

WRITERS SPACE

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AFRICA

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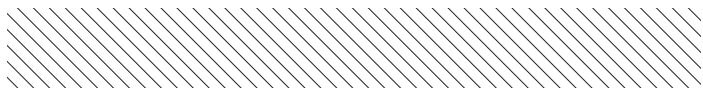
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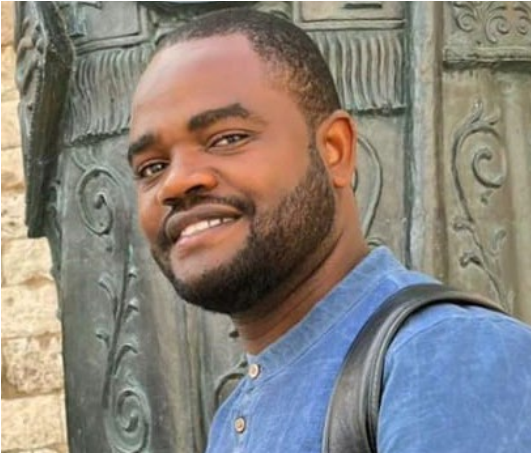
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EDITORIAL

Comfort Nyati, SDB

Chief Editor

Dear reader,

Stunned by life absurdities, we find ourselves entombed in the toxic terrain of life born from our misdeeds and generated by those around us. Given such circumstances, the heart loses the pace of its bit and the mind swims in the sea of delusion. The sense of a brighter tomorrow becomes a stalemate.

Should any form of liberation dawn to soak away the stains of delusion, one is afforded atonement, reconciliation and sanctification. Redemption is central to Christianity, emphasizing humanity's need for salvation and God's love in providing a path to restoration. Any form of separation from

God, the world and man creates a chasm between nature and humanity, necessitating redemption to reconcile.

Taking into account the fact that the wind that blows off to close the door has the same gravitational pull as opening another door. As an opportunity slips away, a tear falls down one's cheek. It is not a tear of grief but of something unfelt for a brief period: freedom. The same wind becomes yours, a silent reminder of restoration. You will realise that, for the first time in years, you took a deep breath, letting go of the past and welcoming the chance of a brighter future.

When we often think about that moment when we once

lost a valuable possession or person and the effort we would have invested to ensure that the valuable thing or person never slips an eye away from us, we realise how precious rain is to the farmer. I am convinced, therefore, that after breathing through the air of the exhaled ink of our creative writers, you will appreciate how small acts of kindness can become bridges that help us crossover from bondage to restoration. Because in the end we need to celebrate a moment of personal growth and transformation.

Wishing you a happy reading



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Writers Space Africa (WSA) is accepting submissions for its 96th edition (December 2024 Edition). We accept Children's Literature, Creative Non-Fiction, Flash Fiction, Poetry, and Short Stories



THEME: **RETROSPECTION**

Deadline: October 15, 2024

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www.writerspace.net

Children's Literature





THE SPECIAL CHILD IN CLASS 6A

Munachim Frank-Dobi
Nigeria



All the children in Class 6A could read and write except Nora!

Nora was quiet, withdrawn, and easily distracted. At break time, she sat alone under the big orange tree to eat her lunch and never played with anybody. There was always an open book in her hands or on her lap, but everyone knew that Nora couldn't read as well as her classmates. Nora was good at Mathematics and Science but because she couldn't read, she never topped the class at the end of the term. She had no friends because nobody

was kind to her except the class teacher Mr Agbeko.

On Mr Agbeko's birthday, the class decided to make birthday cards for him. Mr Philips, the Fine Arts' teacher taught every child how to make a birthday card using cardboard, markers, glue and glitter. Each child wrote a birthday message to Mr Agbeko wishing him well. To make it more fun, Mr Philips suggested that no card should be signed with the child's name so that Mr Agbeko would guess whose card it was.

Mr Agbeko loved the cards and accepted the difficult challenge of guessing which of his fifteen pupils had wished him well. He missed all his guesses except one. It was Nora's card which Mr Agbeko read out to the entire class. The class was filled with awe at Nora's beautiful birthday poem and amazed at how Mr Agbeko knew it was Nora's poem. Mr Agbeko then pinned the card on the classroom notice board and every pupil rushed to read the card. The birthday card read:

"When the letters dance

And the words sing,

Your calming voice,

Tells me what to know.

Hapi Birthday Mr Agbeko."

At once the pupils noticed the wrong spellings and even though it was a beautiful poem, a cackle of laughter filled the classroom. Nora felt so sad and cried for the rest of the day. She wished she could read and write like her classmates. She couldn't understand why the letters danced so much that she couldn't make out the words.

Nora's redemption came two weeks later. Some very important visitors came to the school in search of special children. The visitors had some gifts and scholarships for pupils who were different, and unique. All the pupils were excited and eager to show just how special they were. The visitors went around each class testing the children until they got to Class 6A. One of the visitors, Ms Rachael wrote down some questions on the

board and gave the children some time to attempt the questions.

