

BULLET HOLES

A collection of short stories

Written by Festus Obehi Destiny.



BULLETHOLES

(A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES)

WRITTEN BY FESTUS, OBEHI DESTINY.

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Bullet Holes (A poem)

There are bullet holes on my mother's belly.

One hole for one child.

Blood doesn't flow from these holes, instead tears sprout from them.

They say blood is thicker, but I say tears are deeper.

My mother bled when she told us to close our legs but instead we became the mat that men could lay on anytime.

My mother bled when we tore pages from her Bible to bury leaves of marijuana.

My mother bled when she told us that the weapon in our hands had burnt the bridges to her past.

With each wound, my mother became slimmer.

We looked at her but we failed to see her.

We heard her but we failed to listen to her. Her words crawled in front of us, still we failed to catch them.

There are bullet holes on my mother's belly. One hole for one child.

My mother did not die sleeping on her belly. She died standing.

Written by Festus Obehi Destiny.

1.

1999

I have never really told anyone before. Sometimes I wonder whether I would have told a priest during confession if I was a devout catholic. Rape victims are usually magnets of sympathy and attraction. I wanted none of that. I wanted to be left alone to drown in my well of solitude. I wanted no affection nor attraction. My own tale is burdened with the scale of circumstances and reality.

It's funny how I still remember the little details. I remember the sound of the hinged door breaking and the color of the pink sheets that mixed with my blood. I still remember how his brows curved as sweat broke from his forehead. I still remember how my pleas fell on deaf ears. How powerless I was over an animal whose orgy of sexual excitement invigorated his ligaments and bones. I grew up in Benin. My mother was the third wife of five houses. My father was a chief. He had a duplex in ring road, Benin city. My father's house was close to the market. Benin is a hub of activity and engagement. The closest one could call tranquility is the never ending sound of lorries and busses.

Sometimes the chatter of market women blended with the noises of cars. It was a mixture of excitement. I grew up with this noise. Growing up, my parents never bothered us with religion.

My father was scarcely around. His business meetings threw him all around the country. whenever his footsteps graced the hall of our duplex, he spent his freedom pleasing our

mother's in their different bedroom. My siblings and I attended a government school. I was the third of three daughters. Honestly, I was never particularly bright in academic. Since there was nobody to monitor my academic performance, my studying attitude was flippant. School to me, was a necessary burden. It was a way of escaping from the monotony of home and the platitudinous life that my mother and her Co-wives lived. *Cooking and waiting for our father*. And the discussions had no glow. Chatters of rhetorical questions and drab gossips. As far as I can remember, there was nothing exciting in my life till I got introduced to the poetry of the Christian religion. Our

school observed Christian fellowships on Friday. It was carried out by school perfects. I seldom listened to the doctrines. And I mumbled my lips with lack of enthusiasm whenever I was forced to pray. Everything changed the day he came to our school. His sermon left my judgment with questions that only his words could answer. I wanted to ask a question. Or raise my hands.

Anything to grab his attention so that he would know that his efforts had found a wandering soul.

I was willing to ask for directions for my lost soul but my lips closed its gate firm. Never before had I hated being so reserved. After he was done, The Principal introduced him as Pastor Williams.

He was going to be in charge of conducting the fellowship on Fridays. My heart leaped. "Fridays are never going to be the same" I thought. Pastor Williams came every Friday. He always dressed in corporate. A neatly iron starched long sleeve, always complemented with a tie, hanging over a gator ironed trousers. He made me understand the complexity of the trinity, the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and the laws of the old and New Testament. And by the end of the session, I was ready to be baptized. I started attending Pastor William's church when I was in my final year at senior class. I boarded the ship of our relationship on a platonic Leven with Pastor Williams as the sailor.

Although I was not particularly bold whenever it came to matters of discuss. I found out that the bubbles in my throat were absent whenever I was with him. With time, he became my confidante, brother and perhaps more. I guess I was too naive. It made me oblivious to the warnings of impending doom. I thought pastor Williams would maintain the platonic basis of our relationship because of the religious context that brought us together. He was a man with answers and I was an empty vessels with questions. I remember the day it happened. The rain beat the windows of the car as Pastor Williams drove me home. We sang to the gospel solos that his radios was emitting.

