

# WRITERS SPACE



JUNE 2024 EDITION

AFRICA



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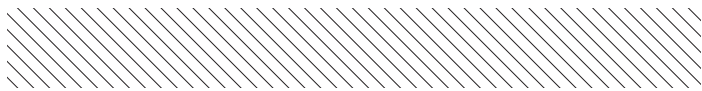
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# EDITORIAL

Comfort Nyati, SDB  
Chief Editor

Dear reader,

We have reached the 6th floor of the year, half down. How does it sound...Too quick right? Stepping into the sixth month of the year; one is reminded about the leap of time. We look back into the pages of preceded months with gratitude and look forward with hope, the hope to journey with the remaining part of the year with a sense of passion and vitality.

However, there is always something that carries us and we carry it deep within our physical and psychological confines. It is like an ocean that never

runs dry. This is the inner child, an ever-ageless reality in us. While it weathers our psycho-structural physique, it completes our being humans.

It is not necessarily the childishness in us but that which reminds us of our fragility and originality. That inner self or pneuma, as also called, exercises at most an imperative task to render a sparkling flame. It lights our way and shows us the vision in the blindness of our sight.

Consequently, in this 90th edition, our renowned authors elevate us to a height where we are bound to af-

firm that no clay has ever become a good part without going through fire. It is the pneuma that feeds the inner fire which is ever burning. Sometimes we wonder how we have survived some conditions in life because there is that which purifies, heals and builds us. Just because you have not seen tears doesn't mean that the person has not cried. It is because someone in us does it for us. The inevitable. The irresistible. The indisputable. The inner child.

Wishing you a Happy reading



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Empowering African Writers

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**Children's Literature**



# THE LION AND THE DANCING GIRL

Agatha Rachael Akullu  
Uganda



In the heart of Kole village lived a little girl named Kela. She had big curious eyes that sparkled like the evening stars, and her laughter echoed through the winding paths of her village. Kela had a secret passion that filled her heart with

joy—she loved to dance.

Every day after finishing her chores of gathering firewood and helping her grandmother with cooking, Kela would steal away to her favourite spot by the river and let her feet draw pictures in the

soft soil.

One sunny afternoon, as Kela danced joyfully, she noticed a pair of curious eyes peering at her through the bushes. It was Simba, a playful lion cub from the nearby village.

“You dance beautifully, Kela!” Simba exclaimed, coming out shyly from his hideout.

Kela blushed and giggled. “Thank you, Simba! Do you like to dance too?”

Simba shook his head. “I used to, but as I grew older, I forgot the joy of it.”

Kela’s heart sank. “But why forget something so wonderful?”

Simba sighed. “We lions are taught to be tough and serious. Playing is seen as childish.”

Kela’s eyes twinkled. “Maybe you’ve just forgotten how to let your spirit dance!”

With that, Kela took Simba’s paw and began to sway gently. Simba refused at first but soon found himself moving his legs like Kela. Kela and Simba danced with colourful butterflies, sang with chirping birds, and splashed in the river until the sun went down. With each moment, Simba’s heart felt lighter.

From that day on, Kela and Simba danced together. Kela helped Simba rediscover the magic of playfulness, and Simba

taught Kela to be brave like a lion. Their friendship grew stronger with each passing day.

One evening, as Kela and Simba danced and sang happily, the village was drawn by their enchanting footsteps and laughter. In amusement, people clapped, cheered, drummed and joined the dance and for the first time the village became filled with hearty laughter and songs.

“Thank you, Kela,” Simba whispered. “You’ve taught me and everyone here that sometimes, to find our true selves, we must embrace the spirit of our inner child.”

“Thank you too, Simba,” Kela whispered back. “I have also learnt from you to be brave. Without bravery, I wouldn’t have danced in front of all these people.”

When Simba went back to his village that day, he taught his friends how to play hide and seek and dance under the moon. Simba learned that his inner child was always within him, waiting to be rediscovered through laughter and adventure with friends.



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# AWC

7TH EDITION

AFRICAN WRITERS  
CONFERENCE

KIGALI

RWANDA

OCTOBER 22-27, 2024.

**THEME:**

The Role of African Children's  
Literature in Shaping the Youth



# African Teen WRITERS Awards

THIRD EDITION

The African Teen Writers Awards is now accepting submissions from teens aged 13 to 16. We are accepting submissions in either poetry or prose.

There is no entry fee for this award.

Theme: **A RIGHT TO PEACE**

Submission Link:

[www.africanwritersawards.com](http://www.africanwritersawards.com)

Submission Date:

Submission of entries is open from March 15 until July 1, 2024.

## PRIZE DETAILS

**1st poetry prize - \$100**

**1st prose prize - \$100**

2nd and 3rd - Certificates  
(poetry and prose)



This Award is sponsored by  
**Nahida Esmail**

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**African Writers  
Conference**



**Flash Fiction**



# VILE

Zaenab Dare  
Nigeria

“You might want to check this out!” Lydia’s partner who was still in utter shock had called her in. And when she came around, she realized that the woman who had been reducing the population of twins over the past few years was her long-lost twin.

On being taken in, she had said to Lydia scornfully: “You always got the better toys when we were kids. You were the preferred one, everyone’s favorite. And when mother had to pay for debts she owed, she gave me up, not you. I live with so much hate because of you. But I thought no girl should have to live like me. So I started with Tanya. Just like me, she was the less-favored twin, the one people barely spoke of, the one who got the crappy gifts. So I redeemed her, even though it meant getting rid of her sister.”





# BARBIE DREAMS

Rehema Zuberi (ResH)  
Kenya

Mother never buys me any toys. I cry until I sleep. When I wake and remember what I was crying about, I wail some more. I understand now that she had the option of getting me a toy or feeding us.

She chose what I could easily forget about. Constant hunger is unforgiving. In a way, she could depend on other children's playthings. I would cling onto them but in the end when they used their tears as weapons, I had to return their possessions.

I was especially obsessed with the Barbie doll. Her flashy clothes and fancy hair were everything I wanted in the world.

As soon as I started earning my own money and could move out of my mother's watchful eye, I started furnishing my house. My major décor accessory is dolls.

Two of my walls are lined with shelves. There is an alternating order which I love. A doll, then a plant. During my playtime,

I make the dolls water and tender for the plants. They are thriving and my mates ask what the secret is because their parenting has been cases of their plants dying. I tell them happiness. They never believe me.

When mother visits, she says I am acting in a childish manner. I laugh off her concerns. She can never understand the journey I have undertaken and the goodness it has served me. One day, I might explain.

