

THE REASON I RETURNED

NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE



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CULTIVATING
CREATIVITY



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who supported me through the creation of this chapbook. I am thankful to the literary community for providing a space where poetry can flourish.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the people closest to my heart. You are the reason these words found life.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Reason I Returned is a fierce, tender and lovely mini chapbook that refuses to be polite about the things that haunt us. Rukayya Bashir Kofar-Bai writes with a courage that reads like confession and oratory at once: the lines ignite and burn in the same breath. I love how intense the poems are, how honest the language; there's no artifice between the speaker and the truth. The insertion of Hausa is more than decoration, it roots the poems in a present place and lineage, letting cultural cadence do half the work of memory and meaning.

The free-verse sections move in a remarkable emotional sync: stanza to stanza they feel like a single, controlled simply by an exhale. Sound comes first here in the returning refrain and reading becomes listening; the poems demand we come to terms with tone before we legislate sense. That sonic bravery makes the collection feel public and intimate simultaneously: a small lifeline thrown across a crowded room.

The themes of silence, addiction, grief, and the stitch of survival are handled with sincere tenderness. The chapbook's strongest gift is how it turns pain into architecture, here there's no fixing, but inhabiting and to walking through. These poems do not console so much as teach you how to continue. In a world that prefers silence, this is a book that speaks what's necessary, and unforgettable.

Abdulrazaq Salihu

*Author of *Quantim entanglements with notes on loss**

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ARMS OF SILENCE

In the arms of silence
In the hush where echoes rest,
Silence wraps me.....peacefully dressed.
Not in fear, nor empty air,
But in a calm too deep to share.

No need for noise to prove I'm strong,
My quiet hum is its own song.
Where others shout to make a mark,
I light a fire without a spark.

Each breath becomes a sacred rite,
Each pause a thread of inner light.
In silence, I am not alone,
I meet myself. I build my throne.

Let others fill the world with sound,
I'll find my power where none is found.
In stillness, I rise, whole and free,
Silence is where I learn to be.

MAYBE IN ANOTHER LIFE

Maybe in another life,
you'd wait at the edge of the world
where the sky bends to meet the sea,
and I'd find you...
not too early, not too late...
just in time to stay.

Maybe in another life,
your name would echo through rooms
not as a ghost,
but as a prayer answered.
And I'd whisper mine back,
without fear of the silence that follows.

Maybe in another life,
we'd be the kind of love
that doesn't flinch at storms,
that doesn't fold at the sound of goodbye.
We'd be the sunrise,
not the ache of what could've been.

Maybe in another life,
we wouldn't be pages torn from different books,
but the same line, the same breath,
written into each other
like we were never meant to be anything else.
But in this life?
You are a sigh I never quite finish,
a door I almost knock on,
a constellation I only trace in dreams.

Maybe in another life.
Maybe.

WHEN IT CALLED MY NAME

I didn't fall
I followed.
Not because I was weak,
but because I was tired.
Tired of holding myself up
when no one else would.
Tired of silence that screamed louder
than any war outside my skin.

It came soft.
Not with claws or threats,
but with comfort.
A breath of ease,
a moment of stillness
in a world that never let me rest.
It didn't feel like losing
at first,
it felt like BREATHING.

And for a while,
I could smile again.
The pain slowed down.
The voices dimmed.
I laughed—not the hollow kind
but the kind that felt full.
Real.
Almost.

But it asked for more.
Slowly.
Quietly.
A little bit of time,
then trust,
then control.

And when I finally looked back
I was no longer holding it.
It was holding me.

Still...

I won't lie and say it was all darkness.
There were moments,
moments I felt alive.
Like I could outrun the ache.
Like I could be
WHOLE again,
if only for an hour.

But those moments
cost more than they gave.

And now,
I'm learning to walk without it.
To sit with pain
without numbing it.
To be present,
even when it hurts.

Addiction called my name.
And I answered
not because I was broken,
but because I was trying to SURVIVE.

And now,
I call my own name.
And I answer.
Every day.

THE REASON I RETURNED

I do not come to the page to be clever,
or to perform for invisible crowds.
I come because silence is too heavy to lift alone.
Because something inside me....a tremor,
a shadow, a song refuses to sleep.

I write to remember the sound of my brother's voice
before the accident stitched silence into his throat.
To trace the outline of my mother's hands
as she braided my hair tight enough to hold me together.

Each word is a thread I throw across time,
hoping it catches on a face, a scent,
a moment I thought I'd lost.
Writing is the only way I survive myself
not because it makes me whole,
but because it lets me live with the fractures.

I do not write to fix the wound,
but to name it,
to press my fingers into it
and say: yes, this is mine.
This grief, this joy, this yearning
that smells like burnt toast and rain on asphalt.
The poem is not a destination.
It's the walking, barefoot, aching
through the terrain of memory.

I write not to arrive,
but to move, to breathe,
to make space for all I cannot carry alone.

RUBUTUN RAYUWA

(The Writing of Life)

At Kofar Bai, where the wind speaks in proverbs,
and dust carries the hush of ancient tatsuniya,
I sat beneath the old baobab tree—
where ink was silence,
and words lived in the breath of Gogo.

She began softly:
“Akwai wani lokaci...”
and suddenly,
time folded into her voice,
and I was safe—
wrapped in the warmth of her memory.

These were not just stories.
Ba labarai bane kawai.
They were lifelines,
spun from grief and wisdom,
braided into the soil like roots,
carrying the weight of names I never knew,
but somehow belonged to.