He was driving me home from one of the Bible studies that we attended. "Gosh!" He exclaimed "I forgot your present at home. I bought you something"

"What is it?" I sniffed in suspense

"I can't tell you" He said "That's why it's called a present. It must be a surprise. Something more or less unexpected".

"But it's late already, and the rain....."

"Don't worry Grace" "I'll bring you home safe and sound. Trust me".

Well, I did trust him. And that trust gave me a sense of comfort and security. I didn't object. He gave me a drink when we arrived at his place. He said it was a special cocktail. "

Something special for your beautiful soul " He added. He zoomed up the stairs to bring my present as soon as he saw me drinking the cocktail. With time the bond of consciousness enveloped my eyes. Sleep warmed it's way into my heart. No. Not sleep. A deep feeling of emptiness. My bones lost their vigor. It felt like my body was giving way to something else entirely without my consent. My lips wanted to question this new found evolution but the gate that housed my words refused to open. I screamed in silence and yelled into nothingness. Pastor Williams arrived and found me in this new found state. When he picked me up, I imagined him as one of those Fulani horsemen that I saw on television. Carrying me in his hands and driving me to the hospital on a horse. Beating the rain

and challenging the winds as he sped, daring death to touch the helms of my garment. His words made their way into my fading memory. "Beautiful soul." Pastor Williams took me upstairs. He tore my clothes off. I was shocked. I couldn't speak. My shock flowed through the stream of tears that gathered in my eyes. "Don't cry" He whispered. "We will be home before you know what's going on". That night pastor Williams took me on a journey. It felt like swimming while the waves slapped you and the tides turned on you. While I drowned out of consciousness, he held my hands and swam faster. He wanted to get to shore before I drown. And he did get to the shores of climax.

Perhaps seven or nine times. My head was spinning out of control and my legs lost their sense of irritability. I woke up on the hospital bed. The first thing I saw was my parent judgmental eyes staring at me. Piercing deep into my soul and asking questions that I will never know the answers to. They gave me solitude. More or less, I was abandoned. I was a disgrace. I guess that's why I was sent to a university outside the country. Maybe that's why my mother only called once a year.

My father never called. My mom relayed the farewells he never sent to me.

2019.

My number of suitors reduced as my age increased. I guess I never fully recovered. I wanted a boring life. My zeal for hunger and questions died a long time ago. My sense of adventure vanished with my virginity. I can hardly remember pastor Williams face but he lives in me. Sometimes I wished I had a way to contact him. I rarely contact People these days. And people in turn have grown to leave me in my island of solitude. The only call I receive is from Desmond. My coworker who still thinks that my worn out face is beautiful. I guess he likes me. He promised me marriage and all the other stuff that girl, my age would beg for. I guess if he knew how broken I was, he would jump the fence and never return. I guess I'm too scared to scare him with truth because part of me enjoys the company. I do not allow him to sleep over but he stays late. His conversation are all consuming. Not dull but not interesting. The scars of my pain still runs deep sometimes it affects me unconsciously. I have seen videos of how rape victims come out strong. But not for me. I pushed everyone out of my life till I was sure that I was the only person on the island. Maybe that's why I stopped talking to Desmond. Perhaps that's why I avoid him. But Desmond is persistence.

A part of me wants the life that he is promising. A life where the twang of loneliness loses its grip on my skin. Where the tyranny of boredom will evade my doorstep and the cry of children will glaze through my brick walls. A world where laughter and taunt is exchanged between lovers.

Where there is laughter. Where there is happiness. Happiness for me means quiet. I understand that quiet doesn't mean all is well. But Desmond definition contrasts with mine. Why not try it all?

I wonder. Why not? Desmond comes into my room in the evening. When the flies are buzzing around the bulb on the front yard. He is holding a flower. He says a lot of stuff. Mostly questions that I do not want to answer. The only thing I catch is the last word that slips out of his mouth.

"I'll never break your heart. If you let me into your life. I'll provide you happiness that you only dream off. Let me in Grace. I won't break your heart." We share a moment of silence before I

speak. Rather awkward. "You can't break what's already broken Desmond." And with that I open the door. Not wide enough so that the mosquitoes won't think I'm inviting them for a feast. "Come in". I finally say.

Written By Festus, Obehi Destiny.

Title: Unbroken 15/07/2019

In the north, girls marry early. I do mean this literally. Backed up by the arms of culture, men throw their daughters into marriages before their noses can catch a sniff of puberty.

I once asked a man "How did you marry her?"

The man smiled. This indeed had been the question he was hoping for. He went on to talk about how he had paid a huge amount of money for the twelve year old girl and how he had tamed her.

Listening to him was like walking on broken glass with naked feet. Hearing the blood drip from your feet and soaking the shards up. I took a look at the girl and indeed there laid a tamed lioness.

Her golden mane had lost its dignity and now, it looked different. "A colour of defeat perhaps".

I wonder if these brides had dreams before they were bundled into the shackles of their sentence.

They had perhaps lived that fear for a long time before coming to accept their reality. I remembered Langston Hughes, the poet. "What happens to a dream differed? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?"

Festus, Obehi Destiny.

2.

Title: Truth and silence (An Igbo story)

Written by Festus, Obehi Destiny.

Sometimes I think about the Igbos. Their ways of living. Before they found out that their masks could burn from the white man's fire. Before they found out that the white man's metal could bend a man's ofo. Before their ways of existence was threatened and their truth taken from their lips.

Before they realized that underneath the masquerades that crawled from anthills had human faces underneath. Before they was colonization, they were Igbos. They were songs and they were stories.

Stories had it that Nnechi had a razor blade as a tongue. She was the Python *Agwo* that bit deep when or without being provoked. People said she took it from her mother. Others said her father was to blame. He had trained her with the freedom that should be accorded to a male child. Her father Oke indeed was not strict in the way he had brought Nnechi up. Nnechi was the only daughter of his fourth and favourite wife Obiageli who had died during childbirth. Nnechi's tantrums threatened the popularity of her father's achievement. From a tender age, she had fought off older sons and daughters over pieces of smoked fish that should be shared amongst children after evening meals. Where her fist proved to be powerless, she would wrap up sand in her little

fingers and throw it into the naked eye of her opponent. Her next move would be to seek protection in her father's *Obi*. She assumed the role of a bully from early stages of childhood till she became a full chested woman. She pursued suitors with her fist. She made her way in life by dragging the backs of others through the path she chose. It was no wonder that the relationship between her and her step mothers was everything but amicable. After a regular disagreement between her and her step siblings, their mothers fearing the wrath of Oke would point fingers and shout that what will kill a woman will begin as an appetite. But Nnechi never heard these words. Or if she heard, she chose not to listen. Women avoided the quarrel she offered freely and men avoided her path.

Nnechi's irritation knew no bounds and men knew that it is not bravery when a man beats a woman.

That was Nnechi before the lioness was bundled and tamed into the compound of Okibe. But one cannot tell the story of Okibe without telling the story of the white man, the new

religion and the destruction of the Ibo tribe. Before the white man came, Okibe would have been regarded as a regular man. He held no titles as the father before him and the one before that. When the white men came with their religion, the people of *Umuchina* regarded this new religion as a threat to their existence. The white man had brought this religion. The white man who did not have feet, whose skin did not burn in the sun. The white man who couldn't move three kilometres without the help of his iron horse. The first set of people who were intrigued by the poetry of this new religion were regarded as the excreta of the community. The women, men without titles and *Osu*.