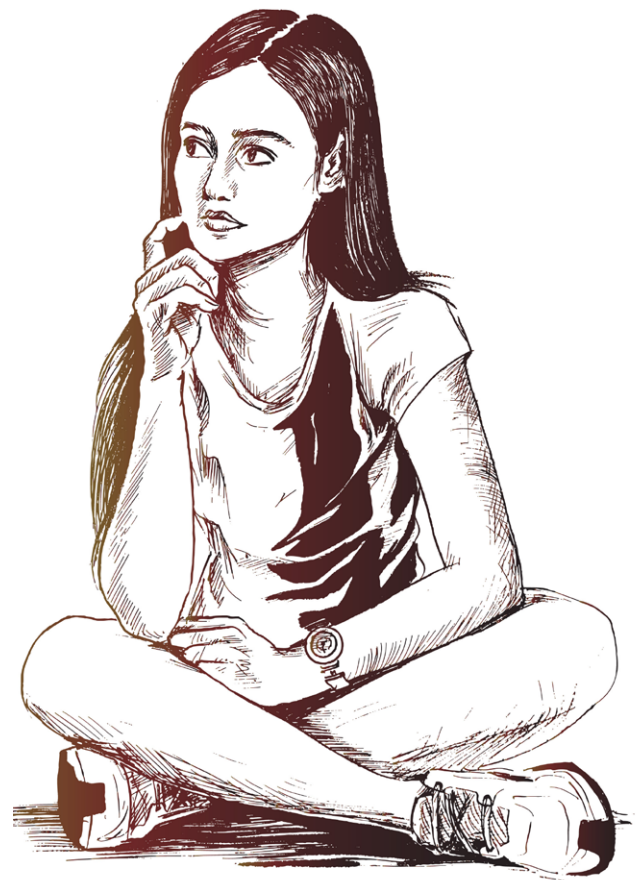
I did not know it when I started but I now realize that slowly, I am getting to heal the part of me that had nothing. I am learning I can reach out to the little me and grant her the little big things she was denied under the circumstances. She smiles up at me seeing displays of Barbie in all her different glories.



# BEADS OF REFLECTION

Ogechukwu Egwuatu  
Nigeria

I looked in the mirror and admired the pretty beads in my hair. I positively looked like a child with my Minnie mouse t-shirt, wide-legged blue jeans and braids adorned with beads of multiple colours. I must confess, I had missed wearing beads like this. It was great that they were coming into fashion for adult women. Not that I looked like one... or thought of myself as one. My best friend Sola had told me she hated being mistaken for a teenager. She had changed the way she dressed to look more mature. Me? I embraced it. I was 27 and wasn't sure of what I would be doing with my future. That people thought I was a teenager made me feel like I had more time to figure things out. Maybe I am running away from reality under the guise of embracing my inner child. I shoved that thought to the furthestmost recesses of my mind. "There is no rush", I remind myself. I still have time to grow up. Though the widening discomfort in my chest begged to differ.



6th Edition

# Wakini Prize for CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

THEME  
**Guardians of Peace**

**Word limit** 1200 Words or less.

**Requirement** The story should be for children between the ages of 6 and 12.

**Submission Date** March 15 until July 1, 2024.

■ **There is no entry fee.** ■

Winner receives \$200  
1st Runner-up receives \$150  
2nd Runner-up receives \$100



This Award is sponsored by  
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submit your entry at

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Creative  
**SPOTLIGHT**

*Divine Okpe*







*Divine Okpe, the 16-year-old winner of the 2023 African Teen Writers Prize (Prose), converses with Lise Nova Berwadushime about her writing journey and creative inspirations.*

**Lise:** It's my pleasure to host you, Miss Divine Okpe. May our audience know more about who we have today?

**Divine:** Ah, 'Who am I?' What a profound question! My name is Divine Okpe and I'm a sixteen-year-old Nigerian student. I see myself as a student of life, learning from every moment and every person I encounter. I love learning new things, creating and connecting with others. And, yeah, that's me in a nutshell.

**Lise:** When did you start identifying yourself as a writer?

**Divine:** Honestly, I've always been a storyteller at heart. With the juicy gossips with my mum and friends. But I think I started taking writing seriously after a consolation prize in Uzo

Udegbunam poetry contest which gave this "Go girl" kind of spirit that I could be more. So, I decided to explore my creativity experimenting different styles and genres. So, I'd say it has been a gradual process.

**Lise:** 'What inspires you? What is the source of your creativity?'

**Divine:** Oh, I find inspiration everywhere! I'm a curious person who loves trying new things. Movies, music and conversations with others all spark ideas and creativity for me. I also do lots of reading the works of amazing authors which always motivates me to write. Sometimes, even a simple moment or memory from my childhood can ignite a creative flame. But honestly, my biggest source of inspiration is the human experience – our stories,

struggles, and triumphs. I believe everyone has a unique perspective and experience to share, and that's what drives me to create and tell stories that resonate with others. Most importantly everything around me inspires me to spill my ink. I try to find muse in everything that's just it.

**Lise: Would you say that you are much of a writer or you are much of a reader?**

**Divine:** Definitely both! I'm a firm believer that to be a good writer, you need to be a voracious reader. I love getting lost in books and discovering new authors and genres. Reading expands my vocabulary, sparks ideas, and helps me understand different perspectives. At the same time, writing is my way of processing the world, expressing myself, and connecting with others. I enjoy writing in various forms – stories, poetry – as it helps me reflect, grow, and heal. So, I'd say I'm equally passionate about reading and writing; they fuel each other and help me become a better storyteller and communicator. To be a good writer one also has to read wide, they both go hand in

hand. So, I find myself doing both.

**Lise: How did you know about African Teen Writers Award?**

**Divine:** I found out about it through my mentor, Mr Ojo Blessing.

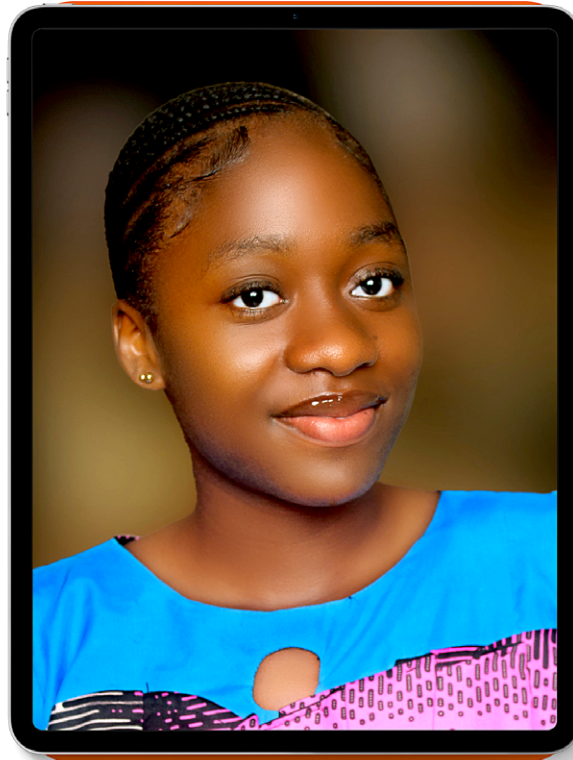
**Lise: Tell me about the process of writing, submitting and daring to go for that competition**

**Divine:** When he told me about the competition, honestly, I was really blank on what to write. I had to do so much research and a lot of reading as well. I just don't write straight forwardly; I like to merge a lot of things that come to my head to produce a beautiful piece. I'm a movie kind of person so I got the muse to write flipped coin first from a movie. I just knew I had to write something down and from there I did my research and fused in different aspects of life issues like problems faced by single mothers, the Nigeria army and others. Voilà! my piece emerged. I try to live in my story it's something I always do to connect my emotions with it that way I know how my reader should feel while reading it. Usually, I hate failure it's something I really fear a lot but during the process



