

WRITERS SPACE

AFRICA

SEPTEMBER 2024 EDITION

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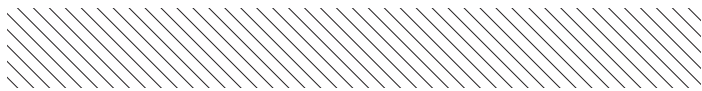
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EDITORIAL

Comfort Naana Adwoa Okyere

Guest Chief Editor

Dear reader,

Life's unpredictability ensures that challenges arise, regardless of our preparedness. While some individuals possess the resilience to withstand these unexpected trials, others struggle to cope. Paradoxically, even the most meticulous preparations can be rendered ineffective by life's inherent unpredictability, leaving us vulnerable to the whims of fate.

Throughout history, battles have been waged not only on external fronts but also within our minds and hearts, presenting a dual

threshold of internal and external struggles. The impact of these silent battles can be visibly etched on our physical selves or remain imperceptibly hidden, leaving no discernible trace. Yet, their potential to debilitate and incapacitate is undeniable.

As we collectively prioritize mental health awareness, Writers Space Africa is proud to contribute to this vital conversation through our 93rd digital literary magazine edition, themed "Silent Battles." In a befitting scope, this has been timely echoed by our

revered authors who featured in this edition. We invite you all contributors, creatives, and readers worldwide to engage with us in a powerful exploration of the human experience, distilled into a potent fusion of words. We wish you an enriching and thought-provoking reading journey. Stay safe, and we look forward to connecting with you again soon. Best regards.



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Empowering African Writers

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Theme: Identity Barriers

Writers Space Africa (WSA)
is accepting submissions
for its 95th edition
(November 2024 Edition).

We accept Children's Literature,
Creative Non-Fiction, Flash Fiction,
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Children's Literature



FRAIL

Rebecca Eduah
Ghana

By my might I cannot fight

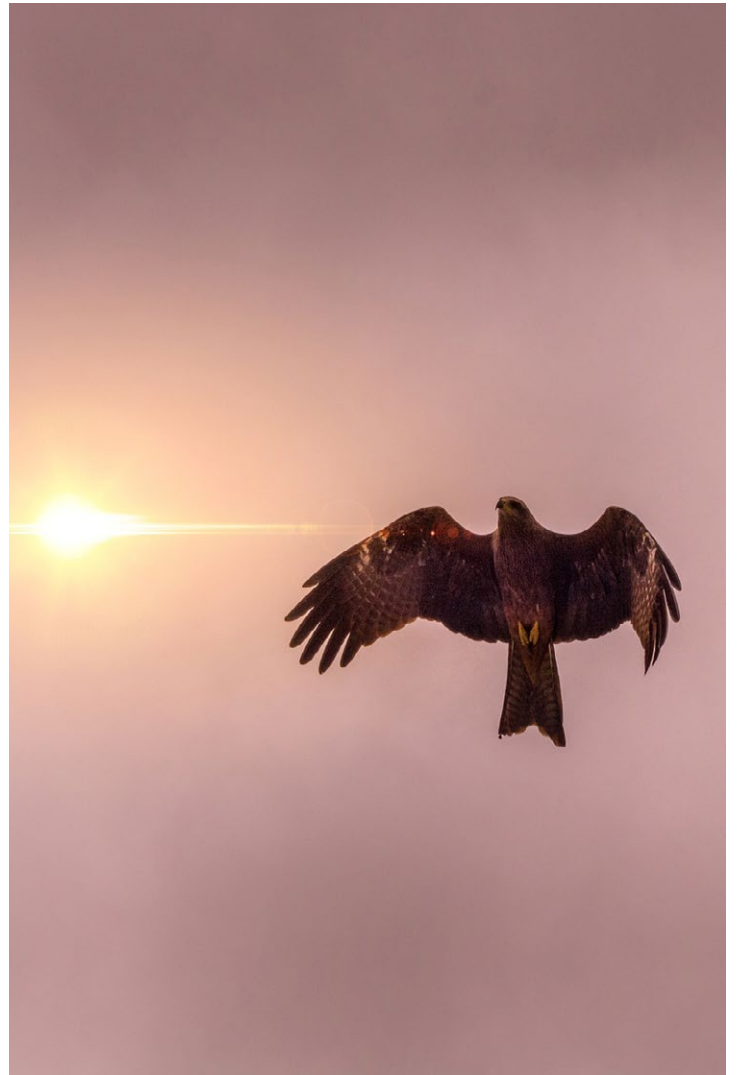
By thy might I win the fight

By my light I see the night

By thy light my night is light

Smite my fright

Put it to flight.



Creative Nonfiction





THE VISIT

Jessica Ireju
Nigeria

I sighed deeply before opening the door. I tried ignoring the persistent knocks, thinking that if I said all the right words like, “God knows best,” grief would realise I didn’t want to entertain him this time and go away. I realised I had no choice when I woke up from my troubled sleep the next day to dark silence. I couldn’t hear the sound of the TV set with whatever Nollywood drama she decided was her entertainment for the evening, or her snore next to me. That’s when the dam of tears finally burst open, and so did the door, allowing grief to enter.

He strode in confidently. This wasn’t his first time—and although the colour

of the painting on our wall had changed, he proceeded to occupy the familiar blue chair she always sat on, so that every time I looked at it, I could see that grief had brought sadness and loneliness as companions. We looked each other in the eye, and my battle with grief continued because loss re-echoes already existing heartbreaks. I realised the fight was uneven—2-1; I think it’s unfair, just like death.

I feel overpowered in my own body. It’s the way I feel when people whisper behind my back. I know they feel pity for me; they are avoiding me because of the stench of death that oozes from me.

I see it from the corner of my eye, in the way the usually cantankerous woman who sells fruits on my street is finally polite to me, the way my neighbours struggle to find the right words to say they're sorry she's not here. Even the coconut tree looks defeated, with its unkempt surroundings.

I know they want to be there for me, but they don't know how to fight grief for me. They have their own battles going on, but they are determined I won't be oppressed alone, so they come armed with weapons of love packed into food coolers. They aggressively visit for the first few weeks and continue to restock the armoury in my freezer, but then they're exhausted by their own life, battling the rising level of inflation, fighting loneliness as their children leave in the wake of Jakpa, and struggling to keep their joy even as their own faith is fleeting in the face of everyday challenges.

Of course, I forgive them; they are present, which is more than you can say for the two humans who decid-

ed they didn't want to live without each other. They had had enough dreary days of watching a government kill its own citizens and launched me into this battle with grief in the first place.

I thought everyone wanted to help, like my kind neighbour with her party jollof rice. Two years later, I can still remember the smell of the food when I opened the plate her daughter had brought for us. The pepper soup going down my throat from the other neighbour reminded me that food is a love language. I could still taste goodness in the world, and maybe I should fight to live another day so I could get an opportunity to eat the well-fried chicken again. But people aren't always kind to me. They soon remind me to grow a spine; it's in how they tell me, "You're an adult, I lost my mum at 16," as if I need to outgrow grief, erase memories, or rewrite my childhood fantasy of a dream wedding to exclude a father-daughter dance. I had the perfect song picked out - "I Loved Her First" by Heartland was supposed to

be our song. I was sure my father would get a kick out of it, given his love for country music.

So, I try to toughen up, learning to perform instead of worship and survive instead of thrive. I acknowledge God but refuse to sit with Him, even when I receive His invitation for a conversation. I tear it up and continue chatting away on my phone; I don't want to hear anything He has to say. Grief is an adversary I have misjudged in the ring, thinking all I needed to overcome him was ignoring the first jabs of pain from when the look in the doctor's eyes announced that she was dead. The news knocked me down; I didn't know that the fall would cause me to bleed internally, that my heart would be broken, and faith bruised as well.

The fight may have been over when the casket was laid in the ground, but I had begun a battle against depression, constantly warring not to lose my mind, my will to live, to not tear up every time a stranger said, "I'm sorry for your loss." Those meaningless words seemed

to empower my rage, another feeling I had to keep contained, even as I smiled in church and muttered “Amen” loudly. I didn’t want to lose my mind every time I heard my brother chuckle. I could have sworn I heard my father chuckle like he used to every day, eating his evening meal with the remote control perched precariously close to him as he tried to keep abreast with the evening news, flipping news channels. It’s been years since I heard the radio in the early hours of the morning, as my father tried to catch the day’s headlines.

I am a tough girl; I’m defiant, I will not succumb to grief, I tell myself. I fought a good fight initially, but this time it’s overpowering; grief is everywhere I look. Six months later, I give in, staring at the methylated spirit on my window, thinking it would be easy to reach for it and drink the entire bottle. I consider downing its entire content. Nobody is home, the silence crushes me, and loneliness hurts me deeply. This seems like the right moment to give up, but then my phone rings

and an acquaintance checks on me. I feel relief and postpone my suicide.

I’m not sure if I can claim victory. It’s been six years since grief first arrived, and all I can say is grief is no longer just an opponent but a sparring partner teaching me to stand up when career lows threaten to make me tremble in fear. He whispers, “How many mortuaries have you visited, Ireju? You’ve seen dead bodies.” I confront grief when another relationship ends and say, “My heart didn’t stop beating with death. Surely, Ireju, you can learn to cope with heartbreak.” When my friend loses her loved one and wails loudly, I don’t tell her to stop crying. I listen to her, and when she asks with tears in her eyes, “Why would God let this happen to me?” I hug her, offering her tissues with the same hands that nearly grabbed that methylated spirit; it’s my response to her, the miracle isn’t the resurrection of the dead she craves but the scars she will bear from her battle with grief.



SLAUGHTERED BY 'UMNDENI'

Lukholo Mazibuko
South Africa

Mingaphi iminyaka yakho?

No no no no. Why me?

I Don't Understand What
They Are Saying.

Sorry, I only speak English.

*Hayi! Ngoba? You're black and
you don't speak your mother
tongue? You should learn, my
girl!*

Just force a smile. The
stranger will leave you
alone.

Hehe, I know.

Avoiding this song was impossible. It looped on repeat. It didn't matter where I was but it would always find its way to my ears. They spoke. I stared blankly. Respond-

ing in English. Their expressions resembled disappointment.

Strangers were disappointed in me. That hurt more than when my parents were disappointed in me for trivial things. I was always left with an unexplainable emptiness. Why are they all saying the same thing? Why is it so wrong? Though I was too young to decipher their responses, one thing I could decipher was the way I felt. Extremely embarrassed. Embarrassed that I used my limited vocab such as 'Yebo' or 'Ewe' to answer a question. Embarrassed that I stood out like a sore thumb. But I mean imagine meet-

ing a South African black child who could not speak her mother tongue. Absurd right?

