asleep in the dream.

first glory – last glory

one day of water at a time, one small boat,
one oar, one swell of a small town growing from seaweeds,
one life, one fear, we scull the oil
field floating on water, past drill ships,
butterflies flowering barges, evenings, war stories,
deepwater horizon we cannot reach, lettuce, the hush
of the violence in present
conversations, houseboats, the love of underwater,
sea portraits: a dead child petal'd
by waves, a white heron browned
by the history of its own flight, to what looks
like the future – the offshore night singing

the lights *glorious, glorious,*

glory be to deadwood & riverbank.

this is the night we have been living,
the mirror we won't be reflected on, says my mother
as she passes the fishing lines to the shapes
my hands have taken to write these proems & poetry,

that, in spite of the tempest of our eyes,
will someday become the shape of my story.

Tares Oburumu is a lover of God & his daughter, Sasha. He writes from a hole, 23 miles away from Warri. His poems have appeared in *Afapinen*, *Connotation Press*, *Agonist*, *Bluepepper*, *Expound*, *Kalahari*, *Praxis*, *Agbowo*, & elsewhere.