The new religion spread like the gaze of the harmattan in the dry season. Deities were consulted regarding the fate of this religion and it was uttered that the future held promise. The new religion was like a false god. Soon it would exhaust its power and would be useless. Great men of the clan smiled after hearing the news. They rested their backs on the walls of their Obi and inhaled their snuffs. The future held promise. The people counted hours. Hours turned into days. *Eke* repeated itself. *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo* ran but the new religion stood. Stories mounted about the prowess of the white men who walked on the sea to the coasts of the Igbo land. They had experienced resistance in the village of Aninta. The men of the village of Aninta were wiped out by the white men. It was the shortest war the people had ever witnessed. So many killings under one moon. The white men had taken long spears that need not be thrown. Metals pierced men and their ofo. Their chi uttered a weak cry before their bodies returned lifeless to the earth. After many moons, the elders of *Umuchina* visited their deity again for wisdom. "The gods are quiet. But there is wisdom in the silence of the gods". The chief priest had said. The elders shook their heads and went back sad and confused. They had no words for the questions of their wives and children at home.

The white man had set up his church. His own shrine was made of wood and stones. They said his own chi was a son whose father sent him to the earth to die. The next step was to establish his system of administration. The system required the establishment of a role. A native who would be superior to his other natives. *A tool*. He would be required to carry out the dictates of the British empire and influence the establishment of a colonial settlement. Okibe was chosen. His acquiescence to the church was evident since day one. He had coordinated other members in fetching sticks and trees for building the church. Since the convert had been banned from fetching wood from the village. Okibe had led them to path in the evil forest where they had fetched trees.

He reassured them that the white man's power is stronger than the *Mmuo* of the forest. The new religion filled them with a sort of confidence to defile their existing beliefs and instincts. Knowing the source of its foundation, the villagers expected the church to desecrate to ash. But it turned out that the power of the white man was indeed great. For many months later, when Okibe was accorded the post of warrant chief, the ceremony took place in that same church. Not only in *Umuchina* but in other villages, posts were set up by the white men. These warrant chief powers promised to be superior even to men who held four titles in their own clan. This had never been heard or seen before. People were fleeing daily to the new religion. White men could be seen sometimes parading the streets and

smacking their lips whenever they came across a hoard of black women. Children started to grow wisdom outside of the father own stock. They started abandoning their ancestors to answer the call of the white man. It was never heard in any clan that a superior position was accorded to one man. A man's title were based on his merits and achievement. The size of his arms determined the yams in his barn. Indeed times were changing. They say a man must dance the dance prevalent in his own time. The elders of *Umuchina* refused to move their feet to the dance of the white man. Hence no elder was present during the coronation of Okibe.

The confusion in *Umuchina* was different. The stories did not sleep even when the moon closed her eyes. They embraced the sun and caused ripples in streams. They caused beads to shake and made great men put more woods in the flames. Meetings were held, gods were consulted. The stories of the past was being threatened with new lies from this new faith. The men of *Umuchina* decided to have a meeting about this new conundrum. The meeting was held in Mazi Nnamdi's Obi. Only men of titles were invited. Since men were running to hold the umbrella of the white man, only few attended the meeting. Mazi Nnamdi's wife swept his large Obi and before noon, the elders of the land trooped in. They each held their ofo and carried their goatskin bag under their arms. They dropped their ofo in front of Mazi Nnamdi's Obi and went inside. This was done to inform outsiders that this was a meeting of important men hence no eavesdroppers. The men saluted each other and Mazi Nnamdi called his first son and told him to bring Kola from his mother.

Mazi Nnamdi held the Kola above his head and prayed "He that bring Kola brings life."

"Ise" the men chorused.

"Let the sun rise and let the moon fall. What is mine will come to me and what is yours will come to you" Mazi Nnamdi's lips trembled as he spoke. He had seen many years and his body was beginning to shrink.

"Ise"

"Each man to his own. No disgrace shall come upon our name"

"Ise"

He broke the Kola and passed it round. After everyone had taken a lobe and chewed it. He opened his goatskin bag and rolled his chalk and gave it to Mazi Ibe the oldest amongst them. Mazi Ibe

painted his big toes with it. Others painted their face, some painted one part of their eyes. When the stone was given to Mazi Nnamdi, he painted his big foot.

Mazi Ibe was the first to speak. He decided to hit the nail on the head. He spoke softly with a deep and burdened voice. "Times are changing. Men have forgotten their father's names. Last week in Umuofia, a man broke his father's ofo right after his conversion to the *Christi*

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