In our cultures, it is emphasised that parents make a concerted effort to instil proficiency in their mother tongues in their homes. However, my parents were heavily engaged in work during my babbling days. They worked long hours which resulted in night stays at creches and less contact with them. Less time for them to speak to me in isiXhosa and isiZulu and more time for me to attach to the English-speaking caregivers. As a child, visiting extended family was where I felt most isolated. I would watch my parents boisterously greet my cousins, aunties, and uncles in elegant rolls and snaps of their tongues. The buzz of isiZulu swimming around the room while I sat there clueless as to what was going on. Amused laughs emerged when I stuttered my way through a sentence; my broken language a humorous spectacle to them. I felt humiliated that my family members would have to speak English to me when-

ever we visited. It shouldn't have had to be that way. I knew that.

There is a very strict, unspoken criteria for what makes someone part of a certain culture, so lacking in essential components made me insecure whenever I would attempt to inhabit space as a 'supposed' black South African. So much culture is baked into a language, that a lot of my cultural literacy and connection became fragmented, and just out of reach. Naturally, I strayed away from my African identity. I felt rejected by my culture, so I only thought it fair to reject it back. So, I threw myself into English, fostering a love for reading and writing which positively shaped me into the person I am today.

Growing up in predominantly English-speaking private schools also aided in this affair. Being the only black child in a room of 30 white students made it easy for me to find comfort in them. We shared something in common (English) thus I grew closer to them and adopted their mannerisms, their music, their dialect

but, this only created more problems than solved. I was nicknamed 'Coco' short for Coconut. Black on the outside but white on the inside. Phrases arose like, "You're so articulate, public speaking would be your forte", my English teacher, Mrs Maclaran would praise. I unknowingly fell victim to projected racial microaggressions by white people in my school. "I don't see colour when we're together", my white best friend ignorantly once told me. Unfortunately, I was too blinded to see offence in those notions. I let it define my identity and felt it was all I was limited to.

The second time my identity was brought into question was in grade 8 when more black students enrolled in my school. I could not tell whether it was a relief or not. Should I join their circle or stay put? But like a magnet, I joined their circle. A circle that provided the acceptance I longed for. I had learnt not to be ashamed of my incapability to speak. "It's not the end of the world Lukholo, we'll teach you isiXhosa". They would translate when I was uncertain. I was en-



couraged to listen to their conversations and break down certain words in order to understand. Qhom and Amapiano flooded my playlists. My vocabulary blossomed and my pride was born. There was an excitement in learning about my culture, being brought into a different world. There was an excitement knowing I was becoming the person I was predestined to be. There was excitement in finally belonging. If approached, I took no shame in admitting I was fluent in English, knowing that one day I would become proficient. I participated in Heritage Days with intent, not just for show. I made an

effort to change my narrative.

That was how I learned, coped. It's still what I do. Today, I acknowledge my 'Africanacity'. I introduce myself as Lukholo Vuyiswa Mazibuko, not Coco, who unashamedly understands isiXhosa or isiZulu more than she can speak. I want to raise my voice. Through writing, I share my story and hopefully, it reaches black children who too feel as lost as I felt. Who had no one to turn to when they felt ambushed by clicks and plosives of their native language. I want black parents who are raising their children without their mother tongue to understand the

power of belonging and the importance of alleviating division within their own culture groups. That a person who feels accepted on their own is a person who will grow up with psychological safety and will be able to stand up against those who are against them with the power of their language on their side.

—

Umdeni (isiZulu) - family

Ewe (isiXhosa) - yes

Yebo (isiZulu) - yes

LETTER DATED FOR WHEN **YOU WILL NEED IT**

Herman Owuor
Kenya

Dear You,

A warrior in an ongoing battle, a spectator watching a struggle, or a veteran of one, does the battle ever stop? Ooh, if only we'd write about the ongoing wars. The clanking of ideas, beliefs, and experiences is so loud that it's ironic how it is the most silent battle. Does it feel like watching a movie on mute with subtitles? When someone can be right there but cannot follow unless they sit down and pay close attention, then the captions get louder. How silent are they when my neighbor next door is also down with it, and so is the food vendor across the street? If it were an infection, it'd be the big-

gest epidemic, or maybe it is. Only, it is not treated with the urgency it muffled screams for, and that could be because while it does drop bodies like the others, it is not death at that instance but the tight embrace of a constrictor, slowly suffocating the life out of its victims.

Some warriors fight tooth and nail to slither out of the grip, vets those, and a key group I would like to begin by appreciating for putting in the work and doing what had to be done to win their battles. Like all survivors of fighting, your incredible war stories could be what navigates a naïve captain in stormy waters, and it could be the band-aid that patches

up this private who believes he is alone and cannot make it back up. It is your word that brings this back life into this shadowy human. The fact that you won this battle, regardless of whatever, for each battle is custom, means that it is indeed beatable, rekindles hope, and delivers that igniting spark. I implore you to be one more of those people you wished you had when you were in need, to this soldier who needs one now. Getting back on your feet is a testament to resilience. Your courage in slaying these unseen dragons inspires hope and solidarity. Your stories, if told, will illuminate paths through adversity like a beacon of understanding and reassurance.

To those active in battle, your struggles are validated and understood. To you, I send a piece of my heart. With you, I plead that help can only come when you call for backup, speak out, and reach out. Dragon slayers could be meters away, and they are willing to lend a hand, ear, or shoulder to lean on; you have to send the flare. Silence could be another

reason it is called silent, for it only exists when you want to face it "like a man." I do not underestimate your capabilities, officer, and you could be the finest soldier to grace these battlefields but remember the scene from *Blacklist* when Reddington and Dembe were pinned down by a hit squad, getting overpowered? They sent out an SOS, hoping to find help; meanwhile, gun in hand, the mighty Red even armed himself with a duck whistle. It may not have helped, but it is better safe. Take our days on the equator, where we get 12 hours of sun daily and the moon in equal measure. So should life be, it can't be sunny all day, else, the beauty of the night sky wouldn't be seen, a highs and lows kind of balance.

We humanly love the sunny part of our days and frown during the latter, the prime setting for a silent battle. So many moons are out there, not pleased that they aren't bright like the sun or warm enough. Has the sun or moon ever changed because someone did not like it? Don't you improvise at night

to see and walk with umbrellas on scorching sunny days? Dear moon with phases that gradually change, one time, the luminous full moon, another, the almost invisible new moon, the phase you are showing is just a mere reflection of where you are from the sun. This battle you are in, soldier, has been won by several vets, and so can you. That little missing piece of the puzzle could have skirted beside your neighbor's shoe, and if you ask him to help you find it, he will move his feet, and there it'll be. For most veterans, help came from a nearby ally or even a perceived foe who did not seem like they would have understood the turmoil inside those heads. To each of those straws, grasp for from under there; you wouldn't distinguish the differences, and one of them may just be what you need.

Unfortunately, in most battles, there are KIAs, the fallen ones. For energy cannot be destroyed, I watch my continuing shows with subtitles so you can follow every blunt stub to the earth for you and those who went

before you. I particularly resonate with this group, for growing up, I watched as two of my uncles, T and G, so full of life yet oblivious to us, were on the verge of losing some battles. Their stories, textbook definitions of silent battles for even after their demise, and people tied piecing together the puzzles, all they could come up with were mere speculations as to what may have been happening all this time: Uncle T, a cheerful spirit who taught me how to milk and scale trees. In my great grandparents' home, there existed a live fence, a ring of fruit trees under which he would put a wheelbarrow as a collection basin, and into it came loquat, jamun, mangoes, and avocados, and we were a happy lot. He smoked his pipe until one day, he lost a battle we were oblivious to, and that is when the unmute button was hit. So was Uncle G, a happy scientist so clever he taught high school science without ever carrying a textbook to class. Despite being a strict disciplinarian, he was very generous. He looooved his liquor as well.

Also, fish drunk, his most marine-like friend, Fish, always brought him home. One day, though, whatever he was drinking to keep at bay caught up with him and became the liquor; neighbors found him days later. The human body was too intoxicated to keep his spirit, and silently, he left. I could not help but wonder whatever it was, but again, I was still a decade from knowing that in every human mind, a battle of its kind takes place, each in its setting, with characters and angles. They are part of a statistic, the ones we lost, those whose stories are rarely talked about, just like the battles they succumbed to were never talked about.

To everyone, your empathy and humanity could be the lifeline a drowning man clutches onto. Be kind, listen, and do not judge. I hope for a day when mental wellness will not only be a worldwide conversation but also when resources, infrastructure, and personnel will be accessible to the general population without costing an arm and leg and the entire treatment process less traumatic.

A hug for you all.

Warmest regards,

Herman Owuor.



I DO NOT PITY YOU

Arike Priscilla
Nigeria

Dear Amara, at the end of last year, I received the teary email you sent me, which I read and reread until my heart wept. Some situations are humorous in themselves. It is how you run to someone for consolation and they end up crying with you.

I swear to you, Amara, after I read that email, I wept for myself, and are we not all humans, was it not that you wrote to me so you could be the subject of pity?

It's been a year now since I received your rants that the world isn't for people like you, people like us, Amara. I saw in your mail that you wish to vanish, and for the first time, I am thankful that wishes are not horses, for

if they were, even I would have ridden.

You said that your problems have suppressed you and I smirked. You had spent nearly three years fighting, fighting for a cause. A very bitter experience had led to it in the first place and in your words you said I would judge you, and that I would not know why you chose him. This decision has been less difficult for me by the sure knowledge that in our hard days, we escape from our dignity and sanity.

During my hard days, I have been comforted by tales of those whose crosses were heavier than mine. There has been no mental difference between me and them



and between them and me.

I spoke to you earlier about the grant I got, about how I immeasurably became the happiest person. Was it not that the organization credited me? That the next week diabetes visited my husband. That the other doctor said it was kidney failure. But we must not. We did not intend to allow those sluggish facts to blind us to fear.

But here is another question I have been asking myself; why exactly did I use

that money to treat my husband's lung disease, what happened to asking people for help? I know some will say with great sincerity, 'What use is wealth without health?' Maybe so, but it is for them to submit the proof that using that money wasn't foolishness.

So far it is hard to be convinced that I am wise.

But yes, time does heal and things do get better as you get older. After all, the more mistakes you've made, the

less likely you'd come up with new ones.

Amara, as long as you look back and see where you went wrong, you realize that there is little else you need to do. I am getting older too but not any wiser particularly. Once I accepted this some years back, I have been more forgiving and kinder towards myself and others.

There is another point: I have not said that I deeply understand your situation, but I do sympathize with you Amara.