At the palace gates,
I watched the griots with no scrolls,
writing sorrow into kidan baka,
carving rhythm into air—
each word a quiet rebellion,
each verse a map for the lost.

They whispered:
“Ko bakinka ya mutu, ruhinka zai ci gaba da rubutu.”
(If your mouth is silenced, your spirit will still write.)

So I became the daughter of syllables,
'Yar baitin da ba ya karewa '
an heir to those who spoke so the silence wouldn't win.
Their wisdom lives in me now—
in every riddle, every kirari,
every line that found me when I was lost.

“Ruwa baya tsami sai da dalili...”
(There's a reason behind every bitterness.)
I learned that even pain carries a lesson,
and in every fall,
there is a verse waiting to rise.

When the world grows too loud,
when I am weary of pretending,
Lokacin da zuciyata ke gajiya da shiru,
I return
to Kofar Bai,
to the place where language raised me,
to the baobab,
to her voice.

And I write
not just to heal,
Ba don na warke kadai ba,
but to remember.
To resist.
To rise.

Don in tuna,
don in karfafa,
don in tashi
kamar baitin da baya karewa.

THE STITCH AND THE SCAR

Some poems are born from blood.
Not the dramatic kind, not the gushing.
Just the slow, persistent leak
of a wound that never closed.

I do not write because I am whole.
I write because the wound won't let me be.
I stitch lines like a seamstress
with trembling fingers.
Threading each word through memory,
pulling tight the places that gape.
Sometimes, I rip it all out,
start again.

Not every healing takes.
Not every metaphor holds.
Some unravel at the softest touch.
Still, I write.
Because what else can I do
with all this leftover feeling?
Because somewhere, someone
is bleeding in the same rhythm,
and maybe these lines can staunch the flow.
Or at least name it.

Writing is not just survival.
It is surgery without anaesthesia,
where you hold the scalpel
and the mirror.

Each poem leaves a scar,
but each scar says:
“you endured.”
“You spoke.”
You made something from the mess.

THE LITERARY LIFELINE

My voice

a thread pulled tight across the quiet,
a spark flickering stubborn in a room full of shadows,
a pulse that won't be silenced.

Each word lands like a stone,
skipping on still water
ripples stretching farther than I can see,
waves I refuse to tame.

I don't speak to whisper
I speak to break glass,
to shake roots so deep they tremble,
to unsettle foundations built on silence.

Poetry is my armour and my arrow,
a fierce dance of light and edge,
cutting through the noise,
carving space where silence tried to settle.

I write because silence is a cage
too small for what I carry inside,
because every poem is a fist raised in the dark,
a step forward on a road
paved by voices like mine
unyielding, unbroken.

This lifeline I throw
not for rescue, but rebellion,
a bridge made of words,
heavy with truth and fire.

I speak for those whose voices
were clipped before they learned to fly,
for the stories buried under shame,
for the power in raw, unfiltered truth.

My words are not gentle
they are thunder, they are flood,
washing away doubt,
breaking down walls built to keep us small.

This is my fight,
fought in verses and breath,
in the spaces between lines,
where freedom waits for those brave enough to claim it.

I am not quiet.
I am the echo in the silence,
the crack in the armour,
the spark that becomes a flame.

And every time I write,
I send out a lifeline
to catch the hands of those still struggling,
to pull us all a little higher,
to remind the world
our voices are not just heard,
they are unstoppable.

GHAZAL OF THE FORGOTTEN LETTERS

You tore my name from all your song.....I write again to you.
Though you erased where I belong, I write again to you.

The ink ignites, I let it burn with every word I scrawl.
No right can rise from what was wrong, I write again to you.

Your silence tried to silence me.....how loud I've now become.
You'll hear me, fierce, relentless, strong.....I write again to you.

You lost the war when I unchained my voice, my past, my pen.
And still, while marching truth along, I write again to you.

Shah stands now tall, unmoved by lies you whispered in the dark.
Though dusk remains, I rise like dawn.....I write again to you.

THE FIRE I CARRY

I was told love was surrender,
A folding of my edges,
A soft compliance,
The art of being less
So another could feel whole.

But I am not less.
I am not absence.
I am not an aching to fill your silence.

Love, to me is fire,
Not a flame begging for oxygen,
But a blaze that names its own sky.
If you step close,
Come with bare hands or courage,
Or be burned.

Faith was fed to me as fear,
Kneel low, obey,
Do not ask, do not question,
But I heard God louder
In the crack of storms,
In the stubborn beating of my chest,
In the refusal of my soul to shrink.

Faith is not submission,
It is defiance.
It is walking barefoot through the dark, unashamed of trembling,
Because I know the dark will split.

So hear me clearly:
My love will not kneel,
My faith will not be chained,
My becoming will not be delayed.

I am the fire I carry,
And I burn to be seen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RUKAYYA BASHIR KOFAR-BAI

Rukayya Bashir Kofar-bai hails from the historic city of Katsina State and possesses a deep passion for the arts, finding joy in creative expression and aesthetics. While she has always admired the world of modeling, she is still building the courage to fully step into it. Currently a third-year cyber security student, Rukayya is undergoing her SIWES program, gaining hands-on experience in the field. She is participating in the Northern Narrative Initiative because she believes it is crucial for young people from the North to tell their own stories—stories rooted in culture, resilience, creativity, and growth, which often differ from external perspectives. Through this initiative, she hopes to contribute a voice that represents strength, femininity, and ambition, especially as a young woman from Katsina. She aims to amplify her voice, develop her creative expression, grow her confidence, connect and collaborate with like-minded individuals, and ultimately inspire change.

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