

**Girls
And The
Silhouette
Of Form**

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

Girls And The Silhouette Of Form

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS


Star Zahra



MASOBE

Published in Nigeria in 2024 by Masobe
An imprint of Masobe Books and Logistics Limited
34 Gbajumo Close, off Adeniran Ogunsanya,
Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria
Tel: +234 903 097 1752, +234 701 838 3286
info@masobebooks.com

Copyright © Star Zahra 2024

A catalogue record for this book is available on
request from The National Library of Nigeria

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

ISBN: 978-978-60501-0-2

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted
or stored in a retrieval system in any form or by any means,
without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Illustration & Cover Design by Amina Gimba

www.masobebooks.com

For Zurain Ali.

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

Contents

Once Upon Many Stars	xi
What a poem knows of death.	1
Waist Beads	2
Just as Miracles are Grains of Sudden Change	3
Blocks, Beginnings, Poets.	4
Little Girls	6
Vials of Immortality	7
The Colour Green.	8
Of Bad news and a Country	9
Anjenu	10
A Carnival of Tension.	11
Tanzania	12
Flowers	13
A poem is a clan of things.	15
Write of the Thing with Feathers	17
Home and Nostalgia	18
Hope	19
Like Rain	20
Mandala	22
Early Risers	23

Lover Man	25
Victory Song	26
Of Many Riddles and Other Things	27
Night Light	29
Spirit	30
Naming a Song	31
To Call the Sun the Sun.	32
Metaphors and Ikhlass	33
Like Candles in a Dark Room	34
Otu.	35
A Tale of One City	36
Nomad	37
Richard Ali	38
A Proverb in the Palms of a Poem	39
Revelation	40
A Girl with the Height of Longing.	42
Visions of a Place in the Soul	43
The Silhouette of Form.	44
Woman	45
A Tale of One City	46
Travels	47
Why Happiness is Unpopular	49
Renaissance	50
Faculty of Arts, Abuja.	51

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

Ihotu	52
Wasteland	53
Ugbede	55
Cane Scrolls of Kaduna	56
Where Do We Go?	57
The Road to Kaduna	58
A Gathering of Crows	59
Mahmud	60
Pain is a Silly, Naughty Shadow	62
Crystals and Home and Random things like that	63
Portraits	64
Hosting the Sadness of This Place	65
The King's Men	66
Fireflies and Insomnia	67
Lanterns and Prayers	68
This Is Love now	69
Deja Vu	70
Imageries of Thoughts and the Subconscious	71
Distorted.	72
Acknowledgements	73
About the Poet	75

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

Once Upon Many Stars

My social media is a delightful potpourri of artists and poets. Star Zahra is one of the ones that have stood out the most to me because she embodies art in a light easy way that is soothing, yet coated in a fuzziness that harks at homesickness, which, to me, is at the core of true art. This collection is my first immersion in her poetry and as they say in popular parlance today, Star is everything she thinks she is and more.

The magic of the collection is the unexpected turns of words. She defamiliarises the context of things and metaphors, making them unrecognisable to themselves. She officiates harmonious marriages from the unlikely matches of seemingly unrelated metaphors, just as she is the priestess at “a funeral of unequal sonnets” in “Anjenu”. Tattered pages become springs of water in the collection; Amirah swallows the river for a sip. The sense one gets is of poetry as a spirit loosely embodied, able to take on flesh when it wills and shed it, like a willful Abiku child. There is something about the poems in this collection that taunts space and time. When she poetizes on “cities dragging themselves along a metallic line of poetry”, one can almost hear the grating of the metal she speaks

of and picture the rust. There is the feeling one could reach out and cut oneself on this rusty metal. Her metaphors are so successful that they drop as seeds and form a trail that inspires the reader to participate in the making of the poem. Thus, in this sense, many of the poems never truly end because of the rich metaphors.

