

GRAVEYARD

A MEMOIR



OHAKEM AUGUSTUS-REIGN

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~Akūezepkaragwūagwū~

I write you in history, in gold
High in the halls of the ones gone.
I dance with your ghost.

Mother, rise.
I bring new life, in words
For you, for me.
A new sound to dance to.

I climb to the roof of the museum,
mother
Where names and names are piled away
in archives.
I pull you out, welcome home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To my editors, for being with me through this ride, thank you.

**“Death is a person and you have
occasionally flirted with her..”**

REIGN



Do you visit the graveyard as I do?

I am at one now, where one of the graves hold my first love, walling her away from me.

I sit with her today in this desolate and forgotten place.

How easily she is forgotten!

As I summon her I feel the air icily blow on and pass me, it is like being pierced with an army of needles I do not see. Maybe they are in me.

This graveyard wears moss like a robe covering its every inch with grasses like flowers adorning the floor.

This graveyard's cracked cement slab makes me think its captive intends to escape.

I think of my first love's strength, her fight through life a testimony to that. I think too of how easily she lost to death.

My emotions run high as I run my hands on her epitaph: where are you? Awake, sleeping, dreaming of me in sleep? Or you are not just here? Why are the beautiful ones taken?

I feel anger greater than myself, a sadness I cannot carry alone.

And then I hear her whisper: "I am home. Life isn't being alive, we only survive. Dying isn't the end either. Here's life and there's death, find yourself some loving in between. Wrapped in a cocoon of flesh and blood, one day you will be home but before coming home, leave your indelible marks here'.

'When you visit a garden, which flowers do you pick first?

The whisper continues.

“I am half the world away now. My time has come and gone. Time flies and memories are the only reminders and keepers of what we had. One day you will become a story but before becoming one, live because you want to live’.

Her voice floats like the air around me and I question my consciousness, more questions come like which flower do I pick first? Certainly the most beautiful. I feel light like air breezing through water and I see her when I look harder. She sits at the epitaph I ran my hands on just before. Her legs crossed, her eyes glassy and her face bears no expression. Her aura is cold. She is looking away, into the cluster of graves and the crumbling epitaphs around her.

“Yes, you pick the most beautiful. Look here.” She waves her hand over the beauties of the graveyard.

“The beautiful ones are taken first,” she is saying “these are most of the most beautiful ones, you do not know what these souls carry, they once had dreams. They once were like you. They lived because they wanted to live, they knew they had only one life and the second which they were unsure of was going to be a life caged by the four walls of a box and earth. Do you see how sorrowful here is and how forgotten our remains lie? This is what happens even when you choose not to explore life but to please humans, who in turn will forget you as quickly as you are laid to earth.”

She stands up and starts walking around the edges of her grave. She walks weightlessly like she is the air itself.

“What is the meaning of life and what is the essence of death? These are our only companions here. You have our memories to keep you together, we do not have such gifts. We are a part of humanity but yet torn totally from humanity. We are here,” she says pointing to the center of her grave.

She leaves the edge of her grave and heads towards the stone where I am sitting, I sit not far from her grave, where my anger drove me after I had considered leaving the graveyard. She moves with the air and as she stretches out her arms to touch my face, I feel nothing but air against my face.

“I see the pain you carry, it is a beautiful kind of pain and the loneliness you harbour, you are standing in its flames. You are an embodiment of what life took from us. It is the pain we leave behind. We cannot stop leaving and we cannot ensure staying either. We just live to the fullest and disregard whatever opinions placed on us, we just live to the fullest and fade when our time is up. I hope you learn to do so too, for one day you will be here. One day, sooner or later you will kiss the earth that birthed you.

“I know you have questions, my child, I can see through you, I can see your troubled mind. I walk through you now.

“Yes.”

“Why do you speak as though life ends here, in these graves. There is an afterlife, or isn't there a transition?” I ask, regretting my interruption.

“I see the rage that burns in you, it is your deepest fear but listen, child, it is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.”

I sit motionless, watching her from the corner of my eyes. I am not scared it is not the first time I am sitting with her but I feel a fear greater than death itself. Deep within me, I feel it somewhere in my heart. It is the first time she is telling me what it is like on the other side, the afterlife.

The night before, I had dreams.

I was under the fig tree, with its falling leaves in the air and the wind blowing into my face. I was by the river, with the cold water under my feet and the lilies afloat. And then, I was under the sun, with its ray burning through me and my body shimmering from sweat.

When she came to me.

We walked down the lane, with the evening around us and the wind blowing us apart.

She edged in close and said;

“You have now, why don’t you make the most of it, you are not programmed, you are made to explore and draw your lines not following the pattern. You know there’s a thin line between living and dying, a fragile glass between life and death, funny enough, I am the fragile glass.”

When I looked at her, she was dancing to the tunes of her harp, her hair caught in the air, her hand hard on her strings, and her body fragile and small.

“A clap for death.”

“I am everywhere and nowhere, a gift, a curse. Live life, bask in it, you are made to follow your own heart. Explore life and live by your dictates, breathe,” she sang.

“For you, I came under the weight of a striking axe, I came bearing the force of crashing cars but I missed and with that, you saw the vulnerability of humanity, the sparseness of existence.

“Death is a person and you have occasionally flirted with her,” She said as the wind blew her away, far from my reach.

“You do not know until you have felt it. The blankness between life and memories. The thinness of living and dying. It is like a mirror, you see through it and once you hit it, it shatters. Now you cannot fix what is broken. That is the exact fragility between you and me, the living and the dead,” she says drawing me back to reality, her back to me and her hands in the air.

I can see the cut on her middle finger, it did not heal. I mean to ask her why she still has the cut but before I can, she says in a voice softer than the air around her but yet harsher than the season’s sun.

“We live to die.”

I wonder if I can tell her about the conflicting memories in my head or if I can remind her of how she is my first love. These thoughts come tumbling in and around my mind. I am left with my thoughts. I cannot speak. I am stunned and speech eludes me.

“While at it, flaunt it. One day you will be here, one day you will become a story. One day you will move from telling the story to being the story, one day you will cease to exist. One day you will share this life, these walls, this box and earth. You will be forgotten by those whom you tried pleasing, by the standards you tried upholding, by the expectations that never stops coming. The only remainder you will keep to tell your story will be your epitaph,” she continues, touching her epitaph and making it look like some sort of trophy.

“Do not live by laid out standards, make your own pattern and explore. You cannot live up to everyone’s expectations, you cannot keep on placing them first. Live through life, grow with every process.”

“It is a secret now and I do hope you understand that everything is temporary. Emotions, thoughts, people and scenery. You do not become attached, you only absorb, living in and for the moment.”

“You go with the flow, you flow from your depths, letting whatever flow, flow and whatever crash, crash. You reserve time, space and energy for what is rightfully yours-what is to come.”

“Sadly, we spend our whole life gathering guests for our funeral.”

“Remember this child, remember this all,” she says weepingly with a fading tone.

As I look up to tell her what runs through my mind, she isn’t there anymore, she is gone.

I am here for my first love with a burden and I am leaving with a lesson. I am walking away submerged in my thoughts, I stumble on a crumbled epitaph which hits my foot hard and makes me retain my consciousness. I walk more cautiously and keep wondering why the stone hit my foot.

I look back and around me and consider how one day this place will be my home. As the grasses brush against my foot and the clouds holding back the rain, I walk away.

I will be back here some other time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ohakem Augustus-Reign Chukwuma (The Muse of Pain) is a writer, creative non-conformist, concept creator, activist, and content analyst. He is presently doing a major in Theatrics at Imo State University. He is a critic for some Art firms and has had works published by some of these firms. Quite the sensualist, he loves to read, write, travel, and swim.

Reign loves Creative Arts and Theatre Aesthetics, and spends most of his time editing, curating and proofreading literary works. Recently, he was selected to work with an African cinema on a movie. *Graveyard* is his first book.

You can contact him on:

Mobile Number-09030298435

Email-augustreign1@gmail.com

For mother with whom I still feel a deep
connection and haven't been able to let go, it is
painful and heavy because I keep walking into
your spaces.

Year after year, the pain mounts up and heal-
ing drowns, I have written you in royalty, in
the hall of queens gone.

From the deepest of places and clearest of
truths, it doesn't get better but what else can
be better than this?

For Lady Stella Ngozi Ohakem, I have
awaken you in words, a gift.