As usual, every child in Class 6A scored very high in every subject because they were smart. But Nora couldn't read or understand the question, so she scored very low. Ms Rachael was immediately drawn to Nora and invited her to take another test. The other children snickered and sneered as Nora struggled to read and spell. But to their surprise, Ms Rachael announced that Nora was the most special child in the whole school. Everyone was shocked and watched as Ms Rachael gave Nora many gifts and a scholarship to Marigold School for Special Children. It was a school for gifted and special children just like Nora. The children in Class 6A couldn't believe their eyes and ears as Ms Rachael began to sing Nora praises. She explained to the rest of the class that Nora was neither dull nor slow but she had a special gift that helped her see letters and words differently from the rest of them. This special gift was called dyslexia and only special people were born with it.

The entire class was amazed at how different and special she was. They regretted how mean they had been to her and promised to be kind to her for the remainder of her days in Class 6A. They also organized a goodbye party for her and made many goodbye cards with beautiful poems. Nora was so happy that her classmates had come to understand her and was grateful to Ms Rachael for redeeming her in front of the whole school.

Creative Nonfiction





MONDAY EVENING,

1950

Carla Chait
South Africa

My grandparents married in August 1950. They had a small civil ceremony in London, where they were living at the time as my grandfather was specializing in paediatrics. My grandmother had been previously married and divorced, which was scandalous then, and worse, she was pregnant with my mother at her second wedding.

She looks happy in the photograph of them in my mother's album. She's wearing a light-coloured dress with white polka dots, and there are flowers in her hair. She smiles and gazes lovingly at her new husband, whose hands are clasped casually on top of the signed registry

book. He looks greener than her, maybe a little intimidated, but full of promise and devotion.

In later photographs, my grandfather appears more debonair and surer of himself. In one, he is reclining languidly in an upholstered armchair, his legs crossed, and a cigarette in his hand. He's wearing a tie and a blazer with a medal pinned to it—I remember he used to play bowls. He looks suntanned and relaxed.

Then I see a photograph of my grandmother wearing a fur coat and hat, and large, blossom-shaped clip-on earrings. The photograph seems staged as she's looking off to the side and clasping the

coat's collar. She was an only child, my grandmother, and her mother owned a ladies' boutique in Eloff Street, where women would buy their wedding trousseaus.

Both my grandparents were the children of immigrants from Lithuania. My grandmother's father was one of ten siblings who escaped the Cossack persecution, seeking freedom and safety in South Africa. My great-grandfather, the second youngest boy, boarded a ship bound for the Cape Coast when he was 11 years old in the first part of the 20th century. His elder brother had come to the country first and he brought the rest of the family out after him. My great-grandfather met and married my great-grandmother, who had moved earlier with her family to Johannesburg.

My grandfather's mother grew up in Plungyan. Every Friday, she would walk from village to village selling kitkas baked by her mother for the Sabbath. She was literate and would be asked to read letters sent to the villagers who couldn't read themselves. My grandfather's fa-

ther came to South Africa as a young man to fight on behalf of the Boers in the Boer War. He returned to Memel, a port city in Lithuania, and married my great-grandmother. The family immigrated when my grandfather, their first child, was two years old.

I never knew my grandfather's parents. They died before I was born, and I was named after my great-grandmother. She stands sweetly in a striped dress and pearl necklace next to my grandmother in one photograph. She had a beautiful face, and my mother resembles her, with her curly hair and delicate but compelling countenance. My mother remembers her grandmother always wearing a hat and high heels to disguise her tiny stature: at 144cm, she was the pudding sandwiched between them. My great-grandfather owned a bicycle shop. They were very poor, but he had a brilliant mind, especially for mathematics, and his wife encouraged him to go into bookkeeping. She helped him with his work, looked after their small house in Bez Valley, and was a wonderful

cook.

I distinctly recall my grandmother's parents. Her father was over 182cm tall, slim, and had a head full of white hair, which was once black, and gentle blue eyes. While his wife ran the ladies' boutique, he had a men's clothing store in town. My mother says that her mother's parents were more worldly and better assimilated than her father's. There's a photograph of me in the album blowing out the candles on my great-grandfather's 90th birthday cake. He lived healthily into his 92nd year and my mother kept his collection of Italian leather shoes.

His wife, my great-grandmother, didn't finish high school. She went to work in retail clothing at 16 years old and travelled twice to France to source imported garments. In photographs, she appears strong and graceful, but she was also warm and loving. In her old age, she had a stroke and was demented. During the customary Saturday lunches of chicken soup, leftover kitka, and stewed apples in their apartment, my sister and I would hear

our great-grandmother's incoherent babbling from the adjacent room. Her eyes lit up when we went to sit with her after the meal. She was nursed dearly by her husband until her death.