I would say that there are two problems outstanding above all others in this world: the problem of foolishness and the problem of poverty; the foolishness that traps us and poverty that plagues us.

My son's wife had been sick two years into their marriage. This sickness followed the month after I sold my car to start a business since my children were nothing to thank God for financially. It was how my son had called me to borrow money for an urgent surgery, as if he knew I had money. But there was the importance of learning from experience. There was nothing I could have said to him.

'I do not have money Ebuka.'
Did I? There is another thing about lying, the pinch of it that is truth.

At long last, Ebuka's wife died just before the church approved all protocols to send in money for the surgery. I wanted to believe that this kind of death was destined, that my money couldn't have prevented it.

Amara, can you see now

that if foolishness were measured, I would be a hero on the list? I wanted to learn from my mistakes. This was a thing I have had to judge entirely for myself. I have for ten years tried to kill my guilt. But you must believe when I tell you I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of blaming myself, for if I did, I wouldn't be here.

I know that you say your problems are immeasurable, that the rich man you married in your late thirties lied to you. That he was living with cancer and he lived only two years after your marriage. I know that you blame yourself.

That was your own mistake, Amara. But what happened to the orphanages? I do not think it would be wise to leave all that wealth he has left you alone in sorrows. Do you know that ninety percent of orphanages do not have dogs in their compound? You could walk in at any time. What makes you a mother, Amara?

You still have a pen. I do not. I cannot rewrite my story to

bring back my son's wife, or apply for any more grants, or quench the gigantic fire that started from the shop beside mine.

But you, you still have the pen, do not let ageing take it from you.

...and I do not pity you Amara, I envy you, for you are sugar, surrounded by ants of possibilities.



A SILENT BATTLE CALLED GRIEF

Catherine Kuria
Kenya

We all have a set of memories that are particularly painful to tap into. We box them up and push them behind our closets simply because they are too painful to think of, let alone narrate. The events that occurred on February 13th 2022 are those types of memories.

At around 10 pm on February the 13th, my only sibling—my older brother, was attacked by an unknown person or people and left unconscious by the roadside. I was ignorant of this fact since I was cosying up for a calm weekend at my then boyfriend's house where I had resorted to staying for a while. However, on February 14th before dawn (around 5 a.m.) my phone rang and I was alarmed at who would be calling at

that hour. When I saw my mother's name pop up, I knew it was an emergency of some sort, but the moment I picked up the phone, my heart shattered.

I could tell from her raspy voice and muffled sobs that it was critical, and I rushed to the hospital he'd been taken when the slightest amount of light crept in signifying the beginning of a new day. The journey to the hospital was excruciating. I kept thinking, "Please, please Lord, let him be okay."

Immediately after my arrival, he had to be transferred from the level 4 hospital he was at to a level 5 hospital that was well-equipped to deal with his critical condition. His head had been hit by a blunt object and he

was found unconscious with blood oozing from his mouth by a passerby who happened to know him and my mother, being a small village and all.

The next few days until February 17th were a blur. We were in and out of the hospital. Commuting from home to the hospital and dealing with well-wishing inquisitive guests, all while our hospital bill spiralled. The hospital kept delaying an MRI scan which was supposed to assess the damage and which they had specifically requested we pay for. We had scavenged the funds for it. All along my brother remained unconscious. I remember the beeping machines and my very own blood looking like a hospital scene from a movie. It was agonizing. The tubes in his mouth and nose, a drip for feeding and administering medicine; this was something I never thought I would witness, especially when he was only 23.

There are only a few times you get to see your mother vulnerable, weak, frail, and defeated. My first time was

on the 14th when I arrived at the hospital, the second was on February 17th when my brother gave up the fight. I wish there was a way I could summon the words to describe what losing my only sibling felt like, but there is none. Grief is a dark pit and it is only those who have ever sunk in it that can comprehend how I must have felt. Loss is a silent tortuous battle, a thief that steals your very air.

Right before my brother was beaten to death, I believe the universe had tried to warn me. I had felt a deep longing for him. I missed him and had planned to spend more time with him later, but I didn't heed the warning. I did not, and I have always felt like if I had chosen him over staying at my boyfriend's, maybe, just maybe, I would have changed the trajectory of that event. I was at war with myself, with the universe, with those goons who had robbed me of my childhood companion. I was at a silent war with the corrupt law system that did not care to provide justice for the poor. We couldn't afford a

lawyer, or to bribe the police to look into our case so we didn't matter. I was at war with those doctors who had taken our money but never conducted that MRI. They had failed us. They could have done more but we were just peasants and not in the private wing of that damn hospital.

We laid him to rest, and we began to grieve. Out of all the misfortunes that life can afford, I'm convinced that none is crueller than the death of the ones who keep you whole; the loss of a young promising future taken unjustly. For a whole year I battled insomnia, I was hysterical, I wanted to numb the pain. I felt like I had played a part in this cruel joke, I had failed to keep the one person I would grow old with in my life. Siblings are constants in our lives, and I had been robbed of mine. Two years from then it's been a silent battle I'm still fighting. I am still wounded but I have learnt to hide and live with my scars, and whatever yours are, I deeply empathize with you.



Flash Fiction



HOME ALONE

Christiana Agboni
Nigeria

I have a blazing smile, and a penetrating gaze.

When we were young, my brother liked using some words in his sentences.

We could be having a reason to celebrate and he would go, "I hope this will not turn out to be a shattered, scattered, battered and tattered memory." I am sure he just loved how they sounded on his tongue.

Mama would scold him, and he would say, "Just be patient, you will see." And I will look at him, seeing, and waiting.

It has been 10 years, my brother is now a prophet ordained in my heart. This is me saying I am living his words.

"Do you know how the road to heaven looks like?" My sister asked, as I gently covered the sticklike looking things that used to be her legs. I shook my head.

"It is lined with the blood, and the sweat of

those who can endure."

I do not think to tell her, that her logic was skewed. Not when we can both see that the blood and sweat of my family lined the front street of heaven, that the only enduring thing even here and there is the streets. And her own enduring, yet fading breath.

Later, I comfort people, exhorting them with what I do or even know to believe anymore, quoting verses, raising hymns, while the poison in my body grows, and spread. This poison that has made a martyr of me. The streets are patiently waiting for me now.

They say I am a wonder. They say my home is quiet and still, but no one talks about my heart that is shattered, battered, scattered, and tattered, they don't see it. What they see will always be the only weapons I have; a blazing smile, and a penetrating gaze.



DIARY OF A MIRROR

Fatima Hassan
Nigeria

It is day three hundred and sixty five of being a thing that hurts in the life of the one person I love. Fernando Pessoa was right when he said: the inventor of the mirror poisoned the human heart. My existence is contradictory against nature, against what was meant to be.

I believe human beings were not, in the first place, supposed to see their reflection in something as clear and convenient as me. They were supposed to see themselves in art, inside their mother's eyes, in the smile of their lover, and in the embrace of a friend. They were supposed to see themselves in the paintings they hung on their wall, drawn by the one who loves them the most.

But I exist, and what is done is done. While it is no intention of mine to be the thing that hurts, it seems to be the only thing I'm good at. It first happened almost a year ago, I remember that day more than any other. She rushed into her room, still in her school uni-

form, and headed straight to where I was hanged.

I thought it was unusual, the first thing she normally did was to collapse on her bed while trying to wiggle her shoes off her feet. But that day, she gazed into me and her face morphed into confusion. "Are my eyes bulgy?" She muttered, still staring.

It wasn't a question that was directed at me, or anybody at all, I knew she was asking herself, but I wished so badly that I had the ability to speak. If I could, I would have told her how beautiful her eyes were. I'm not a living thing, but I swear whenever she stares at me it feels like she's gazing into a soul that I don't have.

Since I couldn't say a word, I watched as she got out of her school uniform and slept off. The next morning, she didn't smile at me, and her beautiful brown eyes didn't light up. I blame myself, I've always blamed myself.



THE ANT CANNOT **BE RESCUED**

Linda Temienor-Vincent
Nigeria

It crashed on its back, its legs up and wriggling. I found myself envious of its natural voluptuous gaster—my body was eager to fill out in the right places—as it twisted its thin waist this way and that way, struggling to get back on its feet.

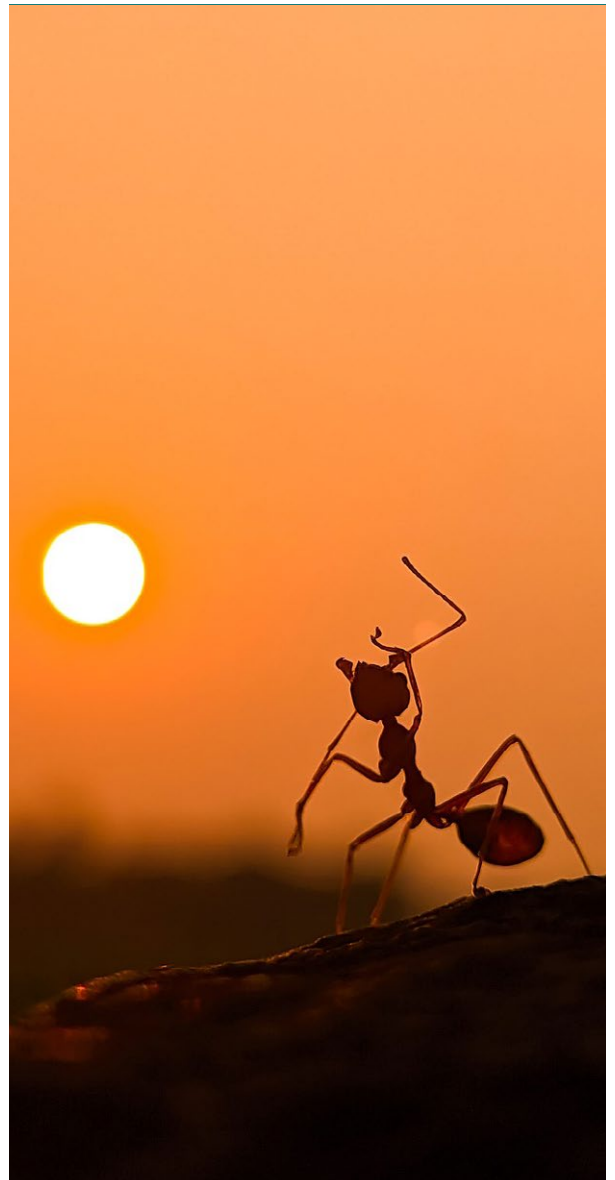
In all its brown glory, it displayed its athletic strength, making numerous attempts to climb the base of the gleaming toilet bowl.

Again, it tumbled; again, it tried.

