



Tick, tap! The clock's hand crawls towards midnight.

Tock, tap! I tap my pen against the till, impatient in the crowd.

A voice guides me, a soulless song further darkens the night.

Tick, tap! Waiting for the last of the crowd to leave,

I mutter, frustrated, sighing, disengaged.

Tick, tock! "Midnight, at last!" I cry with excitement.

Grappling for my native attire, I race to catch the night's final glimmer.

Exiting, locking the shop with desperation.

Sunlight kisses my skin, waking my body.

"Ya! Cha-Cha-Cha — Kwenu!" chant the people, waking my soul.

"Ya! Cha-Cha-Cha — Kwezuonu!" I scream back.

Tumbling, twisting, I transform into the majestic masquerade.

One with the chant, I dance, spinning with the wind's intricacy.

One with the people, children's laughter ignites a fire in my soul, warmth in my heart.

Twirling in a vibrant array of colours, I lift dust into the air.

I am caught by every lens, preserving my spirit from every angle.  
Uplifted by curious children, I breathe new flames into their souls,  
Filling them with awe, breathing new life into their eyes.

“Whoa, Wow, Ahh!” they scream in excitement.  
Their joy fills the air, and they shower me with native gifts.  
Chased by their voices echoing in broad daylight — “GINI? BIA!”

Moving with grace and precision,  
I am admired, adorned, a living treasure of tradition.  
Never in spite, never lacking spirit —  
I am fuelled by culture, heritage, and time-honoured tradition.  
I am timeless, energized by our values.

Adored by the crowd, celebrated by the children, I give life to culture.  
Always masquerading within the crowd, for what is young and yet to be, I became.

Now go, tell the tales that gave me life.  
Do not let our history fall and fade — forgotten, lost.  
Instead, cherish it, rejoice in it, and share it with open hearts.  
Now, GO! Pass it on, from one generation to the next.  
With the spirit of the Masquerade, we belong — together.

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I was inspired to write this piece because I deeply miss the masquerade — an integral part of my Nigerian heritage — ever since I left Nigeria. Growing up in Biafra, my hometown, I experienced the vibrancy of our traditions from a young age. I was immersed in culture even before I turned nine. As someone with autism, ADHD, and Asperger’s, I once believed that my challenges were solely a product of my environment. Over time, I learned that society’s misunderstanding of neurodiversity — often labeling those of us with learning differences — can create barriers.

Living in the UK, I’ve found the social scene to be starkly different. There, interactions often feel dull and reserved, with a prevailing sense of isolation. Antisocial behavior is not only frowned upon — it’s legally restricted. In contrast, back in Biafra, one could express themselves freely without fear of breaking the law. Despite these differences, I’ve learned to control my impulses and navigate social situations to avoid trouble.

I vividly remember attending an autumn festival in the UK. Seeing children chasing after masquerades in Central London rekindled memories of the vibrant celebrations of my youth back home in Nigeria — a time filled with friends, family, and rich cultural traditions. It reminded me that my neurodiversity isn’t a limitation; it’s a part of who I am, shaping my unique way of connecting with the world. Even as an adult, I long for those nights filled with energy and cultural expression.

The emotions I wish to convey through my work are about missing home and sharing my culture. I want people to see that even though I live far from Nigeria, my heart remains tied to my heritage. The chants — “Ya! Cha-Cha-Cha — Kwenu!” — symbolize the call to unity and celebration. In Igbo, these words mean “all hail the matching masquerade,” a call that unites people. For me, the masquerade isn’t just a festive display — it represents a transformation. It reminds me of the young prince I once was, destined for kingship. Though my father, a king himself, never performed the traditional ceremony to pass on that honor, I feel compelled to return to my county, help the Biafran people, and honor our traditions. Unlike my father, who embraced a British lifestyle, I strive to uphold our customs and use OBINexus Computing as a means to support my people.

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I remember how, as a child, masquerades in my country were both a source of awe and a controlled way to bring fearlessness into our lives. I recall helping a masquerade dance under the scorching sun at the age of six, holding a water bottle as a symbol of care and resilience — a moment that left a lasting impression on me.

Now, as I see children donning masquerade costumes, I witness a renewal of our rich cultural legacy. They remember who they were and who they can become — creating a cycle of richness and education that spans continents. My second poem, “Riches,” will celebrate this journey: the return of our riches, as we seek education abroad, better ourselves, and then come back to uplift our families and community.

I was celebrated as a young prince, destined to be king, but circumstances forced me to leave Nigeria due to civil unrest, famine, and pollution. Despite these challenges, the spirit of our people endures. I see an arc of transformation where children, through the act of masquerading, reconnect with their culture and breathe new life into our traditions.

As a software engineer, I now have the tools and means to help those in need back home. My work with OBINexus Computing is not just a career — it’s a commitment to return the riches of our heritage and support the community that raised me. I want my art and my actions to speak to the unity, resilience, and enduring spirit of Biafra.

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