**2ND EDITION  
OF THE** **AFRICAN  
TEEN** *Awards*  
**WRITERS**

**PROSE CATEGORY**



**TITLE:**  
A Flipped Coin

**Prize:**  
**\$100**

**DIVINE OKPE**  
(Nigeria)  
**- WINNER -**

of writing for this award I got to understand that you need to pour your heart into writing the work and never forget that winning isn't everything; the journey itself is valuable because you'll learn, unlearn and relearn once more

**Lise: How did you feel when you emerged as a winner of African Teen Writers Award?**

**Divine:** Smiles. Waiting for the result was really nerve-wracking. I was absolutely thrilled when I emerged as a winner! It felt unreal because I initially heard of it from friends before actually checking. Buhh!!! I mean I won it, *lol*. It was an incredible feeling, knowing that my hard work and dedication had paid off. I felt a sense of validation and recognition, which boosted my confidence and motivation to continue striving for excellence. But what was even more rewarding was the opportunity to share this achievement with my friends and loved ones. Especially my mentor and my mum who had been there to encourage me every step of the way. It was also a stepping stone to prove to my dad that being in a sci-

ence class is not a limitation for whosoever wishes to write. It was a truly unforgettable experience that I'll always cherish.

**Lise: There are moments when a writer relates to their stories. Do you relate with *A flipped coin* in one way or another, if I may ask?**

**Divine:** Absolutely! As a writer, I pour my heart and soul into my stories, and I often draw from my own experiences and emotions to create authentic characters and narratives. I certainly infuse pieces of myself – my thoughts, feelings, and observations. I believe that's what makes writing so powerful – the ability to connect with others through shared human experiences.

In my story, *A flipped coin*, I explored themes of pain, hopelessness, death and others. The character's struggles and triumphs are, in many ways, my own, and I hope that by sharing my story, I can help others feel seen, heard, and understood. It's my usual habit to live in my story and connect with it.

**Lise: What are your hobbies?**

**Divine:** I love to make-up, just sit, take

the powder, eye pencil and do crazy and wonderful things to my face so that's my number one amongst others like cooking, dancing, singing and I'm a foodie as well. I love eating a lot.

**Lise: What is your way forward? I mean, what should we expect from you in terms of writing/literature?**

**Divine:** As a writer, I'm constantly evolving and seeking ways to improve my craft. In terms of my writing, you can expect me to continue pushing the boundaries of creativity and storytelling. I'm excited to explore and experiment new genres, themes, and styles. Ultimately, my way forward is to remain true to my passion for storytelling, to stay curious and open to new ideas, and to always strive for excellence in my craft. Expect a bigger Divine in the literary world because she's growing and will be cooking up things, serving hot. And of course, staying loyal to her mentor as well.

**Lise: Is there anything you would like to share with us?**

**Divine:** Actually, yes! I'd like to share a piece of advice that has helped me in my writing journey to my fellow writ-

ers and creatives to keep pushing forward, even when faced with rejection or self-doubt. Embrace constructive criticism and use it as an opportunity to grow and improve.

Remember that every writer has a unique voice and perspective, and the world needs more diverse stories and perspectives. Don't be afraid to take risks, experiment with new ideas, and learn from your mistakes. And most importantly, keep writing from the heart, with passion and purpose. Reading extensively, acknowledging there are people better than you so you just have to learn. It is said: "Rome wasn't built in a day" so just work on yourself.

**Lise: Thank you so much for your time. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.**

**Divine:** Thank you so much.



# The Wanjohi Prize

FOR AFRICAN POETRY

PoeticAfrica is pleased to present the maiden edition of The Wanjohi Prize for African Poetry.

The Wanjohi Prize for African Poetry is in honour of the remarkable contributions of Benny Wanjohi to African poetry.

## Requirements

- No specific theme.
- Submit only one poem.
- The poem should not exceed 30 lines.
- We are looking for poems with originality, creativity and rich use of poetic devices.

## Submission date

April 1 to July 1, 2024

## Prize

The winner receives \$100.  
First runner-up receives \$50.

Submit Here

[www.writersspace.net/poeticafrika](http://www.writersspace.net/poeticafrika)

PoeticAfrica



**Benny Wanjohi**  
(Co-founder, PoeticAfrica)



# Issue 14

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PoeticAfrica is Africa's first trilingual poetry magazine published quarterly. The magazine showcases rich and diverse poetry in English, Kiswahili, and French from all over Africa to the world.



# Poetry





# SOMEWHERE IN THE **PORTRAIT**

Thompson Emate  
Nigeria

There's a part of us deep in our chamber  
A part that time and age sometimes don't put to slumber,  
A part that eternally yearns for the light  
A part that's wearied of the fight.

This part seeks a higher order  
A place beyond the turbulent border,  
It sits in the shadow  
Sometimes it wants to run through the meadow.

It wants to be heard  
Like a book that needs to be read,  
This part leads us through enigmatic lands  
As our feet sojourn across the sands.

My room is not an empty space  
I walk daily in the Father's grace,  
Sometimes the child in me could be boisterous  
The reason is mysterious.



# AGELESS WONDER

Alvin Ayesiga  
Uganda

---

A nonchalant exterior  
A resigned expression,  
Pursed, unmoving lips  
Hands in pockets, bored  
Proud, arrogant gait,  
But behind the dark-tinted glasses  
Lay eyes furiously moving, taking in the sights;  
The colors, gray clouds under a blue sky  
The people, a couple laughing hand-in-hand, a child sleeping in a stroller,  
The fauna, an owlet learning to fly, ants in file to their hill  
The flora, a flower blooming, leaves leaving their branches.  
Neurons firing excitedly, absorbing all the information, new and old,  
Despite having experienced them before.  
An excitement that has never left,  
An inner childish fascination and naiveté I hope never leaves.



# FOR A CHILD LIKE ME

Akuei M. Adol  
South Sudan

Flipping through the delicate pages of my tender years  
I wonder where I truly belong in those enchanting days,  
For me, like a kid from a distant memory  
Through war-torn lands, my child-like spirit roams free,  
Where innocence once bloomed in endless streams  
I navigate debris with hopes and dreams.

I am a refugee child embracing chaos and light  
In my heart, echoes of laughter take flight,  
Seeking solace amidst despair's harsh glare  
Longing for a glimpse of childhood's soft care.

I observe as other children frolic and play  
Yearning to join in, to find my own way,  
Bearing burdens heavy, feeling out of place  
Yearning to reclaim my former grace.

Yet within the depth of my soul, a flicker remains  
A spark of joy that sorrow can't chain,  
Guiding me back to a time so divine  
Before darkness marred this innocence of mine.

I clutch memories close, like petals in a breeze  
Hoping to heal, to find my inner peace,  
To rediscover the child I left behind  
And let my inner light brightly shine.