Reaching out to help, I shoved a paper underneath and lifted it to the safety of the potted sansevieria labyrinth by the window. There, it could run through the web-like underground roots and glide on its abundant, sword-shaped leaves if it got tired of crawling at any time.

My finger pressed against the flapper, and water rushed excitedly from the rim, showering away my dark urine. Leaning against the cold tiled walls, I flexed my neck and inhaled, worrying about improving my liquid intake.

Slumped over with random thoughts, I noticed little ripples and squelching feet, and I watched as this creature relentlessly performed a skill not assigned by nature—swimming.



Creative
SPOTLIGHT

COMFORT NAANA ADWOA OKYERE





In this edition, Liza Chuma Akunyili speaks with Comfort Naana Adwoa Okyere, a passionate creative and guest Chief Editor of the Writers Space Africa (WSA) Magazine for the September edition. Comfort discusses her journey as a writer, her love for poetry, and her recent accomplishment as a participant in the 2024 Aspire Leaders Program. She reflects on the transformative power of writing, emphasising its role in expressing her inner self and connecting with others.

Liza: Hi Naana, I am so excited to get this opportunity to sit with you. Thank you for the work you are doing with young leaders and congratulations on finishing the 2024 Aspire Leaders Program

Naana: Thank you very much Liza. I am very much excited about today's conversation.

Liza: What came to mind when you first heard you will be the spotlight of the 93rd issue of the WSA Magazine?

Naana: I felt a mix of emotions- joy, surprise and gratitude. I was so overwhelmed with excitement. I was happy because finally a great audience would be able to

learn more about my creative journey.

Liza: Hahaha, Ma'am, you have introduced yourself as a powerful master of Ceremonies during the African Writers Conference, 2023 and then gone on to becoming the Chief Editor of this magazine. It is I who is grateful and excited to get the opportunity.

Naana: That's wonderful. I'm very much excited.

Liza: Now that we are here, if this was your one shot to sell yourself as a creative, what would you say about yourself?

Naana: As a creative, I love to explore the dynamic fusion of imagination and pas-

sion. I always make an effort to craft unique pieces with a keen eye for details and captivating ideas.

Most of my writings help me to express my inner self better.

I love the transformative power of writing, crafting worlds and breathing life into characters. Writing connects me with others, touching hearts and sparking meaningful conversations. It challenges me to learn and grow, exploring new subjects and refining my craft. Writing is my passion, sanctuary, and gift to the world. I'm grateful for every moment I spend with words.

Liza: ooh! I love it! What is

your favourite genre and why?

Naana: Poetry is my favourite.

Poetry is my favorite genre because it's a symphony of words, evoking emotions and thoughts with precision and beauty. It's a condensed yet powerful form of expression, distilling complex feelings into few, well-chosen words. Poetry's rhythm and meter create a musical quality, making it a joy to read aloud. Its imagery and metaphorical language paint vivid pictures in the mind. Poetry's brevity belies its depth, inviting reflection and contemplation. It's a genre that both inspires and challenges me, making it a lifelong passion.

Liza: *Yes! From one poet to another, you have delivered poetic justice with that response. Hahahaha!!! If you could try out another genre of writing, what would it be*

and why would you try?

Naana: Flash fiction! Yes, it would be flash fiction because it is a fascinating genre that requires concise and evocative storytelling. Flash fiction typically involves:

1. Brevity: Stories are extremely short, usually under 1,000 words, and often limited to just a few sentences.
2. Implied narrative: Suggesting a larger story or world beyond the brief text.
3. Focus on essence: Distilling the core elements of a narrative into a tiny, potent package.
4. Experimentation: Pushing boundaries of language, structure, and style.
5. Impact: Aiming for a strong emotional resonance or surprise.



Performing MC duties at the 2023 African Writers Conference held in Accra, Ghana

Flash fiction also challenges writers to:

1. Edit ruthlessly: Cut out some 'unnecessary' words and focus on the essential.
2. Use suggestion: Imply character, setting and plot rather than spelling it out.
3. Create a snapshot: Capture a moment or image that speaks volumes.
4. Play with language: Use concise, evocative prose to convey complex ideas.

Flash fiction is an exciting genre that de-

mands precision, creativity, and skill. It's an excellent way to hone writing skills, experiment with new ideas, and captivate readers with brief, powerful stories.

Liza: Whoosh! This is beautiful! I love how you swiftly taught us about it. Hahah

What are the top five lessons you have learned from writing consistently over the last five years?

Naana: Well, Liza I have learnt a lot of exciting things from writing all these years



On her graduation day, 27th January 2024 at the University of Ghana.

First of all, *Discipline breeds creativity*: Showing up to write every day, even when inspiration is scarce, has taught me that discipline is essential to unlocking creativity.

Also, I believe Writing is rewriting*: I've learned that good writing is often the result of rigorous editing and revision. It's okay to write badly at first, as long as you're willing to refine your work.

For me, authenticity resonates and it is very essential. Writing from a place of honesty and vulnerability has helped me connect with readers and build a loyal audience.

And then, consistency trumps perfection. Regular writing has taught me that it's better to publish something imperfect but complete than to wait for perfection that never comes.

Finally, Growth happens outside comfort zones*: Pushing myself to try new styles, genres, and topics has helped me grow as a writer and discover new strengths and passions.

These lessons have been invaluable in my writing journey, and I continue to learn and evolve as a writer.

Liza: *how were you able to combine schooling with creative writing?*

Naana: I balanced schooling with creative writing by:

- Setting aside dedicated time for writing, even if just 15-30 minutes daily

- Using breaks between classes or assignments to jot down ideas or write snippets

- Incorporating writing into school projects, like essays or presentations

- Prioritizing tasks and managing time effectively to meet deadlines

- Finding inspiration in coursework and applying it to creative writing

- I also got into positions that allowed do lots of writing to enable me develop my craft holistically.

This allowed me to nurture my passion for writing while still excelling academically without feeding one more than the other.

Liza: *These tips feel like the making of a writer's guide to greatness!*

Which three books or three authors made the most mark on you as a writer?

Naana: Wow! This is a very fantastic question. Let me begin with Toni Morrison. I admire her style of lyrical prose and exploration of theme like trauma and identity. Another author who has the best mark in my life as a writer is Danielle Steel. I love how she is able to tackle real life issues and also amplify the strength and abilities of her female characters especially in "No Greater Love". Maya Angelou is the third author. She has made me understand that writing is a great tool for healing and self-discovery.

Liza: *Those women are phenomenal! Which*



At the University of Ghana Parliament House Alumni Connect Dialogue 2024
as the erstwhile First Deputy Speaker

book did you read and wish you authored and why that book?

Naana: “No Greater Love” by Danielle Steel. I wish I had authored this particular book because I really learnt a lot from it. Looking at how Edwina Winfield had to stand up and care for her siblings after tragedy struck their family on the Titanic, it shows how unpredictable life can be sometimes. In a dinner with your family and few seconds later their lives flash before your eyes. Quite sorrowful but very captivating.

Liza: *If you could give a piece of advice to*

the African Union, what would be your recommendation to improve literacy skills on the continent?

Naana: To begin with, investing a lot into the various mother tongues across the continent will go a long way to improve literacy skills to make learning more convenient and accessible. Also, leveraging on technology to reach remote areas and providing interactive learning tools. I would also like to recommend to the African Union to also invest in more training programs for our teachers and facilitators to improve their instructional skills and confidence.

Liza: Mother tongue! That's a conversation we need to have! Imagine more creative books in our mother tongue, the flow and sheer beauty possible! I've loved having you here today, Naana.

Any final lessons you will like to give to a young writer who is reading your interview and hoping to grow up in the creative space?

Naana: Well, I have a lot to tell the young writer who would see this spectacular interview.

To a young writer, I'd say:

1. Write from the heart: Share your unique voice, experiences, and perspectives.
2. Read widely: Devour books, genres, and authors to broaden your understanding of storytelling.
3. Practice consistently: Make writing a habit, even if it's just a few sentences daily.
4. Embrace feedback: Learn from constructive criticism to refine your craft.
5. Be patient: Writing is a journey; don't rush the process.
6. Stay curious: Explore new ideas, themes, and styles to stay inspired.
7. Join a writing community: Connect with fellow writers for support, motivation, and growth.
8. Celebrate small wins: Acknowledge your progress, no matter how small.

9. Persevere: Overcome self-doubt, rejections, and fears to keep creating.

10. Keep learning: Attend workshops, webinars, and conferences to hone your skills.

Remember, writing is a lifelong journey. Enjoy the process, stay true to yourself, and keep writing!

Liza: Thank you, Naana, this was worth every minute invested.



A visit to the House of Parliament, Ghana in 2022 as the Majority Chief Whip of the University of Ghana Parliament House.



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





AN ODE TO SATAO

Liz Mwangi
Kenya

Edged, strong, and aged
They touched the ground.
A source of my wisdom
And the ability to nourish myself.

They first saw me with the herd grazing about
Plans set in motion, days of tracking and evading
Even I couldn't escape them
It happened in the evening, in the pitch dark, you see
I only heard the shots,
Didn't see or hear them pry upon me
Then more shots, and I crumbled to the ground

They hacked and they hacked
"Usibakishe kitu" I heard them say
So deeper and deeper they hacked
Took what they prized most. And then fled
A piece of me cost my life
Sold and turned into
A must-have. A need-have. A should-have

Yet there I lay
A giant that once roamed this land
Reduced to a meaningless speck
All with the mere excuse "to meet the growing demand".



Photo Courtesy of Tsavo Trust

*At his death, Satao was the largest tusker known to roam the earth. He was killed in 2014 by poachers at the Tsavo East National Park in Kenya

TO THE GIRL IN **THE MIRROR**

**Bee Chikapa
Malawi**

Chin up princess or the crown slips
Tuck away the shames, shambles and shackles
Keep a bronze lock on those closet skeletons
Rehearse that sweet smile till it looks frank
Conceal those scars, powder those tear stains
Three deep breaths in. Release. Repeat
We're not screaming into the pillow tonight
Or they'll push you off the pedestal they put you on
They say problem shared is half-solved
Papers and pens don't rattle
Write those you're too perfect to confess
Laugh the loudest or they'll know you're a mess
Their ignorance is our bliss
Chin up princess or the mask slips

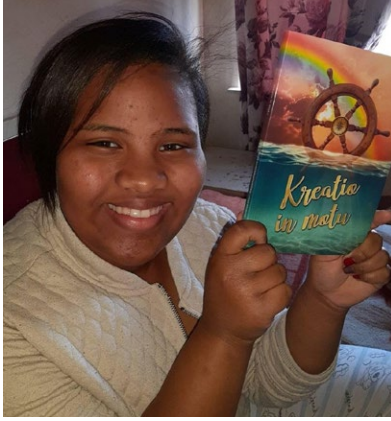


FIFTY DOLLARS FOR A NIGHT

Akuei M. Adol
South Sudan

...God, oh dear God!
Is this the worth of my soul,
To trade my dignity for a handful of bills?

