

WRITERS SPACE

MAY 2024 EDITION

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GRACE **TENDO**

Mother, Writer and Veterinary Doctor



ISSUE 89

<https://www.writersspace.net>

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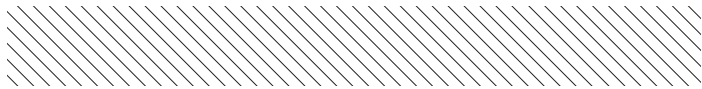
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EDITORIAL

Comfort Nyati, SDB
Chief Editor

Dear reader,

I suppose many of us still wonder why the theme for this edition of the WSA Magazine is Rwanda! This East African country, among 54 countries on the continent, stood out to be a theme for the May edition. The principal motif is to engage in a literary conversation with African writers, a means to enlighten our panoramic view vis-à-vis Rwanda ahead of this year's African Writers Conference to be held there in October. Why is Rwanda to host the AWC? Perhaps it's another miracle to mention an African country as a dreamland to host such a prestigious event irrespective of the other foreign countries that have the potency to.

It would please you to learn of the phenomenal beauty that the country holds through the pages of this edition. It stretches from its hygienic cities and breathtaking landscapes to the rapid growth in innovation—a destination of the fastest-growing scientific technology in Africa. There are many reasons why Africans should celebrate this East African country. And the good thing is, her spectacular structure finds a home in the ink as she breathes the air of a creative writer who adds value through artistic creativity.

In this 89th edition, we do not only present some glitches and fitches of a pacesetter but also take you into a threshold capable of tuning and turning a dark

past into a fertile future. Should history define us, progress becomes marred by a horizon of vengeance instead of resurgence. From the penned art unveiled by our daring and talented contributors of this edition, one can't help but notice how the world is taken into a lecture room to learn yet another definition of renaissance. With this, allow me to subscribe to Wole Soyinka's words when he said: "Given the scale of trauma caused by the genocide, Rwanda has indicated that however thin the hope of a community can be, a hero always emerges. She has risen from the ashes as a model of truth and reconciliation."

Wishing you a happy reading!



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Empowering African Writers

**THEME:
PURPOSE**



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

**Writers Space Africa (WSA) Literary magazine
is accepting submissions for its 91st edition (July 2024 Edition).
Please submit in any of the following genres**

**Children's Literature | Creative Non-fiction
Flash Fiction | Poetry | Short Stories**

To submit, Visit:
www.writerspace.net

**Submission Deadline
May 15, 2024**



Children's Literature



UMWARI

Varnessa K Varlyngton
Nigeria



Umwari lived with her grandmother on the lush green hills of Rwanda, surrounded by the majestic mountain gorillas that roamed freely in the nearby forests. A beautiful girl with bright eyes and cute dimples who always dressed in her

jade green Umushanana had a deep connection to the land and its inhabitants. Every morning, Umwari would wake up to the sweet scent of red roses that bloomed around the hills. The red roses were the national flowers of Rwanda and

therefore she cherished them. She would spend her days exploring the hills, learning from her grandmother about the importance of protecting the natural beauty that surrounded them.

One day, while wandering through the forest, Umwari stumbled upon a wounded mountain gorilla.

“Awwnnn! What a poor thing! I wonder what this cute creature is doing here all alone.” She said in a worried tone. Without hesitation, she knelt down beside the injured creature and gently tended to its wounds. The gorilla looked at her with eyes filled with gratitude. She took the baby mountain gorilla to show to her grandmother and to know more about it.

“Mama nabonye iyi ngagi yo mu misozi. Nshobora kubikomeza? (Translated as ‘Mom, I saw this mountain gorilla. May I keep it?’) She asked in her native language, kinyarwanda. Her grandmother who was busy preparing the Ibihaza (pumpkin) looked up at her and spoke gently.

“ Yego “ She agreed to Umwari’s request. “Humans are pushing mountain gorillas out of the wild and into extinction. By taking care of this creature, you are saving a life. Remember - “

“One who saves a life, saves the world.” She placed the baby gorilla down and hugged it tightly. Together, they ex-

plored the hills and valleys, forming a deep bond that transcended language and species. People from all over Rwanda came to see the extraordinary friendship between a girl and a mountain gorilla which of course was a strange thing.

As the years passed, Umwari grew older and wiser, but her love for the land and its inhabitants never wavered. She knew that her life was intertwined with the mountains, the gorillas, and the red roses that bloomed so beautifully.

And so, Umwari continued to live on the hills of Rwanda, a guardian of the land and a friend to all who needed her gentle touch. The mountains echoed with the sound of her laughter, and the red roses flourished in her presence, a testament to the enduring power of love and compassion.



PRINCESS KEZA

Moses Tololo
Zambia



Molly loved going to the zoo. It was one of her favourite activities she did on weekends. Her mother loved taking her to the Montana Zoo. Her grandmother worked there as a zoo keeper.

“So, what animal do you want to see in

particular?” her mother asked.

“mmmmmm gorilla!” she said in reply.

“Why gorillas?”

“I want to learn more about them,”

"The sight of gorillas terrifies me," her mother said.

"Why mum?"

"The way they look," she said, "so dark and scaring."

"No mum," Molly said, "they are harmless animals."

When they got to the zoo, Molly quickly ran to the part where the gorillas were found. She saw people running away from the gorillas. Children were screaming on top of their voices. Molly asked what the problem was.

"The gorillas are making so much noise and breaking things!" said one man.

"They are rioting said another," said another.

Molly was not afraid. She wanted to know what was wrong with her favourite animals. She got closer and saw the animals crying. One of the gorillas signaled to Molly to move closer. When she moved closer, she was surprised that one of the gorillas could talk.

"Hello," said the gorilla.

"Heee....lo," Molly said reluctantly.

"My name is Keza,"

"Not Vicky as on your name tag?" Molly asked.

"No, that's not my name," Keza said.

"Hello Keza," Molly said.

"I need your help, Molly," Keza said.

"What can I do for you?"

"I need to go back home," Keza said, "my people need me."

"Where is your home?" Molly asked.

"Rwanda, in Africa,"

"Why do you need to go?"

"I am a princess in my village," Keza said, "I need to lead my people as their future queen."

"But how did you come here?" Molly asked.

"I was abducted by the people here," Keza said, "now I need to go back home."

"Why me?" Molly asked, "can't you ask the grown-ups?"

"Only you can understand our gorilla language," Keza said, "the rest of the people cannot understand us"

"Ok,"

"Come closer so I can tell you our plan," Keza said.

All the gorillas had stopped making noise and were listening in as Keza talked to Molly. The people on the other side were surprised that Molly had managed to calm the gorillas down. Her mother was shocked at what her daughter was doing.

The following day, Molly went to see her grandmother who was the zoo keeper. She was doing everything according to the plan.

“Hi granny,”

“Hello pumpkin,” her grandmother replied.

“Came to help you clean the house,”

“That’s thoughtful of you,” granny said, “Just clean up as I take a nap.”

“Ok granny,” Molly said, “I will go back once I am done.”

When her granny went to take a nap, Molly quickly cleaned the house. When she had finished, she packed some of granny’s clothes, make-up kit, passport and the zoo keys.

Back at the zoo, Molly and the other gorillas helped Keza to put on granny’s clothes and make-up. Keza wore a long pink dress, brown hat, dark sun-glasses and a face mask.

“Keza, you look like Molly’s grandma,” said one gorilla.

“Now, walk like a human being,” said another.

After practicing how to walk, Keza and Molly were ready to go. It was 21 hours

in Monatana when the two were ready to go. Molly booked an online taxi to the airport using her grandmother’s phone. The taxi took them to the airport where they boarded a plane to Africa. She used her grandmother’s credit card to book a flight to Rwanda.

On the plane, Keza pretended to be sick and slept the whole way. She kept quiet to avoid people noticing that an animal was on the plane.

After a long flight, they arrived in Rwanda. Molly booked a taxi to take them to the game park. The driver took them there. When they arrived, Keza removed the clothes. She was happy to be back home. When the driver saw that, he ran out of car screaming on top of his voice.

Keza then led Molly to her jungle. The gorillas were happy to see that their princess was back home.

“Welcome Home, Princess Keza.”



THE UNPLANNED TRIP TO RWANDA

Immaculate Ajiambo
Kenya



One hot afternoon, the science teacher came to class and asked us to pair up for a project.

“I don’t have a partner.” I raised my hand.

The class laughed at how desperate I sounded.

“Who is absent today?” asked the teacher.

Three people were not in. Amour, the

new student was also missing yet it was her second week in school. Amour only speaks when spoken to. I love her sunshine smile. People say she has an angelic voice because it is soft and gentle. At least she is the same height as me and now I am not the shortest girl in class.

The teacher asked me to brainstorm on the task and when the rest came to school, I would get my partner. I really wanted Amour to work with me because she was new. I was convinced that she would give me fresh new ideas from where she came from. Our task was: Think of ways we can conserve the environment at community level and make a 10 minutes presentation.

