

ALMOST EVERYONE

I have always been a whore for sad books, movies, and games set in a dystopian future. It's sad to see that my literary taste currently mirroring my reality.

Orwell's 1984, Margaret Atwood's Handmaid's Tale, Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, and 2023 by almost everybody.

Nigeria is a place where economic principles and theories come to die. The laws of demand and supply are more like suggestions, as far as this country is concerned. And heaven forbid the price of your favorite product goes up, you are going to learn about Nigerian Economic Physics, which the first law states: not everything that goes up, comes down.

As a kid, I have always felt pity for sardines, the branded ones. The way they are stuffed into their containers like prisoners of war - no wiggle room and face-to-face with others of their kind, like Onipanu and Palmgroove.

These days, housing conditions for the Sardines have improved. There is enough wiggle room and even room to invite friends over. But the sad part is that almost no one can afford the Sardines and their dietary services.

The current state of affairs has almost everyone tapping into their tactical acumen. But instead of Guardiola's 4-3-3 Tiki Taka, the majority of my countrymen fancy the one meal a day 0-1-0.

It's no surprise people are beginning to voice their concerns about the rising costs of everything- blood pressure included. The roads are empty, and rush hour is still rush hour but without Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker. The air feels heavy, there's a light missing in people's eyes, and almost everyone looks unemployed and dangerous. And when anyone walks behind you, it looks like there's a certain spring in their steps. Everything just feels wrong.

It has been ages since you last heard from me, I did not realize how much time has passed or how much you can achieve or lose within that timeframe till I started writing this down. In hindsight, and as a soldier, time is the least of your worries. The only thing that matters is whether or not you make it back after each battle.

First things first, I am sorry for not writing you all these years.

I heard about your sister, she did not deserve to go out that way. I would not wish that sort of death on my worst enemy. Dying in a car accident on your way to serve your country through the NYSC scheme. I heard there were no survivors, and there were no bodies to bury either - just charred, burnt, and unidentified remains left at the scene of the accident.

I hold fond memories of your sister. She gave me my first-ever taste of pizza, even before I knew what pizza was. And she taught me how to pronounce chaos because back then, I pronounced it the same way you would pronounce Charles. Your sister was the kindest person I ever met and I admired how people were always drawn to her. She saw the best in people, never took anything personally and most importantly, no one had anything bad to say about her.

Last I saw you, I told you of my intention to enlist in the army. You shook your head, looked at me with pity, and uttered words that stayed with me till today. You told me not to enlist, and that if I ended up enlisting, I would be lucky not to get killed, and if I got lucky and escaped death, I would come out maimed or missing some limbs. And if by some miracle I avoid the fate of an amputee, I would come out poor and with PTSD so bad that I would not be able to hold a job or even find one.

In hindsight, I should have listened to you. I am not dead, scarred, or missing body parts. But after fighting in other men's wars and killing other people's sons, all I have to show for it are nightmares, trigger-happy fingers, a meager salary of 55 thousand Naira, and, oh! I am scared of fireworks too.

I have lost count of the number of old friends that have died. It's ironic how -Lucky- my seat partner from primary school died when a trailer crashed into his car - he was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident.

Patience died at the hospital. She complained of headaches but she was left unattended for hours because the doctors were on strike. She slept on those miserable chairs in the waiting area of the hospital and she never woke up again. I did not get the news of her death until a year later. These days, I'm starting to forget what her face looks like.

Justice died by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A case of mistaken identity. People on the street were shouting about a thief in the neighborhood around the time he was coming back from his morning jog. They saw him running and assumed he was the thief. They chased after him, caught him, beat him, decorated his neck with tires, doused him with scarce petrol, and lit him ablaze.

It is eerily ironic how my friends died. You can say Lucky ran out of luck. Patience died by being patient and being a patient at the hospital. As for Justice, the jungle brought their idea of justice to him. What exactly is in a name?

These past couple of years, I have seen things my eyes were not designed to see. Growing up, and in my wee years, I thought lavender fields that looked like something out of a painting of a farm in Bulgaria and terrible artworks so expensive that you wonder why they cost so much were in my immediate future.

But all I get is morbid images of men who shat themselves to death as bullets rip through their intestines, men who have the afterlife written on all over their entire faces as they go into battle with faulty weapons, outdated protective gear, and little to no ammunition. I have seen men, the lucky ones, the ones who died before their bodies hit the ground, and the ones who died a slow, painful, and agonizing death that the thought of death scared them enough that they started crying and begging their comrades not to forget them.

You must be wondering why I am writing you after all these years. It's looking likely that I am off to fight another man's war again. But this time, in a foreign land and I am not sure I am going to make it back. My dreams are dead and I have run out of fuel and will to power them. I am no good for anything these days except killing. And even if by some chance I survive the foreign war, what sort of life awaits me back home? These days, I hear my salary is not enough for a flight back home, a bag of Rice is more than half of my salary, my favorite

snack from our childhood is out of production and if the universe sees fit to return me home in one piece, by then, whatever money I have left is probably worth nothing.