Each night, I paint my lips with lies,
Walk cold streets with a mask on my face,
Inside, I crumble, my soul in decay,
Haunted by whispers of my darkest hour.
I walk the line between pleasure and pain,
Struggling to break free from chains I chose,
To auction my body to sustain life.
I am now a broken doll, a puppet on a string,
Dancing to the tune of men's lustful demands.
My spirit crushed beneath the weight of sin,
Fighting in s-i-l-e-n-c-e with demons within.
Each transaction leaves a scar,
Emptiness consumes me, a hunger that won't abate.
I try to drown it with each client I satiate,
But the shame remains, a stain that won't wash away.
And I wonder...God, oh God!
How long can I endure this endless battle in the night?
Will I ever find the dawn to reclaim my light?



A GARDENER OF **GUARDED AGONY**

Carmi Philander
South Africa

My pillow is a sympathetic flower
I soak its trustworthy roots in starlit tears
Drowning the day's final hours
In the pain I've harvested throughout the year

Its cotton tongue licks the sorrows from my eyes
I allow it to savor the salt on my cheeks
To cradle the darkest corners of my mind
my heart that's raged inside me for weeks

I let the charred sky eavesdrop on my unremitting agony
Whispering secrets about my scars and fears
As if the endless beautiful galaxy
Has a pair of unoccupied ears

My bruises and blood spill into the moonlight
Only to be swept aside by the indifference of dawn
My misery always craves an unfair fight
So, when the door is locked, my sword is drawn

There is a battleground in my ribcage;
A massacre in my mind
But I wipe the anguish from my face
And slip on a practiced smile

A zipper clenches my mouth shut with its tenacious fist
Fusing together my stubborn silver teeth
To lock all my troubles behind stagnant lips
Because I'd rather suffer in silence than dare to ever speak



SILENT BATTLES

Solomon Ibrahim
Nigeria

In hidden wars, we fight alone
Battles rage, though none may know
The scars we bear, the tears we've cried
The weight of secrets, we cannot deny

The masks we wear, the smiles we fake
Conceal the pain, the hearts that ache
The silent struggles, the endless nights
The fears we face, the darkest lights

But still we rise, we find our strength
In every breath, a new length
We learn to heal, to mend the tears
To find our voice, to calm our fears

For in the silence, we find our might
A resilience, a will to fight
So let us stand, let our hearts be heard
For in the silence, we are not alone, we are not blurred.



FOREVER MORE

Abdullatif Khalid
Uganda

Broken triads ring out
Into the quiet night,
Soft words fall deaf
dry tears fight
Vacant emotions!

Nothing is risked
So nothing is lost
In silent scuffles!
But oooh! The cost
Oh god! The cost.

Girl I can see
The light in your eyes
That pierces the dark
And my fragile guise
If only you knew
Smile again baby
'cause soon it'll be dawning
I'll hold your hand
'Till the dark is gone
forever more.



A HEAVY SOUL

Kaaria Mugambi
Kenya

So what if I pray?
Will He hear me when I call?
What would I even say?
Will he pick me up if I fall?

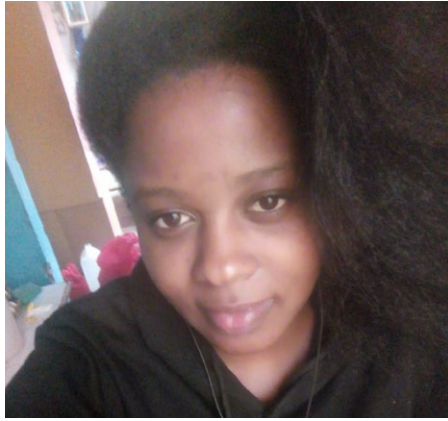
Sometimes I rue the day
I claimed to be having a ball
Clueless of the price to pay
Climbing a mountain way too tall

The highs were great
But boy! The drop left a mark
I couldn't bear the weight
All the lights suddenly went dark

Friends turned to foes
A tale as old as time
I took a huge blow
That left a taste of bitter lime

Is there really a way out?
I'm just a man clutching on straws
My mind is filled with doubt
I'm a victim of life's sharp claws

I pick myself up and fake a smile
Surely, this can't be the only way
To find an answer, I'd walk a mile
But for now, I guess I'll just pray.



OUR COMFORT **THEIR SUFFERING?**

Hannah Njung'e
Kenya

We are caged,
In the privilege we call home
A neat place, peaceful,
Overlooking suffering.

They are caged
In the violence they call home
At the hands of our privilege
They suffer so we benefit.

It's in the cobalt we use,
The copper, the minerals
It's in the diamonds,
Embedded deep in the ruby's

So we can show up,
So we can show out
Our peaceful luxurious lives
Driving their suffering ones



HASTILY PUT

Malindi Matladi
South Africa

I came out with the Truth
To the Truth and
All hands picked up stones,
I come out to the Truth
With the Truth and
Everybody riots,
Easier if you knew Who the enemy was!

It's sad... Flesh of My Flesh
They got You Hooked!
Shared heritage into flames,
Black and blue; They got You lured!
Tangled and seduced by
The siren song of control!

You bury your own
To look good in the eyes of another
To look good in the eyes of those
Who bury You
To look good in the eyes of their own

Cannot unblend fallen
To risen apartheid!
Cannot differentiate, the 'Now from Then'
Tell me, can you not see?
We got out just to go in
Apologies aside!
Only told the truth everybody else was thinking.



WHISPERS OF THE SOUL

Saidou Anna Ibn Ahmad
The Gambia

In the stillness of the night,
Shadows dance, unseen by light.
Battles rage, a silent plight,
Consuming hearts, a hidden blight.

Emotions swirl, a tempestuous sea,
Thoughts surge, a cacophony.
Yet outward calm, a masquerade be,
Concealing the turmoil within, a mystery.

Scars unseen, a private war,
Wounds that weigh, forevermore.
Resilience forged, a silent roar,
Strength found, in the depths of the core.

Though the world may never know,
The silent battles we often sow.
Our spirits rise, like embers aglow,
Unbreakable, our souls overflow.

For in the darkness, we find our light,
Emerging stronger, through the fight.
This poem, a testament to our might,
“Whispers of the Soul,” a guiding light.

Short Stories





SILENCE OF THE NIGHT

Joseph Ikhenoba
Nigeria



I heard the hooting of a barn owl on my thatched roof this morning. People said seeing an owl in the morning was a bad omen. The sky was tar black, blotting out the old blue ambiance. At a distance, the howling wind rustled trees, waving the simmering

rivers like a possessed witch. The rain didn't exude from their chains as fast as a hardened criminal. It snapped and crackled through tiny apertures in Heaven's gate, loosening itself in miasmatic carnage upon the wretched earth.

"MAMA DIED YESTERDAY, COME HOME." I received the telegram from a postal worker after the dark skies had finished spurning their red petals of blood.

"Another blackout."

My eyes widened, my heart thundered as I stared at the brown paper with a crumpled face. Three days ago, I lost my sales agent job, and things were hard in the country. No job was forthcoming.

I couldn't sleep that night. My heart was heavy, and a barrage of missiles was firing in my brain. I tried to get my mind off it, but the sun kept flogging my brain with its furnaces.

I kept my silent arrows to my chest, even though I knew they were firing in all directions. Mother said brave men conquer winter to reach summer's summit.

At the lonely silence of the night, the hooting of vultures, the gurgling croaks of ravens, and the rambling caws of crows on hemlock trees shocked and possessed my existence.

The next morning, I rushed to Agofure Park on Lagos

Island to catch the first bus. I went to the ticket office, attended to by an ebony, svelte lady. On a golden moon, I would have laid my cards on the table, but the lilies sprouting from my bleeding heart blinded me.

"Why is all this happening to me? I have lost my job and mother. Who do I cry for? No friends, no family. My father's brother does not care if I exist. They confiscated my late father's land when mother refused a levirate marriage. As for my friends, they vanished when the money stopped coming. In those days when the sun was still shining, they flocked to my house like ants attracted to a wax of honey. The world favors oily hands over bloody ones."

I poked a cigarette in my lips. The blue lighter refused to strike. I tried thrice in another failed attempt.

"Why is everything crumbling? Even my lighter is feeling the dark storms."

I put the cigarette back in its pack.

A doctor told me to stop smoking, as it causes lung

cancer. I was an addict. Anxiety, sadness, and restlessness shook me, the day without a stick.

I waited for another hour because the mechanic was battling with the engine.

The driver, an unkempt smoker, blew the nicotinic haze with reckless abandonment, toppling it with dry gin. A stale smell of cigarette irritated me. I had never felt so disgusted.

"Maybe the death of my mother was evoking the black smoke?" I thought.

More nauseating was the man's paunch belly, stained yellow teeth, and fusty breath. They rekindled sleeping ashes and laden Harmattan dust.

I buried my head in my palms, alone with my silent monsters. Some enthuse there is no love of life without the despair of it, and one cannot be happy when searching for the true meaning of life. I guess mine was in its ground state, hopeless.

The bumpy road, solitude of other passengers, humid clouds, and the acrid smell of gasoline made me doze

off.

I arrived at Evbiamen at noon. The dark clouds had turned to a cracking fire, in ominous undertones, as beads of sweat trickled down my face. It was a harrowing journey, but the drunk driver showed his wizardry on the wheel. He boasted about how he had been on the road for two decades.

Mama's hut was a stone's throw from where the driver stopped me. It was a small, thatched house with a few bric-à-brac. At a distance, I saw someone wrapped in a white cloth, surrounded by women. Warm liquids ran down my spine.

"Hope it wasn't her?" My legs wobbled.

Deep into the darkness of my pierced soul, I remembered how we crammed ourselves in its four walls, and how she told me moonlight stories. Mother was not only an excellent storyteller but a generous woman. She was also full of wisdom. Her white morsel festered through the entrails of the wildest beasts. Women like her carry villages on their backs.

I greeted and asked the women if that was my mother. Her younger sister unwrapped her face. The wailings from the women hit me from all directions.

"She died yesterday of fever. She had been ill for three weeks, waiting for you," she said, her eyes freckled from the tears. Her face had turned too dark and rigid. She had been a rose flower all her days, the good seed that grew and bloomed.

I didn't know whether to rattle or hang my-

self on a tree.

"My gold has shattered." How I thought the white skies would rain fog to erode me into an abyss."

I felt a tinge in my stomach. Mama told me to farm in the village, rather than looking for a white-collar job in the city. Imasuen, my childhood friend, had married and built two stories for his parents. He became rich through farming.

I went inside and sat on a bamboo chair, deep in reverie. "If only the ears had listened to the yelping falcon!" I thought.

"Here is water. Take heart. We are all mortals and will die someday. Your mother was an amiable woman. Crowds came here yesterday. More condolences came this morning. The villagers will play their part in her burial. Everything good will come," a woman comforted, wagging her head in pity, before fading from the dim light.

"Thanks, ma." I gulped the water, every drop bringing back hurtful memories. Those spirit-raising words were what I needed to keep my soul afloat amid my tribulations.

"What's a soul without happiness? It's nothing else but a pain bringing forth that which separates itself from its body."

I couldn't stare at her corpse again for fear of rattling. I leaned my back against the wall, trying to figure out how to get out of my predicament. For the second time, I slept off from the silent whispers of the cold room, flapping its wings everywhere and sending the glorious restless world into nonchalant

exile.

I stayed a week in the village to mourn her. Sympathizers from far and near attended the occasion. Everyone said good things about my mother. Without their love and massive turnout, I would have licked my paws.

My travails didn't end there. I was getting older, with no wife or children. Mama begged me several times to give her a grandchild before her death. The odious city life consumed me completely. The fishes that swam in my river were countless.

"Mother wouldn't have died if I had stayed with her. It was my fault."

I flooded my pillows. I reclined myself from my neighbors and stayed throughout the day, thinking of suicide. "Lost hopes. What else am I living for?"

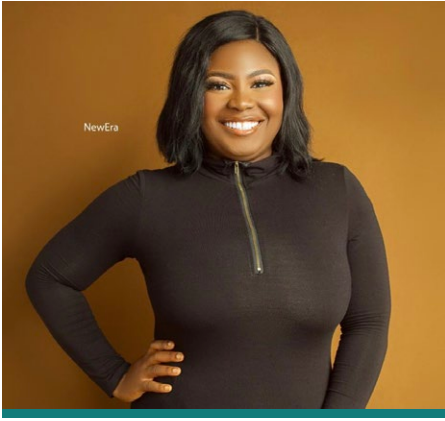
I often practiced tilting a rope on my fan and forming a circle with it to fit into my neck. I felt thirsty for humane love, that kind of companion that dissects the dark silent room of one's mind, bringing it to illumination. However, my introversion wouldn't unchain me.

The suicidal thoughts continued for weeks. I had become a living corpse. The death of my mother had affected me in a way that I couldn't breathe well. Before her death, we had a mother-and-child relationship, and she was never shy to scold me for my wrongs. The same with my papa, too. Papa was a disciplinarian and devout Catholic. He once said if he hadn't married Mama, he would have been a celibate priest.

On one hand, I thought if I hung myself, no one would pour their hearts and tears out for me, nor say good things about my death. People would judge me as a villain, and I would be even more alone in death than in life.

I summoned the courage to unfasten the black birds from my cage. The doves had always known the sparrow's chirrups, but when the sparrow makes hissing screeches, the dove lets it be. I poured out my silent room to them. They growled at me for not sharing it with them in a timely manner. One of them eventually helped me secure another sales job in his former company.

Two years later, I got married and christened my beautiful twins after my parents. I appreciated everyone who stood by me during the storm. Those years, I took flowers to their graves, remembering how their death took one part of me. I appreciated everyone as well who kept me afloat from the creepy shadows of the silent room.



ONE LAST TIME

Rekanor Mbeh
Nigeria



They say when you're about to die, your life flashes before your eyes in a myriad of pictures. For me, there are no flashes—just the inner voice of my mother saying,

“Be organised, dammit. And do things properly.”

I sigh as I look down at the words I have written in my amended will. I move the documents and lighter to my left-hand side, and then the cup with the foul-smelling liquid to my right. My flat is dark and dingy, like my heart. The steady pattering of the rain on my rooftop and the slight wind blowing in

through my window seem to offer a soft protest to my decisions. But my mind is made up.

Today is the day I cut off both my children. And today is the day I die.

They say when you're about to take a wrong turn, your spirit warns you with a sign, an unrest, a tightness in your chest. I feel nothing but relief. The clearheadedness with which I have decided to kill myself is astounding. Perhaps my spirit approves.

I pick up the copy of the old will and lighter and try to take deep breaths but fail. I'm about to make a second attempt when I hear a loud crack outside my window, followed by a loud voice,

"I dare you, James. Tell me! What? For the five years we have been married, what have you BLOODY DONE RIGHT?"

I wince as her voice carries all the way to my window. Poor James, I think. He and Sandy are having another fight. Sometimes, I look outside my window and see them arguing. Or rather, Sandy yelling, all red-faced, and James

listening, also red-faced. Then they'll both see me and smile politely before walking inside. However, everyone knows that old houses have thin walls. I feel for James, but I do know Sandy. She's a sweet girl. Never mind that she's unraveling on a rainy night in her driveway at 2:45 AM.

"Answer me!" she screams, following James, who never answers and isn't about to start now. He climbs into his pickup truck.

Dropping the lighter carefully, I take my mug of the foul-smelling liquid and wheel myself closer to the window so I can hear clearly.

Being elderly has some perks. Young people will often come to you to acquire your pearls of sagely wisdom.

This is how I know that by morning, one of them will come to me. I want whoever comes first and discovers my dead body to know that till the very end, I rooted for them.

"Good. Go hide! That's what you do well! I'm so freaking tired of running after you, of

trying to make you look at me, James. I'm TIRED!"

But he does look at you, I think before I can stop myself. I really shouldn't take sides. I watch as Sandy bellows into the rolled-down windows of James's shiny red truck.

"You know what else I'm tired of? Freaking cleaning up after you! You're a GROWN MAN, James. Why do I have to pick pieces of soap off the bathroom floor? Wipe your bloody soap suds off the shower walls, why? And how hard is it to hang up a coat? Answer me! Would you die if you put your plate away one freaking time?"

I frown as I listen to Sandy's words. I know James. He's much too sensitive to see what's really at play here. That this isn't about pots or dishes, or messy showers alone. I grab a piece of paper and a pencil and turn on the lights. I may be dead by morning, but tonight I can write to them.

Dear Sandy and James,

I start to write before I am interrupted by a loud wham!



I squint into the driveway to see that James is out of the car. Uh oh, this can't be good. James never engages. Not ever. I see the startled expression on Sandy's face and then the relief, but she quickly hides it under a veneer of anger. He stands before her now.

"Why don't you care, James? Why?" she asks, slapping her palms against his chest. I know what she's talking about. And I know James does too.

"And who says I don't? What do you want me to do,

Sandy? Obsess over it the way you do? Have sex every damn minute and in every position those harebrained books and podcasts suggest?"

Livid now, Sandy throws her head back in a mirthless laugh. "At least, I try, James. I bloody make an effort. I give making this baby everything I've got. But like everything else about me, about us, YOU DON'T BLOODY CARE!"

"I CARE!" James bellows into Sandy's face. "But I have far less chance of making you happy than freezing

hell over. I'm bloody doing everything I can! MAYBE THE REASON WHY WE HAVEN'T HAD THIS BABY IS BECAUSE WHO KNOWS WHAT KIND OF PARENTS WE'LL BE!" James spits out, a muscle pulling in his cheek. There's a stunned silence in the air. Sandy looks too shocked to speak. And I close my eyes in pain. James has bungled it all. He doesn't really mean that. I know he doesn't because James and I talk.

And last week we had spoken about his fear. The irrational intrusive thoughts

that told him every minute of the day that he would make a horrible father. He had sat across from me in the living room, head in his hands as he said,

“I think I would make a horrible father, Ms. Edwards. Maybe that’s why God is delaying this baby.”

“Why do you think so?” I had asked.

“Well, I can’t seem to do anything right.”

“Right or the way Sandy wants it?” I had enquired, leaning forward to look him in the eye.

“It’s sort of the same thing, Ma’am,” he said and lowered his eyes. But not before I had caught the shame in them.

I glance at Sandy now. The fight seems to have left her. Tears are streaming down her pale face, and her shoulders are heaving from sobs. James stands conflicted and afraid to make contact. At last, he capitulates and tries to touch her, but she moves swiftly out of his grip.

“So this is how you’ve been jinxing it. I keep trying to have our baby but you don’t

think I’m good enough,” she says as she crumbles to the floor and begins to rock her knees. “You don’t think I’m good enough.”

“You don’t love me.”

“You think I’m a horrible person, a horrible mother. My own husband.” She wipes her tears and continues to rock herself.

I close my eyes and let out a sigh I don’t realize I have been holding. Tomorrow, Sandy will want to walk into my flat and tell me, “I told you, Ms. Edwards, he doesn’t love me. He doesn’t want me anymore.” I know because we’ve had this conversation more than a dozen times. No matter how I try to convince her, the voices in her head tell her otherwise. She’s convinced James is going to leave her. And every day she battles the thought. Sometimes when he’s late from work, she comes and asks me if I think he’s gone.

Of course, James will do no such thing because every time we have spoken about Sandy, it’s about him working harder to make her happy. It’s about him getting committed to the period

app she sent him to track her fertile window, and wearing nice clothes for date night rather than the black tees and shorts Sandy hates and says speak of no effort.

I sigh as I watch James sit beside his weeping wife. His shoulders are drooped, and I can tell he’s weary from all the fighting—both the ones in his head and the one with Sandy. And I know by morning, they’ll each sneak in behind the other’s back to fall into my arms and sob.

I look down at my piece of paper and set it aside. A letter will not do it. Do I postpone my death by one more day? I sigh as I raise the foul-smelling liquid to my lips and then let the cup clatter to the floor. All my pain and anguish have to wait. I can’t die tonight. Tonight, I weep with Sandy and James, and I wait for morning when I know they’ll come.



MUTED PRAYERS

Natasha Tlhalerwa
Botswana

A flock of birds perched on the ceiling beams chirped softly, their eyes fixed on the only human speaking in front of the church. The dark clothing of the congregation stood in stark contrast to the white robes of the preacher, who spoke softly but with power. His voice was audible to those in the back, but so were the occasional sniffles that echoed in the church. The family sitting in the front had grief written all over their lowered heads.

The mother, dressed in a simple black dress and a matching hat adorned with a black rose on top, clutched a small hand belonging to her toddler, who clung to her. Her big brother huddled close to them, his jaw clenched as they sought comfort from each other. Behind them, the congregation, friends, and neighbors displayed a mix of emotions and opinions. Quiet whispers were shared among them, low enough not to be heard by the preacher but loud enough to cloud the family's minds. The preacher continued speaking after letting his words sink in: "Though our hearts may be heavy, let us find comfort

in the memories left behind. And though he may no longer be with us, his spirit lives on. Let us remember his strength, love, and silent kindness."

The 19-year-old boy stood up and shouted, "Was it silent, or was it forced silence?" At his question, the congregation raised their heads and began whispering among themselves. The church, once filled with sounds of sorrow, was now loud with questions as they looked between the preacher and the younger brother of the deceased. When the preacher finally got over his shock at such defiance and disrespect, he whispered, "Boy, you cannot raise your voice in the house of the Lord." The mother tried to hold her son's hand to calm him down, but he pulled his arm away and pointed at the preacher. "And what about my brother who had no voice? You never welcomed him into your church, and now you dare speak FOR him?"

The congregation gasped and whispered questions, and the mother whispered to her son with a lowered head, "Mothusi, please.

Not now.”

Mothusi stepped away from the bench and turned to his mother, “Then when, Mama? My brother is already dead! And these people want to shed squeezed tears and pretend they ever saw him as anything but below them.” The preacher slammed his Bible on the pulpit and spoke up, “Young man, you will not come here to accuse us. This church has and will always be open to all. But Psalm 142:1-2 says, ‘With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before him; I tell him my troubles before him.’ That’s what David said, his voice!” The congregation hummed in agreement and nodded, including the mother. The preacher continued with hushed aggression. He stepped down from the altar and walked over to Mothusi. “We had nothing against your brother; however, we couldn’t deny his shortcomings! Forget praying; he could not speak two coherent words! This... is a house of prayer. Your brother was an incurable mute.”

Tears flowed from the

younger sister as she clung to their mother, watching her mother nod with the congregation as she sobbed. Not understanding the situation but feeling the weight of the moment.

“My brother was able to speak some words. Long sentences even; he could go on all day about his favorite things. But you shut him up because the sounds of him trying were distasteful to your ears.” The people exclaimed and shouted at Mothusi, “Haibo, haibo! Enough, Mothusi! This is outrageous!” Mothusi looked around, his fists clenched in anger and his eyes filled with tears. “I will not let you have it today! I will bury my brother myself! You will not satisfy your egos and guilt through my brother’s death. Ogone might have been a mute, but the problems and discrimination he faced were loud enough for God to hear him, and he was saved from this harsh world. And his silent battles are now being swept under the rug of your altar. I will not have it.”

Mothusi snatched his jacket from the bench and stormed out of the church, leaving it

in chaos as the preacher tried to calm everyone before turning to the crying mother.

“We understand that he does not mean what he said. Sorrow can take many different forms. He is young, so he thinks the world is against him. He will be okay.” The preacher looked down at the little girl and gave her a firm smile before walking back to the pulpit. The little girl let go of her mother and turned around on the bench to look where her brother had left. Her gaze swept through the room; all she saw were perfect worshippers of the Lord, who looked nothing like her deceased brother or her friend at school with a missing arm. She turned to face forward again and looked up at the picture of Jesus above the altar.



DENG'S WORLD

Lino Arop
South Sudan

“Maama!” Ssekandi exclaimed. “Denge, come and see.” Deng made his way towards the group. The group comprised three boys and two girls. There were similar groups all around, varying in composition and number. It was Saturday, and all Saturdays at Katonda Boarding Secondary School were known as ‘chilling days’. Students fished out their phones from the bottom of their suitcases and used them without fear of the teachers, prefects, or their dreaded DC. They used their phones to chat on Facebook and watch movies, but mostly, they just watched skits. Every rule was lax that day except for one: absolutely no porn.

Now, as Deng made his way towards the group, he found himself thinking, let it not be porn, please. He hated porn. It wasn’t even a question of being caught. He hated it because every time he watched porn, he was likely to run to the bathroom, and he hated what he did in there. Of course, not while he did it—then it was kind of nice—but after the act, he felt ashamed and dirty.

As he made his way to where the group was, another group nearby suddenly burst into thunderous laughter. Deng fought the urge to turn and find out what they were laughing about and finally tapped Ssekandi on the shoulder.

“Nakitende, rewind that thing,” Ssekandi said and waited as he looked on. “Not that one, Denge! The one where the man in the suit tries to date that beautiful girl... yes, that one.”

Deng sat next to Ssekandi and watched the skit that his friend so much wanted him to see. It was one of those with a laughing voice in the background, the kind that makes you laugh before even seeing the content. Deng always thought of that method of skit-making as a double-edged sword technique. The audience always laughs along with the voice even if the skit turns out not to be funny at all. He laughed along with the voice as he watched.

A young man, probably in his early twen-

ties, moved along the road, whistling. He was smartly dressed in a navy blue suit with a white shirt, complete with a white-striped dark blue necktie. Ahead of him was a girl, also probably in her twenties, dressed in a short tube dress. The kind that stops just above the knees and is so tight it accentuates her ass. The young man and the young woman passed each other along the road, the man absorbed in thought and the woman trying to hold her wig down so the wind wouldn't blow it off her head. After passing the lady and realizing the fact, the young man turned to look at her, but his eyes only landed on her ass. Her ass is now zoomed in on, and as she moves, something like a ripple runs through it. The young man's jaws drop.

"Nyash promax," he whispers and runs after the young lady. Once he catches up with her, he says, "Sweet lady." But the lady doesn't respond, so he touches her on the shoulder. The lady turns sharply but doesn't say anything. She looks at the young man intently, strikes her right index finger

across her left palm, which is turned upwards.

"Sweet lady," the man repeats, and the young woman repeats the index finger across the palm gesture and makes incomprehensible sounds in her throat. The man looks bewildered and flees.

Deng's face had grown grave as he watched. It wasn't funny, not in his world. He didn't want to laugh, but all around him, Ssekandi and the other four laughed hard, even to the point of tears.

"She's deaf, Denge. Deaf and stupid, and the man doesn't want her," Ssekandi said, tears of laughter rolling down his cheeks.

You stupid asshole. That's sign language for 'what?' She wants to know what he wants and why he touched her, among other things. It's not what you think, you stupid fucker with your yellow teeth. But Deng didn't say any of that. He only smiled, mostly because doing so kept his world intact and Ssekandi close. He didn't want to hurt Ssekandi, even though he knew right enough that the rate at which things were

going, there would soon be a lot of laughter at Ssekandi's end and a lot of tears at his own end once the guy found out his little secret. The secret he shared with the girl in the skit. His was mild, but his experience had taught him that people like Ssekandi always went hardest on the hard of hearing than they did on the completely deaf. He should have known the first time he met Ssekandi that he was the kind who had no empathy, the kind who thought their way was the only way. The question he asked the first time they met was evidence enough.

"Denge Denge," Ssekandi had read the name sewn on Deng's new uniform through bursts of laughter. "Why do you Sudanese like repeating names?"

"That's not repetition. That's Deng, the son of Deng. My father is also called Deng, you know."

"That's bullshit. The Baganda should be allowed to civilize more tribes in Africa. Especially you Sudanese."

"If it comes to that," Deng retorted, "then the man called Jesus whom you worship

had his names arranged in a similar manner to mine. Remember Matthew chapter one. The one that talks about Jesus' genealogy—Jesus the son of Joseph, the son of Jacob, the son of Matthan, the son of Eleazar, the son of Eliud...”

But Ssekandi either did not remember or had never read the Bible beyond Genesis and had stubbornly denied the existence of such an arrangement of names in the Bible. Deng had let it drop, and for some reason, the two had become friends. That was about to end now, Deng thought.

“That was very funny,” he managed to say to the other five who were still laughing. Deng watched Nakitende calmly. She was laughing but gracefully, and while Deng hated them all for laughing, he found that he hated Nakitende less. He actually forgave her. He loved her, wanted her, but he hadn't told her a thing as yet. Deng suspected she knew about his intentions already because, in his experience, women always know. She was just waiting for him to shoot his shot, as it were, and probably had

her answer ready. If the answer happened to be a no, no problem. But if it turned out to be a yes... Deng shuddered.

She would want to have his phone number as sure as the Nile flows north. Then he would have to ask himself if he loved her enough to give her his real phone number. If the answer was no, he would give her his fake phone number—the one he had used with countless girls. But if the answer were yes, he would have to give her his real phone number and risk shouting endlessly, “Hello, hello, hello,” whenever she called him after night preps or during the holidays. Then it would be a matter of days before she asked the old familiar question, “Do you have a problem with your ears?” and the relationship would end suddenly, like a presidential decree. Not just that, Ssekandi and the whole school would find out his little secret.

* * *

Deng was afraid to shoot his shot, but as the ‘chilling day’ wore on, he decided he would shoot his shot any-

way. One last time before I call it quits, he told himself. Tonight, he would rewrite the poem—the one he had used to woo so many girls. He was going to take Ankunda's name out and replace it with Nakitende's. Other than that, he didn't plan to change anything else.



Liza Chuma Akunyili
@iamlizachuma

SAVED BY RELATIONSHIPS

A few years back, I stopped feeling like a writer. So, I sat down with my writing coach to find out what was holding me back. It turns out that I was not writing so, I did not feel like I deserved the title.

I am sure you thought well... write! That was not the situation. I had experienced grief in an intense way and even though writing helped me clear my head at first, it did not bring me into newer experiences.

So, I read other people's writings. I wrote more reviews, I focused on moderating debates, hosting more interviews and having more industry dialogue.

At the time of my conversation with my coach, this was where I was - living a non-writing writer's life. He said some things to me that day that forever changed how I used to show up as a creative.

He made me realize that

learning and breathing breaks are part of a healthy creative circle

He showed me how repetitive writing when in the same headspace bred stagnancy

He pointed out ways my new adventures were diversifying my business perspective of writing

All these things were taught in less than three minutes via WhatsApp text. I am the voice note sender but my coach likes

to cross his Ts and dot his I's. This little conversation that could pass as mere banter from a leader to a learner ended up holding the key to how I manage my ebbs and flows as a creative.

You may not be grieving like I was but perhaps, you are experiencing an influx of requests from publishing companies asking you to send manuscripts or you are the new big name trending on magazine covers or you are trying to float your own magazine, wherever you are on this journey, you need people.

Dear Affluent Author, creative writing is not a one-man show. You need people who can see the light in you when you cannot see it in yourself. You need people who are more concerned about your health than they are your craft. You need people who listen to your voice and not just your characters. You need people who can power you through the ebbs and flows of life.

I am a therapist so I understand first hand how impostor syndrome makes people sabotage themselves. Yet, it took someone with more experience as a writer to look at me and say you are not writing now but when you write again it will be more robust because you have been learning.

Dear Affluent Author, Who is in your corner? If your publisher calls you and says "the market rejected your book" who would you reach out to for comfort? Who will make you laugh even if you had tears in your eyes?

Relationship skills are not the opposite of creative skills. If anything, our creativity should allow us to bond better. However, relationships cannot be forced.

An older friend of mine, a poet, was on social media recently and someone sent him a message asking how they can be a known name like him. I thought the question was quite under-

whelming since these two people do not have an established relationship but it goes downhill from here. This social media person shows up again and begins another conversation with "Hi, why haven't you bought my anthology?" When my friend asked if this person had attempted to get any of his own published books, our social media mentee responded with "how much is the cheapest?"

Affluent people are not just popular; they are people who know others. The problem with us as writers is that we are trying to be the most popular, bestselling authors who do not want to make connections!

I can go to my coach because I have invested time, energy and resources into that relationship. Your friend can kick-off their book sales at their local library because they have been nice to the librarian all this while. What about you?

Perhaps the reason you do not get assistance, mentorship or partnerships as a writer is because you are terrible at building connections! Partnerships are harder when we walk into rooms trying to network for projects; people know when you are just looking to use them.

My coach had seen me create long enough to know that my non-writing season was not failure but a growth opportunity.

Dear Affluent Author, who knows you enough to inspire you? More professionally, who do you have personal relationships with that can recommend you in the rooms you do not have access to?

You think you need a publisher but I think you need a coach. You say you need money to start but I think you need a writing community. You believe you need to be popular but I think you need to be collaborating.

How to build relationships as a writer

Writing and Reading communities: these are designed for people like you who are in love with words. Here, you do not have to put up a facade. These people will ensure your love for the art does not die.

People sometimes complain that these communities are political. Well, they do become political when everyone prioritizes networking to sell their craft over the love of writing. While you may stay within the big influential ones, I recom-

mend you join a community that focuses on the art itself and while you are there, do not mess it up.

Professional coaches: I know you do not like the idea of paying someone for something you can do. However, if all you know is all you need, you will be where you wanted to be by now.

Creative retreats and conferences: think about places you have never been, people you have never met or topics you have never considered. Give yourself the opportunity to meet people and dialogue without the pressure of a deadline or a project.

The best time to build relationships and support systems was long before you ever needed anything.



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REVIEW

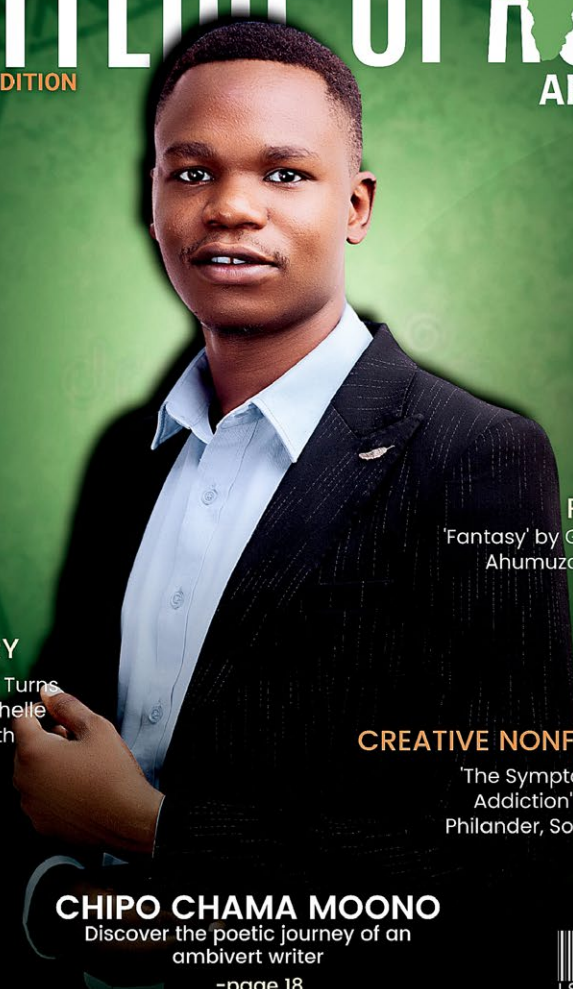
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BEATRICE'S OBSESSION

A Children's Literature by
Joy James, Nigeria

Reviewer
Funmi Richards
(Nigeria)



The story delivers a clear message: excessive vanity leads to downfall. Her initial beauty and arrogance lead to a desire for enhancement. The climax arrives with the potion's disastrous effect. The resolution leaves Beatrice ostracised, emphasizing the consequences of her actions. This narrative structure echoes the classic tale of "The Ugly Duckling" by Hans Christian Andersen, where a character initially rejected for their appearance ultimately finds acceptance and beauty within themselves. However, "Beatrice" takes a darker turn, focusing on the negative consequences of vanity rather than a journey of self-discovery.

The story explores several key themes. The dangers of vanity are central, as Beatrice's obsession leads to her downfall. Inner beauty is contrasted with outer beauty, highlighting the value of charac-

ter over appearance. Finally, the importance of community and acceptance is emphasised through the villagers' initial warmth and eventual horror.

The story employs literary devices to enhance its message. Foreshadowing, seen in the witch's unsettling smile, hints at the potion's negative outcome. Irony is evident in the contrast between Beatrice's initial beauty and her final, scarred appearance. The witch acts as a foil to Beatrice, her grotesque exterior reflecting the ugliness of vanity.

The story of Beatrice serves as a didactic tale for young readers. It warns against the dangers of vanity and emphasizes the importance of inner beauty. Its clear messaging and use of literary devices make it an effective fable. The story could be a strong foundation for further exploration.

SYMPTOMS OF ADDICTION

A Creative Non-Fiction by
Carmi Philander, South Africa

Reviewer

Francis Mkwapatira
(Malawi)



Carmi Philander's *Symptoms of Addiction* is a captivating Creative Nonfiction (CNF) of the August Edition that highlights the feelings and experiences of Poesegraphilia. The narrator begins by explaining how her love for poetry has altered her life before she explains how she drowned in her obsession.

The CNF appeals to readers in so many ways, its lucidness being one of the ways. The prose grips the readers when they begin reading, following a handful of details entailing the narrator's pain—the red shot eyes from sleepless nights of study, her darkened teeth from biting the lid of her pen-cils etc., and how she struggles to disguise it from family and friends. The pictorial explanations stretch further to highlight how she embraced poetry, how she grew in the art, how it won't let go of her now, and how she won't let go of the art's hold of her.

Philander admirably connects to readers'

minds by exploiting poetic devices. She employs antithesis, imagery, oxymoron and repetition to articulate and justify her poesegraphilia. Among many devices, she for instance expresses her obsession and the grip it has on her in the antithesis, '...as I consume it, it consumes me,' but still wills for it to have a gradual toll on her as in the imagery, 'So, I kill myself slowly, ... For I would rather peel back my skin piece by piece than reap it off in one sitting.' These devices ensure the CNF's lasting emotional connection between Philander and her readers.

In a thousand ways, anyone who's ever been obsessed with something can relate to Philander's CNF. The depth with which she explains her relationship with her 'lover' and 'foe,' poetry, echoes slam poetry, a cappella, raw sentiment exploding from a podium, in the similitude of the Jackie Hills.

THE VEIL OF OBSESSION

A Poem by
Rebecca Eduah, Ghana

Reviewer

Akuei M. Adol
(South Sudan)

Obsession is a delusion that overcomes wisdom. Rebecca Eduah's poem exposes this reality by delving into the intricate dynamics of heritage, greed, and moral decay. The persona in this poem is a reflective observer, perhaps a descendant lamenting the fall from grace that the forefathers' lineage has experienced. The subject matter revolves around the transformation of a once-valued land, cultivated by the ancestors, now desecrated by the succeeding generations' greed.

Rebecca's piece highlights themes of legacy, greed, and destruction. For instance, the legacy of the forefathers, who "toiled until it became their possession," contrasts sharply with the present generation's "obsession with gains." This obsession blinds them, turning their inheritance into a "desolation." The poem is structured in free verse with sixteen lines and four stanzas, allowing the narrative to flow organically, mirroring the unravelling of the moral fabric over generations.

Stylistically, Eduah employs vivid imagery and metaphors. The "redness of their

eyes" mistaken for "the grapes of the South" juxtaposes the hard-earned labour with the fruits of that labour, now misinterpreted and misused. The transformation of "soil into oils of turmoil" powerfully depicts the corrupting influence of greed. The language is both evocative and cautionary, with a rhythmic repetition that enhances the poem's lamenting tone.

The tone is sombre and reflective, with a pervasive sense of loss and warning. The mood created is one of sorrow and foreboding, as the poem's narrative arc moves from the pride of ancestral achievements to the despair of current failures. The poem evokes a strong sense of regret and the fragility of moral values in the face of materialistic pursuits. It reminds the reader that in life, unchecked greed can destroy not only personal integrity but also the legacy and future of entire communities.

In conclusion, this piece teaches us against allowing greed to overshadow wisdom and the sanctity of heritage.

MASTER ODINAKA

A Short Story by
Nkegbe C. Joshua, Nigeria

Reviewer

Francis Mkwapatira
(Malawi)

Master Odinaka is an engaging story that explores the harmful effects of obsession on the obsessed. The narrative follows Master Odinaka, an underpaid secondary school teacher, who becomes consumed by the feeling of being exploited in an ever-price-hiking economy. His fixation on this perceived injustice causes him to lose focus on his primary duty—teaching—and results in him lashing out at his loving, curious students and even skipping classes.

Master Odinaka's frustration boils over during an English lesson when his students ask too many questions, prompting him to shush them in anger. In his fit of rage, he exclaims, "I won't strangle myself here over the peanuts they give me in the name of salary," plunging the class into silence. Filled with regret over his outburst, he is unexpectedly consoled by his students, who present him with an envelope of money in an attempt to soothe his anger.

One of the key strengths of the story lies in its clarity. From the first line to the last, Master Odinaka's personality is viv-

idly portrayed. His exceptional skills and knowledge are recognised by both students and teachers, making his eventual breakdown all the more poignant. The protagonist's character is well-developed, allowing readers to connect with his inner turmoil.

Joshua's storytelling is remarkable. He uses the third-person point of view in the present tense, giving the story an immediacy that draws readers in.

His use of imagery enhances the narrative, as seen when he describes the students' curiosity: "He is almost through with teaching and is now being hurled with questions like stones by the students." This simile effectively conveys the intensity of the situation.

Many readers, particularly those familiar with the struggles of teachers in developing countries, can relate to Odinaka's plight, reminiscent of the "miserable lot" mentioned in Temwani Mgunda's *My Name is Asiyatu*.

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