In the opening poem, she lets the reader into a secret, "They never knew I was the seventh line of her last poem." This way, she establishes the understanding that she wishes to draw the reader into an intimate engagement. This line reveals an unveiling that the reader is privileged to enjoy.

Having gotten off with her on this footing, she becomes a magician shunning nifty sleights of hands. It is the unveiling of a poet when she reveals, "my metaphoric self was soon to be destroyed." So confident is she in her magic that she can afford to not put up a veil at the moment of conjuring and shapeshifting, taking the reader through "a street of haunting puns with broken bones or punched knees." Like she says of the fire, her poetry is preserving, keeping and not consuming the things. Rather, she is impelling their true essences to come out and be recognised, and she does this coaxing from within the objects and subjects she thematizes. "I can see and hear their fatigue," she declares about her subjects

in “Night Light” and it rings very true. There is an urgent need to know and see and be the things she poetizes. This she does with the fervour of fire, excited, vibrant and with the intent to know deeply. She is the painter sitting still in “The Colour Green” producing and inhabiting, shapeshifting, taking on unusual forms, offering herself as poetry. She is the “djinn” inhabiting unfamiliar places and conveying the reader along. In “Vials of Immortality”, you can feel the harmony between the poet’s confident metaphorization preserving seas, waves, memories of dreams, and “huntsmen, searching between cards and pawns.” When she poetizes about the sea telling you that it has seen the nakedness of your mother and her mother’s mother,” the horrors of the transatlantic slavery and other traumatic aspects of postcolonialism leap to mind.

If the fact that she quickly lets the reader in on secrets rouses a sense of intimacy in the reader, she occasionally throws them off, like that willful Abiku aforementioned, with orthographic liberties. The letters of a word are sometimes shuffled and graphically unordered such that the reader is compelled to read a little more closely, as though he were a sailor leaning in a little more closely to catch the voice of the siren, desperate for revelation. Her compelling graphical

liberties foreground a confidence that suffuses the poem but leaps out to be actively recognised in some poems in the collection such as the one on Sango. Star irreverently ends the Sango argument, did the king hang or not? She decrees, “Sango has risen from the ground” and, in what follows, an ambiguous deity possesses a hapless young man who tries to free himself. Star, like the recalcitrant god she depicts, seeks to possess the reader and her subjects as well, and in so doing, she splits into many fully functioning selves.

The poet herself is engrossed with these multiple selves, sometimes tangoing in the webs, at other times, trying to pry into the layers to reveal her core. She dialogues with her many selves, the lover, the yielding and defiant poet, the seer, the historian, the woman: “When I look in my eyes sometimes/ I wonder if others can see/ These souls scanning the mirror/ With a hunger to dream.” The imagery here, along with the others, elicits the feeling of watching fluid shapeshifting unfolding, shapeshifting so fluid that it precludes the question of “what is the true form of this shapeshifter”? She defies poetry itself, as she insists on seeing the unriddled version of things in “Of Many Riddles and Other Things” with such poetic genius that one cannot but see this poet as poetry, as

though one were under the firm instruction to try not to think of elephants. How does one contemplate the self-portrait of “this woman whose toes do not touch the earth... an ocean whose space between time and age is a conflict of colour?” and not think of poetry?

Ultimately, Star occupies spaces she should and should not occupy based on logic, describing herself as an intruder “lurking around in reality when men are told to dream.” Therefore, she embraces and defies the realms, dreaming where she should not and defiantly inscribing reality on the face of poetry, snapping out of dreams with such intentional wakefulness. This poetry collection is a sea of confident metaphors of loss, absence, anarchy that reify revelations about being, and Star, the spirit child taunting the demarcations, the Sphinx, offering the reward of enlightenment and magic at the core of her riddles, and the siren hinting at mysteries that unfurl coherently and consistently enough to keep the reader-sailor of postcolonial, feminine, traveller and human seas drawn in.

- Funmi Gaji, PhD;
author of *The Script of Bruises*

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS