



*POETRY FOR  
THE MILDLY  
INSANE*

EDWIN MADU

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## Foreword

*Poetry For The Mildly Insane* – Edwin Madu’s debut chapbook – is an exploration in reality. That may sound strange at first, but this work covers a lifetime of experiences – from heartbreak to family, love to hate, jealousy to harmony. Madu will start small, relatable, a beggar in a microcosm (as he does in “Yard Fight”), and expand upwards and outwards infinitely, touching upon large ideas and possibilities shamelessly and without fear, king of the macrocosm. In all honesty, I believe I felt myself going slightly mad as I read further and further into the book, each poem more passionate and unafraid than the last. As a matter of fact, unafraid is the exact word I would use to describe Edwin’s poetry. He is not afraid to talk about taboos, such as in “She Asked For It”. He is not afraid to express his emotions towards racial injustice (as he shows us in “The Shiny Things”), and yet it is all done with a grace and elegance the likes of which are admirable. Edwin Madu’s chapbook will have you cowering as “the moon cowered” long ago, will have you “Telling old stories to newborns”, will have you dancing naked in the moonlight. “Poetry For The Mildly Insane” will make you feel yourself going mad with the unapologetic truth of reality. Don’t worry. It’s not a bad feeling at all.

Iskandar Haggarty  
2016

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## Ode to the Fallen Hawker

Heavy is the head  
That wears the crown  
But the crown is not a crown  
But a tray of cold drinks  
And on the face there is a mouth  
And further south there are legs  
The mouth reels out the names of the drinks  
The legs run faster than legs should  
To chase the cars  
To sell the drinks  
The things a buck makes us do  
And in the night when the roads are free  
And the drivers, with veins reeking of booze  
Ride the free roads and do not watch them  
Those legs will be broken and that mouth will bleed  
And the heavy head will fall to the ground  
And so will its crown.  
So will its crown.

## On Valentine's

*Part 1 – for the one with bae*

Roses are red  
Violets are blue  
I know violets are violet  
So I'll start this again  
Roses are red  
Violets are violet  
It's that time of year again  
When bae is less violent  
She is calling me sweet names  
Like boo, instead of fool  
She makes me food in the morning  
Like I am some kid on my way to school  
I imagine the violence will resume  
When she finds that I have nothing planned  
For this 'day of love' I hate  
For this pointless Valentine's

*Part 2 – for the one without bae*

Roses are red  
Violets are blue  
We know you have bae  
We are happy for you  
Tit for tat  
Kit for kat  
I'll be alone for Val's  
And I'm fine with that

## Boli

Boli, O Boli  
At the sight of you my heart quivers  
My mouth is suddenly moist with saliva  
My stomach growls a low growl  
My eyes start to wet at the corners

O golden plantain, roasted black in some parts  
To what shall I compare you  
And with what shall I pair you  
Groundnuts or stew?  
None are deserving of you  
You are perfect on your own  
They barely complement.

I must admit that my obsession is true  
Even when I have not seen  
My nose is informed of you  
Your smoky smell never fails to find my nostrils

And you, sellers of Boli,  
Guardians of the roadside grill  
That fan the flames that roast the ogede  
I hail you all and bid you well done  
For you are custodians  
Of an unsung wonder of the world

Boli, O Boli  
The one of whom I will tell my children  
And with which I will woo their mother  
We are undeserving of you  
Shine on you golden wonder birthed in the fatherland  
Shine on

## This Side of Town

We were born in the part of town  
Where people went to die  
And despite the fact that our wings bled  
We still made plans to fly

The streets are lined with bleeding corpses  
Air heavy with death  
You can hear the cry of a million souls  
At night, coming from the earth

Who killed my people?  
Who made my children motherless?  
Who burnt all our crops?  
Who came and turned our more to less?

Why are my people silent?  
Why are their bodies cold?  
When will they know of this part of town?  
When will our stories be told?

These questions stay unanswered  
And weigh on our spirits daily  
We stay here hoping that as He has His eye on the sparrow  
He watches us too – just maybe

We were born in the part of town  
That angels saw and wept  
And demons saw and fled with speed  
Where our restless souls are doomed to rest.



## Yard Fights

"It's like you are mad  
I can't say for sure  
But it is like skoin skoin is worrying you"  
It is with clapping of palms that she says this  
Palms hard from years of beating  
Numb from many bites  
Poisonous and harmless bites  
Reptile and human ones  
She is talking to her neighbour  
They are fighting over a bucket  
The bucket, a faded purple  
Lies in the grasp of both women  
"It is your mother that is mad"  
The other woman retorts  
And the blows follow  
There is thrashing and hair pulling  
I swear I saw a tooth fly free  
From its previous smelly abode  
But in the middle of the scuffle, legs move  
They move quickly and haphazardly  
Like an atilogwu dancer's  
The woman who spoke first stepped on it  
And the bucket, unable to resist  
Broke under her sturdy weight  
Into a few large pieces  
They both stopped fighting  
And stared at their vanquished prize  
Now they both could not bathe  
No one was the victor  
But you would not believe  
Who lost in all of this  
It was us.  
All of us.  
Standing, watching,  
Inhaling.  
Each person volunteered their buckets  
To each of the women.  
Because a yard fight was amazing  
But a healthy nose – protected  
From the stench they would develop  
If they remained unwashed – that  
Was better still.

## Chicken No Dey Cry For Night

Chicken no dey cry for night  
Verily I say,  
Chicken no dey cry for night  
If it happens to cry,  
We will kill and devour it  
With a sauce so pleasing to the nose  
The gods will descend and beg for a serving  
And at the coming of the owner  
Whose face would be red with rage  
And his eyes wet with tears of loss  
We will proclaim with loud voices  
And with our skinny hands resting on bellies full of meat,  
"Chicken no dey cry for night! Oga"  
And he will remember this cardinal rule  
With a look of resignation on his face  
And retreat to his chickenless abode  
And that will be the end of that.

## Father

The one we called father  
The one with the wide mouth  
The one with the protruding belly  
The one quick with his hard hands

She told us to call him father  
She, our mother, told us  
She said he was our 'new daddy'  
That was why we had never seen him

"Oh, my children, look at your father"  
We looked  
And he looked back  
And we thought our mother mad

Because his eyes were unlike any of ours  
And his head, shaped like a pipe, was different from ours  
But we called him father  
Because of our dear mad mother

And we watched him get fat  
On food meant for us all  
I was the one who brought the plan  
I was the mischievous one

We would make him lean at once  
He would shit all of his fat  
So one day while he slept  
We poured laxative into his beer

But imagine our surprise  
When the guttural groans  
That came bursting from the toilet  
Belonged to our mother

But our mother was a Christian  
But our mother didn't drink  
At least that was what she said  
What else were we to think?

Our dear mad mother died on the toilet  
But no one said this on the altar  
We returned home after the funeral  
Just us – dressed in black – and father.

## At the End of the Day

If the end of the day meets me here  
In the rain and not in your arms  
I will speak to strangers  
And ask strange questions  
Like "why am I here?" and "Where am I?"  
Because I must have lost my way.

## The Shiny Things

There was an urgency the night bore  
When the men with the shiny things came  
The air was tight  
Words on lips were light  
The moon cowered  
The crickets were mute  
The men arrived on beasts  
That resembled slender cows  
They came to us as we sat in the open  
Telling old stories to newborns  
They asked us where our leaders were  
We took them there with hastened steps  
For these men were white  
Almost as white as the cowering moon  
They saw the chiefs and gave them gifts  
The chiefs, they laughed and called them kin  
The gifts were several, shiny they were  
But after that night, more of the moon men arrived  
But bearing no gifts, they took instead  
They stole our land and erased our name  
Freedom left when the shiny things came.

## The Wind's Song

Far and wide  
Across the ocean she reaches  
Hope in her eyes, glee in her voice  
She listens as the wind teaches

The soft songs that it sings  
Excite her to no end  
Because they help her forget  
Her loneliness – the loss of her friend

Lying there motionless  
Is Kofo – her love  
Her light snuffed out  
By nature so cruel

The elders would not hear of it  
Her mother would be devastated  
If she knew only half  
Of what she and Kofo had shared

Now the funeral is over  
The tears have suddenly stopped  
They are all now wining and dining  
The bloody lot of them

“Come back Kofo. Come back”  
She screams to the wind  
Teary eyes gleam with hope  
That somehow Kofo would heed

“Kiss me Kofo. One more time”  
This time she screams only within  
Because this was not expected of her  
Because this was sin.

She dances onward  
Ignoring the screaming villagers  
She could hardly hear them  
Over the sound of the wind's sweet songs

“Look out! There is a cliff”  
They screamed at her  
But she danced on regardless  
Toward her lover's spirit...

## My Lemons

Sorry,  
Excuse me,  
But have you seen Life?  
If you see him or her  
Tell them where I live  
Tell them to hurry there  
To meet me in my abode  
To come and take the dirty lemons  
He or She left on my doormat  
But did I ask for them?  
These bloody lemons  
The people that know things say  
That I should use them to make lemonade  
But my lemons are thick  
With backs like bark  
And I have not found any knife  
With which to peel them  
My lemons are not yellow  
My lemons don't have tang  
My lemons want to kill me  
My lemons have joined bad gang  
Please tell life to bring replacements  
Because my neighbours mock me now  
They sip their lemonade, point and say  
My lemons are really just stones.

## What They Said

I cried all the time  
They called me sad  
I laughed without end  
They called me unserious

I spoke of my friends  
They called me nosy  
I spoke of myself  
They called me narcissistic

I gave all I had  
They called me foolish  
I kept to myself  
They called me miserly

I tore down the walls that kept me hidden  
They called me a vandal- God-forbidden  
I built those walls back and locked myself in  
They called me a loner – one without kin

I soaked in their words  
I stored all the names  
I tried to please all  
But one thing's the same

When all is said and done  
At the end of the day  
It doesn't hurt to ignore  
What "they" have to say



## She Asked For It

The one time she asked for it  
Her period missed the train  
She waited and waited till it was clear  
It'd be nine months before she saw it again

The one time she asked for it  
He told her "you better go"  
When she said that she wouldn't  
He stood and he said "don't let me give you a blow"

The one time she asked for it  
He said he was not the father  
"You've probably slept with a ton of guys"  
"You were not even tight" he'd said, moving farther

There were times she hadn't asked for it  
There were times she had said stop  
But it had been her mother's brother  
Who somehow seemed to hear "don't stop"

There was another time she hadn't asked for it  
And this time the boys were caught  
But when the adults found out, they decided to say  
"She asked for it jor, if not she would have fought"

Now a boy who said he loved her  
Says he wants no part of it  
Of this thing they had both created  
This one time she asked for it.

## On the Loss of Minds

I worry that one day I will lose my mind.  
Not in the way people say it  
Not the glamorized 'cute way'  
I fear that one day I won't be able to function in the real world with real people  
I fear that someday I will lose my mind  
With no hope of finding it again  
Like my contact lenses  
That one time they flew off  
While I was riding pillion on a motorbike  
I sit sometimes and think of how I will one day be unable to say words that other  
people understand  
I fear that I will one day be the only person who understands me  
I fear because it is slowly starting to feel like that one day is very close  
I'm scared that voices will soon start speaking to me  
I think they've started already.

## Let's Assume

Let's assume

Let's pretend for a moment  
That you love me like you say you do  
That I make you feel like every day was a Friday  
That I thrill you just like fried plantain and jollof rice

Let's assume

Let's take a step back and imagine  
That it's actually not what it looks like  
That his little head is not lost between your thighs  
And your fingers are not clawing at his back

Let's assume

That when you told me you were out with 'the girls'  
'The girls' were not your yoga instructor  
This bulky man who, before I returned home,  
Was teaching you poses, but none of them yoga

Let's assume

That I am a psychopath  
That I have a gun somewhere in this house  
That this man was not so buff  
That I could actually fight him

Let's assume

For a second  
That you were ever truly mine  
That you ever planned to stay  
That you ever thought we'd last

Let's assume

That we are done assuming  
That this is not a game  
That this love was just a ruse  
That I assumed I had a wife.

## This, That

For the love of all that is pure and good, let me go  
For the tears I have cried and for the parts of me that have died, let me leave  
Let me out of your grip and into the world  
But not in the night-time; when the egungun masquerades surface  
Not at the oritameta either; that sinister T-junction where the gods dine on the food  
you serve  
No, take me home; straight to my mother  
Let me find rest at her bosom  
Do you know how much she would have cried when I did not come home from my  
lessons?  
She never wanted me to go out, she would never forgive herself.

This house you have brought me to is not mine  
This house is neither my father's nor my mother's  
This woman is not my mother  
This woman that is asking me to take off my clothes  
This woman that sends me to meet men upstairs  
This woman that tells these men that they can do what they like with me  
This woman that collects money while I sit in a corner and cry and bleed  
This woman who tells me to shut the fuck up  
This woman is not my mother

I just read the obituaries  
The woman I saw looked like my mother  
That woman had the same name as my mother  
That woman smiled the same as my mother  
That woman wore the same spectacles as my mother  
That woman is a widow, just like my mother  
That woman is survived by a missing child, just like my mother

For the sake of rainy days and sunny Sundays  
Let me say goodbye to that woman  
I will return to you I swear  
There is nothing out there for me  
Just let me say my last words to her before she descends into the earth  
I will come back, believe me  
This life is all I know now  
It has been years since you took me  
And this woman has taught me all sorts  
Let me go and see her and return before dusk  
When I say her, I mean that woman, my mother  
Because for all intents and purposes  
This woman here,  
This woman is not my mother.

## Outcast's Note

If anyone asks of me  
Tell them I am not around  
Tell them I'm in 'no place'  
Tell them I cannot be found

If anyone calls out to me  
Tell them not to call again  
Tell them I am lost at sea  
Tell them to forget my name

If anyone starts to cry for me  
Tell them not to weep  
Tell them not of what befell me  
Tell them "go to sleep"

Do not read this note aloud to them  
Do not read it in the square  
Please let my memory be forgotten  
By those afar and those from near

Do not let them know of how I lived or died  
Do not let them hear my songs  
But always make sure you make it clear  
That I never really belonged

Tell them I have no name  
All I was ever called was 'osu'  
My life was full of fear and shame  
"Ashamed of me, afraid of you"

Tell them I never could love  
And so no one would miss me  
In fact, tell them nothing  
I know that no one knows me

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**Iskandar Haggarty** is one of the editors of *Firefly Magazine*. His work has appeared or is upcoming on *Inktrap Magazine*, *Ad Hoc Fiction*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and *tNY Press*.

**Ayla Yeargain** is a writer, photographer, and graphic designer from Springfield, Missouri.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edwin Madu is a Nigerian short story writer and poet. His short stories and poetry have been published in several literary magazines. He writes from Lagos, Nigeria. He blogs at [www.edwinmadu.com](http://www.edwinmadu.com) and can be found on Twitter (@DwinTheStoic).