In the evening, I went to the staffroom to see my class teacher. Madam Olena was surprised to see me. I have never gone to seek audience with her.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Mmh..." as if she did not believe me, "How are you, Madge?"

"I am doing fine but I have a favor to ask of you?"

Madam Olena's face lit up at the mention of the word favor. She moved closer as if I had a secret to whisper. I requested her to get me Amour's contact and that my parents would make the call for me. She

was hesitant.

"Please madam, I am concerned about her absence today and I want her to feel at home here in PV Academy."

"That is so kind of you Madge." She replied.

I was very excited. She got her phone and sent a short text with the contact to my parents.

At home.

"Good evening, my name is Ivonne. I am a mother to Madge and she goes to school with Amour at Pleasant Valley Academy."

At this point, I was waiting patiently for my mother to pass the phone to me so that I could speak to Amour.

"Hello Amour, your absence got me worried."

She replied, "I was not feeling well but I will be in tomorrow."

"That is good to hear. I want to work with you on the science project we were given today. I will give you details tomorrow."

"Good. On Friday I am travelling to Rwanda. Would you like to come?" Amour asked.

That question broke my ears. I went silent. I was on loud speaker and turned to look at my parent's facial expressions.

Amour continued, "You can ask your parents and they can talk to my parents now."

My parents nodded. And I gave Amour a cheerful YES. I could hear her jump up and down in excitement too.

We passed the phones to our parents. They talked and laughed as if they had been friends for ages. Mum hang by dad's side and nodded at every statement put across.

In my head I thought, "So my parents are willing to pay for me to travel to Rwanda but they cannot buy for me a bicycle." Indeed, wonders shall never cease.

When dad hang up, he said, "I know Amour's parents from the initial class meeting and they are good people. I will allow you to go with them to Rwanda for

the weekend, three days."

Tears beamed in my eyes, "Thank you."

Mother said, "Daughter, Rwanda is visa free for Kenyans. Go and explore a new environment, culture and people."

My parents told me that they would pay for my flights and sign a consent form with a lawyer that I would be under the custody of Amour's parents.

That night, I thought of my visit to the Genocide memorial park. From google search, I realised that Rwanda has Kigali car-free days and the largest investment fund in Africa called Green Fund that aids in financing all environmental conservation initiatives. The visit to Rwanda would surely make our project presentation realistic.



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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

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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WSA
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WSA-R
Writers Space Africa - Rwanda



African Writers
Conference



Flash Fiction

THE TRAVELLING SKULL

Tammy Quakers
Nigeria

Those were the last days of May. Little ragamuffins kicked the skull around. They were playing football. Children who had survived the very worst, children who would be the victims of the very worst. They kicked the skull around. They laughed. Some did. Blood on the asphalt. Blood on the sand. The soles of their feet either wet with blood or hard with dried blood. There were other skulls around but they chose this one.

The body it belonged to was contorted on the hard hot macadam like the best twister player or an award-winning contortionist. That body, one amongst thousands on the ground. No individuality anymore. Just a disgusting collective of human waste. The children kicked the skull and chased it. Stood. Looked around. Tired of the game. They left it. The skull with its hollow eyes watched all around it.

The skull got new brothers. More slaughter took place. More slaughter on the way. In

the end. Eight hundred thousand. Some say eight hundred and fifty thousand. Some say a million. But whatever the true number, the skull was not to be counted among them.

A year later. Those bloody streets are cleaner. No skulls on the roads. No more bodies. But this skull is still watching. It has somehow found its way into a rich man's private collection. Mr. Moneybag is mistaken: he thinks he has a worthy skull. The skull is restless. It leaves the shelf and finds itself in the year 2000. It is surprised by what it is seeing. If it had a voice it would scream. A survivor and a perpetrator reconciled? Now friends?

Year 2024. Thirty-year anniversary. The skull watches proceedings from a rooftop. Sad. It was all for nothing, thought the skull of the génocidaire.

A BIT OF **EVERYTHING**

Neba Terry
Cameroon

Sally swayed from the weight of her khaki backpack. News of gorillas in the land of a thousand hills had left her gazing at the sky's lamps for a fortnight.

Now standing in the heart of Africa, she wished for many things; fresh air from the wetlands, a cup of Joe and Igisafuria smelled like the perfect menu.

“What would you like to order?”

A waitress with the most beautifully-broad forehead spoke through her immaculate cross bites. Her bright eyes flickering, marketing her dimpled cheeks and full blossom lips.

“Everything. I need a bit of everything.”



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
Nahida Esmail

submit your entry at

www.africanwritersawards.com

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Creative
SPOTLIGHT

Grace Tendo





In this edition, Lise Nova Berwadushime interviewed Grace Tendo from Uganda. Grace is the 2nd runner-up in the 2023 Wakini Kuria Prize for Children's Literature

Lise: It is my pleasure to have you, Tendo. Please tell us about yourself.

Tendo: I'm humbled too to be hosted by you. I am Grace Tendo commonly known as Tendo. A mother, writer and veterinary doctor by profession.

Lise: Tendo, a vet who writes! When did you start writing?

Tendo: A vet who writes. Yes.

Many people find it hard to believe. Anyway, my writing journey started a long time ago when I

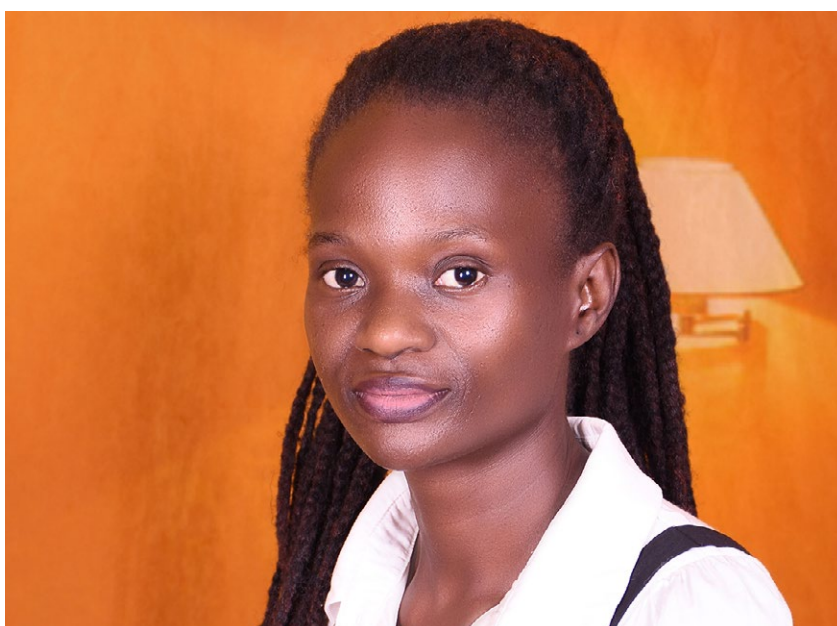
had just joined my secondary school. I think it's about 15 years or more but then it wasn't so serious as I would say it is now.

Lise: I see. When would you say that it became "serious?"

Tendo: Well, it became serious the moment I realised I can write children's literature and that is 2019 when I had just joined WSA.

Lise: Oh, that is almost five years ago.

Tendo: Yes.



Lise: Do you only write children's literature or there's another genre you find easy to write?

Tendo: Well, sometimes I consider myself a multitude genre writer because I can easily say that I've tried all genres. Initially when I had just started writing (that is in my secondary school) I was into poetry and essay writing so much. In the same years, I ventured into novel writing and that was in my second and third year of high school but recently, I found out that I can as well do write short stories with much ease.

Lise: That's awesome. You can write so many genres!

Tendo: I do and I think everybody should try them as well...

Lise: Yeah, it's good to try everything.

Tendo: It widens one's scope on what they can. Also, it gives one a wider perspective of what literature and writing is all about. The fun hidden within!

Lise: Definitely. Last year, you emerged as second runner up of Wakini Kuria prize for Children's literature. Before I ask you a lot about it,

why didn't you submit under poetry or short stories category? You know, you can write many genres.

Tendo: Well, I learnt to ask God first on what to do and that's what exactly happened. I prayed and asked Him to direct me on what to write about and He was faithful enough to give me a go ahead on children's literature.

It didn't matter how many times I had tried out previously.

Lise: Wow! Such a beautiful thing! God is the source of creativity anyway.

Tendo: Always on point.

Lise: Sure. Can you please share with me the process of writing, submitting and waiting for results? Were you nervous or?

Tendo: For starters, I had the title for my story right from 2022. Actually, I had a collection of titles because every time I get a hint, I write down a relatable title in my notebook. When I wrote that award winning story, I remember talking to someone about submitting. I was almost quitting since it was paid for submission but then I

said no, I should write. So, I wrote and shared with a few people of course for editing purposes. Actually, I shared two stories with these people (about 4).

Lise: I see...

Tendo: Some took time to give me feedback and I got anxious. Then at last somebody mentioned I should share it with a lady who has also won once the same award. Marjorie helped me all the way through the editing process.

It took time since she's a busy lady but it was worth it.

We didn't change a bit in the story except for a few events but everything that was initially there remained.

When it came to submitting, at first, I fidgeted but eventually I was able to submit. I was never anxious at all as I waited for the results.

The only time I got nervous only when the long list was shared. I panicked, only God knows.

Lise: I get it, I get that adrenaline rush. Tendo, I was lucky to read through various CL you have writ-



Grace Tendo Receiving an Award from Nahida Esmail (Lead Judge of the Wakini Kuria Prize for Children's Literature) in Accra, Ghana, during the 2023 African Writers Conference

ten and I am always amazed by your creativity. How do you do it or better, what inspires you?

Tendo: Personally, I love children. This alone pushes me to write for them. I put myself in their shoes and go back in life to those years when I was little. Think about what would excite or frighten or seduce me to do something then I go ahead and put it into writing. Also, I must say that I didn't really have that posh childhood would wish to have and that must have pushed me to do better as well.

Lise: You have good reasons to write. Now tell me, Tendo. What are the feelings you had when you received the news that you were the second runner up of Wakini Kuria prize for Children's literature?

Tendo: Frankly speaking, I knew I would be among the winners.

Lise: That's interesting! How did you know?

Tendo: The reason why I say so is because I had had a dream previously about it. I had prayed to God about it and He was generous enough to give

me a hint about the winners in the dream. That is why I was confident about it. I didn't tell anyone except my family who continued to pray with me all the way through till the end

Lise: Aww! "Lay your plans before the Lord and He will direct your paths" I hope my Sunday school teacher will not see how I paraphrased this. Anyway, since you knew beforehand via a dream, did you still got excited by the news?

Tendo: Like all winners of course I got excited. The only thing I didn't know was the position I would be in. But it was a whole vibe. I remember calling my aunt who had introduced me to reading at a very young age. She was very excited. I could hear it over the phone call, and when I called my family, the excitement grew bigger. I heard my son speak in the background about it. He too got excited and immediately wanted to talk to me.

Lise: Such a supportive family you got! It must have been so nice to them to receive such news.

Tendo: Yes. They were so much excited. Actually, my mother had to tell her

friends at church about my award. My boy has never stopped reminding me about it as well.

Lise: I like your boy's energy hhhhh. Anyway, we've just arrived to sweet little questions. Who is your favourite CL writer?

Tendo: I haven't yet read so many books from writers for children but I would say that Dr Seuss is. I haven't read many books from him but he was a really noble writer. May he rest in peace. When it comes to Africa, I can't fail to mention Nahida from Tanzania. I can tell you mama is really good.

Lise: Shout out to them! What are your hobbies?

Tendo: I love sports. All kinds of sports. At least I've tried out most of them.

For soccer/football I once was a goal keeper for my team. Then there's volleyball, netball, handball, board games/puzzles, chess and then my favourite sport 'athletics Funny, not so?

Lise: Really? Wow! So very funny! You should be named "Active Grace"

Tendo: Sometimes I think like you but unfortunately, it's not like that hahaha.

Lise: Hahaha. Before we close this, is there anything else you would like to say related to writing be it an advice to other writers or something?

Tendo: Yeah. I would say one must never give up. It took me a whole lot of years to discover that I could be a potential writer for children in a world where others think its hard to write for them!

The only thing to do is practice. You can't get anything without practicing. No. Also, let's not think about writing as though we shall be punished for not being good at a certain stage. But still, we shouldn't relax.

Lise: This is great advice. There's always a room for learning and perfecting one's craft.

Tendo: Sure. Nobody is born perfect!

Lise: Thank you so much for your time and patience, Grace Tendo.

Tendo: It's been my pleasure to be here. Thank you as well.



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

PoeticAfrica



Benny Wanjohi
(Co-founder, PoeticAfrica)



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

NEW HER OLD DRESS

Odirile Aubrey
Botswana

Her dress is different
It's made of the many skins
Of them that screamed and wailed
Them that were bled and ravaged
On those nights and days

Her dress is different
It's bound by many unanswered prayers
Of them that fell on their knees
Them that begged and pleaded
On those days and nights

Her dress is different
It's kept alive by the memories
Of them that bore witness
Them that beheld the abyss
On those days and nights

Her dress is different
She wears it now not with pride
But with pins still sticking out
She does this intentionally
Just so she doesn't easily forget

That she was once
Naked and ashamed
That she was once
Violent and unyielding.



REFLECTIONS OF WISDOM

Given Mukelabai Kolomu
Zambia

She is as exquisite as Kigali,
Where the effulgence of the hill's butterfly kisses her
Skin with grandeur and scatters light with power.
She is obese with wisdom that flows through her veins like a powerful
Ruganwa River.
Her laughter is contagious and blissful like raspberry.

Her presence is a flare of sweetness
And richness like black skin cherries.
Her eyes like Lake Burera, hold wisdom deep and true.
She personifies the spirit of
Reconciliation and forgiveness like pillars of Rwanda.
Like the ribs of the earth, hills give incisiveness to the terrain
Like the energizing aroma of freshly brewed coffee, she sparks frenzy and motivation.

Her hands form a solid foundation for her action like an octagon
She is an ophthalmologist illuminating the path to better vision
She formulates her moves with foresight and precision like a poised chess player
Her presence fills the room, impossible to ignore like a noise
She leaves a lasting impact wherever she goes like her heels
She offers shelter and sanctuary to those in need like hills
Her love has the ability to heal even the deepest scars like healing.



NATURE'S ROLLING BEAUTY

Comfort N.A Okyere
Ghana

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.

Culture dances, colors go ablaze,
Intricate patterns, woven with grace,
From cow herders to city streets,
Traditions thrive, harmonious beats.

Rwanda's past, a tale of sorrow,
Yet hope and healing, a brighter tomorrow,
From darkness rises a phoenix's flight,
A nation's resilience, shining so bright.

Come on! Celebrate Rwanda's grace,
A land of warmth, a vibrant embrace,
She wears her crown of hills with pride,
She is a beacon destined for a glorious ride.



THE YEAR OF **HOLOCAUST**

Joseph Ikhenoba
Nigeria

Remember, 1994, the year of the butcher bird
With numerous irons, disjointed from their ores
Were forged in bottomless pit of anvils.

Tensed, stale wind of discord
Swivelled between the Tutsi and Hutu,
Left blood-stained scars on churches pews.

It came first like a billow of smoke
Then fanned at its bottomless pit, with black raffia palms
Until the flames turned into wild fire.

Those hyenas who seared the flames;
Who bridled the knot of the cords
Sat on trees with golden chalices of wine.

They gazed as our rivers turned to blood,
Our monument of white morsel to graves
As the vultures gluttoned on their carrions.

Today, their spirits still roam the mountains
Their fleshy blood still littered
On memories of bullets.

Their voices still echo on the rivers and oceans
On the North, South, East, West and Kigali provinces
Crying for the doves' feathers.

Rwanda, beware soul brothers
Yesterday storm blew off our thatched roofs
But it's time to rebuild, a home of our own.



UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Katlego Remelda Leboho
South Africa

In Rwanda's rolling hills so green,
A past of darkness, yet to be seen,
Tutsis and Hutus, torn apart,
By hatred's flame that scarred their hearts.
Rwanda, a nation scarred by tragedy,
But resilient in spirit, with a newfound unity.
As we look to the future, let us never forget,
The price of hatred, the cost of regret.
But from ashes, a nation arose,
Striving for peace, their wounds to close.
United they stand, hand in hand,
Together they build a hopeful land.
Through forgiveness and deep reflections,
Rwanda finds a new direction,
A future where differences are embraced,
Love and understanding are interlaced
In unity, they find their strength
In diversity, they go to any length
Rwanda, a beacon of hope and light
Shining through the darkest night.



A SHADOW OF HOPE

Rodrick Kasuzumira
Malawi

From the abyss of atrocities,
In the aftermath of the genocide
She has soared higher like an eagle
To the pinnacle of her own glory:
Casting a shadow of hope on her subjects and beyond.

Looking into her past in the rearview mirror,
She has driven on to a destination full of milk and honey
Loosing all the hate, malice and dichotomy of tribes in the trailing dust.
Like a sown seed, she has blossomed into a new existence
That has a high affinity for tourists,
Whose eyes long to feast on beauty.

When I delve into her dark history
And contrast it to her present story
One expression I utter without worry
That “no situation is beyond redemption or reconciliation”
Nigeria, Ethiopia, Israel and Palestine!
Learn and borrow a leaf from her.
It is possible to co-exist and flourish as a people
Despite our racial, social, financial and spiritual diversity.
After all, our originator is the same.



THE POLE STAR

Bismarck Kimbi
Cameroon

Land of thousand hills stand as the Pole star
Nourishing her people with kings' wine – nectar
Flora and fauna savours Lake Kivu's splendor
When Rwanda breathes, Africa smells splendor
With rich volcano soil that burgeons life
With alluring climate that has murdered strife.

In the midst of storm, Rwanda stood tall
And sugared their hearts against cruel gall
Clean breeze in the land has dealt with death
Industrious fingers have chased away dearth,
As Kigali stands in azure amassing for posterity
She should pursue this growth with integrity.

Africa's creative minds to Kigali flow
To return with pens and papers that glow
As eagles, African writers shall soar
To poetise figures of speech that shall roar
Let Rwanda as Pole star on Africa shine;
Writers will come back drunk with creative wine.



We are pleased to announce the 7th African Writers Awards.
This year's award is for **SHORT STORIES**.

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Requirement

The primary setting of your story must be in Rwanda.

Story length

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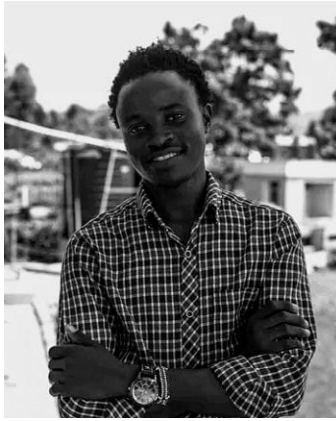
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African Writers
Conference



Short Stories



NYAMBECHE'S COUNTRY

Wafula Meshack
Kenya



When we all struggled to mention America, Canada, Australia and other foreign countries, Nyambeche shouted Rwanda. A handful of us turned to her with

what-did-you-just-say eyes as if she'd grown a third eye on her small but smooth forehead. Even the look on teacher's face was somehow not cool at all however much

she pretended to act normal.

It was a miracle to mention African countries as our dreamland countries when we had foreign countries

that were heaven-like.

Nyambeche was the best performing student in our class. We all fought for second position going downwards since we knew number one was always hers. It was a normal thing to see her top the class and we found nothing shocking about it. Her saying Rwanda instead of America or Japan or China or Dubai or any successful country away from Africa was obnoxious and somehow evil. How could she just choose Rwanda of all the countries? To us, she deserved to be laughed at or be mocked or be beaten but because she was the most beloved student among the teachers, we only did so in our hearts.

Nyambeche being the brightest student in our class meant that she knew something about Rwanda that we didn't. If it was Gloriah or Brian shouting Rwanda, then we wouldn't be shocked because they are knowledgeably challenged. That's how our CRE teacher told us to be referring to stupid people or fools. He told us it's sounds

wise and professional to call the under performing students as knowledgeably challenged. But for this case was Nyambeche, not any other person, just her. We couldn't just leave it that way.

During break time, we all wanted to know why she'd said Rwanda. Was it a slip of the tongue? Was she absentminded when she said so? Or she'd got the question wrong?

"Lady Glow, why did you go for Rwanda?" Annette was the first to raise the question.

We'd nicknamed her Lady Glow because she glowed in exams.

"Is there any problem? I thought the question was simple. Everyone was asked to mention his or her dream country."

"Yes, we know but..." Caroline jumped in but was immediately cut short by Nyambeche.

"But what?" Shouted lady glow.

It was her nature to be rude because she was not only a

well-performing student but also the most beautiful. Boys fought for her attention leaving us behind. Her shouting never bothered us. Even if I was the one, beautiful and bright, I would be rude. It's normal for people to be rude and boastful when they have something that others are having sleepless nights just to possess it.

"Okay, why didn't you mention our countries?" Sharon said, imploring her.

No sooner had she said it than the bell rang and we all rushed to class for another learning session.

Enroute back home, she was still hesitant to tell us. She was beating about the bush and we gave up imploring her. We had no time to caress her heart with sweet words just to open her mouth. Of course she wasn't God. She was like us, why then treat her like an angel?

That was way back in 2025 when in class five. We are now in 2047 and I now understand why she chose this country that's now my second home. I'm from Kenya

and I'm still on the process of adopting my dual citizenship with Rwanda. I've attended so many conferences in our then dream countries when in class five but I've never found peace of mind like in Rwanda.

I'm seated on my foldaway chair, enjoying the cool breeze that's coming from Mt Karisimbi. From where I am, I can see three photos of Rwandese maps through the window planted on cream wall. I can speak a bit of Kinyarwanda.

The first time I told my mum that I'm cogitating of changing my citizenship, she shouted at me with words that sounded like curses.

I'd just visited her in the country and we were now having supper, ugali and roasted mutton. I was still looking for the best way to broach the topic but it was a hard nut to bring it on the table. I feared how she would resonate with it. She loves me so much just like the way Jesus Christ loves his church. Telling her that I was planning to move away from her would be the worst thing she has ever heard. She sensed it all.

"Mary, what's the problem my daughter?" She asked.

"Nothing mama, I'm okay." I said. I lied.

"No, just tell me, I can see in your eyes. Something is amiss," she said, insisting.

"No. I'm fine." I persisted.

"Come on my daughter. Don't tell me my eyes are playing games with me. I've raised you and I believe I know you better than you

know yourself. I know there's something irritating you. Feel free."

I was left with no any other option. I remember taking in a long breath then took in a gulp of water before letting it all hang out.

She said so many things I can't remember. Perhaps I can only remember a sole thing and that's "only a bribed person will leave his blood country for another one!" After giving it a second thought, I saw sense in it and that's how I went for dual citizenship.

I wish I could tell her that with over 60% of its members of parliament being female, Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in the parliament in the world. When she was a school girl, she really championed for fair representation of women in leadership positions. The mark on her left cheek came as a result of her being fought by one of the naughty boys after she protested for a lady to be chosen as a school president.

I wish I could tell my mum so many things about Rwanda. Does she know of it being one of the cleanest countries in the world? I'm sure she doesn't. What of community work day? I would've really told her a lot but she'd already switched off.



THE RWANDAN COLLEGE GIRL

Bakar Mansaray
Sierra Leone

She stood engrossed by the closed classroom door while her fingers clutched a pile of books. Immaculee, the Rwandan college girl's pencil skirt and tight-fit blouse gave her the looks of a mature woman rather than an adolescent.

It was not a usual sight at the Kibeho College of Arts in southern Rwanda when the college was closed for the 1991 Christmas holidays. In the past couple of years, a college girl had passed through the school but none that Fabrice could remember had stood alone on a deserted hallway, early on a Friday morning. But then again, he had been gone from the college campus for a while and things might have changed.

He glanced up and down the recognizable corridor with the same classroom doors that he had known for the past five years. Nothing had changed though. The recognition both bothered and appeased him. He looked again, gaping, attempting to find other students.

Not a single one.

In his mid-thirties, he was no longer used to anomalies after a short stint in his home town of Ruhengeri where a student standing alone on a school hallway during Christmas holidays would be a surprise. But in Kibeho it was usual. The college girl stood still like a deity. As he was totally charmed, his intense desire to know her heightened. That was where

he ought to have ended it. But he did not. He moved closer to the girl in a couple of quick strides, with the heat of the air permeating his sweater. He kicked himself mentally for not having dressed casually.

"Are you looking for the library?" Fabrice stretched out his arm showing the way. "It's next to the assembly hall."

Fabrice was at home with bug-eyed responses from college girls, usually followed by a flirtatious sly smile.

"I know. I'm a student in this college. Aren't you a teacher?"

"Ah! So, you're no stranger."

"Thanks for the direction anyway," she said, looking doubtful of what next to do or say.

"What's your name?" He beamed, agreeing that the girl's glowing gaze hit him like a ton of bricks.

"My name's Immaculee."

"Immaculee, hmmm . . . Call me Fabrice."

"Mr. Habimana," she said.

"Fabrice," he insisted, "Do you live in this area?"

"Yes, across the road. I live with my mother, Severine."

"I live in the adjoining neighbourhood next to yours. Can I invite you for some snacks?"

She hesitated briefly and gave him a positive nod.

The next day, dressed in turtle green miniskirt with a rainbow-coloured blouse, Immaculee met Fabrice at Chez mama Razaro restaurant. He wore a simple yellow T-shirt and white pants. After having some snacks and drinks, he asked

her to accompany him to a friend's home. He claimed his friend, Laurent, should have brought a gift he had for her. However, he wasn't sure why he didn't do so.

Once at Laurent's, she glanced uneasily at him.

"Relax, my dear, you look so lovely," he said.

She thawed at his compliments.

"Are you married?"

"I'm separated," he replied licking his lips.

Fabrice couldn't wait any longer. He started to caress Immaculee.

"No! Stop it!" she cried, as her heart fluttered with fear. The spark died out of her eyes.

Fabrice couldn't resist his feelings as Immaculee kept fighting back. He could feel the sweat dripping from his armpits, and in a short while, his T-shirt became sodden and clogged against his back. In less than ten minutes, he had sown the seed of disruption. He put on a penitent smile, and both of them felt

as if they had just finished triathlons in a row. She tried to check her sobs and began to dress up. They left Laurent's home, shuffling home-wards in different directions.

Several weeks later, Immaculee was in an early morning deep sleep, fully clothed, when Severine woke her up. She reacted sluggishly, looking worn out.

"Are you alright?" Severine asked.

Immaculee just shrugged.

"Is something the matter?"

She shook her head and began to hiccup.

At age forty-five, Severine, of average height, was almost a complete replica of her daughter. Her hair, done in an afro-cut was as black as an Egyptian night.

Severine sat down on the bed, drew Immaculee to her. In her arms she began to sob.

"Tell me what's wrong," she said, trying to comfort her.

As if in response to her mother, Immaculee grabbed

the bed sheet and vomited onto it. She felt breathless, like someone having a hangover, a mild headache. She was sweating excessively, feeling too hot. She made an attempt to stand up but her knees were weak. Panic stricken,

Severine guided her daughter to the bathroom where an attempt to brush her teeth brought more vomit.

"I hope it's not what I'm suspecting," said Severine.

"Mama, I'm sick."

"Dress up and let's go see Dr. Munyaneza."

Dr. Munyaneza was a cheerful man in his sixties. Sturdy of bone, heavy of feature, many considered him as the most well-known gynecologist in Rwanda. Others saw him as the devilish chief of abortion. He preferred speaking Kinyarwanda rather than French or English. Dr. Munyaneza was always fuming over the colonization of Rwanda. He thought the German and Belgian colonialists did more harm

than good. Dr. Munyaneza wasted no time in performing a pregnancy test on Immaculee. The result showed positive.

"Impossible!" Severine cried out, placing her arms on her head. She jumped around the consulting room wailing and stamping her feet on the floor as tears ran down her cheek. Once she regained her composure, Severine turned toward Dr. Munyaneza.

"Doctor, this pregnancy must be aborted!"

The doctor gave her a stern look.

"Go and think about it and give me a call later," he said.

Severine started to protest but the doctor dismissed her.

Once they returned home, she breathed fire and brimstone on her daughter. She asked her to spill the beans.

"Who's the two-left-footed monster that did this to you?"

The words were lost on Immaculee's ears. She stood absent-minded unable to reply until her mother shouted at

her.

"Immaculee!"

"Yes, mama," she said, trembling like someone with high fever.

"I'm asking you. Who's he?"

Without any further hesitation, she replied, "Mr. Habimana."

"Who is he?"

"He's one of our teachers at the college."

"A teacher?"

Mother and daughter embraced each other and wept. They wept and wept until their eyes were swollen like river Akanyaru about to burst its banks. Severine looked at her daughter closely. Her eyes glinted resentfully.

"Do you realize that you're a Kibeho College of Arts student and not one from those riff-raff colleges?"

Immaculee nodded speechlessly.

"Do you know how many francs I spend on your schooling as a single mother?"

"Mama, I do."

"Immaculee, my only child, are we living in a slum?"

"No, Mama, we're not."

"Am I not feeding and clothing you?"

"Yes, Mama, you're."

"Do you want to become a prostitute in Kigali's Banny-ahe-Kangondo slum?"

"No, Mama, I don't want to."

Unable to contain her frustration any longer, Immaculee's distraught mother approached the college authorities to report Fabrice Habimana's sordid sexual relationship with Immaculee. Fabrice was summoned by Mr. Mugisha, the college's principal. He didn't honour the summon but instead flee to his home town of Ruhengeri. The news about Fabrice Habimana and the college girl spread like wild fire among teachers and students.

It was not long before the police got information about Fabrice Habimana's attempt to find employment

in his hideout. On that fateful morning, it rained buckets when they came for him. He felt a burst of hot air that smelled like wet soil and mulch as they seized him by the collar of his threadbare shirt and flung him into the police van. A forest of eager eyes followed him as people watched. During the hearing at which the case was set for trial Judge Nsengiyumva, a fierce-looking man, addressed Severine and Immaculee, who were dressed like nuns.

"All we're looking for here is the truth. Immaculee, did Fabrice defile you or not?"

"Your honour, I'm not sure but he..."

Severine couldn't believe her ears.

"Miss, it's either yes or no for an answer," Judge Nsengiyumva interrupted.

Immaculee gave Fabrice a quick glance and felt pity and love for him.

"No, he didn't," she said.

"Yes, he did!" Severine shouted.

The judge dismissed Severine and turned to Fabrice.

"What do you have to say with reference to the allegation made against you?"

Fabrice Habimana, who had grown a beard in detention, bowed his head in resignation. He looked as haggard as a hopeless beggar.

"I didn't commit such a crime," he said.

Judge Nsengiyumva shook his head and concluded.

"This case is baseless, especially in consideration of the plaintiff's dissenting remark, and the insufficient evidence. Hence, it prevents the court, jury inclusive, from convicting the defendant of the alleged crime."

In the months that followed, Immaculee gave birth to a baby girl and later completed her college education.



ANYWHERE BELLE

FACE

Celestine Seyon Reuben
Nigeria

It rained grief in Idoani; the day Mr. Dawap died, and the longest, largest, and fruitless tree was down. Under the tree were lengthened wooden chairs, before his death. The administrative block, structured for tenured principals – the kind and boring; the smart and sluggish; the embezzler and warmth; the bigoted and generous – who would lead and disciple other administrative folks, was a few steps away and adjacent to the staff room Step-B. Younger teachers could not make postural contact with and under the tree. But strangers did. It changed, after Mr. Dawap's demise; at the arrival of Mr. Twahirwa, the mathematician from Rwanda, nicknamed 'The

Philosopher'.

Earlier after the longest sessional holiday, the United African Nations Commission assented and signed the consented act issued by the African Panel of Inter-Education Affairs to promote cross-cultural intellectual curiosity in the continent. Educators would be transferred from and to different African Countries to teach their expertise for three months. An exciting prospect for the fifteen-year-old Chukwuebuka. He wanted to scribe; his father declined. He loved mathematics; paternal embracement. He loved to scribe; he wanted to be counted, to be taken seriously.

Resumption activated. New session. New classes and teachers. A Rwandan mathematician, Sudanese biologist, and Tanzanian physicist were assigned senior secondary school level two. Chukwuebuka loved the previous mathematics teacher's style but he sensitively stuttered.

The Philosopher, more grounded instantly. The first class, 'Modular Arithmetic'.

"Any question?" The Philosopher asked, at the end. Chukwuebuka raised his hand. "Alright, go on."

"Sir," Chukwuebuka said.

"Yes."

"I want my own. I want to create my method in math," Chukwuebuka sermonized.

"In the previous level, the math teacher told us about John Venn, and how he created his method of solving Set problems. How Pythagoras also created trigonometry, and how Pascal also did his. But sir, these people have died before my father was even born. Please sir, teach us how to create our method, sir. I don't like, for example, any of the methods used to solve quadratic equations except the graphical method, sir. I want to create my method. Ebuka's method." The student murmured in the tiniest sliver. Dada, the class captain furrowed his face at Chukwuebuka. Is this boy mad or something? What did he take?

"Is that all?" The Philosopher asked, flipping through the student's note at his front.

"No sir," he said, and reverted, quickly. "Yes sir, that is all sir."

"See me in camera."

"Alright, sir," Chukwuebuka said, trepid. Dada stood from his seat and walked to him, angry and astonished. He didn't believe him.

"Ebuka, what is wrong with your head?" Dada asked. "Are you on something or something is on you?"

"What have I done?" Chukwuebuka asked.

"Water and Garri to make Eba on your wedding day," Dada said. "How could you ask such a question? Were you asking questions or preaching?"

"Please Dada, leave me alone. You have no idea of what I'm going through." Chukwuebuka said.

"What are you going through? Or you don't go give person pikin belle? Have you impregnated someone's daughter?" Dada asked.

"Stop that joke."

"Be the one to stop joking. This man is from the East. Remember I am the class captain, and I have access to their documented profile in the Step-B. He can't understand the West." Dada said. "Don't you know that country? The country with very clean environment, especially their market square. Do you have an idea of how

disciplined their president is? If anything happens now, you will see how they will be saved. Their president doesn't joke with the citizens. The Ugandan historian who took my younger sister's class said their President is called a Visionary Dictator. So, ask questions that make sense, and stop preaching."

"Really?" Chukwuebuka said. "I don't care whether he is from the East or West or North or South. As humans, we are both similarly different and differently similar. Period."

"Well, that's true though," Dada said.

"No, it's not just true. It is the truth. I only need an African I can trust," Chukwuebuka said. "Anyways. It's just three months. So, no pressure. I just pray that he stays longer. I like the man."

The Philosopher's office is far away from the longest, largest, and fruitless tree. It was carved out from a classroom block as a Mr. Dawap sponsored renovation. Chukwuebuka strolled. "Good afternoon Senior Ebuka," a junior

level student saluted. No response. All he would do was to pour his mind to The Philosopher. He knocked. "Ngwino," The Philosopher instructed.

"Sir," Chukwuebuka said, discombobulated.

"Oh sorry. Come in, the door is open."

"Umeze ute. How are you doing?" The Philosopher asked.

"O din ma. I am fine, sir," Chukwuebuka replied.

"What language is that?" The Philosopher asked.

"Igbo, sir."

"Wow! But this is a Yoruba land. Why didn't you school in your land?" The Philosopher asked.

"My father was transferred to Ondo state from Nnewi, Anambra state," Chukwuebuka answered.

"Beautiful. Is Nnewi not the Biafra boss' land? What was his name again?"

"Ojukwu, sir," Chukwuebuka said.

"Yes! Ojukwu. That man is an example of a leader of those who suffered in plenty and also enjoyed nothing. I like him but his beard is too bushy."

"Yes, sir," Chukwuebuka smiled.

"So, why the question in class?" The Philosopher asked. Chukwuebuka sighed.

"Sir," he said. "First of all. I heard some of

our teachers call you The Philosopher. Why that, sir? You are a mathematician, sir, not a philosopher."

"Secondary school students in my country love to gossip about the mathematics teachers," The Philosopher measured a smile. "They thrill their students in class and their behaviours largely shape the majority of their lives. Our youngsters in school love mathematics because we likened the subject to any situation in life. Hence the name, Philosopher."

"Wow! That is very revolutionarily fascinating," he said. "Sir, my father doesn't like the fact that I love writing."

"Do you?" The Philosopher asked.

"Yes, sir. I do," Chukwuebuka said. "He said that my mathematics and writing skills cannot coexist. He said that one has to surrender to the other. I was irritated by this, sir. He said that mathematicians are more respected than writers; writers were killed like chickens and he vowed that he didn't want any of his children to write because people who carried their children at birth used the same hands to put them in graves, untimely after becoming writers."

"Oh!" The Philosopher said. "Your father grew during coups and dictations."

"Yes, sir," Chukwuebuka continued. "I wrote stories for the press club at level one and the former principal liked it. After the first mid-term break, my father came to the school and told the principal not to allow me

write again.”

“What stories did you write then?” The Philosopher asked.

“I wrote four stories sir: How Nigerian youngsters, in political positions, are scarce but densely populated and still multiplied in prisons; how crime investigation is not nourished with concrete shreds of evidence; how the left-handed is perceived as an evil conduit; and my dream as a storyteller; to ensure that all the government officials – federal, states, provincial, and locals – collectively read narrative histories and realistic fictions.”

“Really? Do you think that would work out?” The Philosopher asked.

“Yes, Mr. Twahirwa. I believe so. If they do, the consciousness of how humans are similarly different and differently similar will be their orientation before making horrendous laws that don’t benefit everybody.”

“Oh my God. Imana! You speak like an oracle. How did you know my name?” The Philosopher asked. “Do you also love mathematics the way you love to write?”

“Yes sir, I do. Since my father said writing is a waste of time, I knew it involved creativity. So, I want to create my math and the only thing I want to do is to add methods to existing methods.”

“Now, I see where you are coming from,” The Philosopher asked him to sit. “Your story is not just a Nigerian. These stories are not only Nigerian stories. You have a great sense

of observation. These are African stories. If Nigerians won’t read these, Rwandans would. Go and write them. I will send them to Rwanda; to either *Hose*, *Kigali Today*, or *Indatwa*. You have done well.”

“Thank you so much, sir, Mr. Twahirwa.”

“Wait! How did you know my name?” Philosopher asked, again.

“I saw it on the notice board, sir, after your class while I was coming here, sir. But sir, please, sir. Can you help me talk to my father?”

“Don’t worry. Imana will help you. I will speak to him at the next Parent and Teachers Association meeting.”

“Thank you, sir. What about teaching us the method?”

“Go to your class. The break will soon be over.” The Philosopher instructed.

“Thank you, sir. Dalu.” Chukwuebuka walked out.

Human beings who soaked in such situations are the last child of their family, The Philosopher mumbled. This boy is a change-maker, but has untamed tongue.



THE SERPENT'S SON

Micah Angel
South Sudan



It was a dark stormy night when something fell into my deep waters. Swiftly I swam with all my might to reach this tiny unknown bundle. I was surprised to find a wooden boat slowly sail above me followed by the wailings of a woman. Slithering through the variety of rocks and foliage, I make my way to the bundle below the hoard of bubbles floating upwards.

Grabbing the object, I make my way to the surface and carefully swim towards the shore placing the bundle onto the muddy surface. Using my webbed claws, I lift and peel away every layer covering this squirming curiosity. My eyes widen as I realise what has just been done. Before me lay a new-born baby boy, his skin almost as pale as my own and he is barely alive. Using my powers I heal

this tiny human. Muhire I whisper. I will be your mother.

"Mom?" I plead. "Can I play outside? Please?"

"No, there are dangers outside. Or did you forget." With an eyebrow raised and her hands resting on her side she stares at me.

"No mother, but it will not happen again." I gently rub at the scar on my thigh.

"I will not play in the river I promise." I widen my eyes and pout.

"Muhire! You will not leave the safety of our home and that is final." She snaps back. Dammit. "I need to go. Remember, I cannot always come to your rescue."

In one quick movement she gracefully disappears into the river. This sucks...

Staring at the various spiders that call our wooden roof home, I find myself bored if I stay out of the river and just follow it a bit, I should be home before she gets here. Amping myself up I feel convinced that my plan is failure proof. I quickly put on my

shoes before I bolt closing the door behind me. I feel the warm bright sun burning my pale skin. I should stick to the shade; mom will notice a sunburn.

The air is humid, turning my tuft into a mane and I can hear the cicadas enjoying the midmorning sunlight. Various animals can be heard in the background. Antelopes, Lions, hyenas, baboons. Antelope that huff and puff when I come to close. I keep an eye on the river as I walk amongst the tree line, careful of where I step. Mom has had to heal quite a few scorpion stings before.

Around one of the riverbends a bright sparkle catches my eye. It's a little deeper into the wilderness. I seek around for a small sharp rock to mark the trees so that I can easily find my way back to the river. I have seen the devastation my mother can cause when she couldn't find me a few years ago. It's one of the reasons why I am never allowed outside.

I head towards the light. The view of a glittering pond

lighting up the area in all sorts of colours take my breath away.

"H-hello?" I stutter out, staring at the small pale boy gawking at the pond. I have never seen such a weird sight before. He has light blond hair and milky white skin. The tiny boy bolts up and turns around to face me. Those dark chocolate eyes wide in fear.

"Who are you?" I ask, pointing my walking stick at him.

"Muhire." The boy says softly as his face turns to wonder. "You look just like me." he rushes towards me, I drop the stick in shock.

"What do you mean? You are human are you not?" I ask curiously tilting my head to the side.

"Human." He says slowly feeling the word form on his lips. His face blank, eyes staring into nothing. "What is a human?" his focus shifts back to me.

"That's what we," I gently touch our chests, "are."

"Human, I am human." A large smile forms on his face.

"Where do you live?" I ask.

"I can't tell you." He became sad, looking at his feet.

"Do you go to school?" I ask again.

"What is school?" he sounded out the last word slowly again.

"It is a wonderful place, where elders teach you new things." I smile broadly back.

"I think I want to go..." He calmly states. He quickly stared up at the sky and I could see beads of sweat falling down his forehead. He turned on his heel and ran off.

Dammit I am going to be late. Mother will be furious. Running down the path following my footsteps, The small hut comes into view, and I pick up speed to get to the front door.

"There you are Muhire, I have been looking all over for you." Her voice sharp and filled with venom. She slithers closer and towers above me. Her skin still slick from the water dripping down her black hair.

"Sorry mother, I got bored."

I look down at my feet. I feel her scaly tail envelop my body and lift me off the ground.

"Let me get a good look at you." She said softly. "No burns, no cuts, no bruises." She places me back down gently "I am mad, but proud that you kept yourself safe. Perhaps I will allow you to roam Muhire."

A smile forms on my lips.

"Only if you promise to stay safe." Her teal eyes glowing in the sunlight.

"I promise."

"Let's head inside and prepare dinner." Moms voice sweet and gentle.

"Mother, do you think I could perhaps join the other humans at school?" I ask curiously over dinner.

"No. Humans are evil, they tried to kill you as a baby." Her features darkened and I left it at that.

Over the next few days, I snuck off to the pond and spoke with Rose. She was more than happy to teach me

as I could not attend school. I learned to read and write, and to count numbers.

I kept my learning away from my mother. She would not understand.

One morning I stood waiting by the pool when Rose showed up with some new things under her right arm.

"Are you ready? I took notes from today's lesson for you." She smiled broadly.

"Rose, what do you think you are doing!" A gravelly voice hollered from the treeline.

"Father I?" She froze in the spot, her body shaking.

"Get away from that boy this instant!" He demanded before ripping her away from my side by her right arm.

"Ouch daddy, you are hurting me." She cried, his hand squeezing and twisting her arm tightly. "Why daddy?"

"He is the devil's child." He spat at my feet.

"NO YOU ARE!" the loud resounding hiss coming from my mother made every hair on my body stand on edge.

"It's you!" the man stated shakily, his eyes widening in fear.

"The Mami Wata." I hear Rose say in a gasp.

"You will be killed, you monster." The man declares before he runs off as fast as his feet can carry him, dragging poor Rose behind him, her arm contorting badly.

"I am sorry mother." I choke out through tears.

"Hush my child." She cooed. "I have been keeping an eye on you and I can see that not all of the humans are bad." She smiled at me, her pointed canines peeking from under her lip. "Let's go home."

I nodded and wandered on my path back. Focussing on nothing, my heart in pain. I never saw Rose again.

Late one afternoon a knock came at the door. Mother was still out, and I readied my spear before carefully stalking towards the door. The boiling pot over the fire the only sounds heard.

As I reach the door, I tightly grip the handle before flinging it wide open. Lifting the spear I give a quick thrust forward. The tip stops a breath away from a young woman's nose.

"Muhire!" her eyes start to water, and she grabs me into a tight embrace. "Get your mother, you two should see this."

My spear clatters to the ground and I slowly embrace her back taking in the sight and smell of my old friend.

"What is this?" I hear my mother ask behind us.

Rose let me go and faced my mother. Both of us ready for the attack as she stares down my mother, her posture deadly serious. In shock and awe, we watch her bow down deep.

"My lady. It is an honour to be in your presence." The rest of the night we listen to her stories on how the village fought against its own infractions and built a shrine in my mother's honour.

My mother the Mami Wata became a symbol of peace and prosperity. Those who stood against us met with destruction and death.



A REPORTER'S LAST WISH

Abubakar Abubakar
Nigeria



“Doc, is there really no way?” asked the tall man in a black suit.

“I’m sorry,” said the bald doctor, drooping his head.

The tall man walked out of the hospital, a piece of paper gripped firmly in his hand. A little later he arrived at his workplace, hopping off the elevator into his office.

On the office wall hung certificates, awards, and a big, smiling picture frame. On the table sat newspapers, a seventeen-inch Mac-

Book, and a glass-framed nameplate reading “Martin Kagabo, Deputy Editor-in-Chief.” As he reclined into the chair, staring at the picture frame, he reflected on the doctor’s earlier remarks.

“You are at the end stage of leukemia,” the doctor had said.

“How long do you think I can live on, Doc?” he had asked, stretching out his arm for the piece of paper in the doctor’s hand.

“A few weeks, I’m afraid,” the doctor had

replied after a considerate pause.

He started up from the chair with a napkin and began wiping the picture frame on the wall with it. In the picture he was next to his fair-complexioned wife, Christine, and in front of them stood their seven-year-old twins. Antoine was donned in a white-and-green Tuxedo suit, green bowtie and black leather shoes matching his father's; Antoinette, in a green blouse and high-heeled shoes and with a black purse matching her mother's. The photo was shot on the fifth birthday of the kids.

Suddenly Martin let go a loud breath. He slapped his hands on the wall and bent his head under the frame.

Although Martin was counting his days, he was concealing it. Nobody, save him and the doctor, knew of his illness. Something similarly tragic had happened to him twenty-eight years earlier. Then a cub reporter, he watched helpless as the same illness distressed his mother, Mrs Florence Kagabo, to

death.

When he arrived home that night, he could hear the television talking and the kids laughing back at it. They didn't hear him come in, until Christine, stepping out of the kitchen, shouted at them to reduce the volume. Martin had already reached upstairs. He was doing his unbuttoning as Christine entered the bedroom. "Let me," she said. "You don't look well. Are you okay?"

"Does it show?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" she said, putting off his shirt. "You're losing weight, too. Are you sick anywhere?"

"Uh, well, I've so much on my plate these days--in fact, there is a journalist's conference I must attend next week in Sweden."

"Still, you need to look after yourself," she said.

"I will," he said and smiled. "But I smelled sambaza, coming in."

"Yes, I have made it especially for you." she said and he smiled again.

"We should join the kids now," she said and took his hands and placed them on her hips as she led the way down for dinner.

That midnight Martin kept his gaze on Christine, who was sound asleep. While his hand caressed her hair, which had a few white strands, he reminisced their beginning in Butare, at the National University of Rwanda.

Christine was a senior to him. They met for the first time during one of his campus journalism assignments—he was interviewing a group of finalist students among whom she happened to be—and each liked the other on the spot. Despite the age difference—Christine being 24 and Martin, 22—he won both her love and respect.

"I've sinned against this innocent woman," he thought, his gaze and hand still on her. "She has done nothing but trust me, love me, respect me all these years. I've sinned against my children, too. Will I be forgiven?"

He shut off his eyes and drew a deep breath.

The next morning he left for the Northern Province in his blue Volkswagen. He saw a crowd gathered on the other side of the road. An accident had occurred. A truck, whose brake pedal failed, had crushed two cars to wretches. The truck driver sat in pain on the bleeding floor, beside him laid the bodies of the other drivers and of four passengers (three young men and a middle-aged woman). The crowd pointed fingers and blame at the truck driver for having caused the accident.

Martin pulled over and walked back to the scene. "Have you called the ambulance?" he said, looking down at the driver in bloody clothes, panting on the floor. "And this man needs urgent medical care. This is not the time to blame him. His life need be saved first."

"Save who? He is a killer," shouted one man with a white mustache. "He was flying with the truck and caused this accident." The rest nodded their heads when the old man spoke, and in a chorus gave their ac-

counts of the incident.

"The authority will investigate the cause of the accident and deal with him accordingly, if he is guilty. But what comes first is the preservation of his life." Martin said. They nodded their heads, murmuring to one another. In a flash, three ambulances appeared.

He reached his destination late in the afternoon. It was a double-storey house with a handsome exterior. As he pushed the gate open, a boy playing football alone raced toward him. "Daddy! Daddy!" the boy screamed. He was about nine years old, in a happy-looking, Manchester-City jersey.

"How are you?" Martin said, squatting to the boy's height.

"Fine!"

"Where is your mom?"

"Inside!" the boy answered swiftly again, and then led the way. The boy's mother, having heard their conversation, had sprung to her welcoming feet inside.

"You're here, Charles?" Martin said as he shut the door

behind him.

"Yes, I thought I should see how they were doing. I was about to leave anyway, Brother-in-law," Charles replied.

"I will see you later, brother," Grace (the boy's mother) said.

"O.K.," Charles said and winked at her.

"Mark, see your uncle out," Martin said to the boy.

Charles thus picked his jeans jacket and took his leave, Mark following him out. He had a broad chest, wrestlerish muscles and very black lips. He was also very tall, just about Martin.

Grace moved closer to hug Martin, and helped him out of his coat. Then she brought over a bottle of chilled water with a glass cup on a round iron tray. "You didn't call that you were coming," she said. "What about lunch?"

"Don't worry about that," he said. "I have come to discuss a serious matter; please sit."

She sat down the tray and herself on the brown chair

across him, and he began, "Do you remember? We first met ten years ago when I came to Ruhengeri to cover a story with two other friends. We spent one week and frequented your—"

"I still remember the reactions of the other shops," she cut him, excitement expressed on her face. "They were jealous that the journalists from Kigali visited only my place."

"You must remember too," he continued, "after a few drinks one night, we spent the night together. The outcome was Mark."

"But why are you suddenly talking about the past?" she said, leaning her upper body toward him.

"I've never been at ease that my children are strangers to each other. I want Mark to meet his siblings and Christine. To see my family united is my last wish."

Grace stayed quiet for seconds. When she recovered her voice, she said softly, "I need to think this through. Give me some time."

"I understand," Martin said; and quickly added, "But your answer should come along as fast as possible. There's no time."

At about nine the next morning, Martin called Christine into the bedroom and told her everything--about Mark and Grace.

"The boy can't be your own," Christine flared up. "I mean, it's impossible."

"What do you mean 'impossible'?" Martin said, slowly retreating to his feet.

"Because you can't get a woman pregnant!" Christine shouted and then found a seat on a tip of the bed, sobbing. Martin stood there confused.

She rubbed off her cheeks with a corner of her apron, and continued, "Do you remember how long we were without children? Twenty six years. When we went for another test, I was the one who got back for the result. The doctor said you can't impregnate a woman. But I didn't know how to tell you—no, I was scared what you might do if you learnt of it. So—"

"So?" Martin said, eager to hear her finish the utterance.

"I--I had an affair."

"And our kids--who is their father?" Martin asked in a shaky voice. "I asked you. Who is Antoinette and Antoine's father?"

"Alfred," she cried out the name.

"Alfred?" He asked. "Alfred?" He asked again.

He finally remembered the bearer of the name. "The same Alfred?"

There was instantly in the room such silence that a dropped needle would definitely echo. Alfred was the name of the bald-headed doctor whom Martin fondly called Doc.



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CELEBRATING OTHERS



Liza Chuma Akunyili
@iamlizachuma

Critiquing other people's work is a sign of respect for the number of hours they've put in their creation process. It is identifying they can be better if they tweak a few things and highlighting those areas to them. Also, critiquing other people's work is a great way to show off your expertise to your fan base.

However, to successfully critique someone's work, you must read it! Way too many writers are guilty of skipping over other people's work to advertise

theirs. When was the last time you purchased someone's book even when you got a complementary copy?

Have you ever hosted a reading around someone else's book?

Have you ever announced the launch of another person's work?

This is a good marketing and partnership technique. More importantly, it is the habit of a person who knows the laborious demands of creativity and celebrates anyone who

pays the due.

You and I have met patronizing people but that's definitely not you. You are a writer who is committed to the cause whether it's your work or not. You are the writer who knows the world needs more creative pieces that spark imagination. You know a good piece of writing when you see it and you're not afraid to say "hey world, this piece is magnificent".

Until we overcome our creative low self-esteem, we will not celebrate other

writers who create amazing collections in our genre and beyond.

Benefits of celebrating other writers

1. You are building or solidifying a relationship

When I critique your work with the intention of helping you improve, you do improve if you take the suggestions or you show me where I'm wrong. Either way, this dialogue brings us both to a place of mutual respect.

Respect is a key factor for partnerships; you neither recommend people you don't respect nor form alliances with them. Every writer has paid some form of dues and are still doing so. The last thing any writer will do is recommend a total stranger online just because they have search engine visibility. Beyond visibility, you want to be known by dialogue that shows your expertise.

If I read your writing and I send a detailed analysis

of the high points for me as an individual, you are likely to expect my next review of your work, ask my opinion on something unpublished or read my actual work to see who I am and how I creatively show up.

2. You are building your circle

One writer may be a friend but twelve writers who trust your judgment could be a mastermind like you have never imagined. In my Medium article titled Shield of love, I spoke about getting love from every industry.

Your shield of love as a writer would consist of

- Writers who have been published by publishing companies who know how to negotiate better terms and conditions

- Writers who understand the menace of plagiarism and are learning how to protect their work

- Writers who mastering how to be bestsellers

and top the chat

- Writers who are learning to diversify their income and investment portfolios

- Writers who understand the place of writing in societal education.

Notice how I keep mentioning all these different categories of writers that you may not be as a person. However, as you engage and build community, these new writers will come in with their flavour and influence how you show up as a writer.

They all would not be nice supporters. Some of them would be hyper critical in a way that makes your work feel unworthy; take their corrections, improve and let go of the negativity.

Some will always support everything you create and you will never know if your work is good enough on a global level; take the boost, feel great about being creative and let go of the hype so you can con-

tinue building instead of settling.

3. You're increasing your audience base

Most fans are invested in people who enjoy what they enjoy. This means the followers of the person whose work you're reading and complementing are likely to come check you out thereby increasing your fan base if your work is appealing to them as well.

How to effectively critique another writer

1. Review the work, not the person

In marriage counselling, we tell the couple to fight the problem and not each other.

Why?

- You don't know the person well enough to review them.
- You do not know the circumstances surrounding their writing.
- You have invested

too little in their works to have such a high opinion of their skill set.

- The author has a right to life asides from writing.

When unsure, read the book multiple times. If possible, read other materials by the same author to be sure about their writing style.

2. Critique with growth in mind

There is a huge difference between disagreeing with a point and being disgusted by it. Many of us critique people with disgust. We are so confident of our criticism that we opine that the work should not exist.

When we critique, we must do so with the intention of helping the writer become better in their content research, delivery and techniques. Creative critiquing has become loathsome because we critique with the intention of destroying each other. That's why creatives are getting more

isolated instead of forming community.

A writer's critique is on the side of good writing. If no one can critique your work, there's a problem.

3. Create continuity

While each writer is a separate entity, each writer is also an extension of the culture, language and expectation of their time.

When you critique, you cannot critique a writer in isolation from their time, age and the historical work that influence their writing. This means the critiquing process is research writing process in itself. To thoroughly research and write with continuity in mind is to invite non-writers and upcoming writers to the world of good pieces.

Creating is important but without proper critiquing, mediocrity is born.



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ISSUE 88

AMAHLE: A GIRL WHO LOST AND FOUND HER SMILE

A Children's Literature by Moipone Thandeka, South Africa



Reviewer

Funmi Richards
(Nigeria)

The title hints at a journey of recovery, suggesting a lost smile and the hope of finding it again. Amahle, initially described as a confident young girl with a beautiful smile, embodies the importance of a smile as a symbol of self-esteem and happiness.

The story cleverly portrays a relatable experience: the cruel sting of peer pressure or bullying that can dim a child's light, replacing smiles with a withdrawn demeanour. This resonates with classic tales like Cinderella, ostracised by her stepsisters, and modern films like "Mean Girls," highlighting the devastating effects of bullying.

The writer's portrayal of Amahle's character goes beyond depicting the problem. It emphasises the crucial role of parents and guardians as cheerleaders, fostering self-acceptance in their children. Additionally, the story acknowledges the role of self-esteem itself. While Amahle's eventual dental work is important, the narrative suggests that re-

gaining confidence comes first, making the braces a treatment for a deeper issue, not just a fix for the lost smile.

The simple language allows readers to connect with Amahle's experience. It serves as a reminder that we all have a responsibility to protect the smiles of others. The story transcends the emotional impact of a smile, highlighting its connection to physical well-being. Smiling triggers brain activity in areas associated with happiness, making it more than just a physical expression. Amahle, like all children, deserves to hold onto that happiness and the smile that reflects it.

This clear message, wrapped in a relatable story, makes for a good read for children of all ages. It can be shared in classrooms and homes, starting conversations about self-worth, bullying prevention, and the power of a smile.

WARD B

A Flash Fiction by Ndawedwa Hanghuwo, Namibia

Reviewer

Akuei M. Adol
(South Sudan)

Martin Luther King Jr once said that, *“darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”* It is through the labour of love, compassion, and kindness that individuals are driven out of their dark spots of life to see the light that gives joy.

“Ward B” by Ndawedwa Hanghuwo is a thought-provoking work that delves into the therapeutic power of laughter and human connection in the midst of pain and struggles. Set in a hospital, the author employs concise story-telling and emotionally evocative scenes to highlight the impact of a simple smile on individuals facing difficult circumstances.

The piece effectively captures the contrast between Anna’s light-hearted efforts to bring joy to her patients in Ward B, including Imms, a reserved and grief-stricken new patient haunted by tragedy. Through the use of dialogue and introspective moments, the narrative reveals the healing potential of humor and empathy in uplifting spirits and fostering hope in the face of despair.

Brevity is brilliantly utilized in the work to convey a powerful message about the

transformative nature of human connection and the importance of finding comfort in moments of shared laughter and compassion. The story unfolds with a compelling simplicity that draws readers into the emotional landscape of the characters.

“Ward B” reminds me of the medical movie “Patch Adams” starring Robin Williams. The film explores the healing power of humor and human connection in a medical setting. Therefore, both narratives emphasize the significance of empathy, laughter, and genuine human relationships in overcoming adversity and finding moments of light amidst darkness.

In conclusion, “Ward B” is a captivating piece that showcases the profound impact of a smile and positive interaction on the human spirit. Ndawedwa’s clever story-telling and thematic depth make this flash fiction a gracious read that resonates with readers long after the final words have been read.

MIMI

A Poem by Catherine Mponda, Tanzania

Reviewer

Larona Tlhobogang
(Botswana)

“Mimi” by Catherine embodies the transformative journey of transcending self-imposed limitations and ingrained habits, elucidating the profound realization that growth can flourish amidst adversity. This poem exudes a distinguishing sentiment, advocating for self-compassion and the embrace of one’s inherent essence with resolute positivity.

Catherine employs metaphor to depict her personal journey. She likens herself to a seed buried within dirt, where the dirt symbolizes doubts, insecurity, and fear. However, she emerges from these self-imposed limitations like a plant breaking through the soil, showcasing resilience and growth.

The poet utilizes imagery to immerse the reader in a sensory experience when depicting the emergence from storms. Through diction, the poem unveils the impact of adversaries, faultfinders, and psychopaths, heightening the sense of terror.

“Mimi,” the title of this poem, holds profound relevance within the thematic context of self-discovery and healing. It embodies the Swahili word for “I” or “me,” symbolizing a journey of personal empowerment. It delves into the process of self-

recovery, where the poet finds strength in affirmations of her unique essence.

Rather than relying on external influences, she undergoes a transformative journey, recognizing her mind not as a destructive force but as an instrument for personal growth and triumph.

After immersing oneself in this piece, the reader emerges with a sense of determination and empowerment, mirroring the poet’s transformative journey of self-discovery and healing. The tone oscillates between vulnerability and strength, capturing emotions of self-doubt and insecurity, while simultaneously conveying an unwavering resolve to conquer obstacles.

This balance of vulnerability and resilience evokes a powerful emotional response, leaving the reader inspired to confront their own challenges with courage and authenticity.

This piece resonates deeply, urging one to embrace self-rebuilding and revival. Its message of using a smile as a therapeutic tool amidst devastation offers encouragement, making it a compelling read for anyone navigating the journey of healing.

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