The life I have lived so far reminds me of that poem we used to read together, the one by Maggie Smith - Good Bones - I believe that's what it's called. Life is short and I have shortened mine in a thousand ill-advised ways.

I have always been against touching drugs, but these days, drugs have started to touch me. I lie to myself that my usage of drugs is necessary, as I only use them when going into battle. But these days, I also dabble in its recreational use as I try to find better and better high. The sad part is that there is no one to stop me. Everyone here has also turned to drugs - the country has them by the balls and in a chokehold.

Life is short, the country is terrible, and please, do not keep these things from your children.

At this point, there is no reason to cling to life, I have nothing else to live for. All in all, I wanted to thank you for being a good friend all through the years and an even better person. This country is a terrible place but it would have been worse without you in it.

Thank you for all the things you have done for me, and for the things I do not remember to thank you for. Thank you for helping me differentiate my left from right when we were kids, it has saved my life plenty of times.

It may sound selfish but thank you for existing in this wretched country. Most importantly, I love you not because loving you is easy, I love you because loving you is my salvation.

WHAT EXACTLY IS IN A WILL?

As my final act of selfishness, I am making you the custodian of my will, to act upon after my demise.

Yes, my Will. Not Smith, nor Wessons.

But before we get into all of that, what exactly is in a will? What exactly is in a name?

My parents named me Bloom but all I have seen is doom and gloom. I have never bloomed and so far, my life has been a forever winter. Once again, what exactly is in a name?

Years ago, when I was in boarding school. I used to fondle around the idea of writing a will, but most importantly, I have always wondered whether or not poor people should have a will, since there is little or nothing to share. On the other hand, whether you are poor or poorer than a church rat, there is always something to leave behind - trauma, debt, prayers, wishes to people whom you met through chance encounters, or your entire body to a science museum.

To my uncle on my father's side - I give to you my debts with Palmpay and FairMoney. I know you are always hungry for something. I hope you eat these debts with grace.

As for my traumas, bury them deep in the jungle where there is no justice.

Give my bell jar, yes! My bell jar, not Sylvia Plath's, mine. Give my bell jar(the one which contains my trigger-happy fingers) to Mrs Collins - my computer teacher for primary three. I hope she finds God's wrath for always hitting kids for no reason.

To the random kid who liked my hair - thank you for putting a smile on my face. I hope your summers are forever soft and I pray Mother Nature embraces you all through winter. Even though my hair is quite full, I admire your innocence in seeing beauty in the little things.

To the lady who gave me her orange on the yellow bus - I hope your life so far has been sweeter than that orange you gave me. I do not remember much from that night, I was probably drunk on happiness and high from adrenaline. But thank you for sharing in my happiness and most importantly, I hope life has been kind to you wherever you are. I do not remember what you look like but I still think about you from time to time.

To the people who will show up at my funeral - first things first, I am sorry. I did not mean to be such a bother by taking hours off your precious time.

To you reading this, my best friend - At this point, I have probably disappointed you - that is understandable. Thank you for always coming through for me and for the many happy memories we shared, I am sorry you have to look back on them with a tint of sadness. But most importantly, I am sorry for leaving you with one less friend and a whole lot more worries in this cruel world.

Tonight, I shall write the saddest lines. My world is shattered, the sun is dim, and there is no light at the end of the tunnel for me. In this shattered world of mine, you are the only shining star - the only source of light. And that is too great a burden to place on one person.

Even though I always know where you are, I still look for you in places where you have no right to be - and in death, I know that will not change. I will forever take comfort in knowing you deemed me worthy enough to share your smile with me.

Mitch Albom said that all parents damage their children. It cannot be helped. Youth, like pristine glass, absorbs the prints of its handlers. Some parents smudge, others crack, and a few shatter childhoods completely into jagged little pieces, beyond repair - I feel the same way about this country too. This country damaged me, and that is an understatement.

Let my life serve as a cautionary tale for people who have it at the back of their minds to fight in other people's wars and kill other people's sons. There's no reward in it, just trauma and broken bodies.

On this note, I leave you a final gift from me to you - a poem.

*In the bleak midwinter
Down the long barrel, I stare
As I pen down this letter,
Laced with an edge of finality*

*I would give an arm to see your silver bullet smile once more
Both legs to lay in the chambers on your chest
In a perfect world, this letter would start with your initials, (AK)
Spanning 4-7 lines or 47 pages*

*But we do not get all we want
So, as I stare down the long barrel,
I hope this letter finds you in good health.*

Once again, I love you not because loving you is easy, I love you because loving you is my salvation.

Signed - Your friend at the battlefield.