# SANCTUARY OF BLISS

Stella Gonye  
Zimbabwe

Barefoot I strode upon the damp earth  
The aroma of fresh rain permeating my nostrils  
The overnight downpour left behind a sandy velvet feel  
My diminutive feet sank slightly as I gleefully leaped into puddles  
The fragrance of blossoming flora beckoned me towards the garden.

A stunning purple butterfly flits teasingly over my visage  
Giggling, I pursue it among the vibrant blossoms  
It leads me to the brilliant yellow Marigolds  
There, as they, industrious bees hum  
Indulging in the flowers' saccharine nectar  
Greetings, diligent bees – I beamed.

My gaze is captivated by the vibrant pink Dahlias  
An increased number of bees are indulging in nectar-gathering  
I sprint to the terminus of the garden  
Enveloped within a cluster of purple and pink Bougainvilles, lies a beehive  
A droplet of delectable honey descends onto my palm, ecstatically, I savour it.

The saccharine flavour tantalizes my taste receptors  
Suddenly, an alert interrupts my reverie  
"Time for your medication," a voice echoes  
Ever since the diagnosis, my inner child transports me  
I soar to the realm of tranquillity and elation  
My inner child – my sanctuary of serenity and bliss!



# INNER CHILD

Inioluwa Oladimeji  
Nigeria

If only the suckling lips will pause to peruse  
To think and dig the depth of the unknown  
To plough and explore through the unseen,  
To unlock that which seems hidden.

If only the suckling lips will stop to ponder,  
And be lost for a second in the wonder  
Of the timeless adventures laid ahead  
In the archive of the ages long ignored.

Like the fetus forming in the womb  
Seemingly unnoticed till it begins to protrude  
Like the flutterer still being shaped in a cocoon  
Till it fully blooms and it takes on its wings,  
So are you, metamorphosing.

Every ion and fiber for greatness are set  
With its specialties built rightly in you.  
The arts and poems and teachings,  
The innovations and fruitful intentions  
Uniquely shaped in you, developing.

Not only is your inner child a suckling infant,  
But every thought and idea, unparalleled.  
The soaring inventions and the energetic speeches  
The life-arts and hearts of merry-filled melodies,  
Yet, there they lie, unleashed.

# I HOPE THIS LETTER **FINDS YOU WELL**

**Baaji Akura  
Nigeria**

---

Dear you,  
I hope you survive  
The sudden segue of seasons  
And the soft stabs of the prickly barbs beneath your chin.  
I hope you shoulder more dreams than burdens  
On your newly broadened shoulders.  
Also, I hope your joy-tinged voice,  
Is not swallowed by the hoarse croak  
That ushers you into manhood.

I hope you still float freely in the realm of imagination,  
Where the fetters of reality can never bind your feet.  
And I hope you still soar on the wings of blissful fantasies  
Finally meet the man in the moon,  
Smile back at the smiling sun  
And dance with stars.  
And even when storms come your way  
I hope you never forget to dance in the rain  
And chase the rainbows in their aftermath.

Dear inner child,  
I hope this letter finds you well.



# INNER CHILD **AN ANGEL'S PLEA**

Joy Oche  
Nigeria

---

I want to be a child,  
I want to be able to sleep when it's bedtime,  
I want to go to a playground  
Ride a merry-go-round,  
Run when no one's behind me  
Hang on my father's shoulder,  
Having his hands locked in mine for security  
Smile when someone says my dress looks pretty,  
I want my only fears to be of boogeyman and blackouts  
Whether or not my friends will show up for my tea party.

# SORRY TO MY INNER CHILD

Troy Benjamin  
Nigeria

Sorry to my inner child

That I never allowed you to bloom like brave red flowers thriving in adversity  
Instead, I watched pedophiles bend your stalk and plucked your petals like a thief in the night  
Stripping you of your innocence and beauty  
Metal blades stealthily misappropriating your world of untouched treasures.

Sorry to my inner child

For the times I made you feel like dirty rags,  
easily disposable and undeserving of hearing the words "I love you" and "You are enough"  
Sorry to my inner child that I only entreated you to treats of anger,  
bitterness, rejection and neglect like children playing "trick or treat" on Halloween  
Woefully those were the only hand-me-down toys my mother had to pass onto me  
from her generation and they became my best friends.

Sorry to my inner child

That I was mute by malice to your childhood trauma and loves blackmail  
As your smile spewed silly incessant soothing lies of "I am resilient" or "I am strong"  
But only fools trust in their own strength, so I never interjected because I was taught  
never to question someone who blew his own trumpet or toothed his own horn  
Because pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Now and in this moment

I bend my knees at your mercy as I long to be mitigated of childhood treachery  
And to be released on my own recognizance as my final plea  
like every criminal caught in the act is not guilty.  
I want to be afraid of the darkness again  
I want us to go back to the good old days.





# ODE TO CHILDHOOD

Mike Ekunno  
Nigeria

---

Pray, the childhood places  
That now appear stark  
Sans shine, sans sheen –  
Did the years wear out the sheen  
Or the wool got pulled  
From our infantile eyes?

Pray, the spaces that be now contracted  
Like some terrestrial tummy-tuck:  
Where lies the suctioned fat?  
How about the trees  
That glided past infantile eyes  
From rear seats of speeding autos peeping aghast –  
Wherefore stand they all still now?

O what a cheat adulterating is  
On the Technicolor dreamland  
That is childhood.



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**Story length**

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Conference**



# Short Stories



# HER BEFORE NOW

Cynthia Anjie Nkweti  
Cameroon



This evening, Maria watches her daughter like a hawk watching its prey. As Nene plays with other kids, fear tightens her chest like a rope, making it harder and harder to breathe. Despite the child's joy-filled squeals and giggles, Maria can't take her eyes off her even for a second.

Whenever Nene climbs up

the slide and slides down, she clenches her teeth and grips the edge of the bench in worry. Now, the five-year-old throws her hands into the air, draws her head backward, spreads her arms, and starts turning around like a spinning top.

"Nene, you will fall," this time around, Maria says suddenly, jumping up, ready to

protect her child.

"She'll be fine, you know," she hears a voice beside her. Turning, she finds herself staring into the face of a familiar-looking elderly woman. She hadn't heard when she sat down but she assumes she's been lost in thought. She's met someone who blinks several times while speaking and licks

their bottom lip just like this woman. Well, they say in this life everyone has a double. Maria notices a baby stroller in front of the woman. As their eyes meet, she seems to be drawn deeper and deeper like a magnet and cannot look away.

Suddenly, she can't hear anyone else, not even her daughter's laughter, and that's when she wants to scream even though her voice is gone.

"Don't be afraid," the elderly woman says, with a kind smile. "You have to let her be a child," she says. What is she talking about? Maria wonders and turns back towards the playground. She's shocked to see that in the place of the playground, now stands a house made of red mud bricks with a very large mango tree beside it.

Just as she's trying to recognize the place, two little girls, about 7 and 4 years old, run out of the house, screaming at the top of their lungs. The older has on a red gown and corn rows. Meanwhile, the younger, has short-cropped

hair. As Maria watches, her whole body begins to tremble and the pain in her chest intensifies. She wants to shut her eyes so the memory of this day disappears, but she can't move a muscle.

"Maria, look after your small sister. Remember you are the firstborn," a woman calls from the house. Mama! She cries as she recognizes the voice.

This is the day she and Bertha climbed the mango tree even though Mama had warned them not to. She'd climb first, quickly plucking mangoes and descending. Bertha did the same but had a different idea.

"Maria, see, I'm flying!" That was the last thing she heard before the crash. "That's where you got trapped and the day your childhood ended," the elderly woman's voice interrupts her loud sobs.

She can still hear her mother's cry of anguish as an immobile Bertha was rushed away. Later that evening, the house was filled with strange teary faces and accusing stares. At

that time, she didn't understand death but her mother's words made her know she'd committed an unpardonable sin.

"You should have protected her; you killed your sister! I told you that too much play will put you in trouble!" Her mother's words were the poisoned arrows whose venom sipped into her system and stained the lens through which she saw life.

Play was dangerous. Man could not trust even themselves and bad things could happen to people at any time. That was the mantra she lived by.

"It's time to be set free, to play again," the woman says. "Who are you?" Maria asks, wiping the torrents of tears running down her face.

Just then, the face begins to transform and the features become more and more familiar.

"Mama?" She gasps in shock. "I trapped you in the cage of guilt and I'm sorry. I release you. It was not your fault. Now it's time to forgive yourself or else you will trap

my granddaughter too," her mother says.

"Look, here," she points into the stroller. Maria looks inside and lets out a wail as she sees that it is her sister, Bertha. The child opens her eyes and looks straight into hers.

"I'm sorry," Maria cries over and over.

"It was not your fault," Bertha says.

As Maria cries, her whole body begins to tremble and someone is tugging on her arm.

Mama! Mama! Mama!

Bertha's face is turning to Nene's.

Nene! Nene! Nene!

She wakes up abruptly, calling her daughter's name. Feeling confused, she looks around at her environment. The dark blue curtains, white walls...she's right in her bedroom at home. She looks to the side and Nene's bright and eager eyes stare back at her.

"Mama, you were calling me from your sleep," the child says.

"Hmm..." she hums as she inhales and exhales audibly to steady her heart rate.

"Let's go, we'll be late. I'm already dressed up," Nene says, pulling her mother's arm, struggling to drag her away.

"Go to where?" she asks a bit confused as she sits up.

"You said we'll finally go to the park today and you'll let me play and you also promised to play with me," the child says almost out of breath with excitement. She looks at Ne-

ne's outfit, a white top with a pink unicorn on the front, pink shorts, and black sneakers. She's amazed that Nene is dressed exactly how she was in the dream. Maria catches her in a hug but she tries to wiggle herself out of her mother's arms. She feels Nene's little fingers slip onto her ribs then the tickling begins. Nene knows her mother hates to be tickled and more than once Maria has scolded her for it so but today, she lets herself go this time. She starts to laugh and at first, the sound is strange even to her ears but she's permitted herself to be a child again. She pulls Nene to the bed and they start a tickling wrestling match, their laughter filling the room like music.

This is it! Her before now, the untethered child who had once been filled with endless possibilities, not afraid to laugh, to fail, and to live. She looks at this child who's been caged for years, kisses her forehead, and whispers, "You're free."



# UNDERNEATH

Henry Chukwuma  
Nigeria



A cold morning is the time you wear an extra layer of clothing to work - it could be a raincoat, a sweater, or a suit but not if you work in a hospital. A health professional would wear their ward coat from home. I was on mine, and the neatly ironed navy blue shirt tucked into well-

creased black trousers stayed underneath. The shiny black tie and black Chelsea Boots stayed showy though. It was foggy and drizzling. I squinted my eyeballs as I walked through the drizzle from my unit to the hospital's canteen. I was cold in temperature and in spirits.

I had just been informed of the demise of my favorite paternal uncle the previous night. I was grieving but being in the healthcare industry means that you deal with your personal issues and emotions at work. So I walked tiredly, more like rolled with the way my feet

moved with a lot of internal friction.

Suddenly, I saw light. Light shaped with so much precision of contours, bends, and edges. A creation of a sculptor who must have had an additional degree in architecture or geometry. For some seconds, all I saw was that light glowing in a perfect feminine shape, before slowly, each part settled from a flame's glow to the dazzling of a spotless skin. Soon, she was fully fleshed. I had gone from squinted looks to a full gaze - highlighting, zooming, analyzing every edge and contour of her body. Her eyes were small and shyly hid in her brows when I zoomed into them. The blue scrubs matched her fair complexion so perfectly. She didn't wear her ward coat; she carried it in her arms and her black stethoscope hung on her neck. I couldn't resist such a sight when obviously I was in darkness.

I reached for her. Facing her, I told the woman wrapping the fried rice she had ordered in a plastic takeaway, "Madam, that's mine. May-

be put another one for her." She was fazed.

The seller said, "Make I put your own after this one. E don tey wey this small rain dey touch aunty here."

"Madam na family issue be this. She no gree cook yesterday, so I go carry her own food. Make she continue dey wait."

"Ohhh. Na your madam. Okay!"

She didn't know whether to smile or laugh or frown. I could tell from her bemused countenance that she was utterly surprised.

I then looked at her, all smiles, and said, "Don't worry, I'm not hallucinating. I'm just practicing for our little squabbles when we finally get married."

She laughed out loud. The lady selling food overheard me and started laughing too.

"You actually had me right there. I was so confused."

"I am glad. You are so perfect that you could use a little jeopardy."

She chuckled. Her phone

rang. She hastily paid for the food and turned to me.

"I am sorry. I have to leave now. My chief is calling me already. But I am happy to have met you. I am Doctor Ifeoma, a house officer."

"I am Pharmacist Onyekachim, the Chief Pharmacist of the Oncology ward."

"This is the point when I ask for your phone number and you give it to me so I call you after work, so we can fall in love, so I can experience perfection."

She laughed.

"08071971438. Don't forget to call, please."

"One more thing please."

She slowed down for me to catch up. I looked into her pupils. They rushed to hide underneath her eyelids.

"You don't look real. When I saw you, it felt like transfiguration. Just like the disciples that followed Jesus to that mountain, I have lots of questions."

She chuckled. "Questions like?"



"Why does your skin glow so much? Do you have luciferase protein in place of melanin?"

"Was your figure 8 drawn with a pair of compass?"

"Does the sweet fragrance come with the physique?"

"Were you born or sculpted?"

"Was....."

She ran away giggling.

In the night, we chatted on WhatsApp till 4 a.m.

Our first date came four days later. I arrived earlier and made the arrangements for my first perfect date. Seven minutes later, she seeped in with graces. Seeped in because her fragrance pervaded the restaurant long before she made her entrance. Soon, she saw me completely sublimed to her airs and beauty. She smiled and walked straight there. Her steps were unreal too. She walked as if she had a digital device placing her legs in a constant angle and pace.

She quietly sat on the exotic chair directly opposite me

over the table. I was startled from my daydream. Then, I smiled heartily, and then grinned. I extended my palm over the table, and she cheerfully took it, saying, "Onyekachim. I'm glad we are here."

"I don't know but there is something about your humility that astonishes me. I am out here with the sun's fiercest competitor, and somehow, she is the grateful one. Wow!"

She chuckled. "The sun's fiercest competitor, really? Really, Onyekachim?"

We both laughed.

"Actually, I would run into semantic problems trying to put it in the right expression but I don't mean it in the metaphorical sense. You're not bright - that's what you would call a star. But stars are aided by stellar reflections. You're simply incandescent. You make your rays and carry them with you, as a personal aura."

"Uh-huh?"

"Don't huh huh me. Didn't you see the way everyone

stopped to catch a glimpse when you stepped into this place?"

"Onyi, I didn't. Nobody stopped anything. There was nothing extra."

"There goes that humility again."

We ate and talked and laughed for the rest of the day. I asked if she would want to taste the pasta I made. She affirmed, so we went straight to my apartment. The Spaghetti was delicious but it wasn't really the sweetest thing that happened that night.

The next morning, when she went into the bathroom to brush her teeth, I followed. She was making jokes about the way my towels were worn out when she pressed the tube of my toothpaste at the center. The tube jutted its tongue excitedly. She rubbed it across her brush and tightened the cover. First, she squeezed my toothpaste at the center. Second, she didn't clean off the excess at the mouth of the tube. Third, she kept it on top of the mirror instead of the shelf. She

was talking and laughing, I was blinking repeatedly.

Later, she took time piecing her perfection together for work. I watched it for the first time. She took time drawing the lines, stroking the brushes, dressing the scrubs... While at it, I became her mirror.

"How does my layering look? Too brownish?"

"No. It is perfect. You are perfect." Said someone who didn't know what on earth layering was. But I was sincere, she was perfect.

"I think my edges look a bit edgy, right?"

"It's neat. You are perfect." Ask me where edges start and end, I did not know. But again, I didn't lie to her.

"Is this how this my mirror will function? Everything is perfect. Oh! I forgot you don't ask your man how you look. They see you the same every day, every time."

She laughed but I didn't.

"Are you trying to box me with other men you've known, dated?"

"No. I saw that on Twitter"

"And I am the same with every man on Twitter?"

An awkward silence followed. I blinked twice. She looked away. I held her hands and hugged her. She picked her phone to book us a therapy session.

The following week, we sat on separate sofas in the therapy room.

"I watched Father throw our kerosene lantern's glass at my mother because she said he should have seen the way Okoro was walking around with his wife at the antenatal ward. So I know not to allow my woman make such comparisons even as a joke. I watched him scold mother for cooking with so much firewood even though I never saw him fetch it. I watched Mother chide Father for drinking on a festive day. So I know partners should never give each other a pass."

The therapist scoffs.

"You still carry that emotionally hurt child inside you."

"Does anything help you navigate or avoid this an-

ger?"

"It's funny but I just blink twice and it's gone."

"Wait, I always catch you blinking whenever I am eating snacks."

I shrugged my shoulders. "On the couch. And playing Kizz Daniel's songs."

"You need to learn how to blink internally, I mean without your eyelids moving because you'll need to be blinking a lot for yours now. But what's the harm anyway? I hope you can blink with speed. So that whenever there is no power, she will play Buga so you both can use your blinking eyelids as a fan."



# THE SMELL OF **CARRION FLOWERS**

Joseph Ikhenoba  
Nigeria



It was inevitable: the putrid smell of carrion flowers often reminded me of the fate of my inner childhood.

It all began on the day Papa died. I had returned from vacation from Auntie Esewie, my mother's younger sister's house. Auntie Esewie, a dark, slim woman with impeccable character, earned

respect in her community for her generosity and respect, despite being a spinster. She suffered heartbreak from men and decided not to rush into marriage.

On my journey home, I saw a brown barn owl perched on an orange tree. It is believed to be a bad omen to see this ugly creature on a scorch-

ing afternoon. I thought less about it, excited that I would be home in a few minutes.

I barely arrived at our compound when I heard Mama's wailing. She rolled on the red earth like a wheel, blown by an undulating whirl. Our neighbours surrounded Papa's corpse while they sympathised with my inconsol-

able mother.

Hurriedly, I went to see Papa's face, placing my head on his chest and aligning our breaths until our paths were no longer intertwined. I gripped his white singlet as though to tear it from his hairy chest. I cried till my eyes were too swollen to create tears. Two women held me back and tried to console me. I pushed them away out of grief.

No one would tell me folktales, take me to wrestling festivals, and make me laugh again, my glass broken, my world apart.

Before his demise, Papa took me to watch Ugie Festival wrestling. An annual wrestling festival that brings the Benin indigenous people together. A day before the festival, a town crier announces the day of the event. Young, brave men were often glad to hear the gong. The Igarra drummers and dancers entertained the audience.

A week later, Papa's family members convened at our compound for his burial rites. They accused Mama

of killing him except Uncle Abetu, a thin, graceful, grey-haired man.

He told them Papa died of malaria, as everyone already knew, but they still decided to gang up against Mama. Digusted by the conspiracy, Uncle Abetu left the meeting while the other members continued.

They fixed a levirate marriage, which she refused. Mama vowed not to remarry after Papa died; because of this, they confiscated his properties and subjected her to barbaric widowhood.

They shaved her hair, isolated her in a dark room without changing her clothes or underwear, fed her with a broken, unwashed clay plate, forced her to mourn, swore at the site of the deceased, and were tormented by the women in Papa's family for seven days.

On the last day of the mourning, after some rituals by a herbalist, they forced her to bathe in a forest before dawn. This had a profound effect on her state of mind.

.....

Uncle Abetu gave us a place to stay in his hut. He took me as one of his children, a decision that made his wife envious.

Sometimes she rained a barrel of insults on Mama, accusing her of Papa's death. Mama doesn't respond to her accusations. She knew everything in life happened for a reason; every day, she encouraged me to be studious and stay away from trouble. Whenever Uncle Abetu praises or buys me gifts, his wife and children get so envious that they resort to witchcraft.

Mama's sudden illness and death restrained my dream of becoming a surgeon, where I could treat people with diseases. A huge part of my life smattered. I thought of suicide. What am I still living for? I'm not better than a corpse. Someone had taken away my red rose.

After her burial, I had several nightmares. Sometimes I go to bed hungry. I couldn't bring myself to realise that everything happened so fast, like the speed of light.

I believed a man had the willpower to choose his path. He cannot run from himself, his very own essence. Even though we acknowledge our demise as the epitome of consciousness, we are incapable of conceptualising its fate. Therefore, this phantom of existence then centres on the virtues affected to humanity and ourselves during the years we have lived in the face of complete despair, while accepting that death is an unavoidable weight.

.....

It's easier to see through the eyes of a needle than through the hearts of humans. Uncle Abetu and his family completely changed towards me after my mother's death. He stopped paying my school fees.

His wicked wife forced me to perform all the house chores while her daughters did nothing. They said I murdered my parents. Sometimes, I go to bed hungry, wake up early before the first crow, and begin another marathon of torture.

I wish my parents were still alive. Things wouldn't have turned out this way. I missed our once-happy family. Everything good will come one day.

One fateful rainy night, I heard some quiet footsteps in my room. Dark and breezy leaves rustled from trees. My heart thundered, and my teeth clattered. Who could it be? I thought. I reached out for the hurricane lamp on a bamboo chair. As I struggled to light the wick, someone suddenly covered my mouth and gripped me to the ground. I

wriggled to overpower the grip.

"Don't shout! If you shout, I will kill you." He taped my mouth as he hoaxed.

His breath and the tip of a sharp knife got closer to my neck. I suffered from an adrenaline rush, writhed in pain, gritted my teeth, and clutched my wrapper as he popped the cherry.

"If you tell anyone, I will come for you." He tied his wrapper, then left with a smug smile.

His wife and children had gone to visit their ill grandmother, so he waited for this moment to perfect his deeds. I wanted to commit suicide; there was no point in living. I saw the bestiality of an animal in human flesh.

The next morning, I ran out of the hut. I thought of going to Auntie Esewie's house. I heard she had travelled to Cotonou for business. She sells clothing materials. I don't know when she will be back.

I devised a plan to travel to Lagos without a family and plan and transport the fare. Well, I went to Oghosa Transport Park, at Old Market Road, and pretended to be waiting for someone.

The park was raucous with the blaring of music, traders selling their goods, and people talking. I observed everything until the right moment. I sneaked into the back seat of an empty white bus going to Lagos to carry some items.

No one saw me. As the driver, a bald sexage-

narian, walked towards the boat, my heart pounded, covered with beads of sweat.

Luckily, someone diverted his attention. He couldn't check it again and drove to Lagos directly.

Life in Lagos was another world of noise, from the blasting of vehicle horns to the billows of smoke and densely congested buildings.

In the middle of somewhere, I felt strange, like a pin thrown in a haystack. With the little money on me, I bought some food and slept under the Obalende bridge; plenty of other homeless people returned at night.

If I don't start a business, I will either starve or resort to begging. I started a sachet water business in traffic because of the hot weather, and I saved and fed with the profits I made.

Although my greatest fear was fiery-looking smokers under the bridge, they have been observing me for a while, but I kept my distance. I realised everyone was fighting their own demon.

One night, three of the boys attacked and raped me. I tried to scream, but they beat the daylight out of my body and even stole my money.

I stared at the lagoon and wanted to end it all. Then came a woman who saw me in this mood. She pleaded that I shouldn't commit suicide. I told her my worries and how life had been so unfair to me. A pool of tears dropped from her face as she heard my stories.

She sponsored my education until I became a surgeon.

By some mysterious circumstance, I ended up in the theatre when they brought Uncle Abetu to my hospital. He had heart problems and was abandoned by his wife and children. I wanted to abandon him, too. The better part of me pleaded on his behalf. When he regained his consciousness, he begged for forgiveness.

Storms of tears gathered in my eyes and lips as I hugged, footed his bills, and promised to check on him timely. I admonished the young lady who brought him to take excellent care of him.

He robbed me of my happiness and my inner childhood. I missed those days Papa took me to wrestling matches, how he taught me how to cook groundnut soup, and how Mama taught me how to cook Omisagwe, or "groundnut soup."

I have forgiven him and myself. Life happens. Things happen. The courage to overcome our ill-fated faith, look towards the future, and define who we are.



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# AFRICAN WRITERS AWARDS 2024 JURY

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(Rwanda)



**Sabah Carrim**  
(Mauritius)



**Verah Omwocha**  
(Kenya)



**Anthony 'PenBoss' Onugba**  
Chief Judge



## Affluent Authors

# BE MORE



Liza Chuma Akunyili  
@iamlizachuma

The bane of being a writer is thinking that all you are is a writer. Whether it's being a writer of flash fiction, poetry, research etc. You could imprison yourself unconsciously.

Writing is a skill, how you write is creative but you are a person. It's like cooking; you neither become edible because you cook

nor do you become a cooking utensil.

Why then do you define yourself based on what you write? It's okay to be a poet on marketing materials but if you cannot enjoy life without feeling like you have to pay homage to figures of speech or you cannot accept correction without waving the flag of

poetic license, we already have a problem.

A few years back, I wanted to quit writing because I was charting my course as a sex therapist and barely had time for creative writing. I felt so guilty all the time and He said to me "you read more than many of these people". The implication was that I had a



wider range of things to write from than many of the people I was envious of.

About three years later, I decided to write professionally and I churned out 30,000 words in the first week of resuming. It was the words as much as the fact that I now had more depth.

The quality of your creation is heavily dependent on the quality of life you have as a human.

You cannot have a lack of mindset and think writing would automatically make you a millionaire. Just maybe you need to invest some of that time into therapy so that your limiting belief does not keep clashing with your marketing team when they're making financial projections.

Maybe you need a vacation that requires a lot of physical movement such as dancing or hiking or even pole dancing. Whatever works for you. But your body is underserved

with this sedentary lifestyle where all you do is churn out words.

Perhaps your ideas are stale because the only places you have visited over the last few years are your "favorite spots" and you wonder why you have no new ideas.

I want you to be an affluent author as you deserve to be. However, what use is affluence you never enjoy?

### **How to enjoy your affluence**

1. Invest in a hobby.

You and I have a passion for documenting how the world works, are casting a vision for how it should work or are merely enjoying ourselves.

Whatever side of the divide you are on, this is unfortunately no longer your hobby because you have expectations to meet and those expectations are money spinning expectations.

Even though you can stay

true to your passion and authentic self, you will likely not experience the same level of relaxation as you did at the beginning.

Which means when you are on time bound projects, you need something else that allows you to disconnect with your characters and content so you engage life with your body and mind.

An activity that requires bodily exertion is most appropriate as it allows your body to exert itself the same way your mind has been exerting itself. Plus physical movement allows for higher stimulation of certain feel good hormones.

Do not be misinformed: a hobby is an investment as it allows you to return to your writing desk with more vigor and perhaps, fresh ideas and dissociation. This is also beneficial for objectivity.

2. Get a life.

It feels powerful to sit in

the driver seat and determine why other people read and believe. However if you must keep the power 100%, you must be willing to take the responsibility 100%.

Whether you are conscious or not, writing is the literary equivalent of being an Instagram influencer. Imagine the psychological pressure Influencers put themselves under when they Livestream their whole day everyday.

That's exactly what you do as you write daily. Except this time, you are mandated to only think of one piece or book and edit it until your inner critic says it's fine.

You will write a bestseller no doubt. However, you would have missed the opportunity to read all the bestsellers that would normally appeal to you.

You would wake up one day and realize you created perfect collections every year but have no memory of everything else that

made the world in those years.

Be a fantastic author, but have memories that are solely yours that may or may not ever make it into the pages of a book.

### 3. Build solid relationships

Think of your inner circle as people who would buy your book if it was crap and honestly tease you for writing crap. Think of them as people who will transition with you through cities, careers, life, singleness, parenting, grief etc.

You are an author to your fans but you are a person to your community. These are the people you build a life with.

These are the people who will sit by your bedside if you went into a coma and would be there long after your fans have dropped the get well soon card and returned to their homes.

Affluence is knowing that wealth cannot be one sided

(financial) especially in an industry where thousands of people are rising to fame yearly and thousands more are being forgotten.

As I close out today, I want you to be passionate about your art for all the right reasons and not because you are lonely, struggling and hoping to buy some attention and affection.

Only then can you create your best art and be unperturbed by the obstacles; you have a life whether you write a bestseller or not.



# WSA Magazine

# REVIEW

*May 2024 Edition*

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**GRACE TENDO**

Mother, Writer and Veterinary Doctor



# UMWARI

A Children's Literature by Varnessa K. Varlyngton, Nigeria



**Reviewer**  
Funmi Richards  
(Nigeria)

Umwari is a heartwarming story that promotes three key values: compassion, life, and protection. With en-gaging characters and a beautiful setting, it encourages children to be compassionate and protect the value of life. The language is simple and easy to understand, conveying a positive message and a clear distinction between good and bad.

The story employs literary devices such as personification - "the mountains echoed with the sound of her laughter" and "the roses flourished in her presence" - giving human-like qualities to nature. Additionally, symbolism is used with red roses, representing the national flower of Rwanda and symbolizing beauty and love for the land. The Baby Mountain gorilla, an endangered species needing protection, is also a

reminder of Rwanda's genocide. The use of figurative language, such as "friendship that transcended language and species," creates vivid imagery and emphasizes the emotional connection between all living things.

This story reminds me of the 2016 film Moana, where the lifeline of Mother Earth is rebirth and life becomes green again. Given Rwanda's history, it also reminds me of Frances in the book *The Island* by Olivia Levez. Frances is alone on a small island in the middle of the Indian Ocean and becomes reflective of the past, accepting that she had become a monster and learning to do better. Umwari is a lovely read, a didactic fable that should be read to and with young children, especially in an era burdened by wars and global warming caused by our own hands.

# A BIT OF EVERYTHING

A Flash Fiction by Neba Terry, Cameroon



## Reviewer

Akuei M. Adol  
(South Sudan)

Within the depths of our curiosity lies the spark of adventure, igniting a journey of desire and discovery that leads us to uncharted territories of the heart and soul. 'A Bit of Everything' is a thought-provoking flash fiction set in a vivid African setting, where Sally finds herself after hearing about gorillas in the land of a thousand hills, supposedly Rwanda. Through a concise writing style, the author captures Sally's sense of wonder and longing, seen through her desire for fresh air, a cup of coffee, and the perfect menu item, Igisafuria. The atmosphere is rich with sensory details, painting a picture of a foreign yet enticing place.

The narrative explores themes of wanderlust, cultural exploration, and a craving for completeness or satisfaction. Sally's simple yet profound desire for 'everything' reflects a deeper yearning for experiences, connection, and perhaps a feeling of being whole. This universal subject of seeking fulfillment resonates with readers on a personal level, inviting introspection and contemplation. Moreover, the character of the waitress adds

a layer of depth to the narrative, with her unique physical description and welcoming demeanor. The contrast between Sally's outsider perspective and the waitress's local presence hints at themes of hospitality, diversity, and the beauty of human connection across different backgrounds.

Terry weaves imagery, dialogue, and internal reflections to create an impactful work that carries readers to another world. The brevity allows for quick engagement while still conveying deeper themes and evoking strong emotions in the audience. The inclusion of sensory details and concise descriptions creates a rich and immersive atmosphere despite the limited word count. By focusing on a specific moment of desire and longing, the story highlights the impact of small but meaningful interactions and experiences in shaping one's journey and understanding of the world. In a nutshell, this work illustrates a journey of desires and discoveries where fulfillment awaits those daring enough to seek it.

# NATURE'S ROLLING BEAUTY

A Poem by Comfort N. A. Okyerel, Ghana



**Reviewer**  
Francis Mkwapatira  
(Malawi)

Nature's Rolling Beauty is a poem that depicts the outstanding features of Rwanda, the host country of the 2024 African Writers Conference. The persona in the poem describes how fascinating Rwanda is, with its gorillas, intricate cultural traditions, a horrific past, and triumphant re-emergence from the ashes, as well as its beautiful chains of hills. The poem's excellent form and devices recount these features well.

Stylistically, the poem is one of the best crafts in the May 2024 edition. It is a quatrain, comprising four-lined stanzas, each with a pair of couplets following the A, A, B, B rhyming scheme. For instance, the first stanza reads: "Gorillas roam in forests' lush, / Their gentle gaze, a heartfelt hush, / From Akagera's plains to Nyungwe's embrace, / Nature's wonders, a captivating chase." The poem's form gives it a celebratory tone, enticing readers to read on and appreciate its rhythm.

The poem lures readers into the canvas of Rwanda, following its diction and poetic de-

vices. It is rich in devices that invoke the reader's mind to create imaginations about Rwanda. The poem makes use of imagery, such as "forests' lush," "gentle gaze," and "colors go ablaze" in stanza two; metaphors like "She is a beacon destined for a glorious ride"; and similes like "A land of warmth, a vibrant embrace" (comparing the land's warmth to that of a vibrant embrace, masked in the comma used between the two constructions) found in the last stanza of the poem.

Reading the poem, readers capture the bird's-eye view of Rwanda, luring them into a longing for its intricacies. It illustrates the depth by which literature mirrors life. Having seen depictions of Rwanda's past in films like Hotel Rwanda and Beautifully Broken, and relating it to the present, one can conclude that no one should ever be defined by past failures.

# THE RWANDAN COLLEGE GIRL

A Short Story by Bakar Mansaray, Sierra Leone

**Reviewer**

Francis Mkwapatira  
(Malawi)



'The Rwandan College Girl' is a thought-provoking short story that delves into the complex issues of gender-based violence (GBV), infatuation, and Stockholm syndrome. The narrative revolves around Immaculee, a student at Kibeho College of Arts, who is defiled by her lecturer, Fabrice. In a twisted turn of events, Immaculee denies being abused when authorities take action, citing 'love' and pity as her reasons.

The story's character development and point of view are expertly crafted, drawing readers into the world of Kibeho, southern Rwanda. The narrator skillfully provides a rich background for both Immaculee and Fabrice, making it easy for readers to connect with their emotions. The third-person narration, coupled with dialogues and a 'show, don't tell' approach, immerses readers in the characters' experiences.

The story tackles the sensitive topic of GBV with care, highlighting the complexities of victim-abuser relationships. It underscores the importance of cautious support for victims, who may sympathize with their abusers' goals, situations, and motivations to feel safe from both their abusers and the public.

The author's use of vivid descriptions and intense scenes, such as the depiction of Fabrice's actions, makes the story feel eerily real. The writing style enables readers to empathize with the characters, making the story a poignant reminder of the need for empathy and understanding in addressing GBV cases.

Overall, 'The Rwandan College Girl' is a powerful short story that sparks essential conversations about gender-based violence, victim support, and the complexities of human relationships.

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