My mother was born in London. When she was two and her younger brother three months, the family returned to Johannesburg. My grandfather established a paediatric practice in Hillbrow and worked in several public hospitals for over 30 years. My grandmother had two more sons. When the youngest boy started nursery school, she went to university to study and qualified as a clinical psychologist. She worked as a psychologist and family therapist privately and at a community centre. My grandparents wanted to help children and their families, perhaps because their own parents experienced such displaced and anguished childhoods. They modelled a way of caring and all four of their children work in medical or mental health. My grandfather died of cancer in 1993, when I was 11, and my grandmother followed

three years later. Neither of them lived to be 70 years old. But their parents would have been proud that their children and grandchildren had made a life for themselves that they could never have, having lost their homes, their families, and their communities, and struggling here with little money and mostly no education, working long hours so that their children could thrive.

At the back of the album, I find a letter written by my grandfather to his mother, father, and younger brother. "Monday evening, 10/7/50", it begins, followed by 11 sheets of his scrawling handwriting on yellowed pages with the blue 'Mount Royal Hotel, Marble Arch, London' letterhead. First, he expresses gratitude to his family for their support of his ensuing marriage to my grandmother, before launching into an exhaustive report of the minutiae of the trip, from flights, layovers, and the quality of various airports, to where they breakfasted, shopped, and took snaps with the camera.

It's as if his enthusiasm for this new life and its details is a kind of redemption of the traumatic dislocation of his family and of my grandmother's family. When my great-grandmother returned to Plungyan in 1961 and found no trace of her history or relatives, she was devastated, had a depressive breakdown, and was committed to a sanatorium for a period. "I want to wish you everything of the best in Israel," my grandfather writes in the letter to his brother, who was about to embark on his own journey, "and hope that you'll find what you're looking for. I'm expecting big things from you." And he expected as much from himself. Because to live, to love again, and to prosper, both personally and in facilitating the same in others, might help to redress, or at least mitigate, some of the painful losses and suffering of the past.



A FLEETING MOMENT

Ayogu Chidimma
Nigeria

Lately, memories from my childhood have been surfacing, like fragments of a forgotten dream. One late afternoon stands out vividly. I had gone to buy Baba Dudu from a Hausa man's kiosk, drawn there not just for the goods but for the intoxicating blend of Hausa perfume and heavy incense that filled the air around the kiosk. As I passed by, I noticed a man in front of the house beside our rented apartment. It was a beautiful bungalow, often empty, with its owners living abroad. Only a single road separated their house from ours, leading down to a popular secondary school in the neighbourhood.

The man sat slumped on the floor by the entrance. He looked weary and worn out, his clothes tattered and his face etched with lines of exhaustion, as if he had been toiling under the scorching sun all day. Our eyes met, and in that fleeting moment, I saw an overwhelming sense of helplessness in his gaze. At the time, I didn't fully understand what I saw, but now, looking back, it's clear to me. He was a soul in desperate need. And now I understand why I wanted to ease his weariness with an encouraging smile and a little wave, but fear held me back. Stories of child kidnappings for rituals were

rampant, and my parents had sternly warned me not to speak or shine my teeth at strangers. So, I walked away.

Evening came, and my dad returned from the university where he worked. He brought the almond fruits he had promised to pluck for me. I savoured each bite, blissfully unaware of the storm gathering outside. Then, the rain came, pouring relentlessly, washing away the day's warmth. I didn't think about the man again, assuming he had found shelter or left for his destination.

But he hadn't, because the next morning, someone found him dead, still in front of the house next door. My heart sank as my father and some neighbours went to investigate. They called the police, but after some digging, they couldn't trace his family. He died homeless, cold, hungry, and alone.

I often think about his last moments and how he must have prayed for help that never came. Now, I realize how small acts of kindness can mean the world to someone in need. I wonder if a simple smile or a kind word

from me could have made a difference. I sincerely wonder. As a child, I was taught to fear the unknown, but as an adult, I see the tragedy in allowing fear to override compassion for the unknown.

I carry the memory of that man with me, a reminder of the fragility of human life and the acute impact of our actions or inactions. I hope the other side favored him and that he found the peace that eluded him in this life. And I hope, in some small way, to honor his memory by choosing compassion over fear and by seeing the humanity in every stranger's eye who is ever in desperate need.



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Flash Fiction





CRIMSON REBIRTH

Immanuel M Kiilu
Kenya

Her life was a series of shadows, each one cast by a regret too deep to forget. The mistake she made years ago clung to her like a relentless specter, whispering in her ear, draining the color from her days. Then, one morning, she noticed a red bird, its vibrant feathers stark against the gray sky, repeatedly striking her window. It was relentless, almost desperate, as if trying to break free from an invisible prison.

For days, the bird persisted, its body slamming against the glass, a flurry of crimson and futile determination. She watched, transfixed, the bird's struggle mirroring her own inner turmoil. Finally, unable to bear its plight any longer, she gently opened the window and cradled the tiny, trembling creature in her hands.

Nursing it back to health became her sole focus. She fed it, tended to its wounds, and spoke to it in soft, soothing tones. The bird's fragility and its fight for survival resonated

with her, stirring something long dormant within her soul. Each day, as the bird grew stronger, she felt a small part of her own burden lift.

When the day came to release it, she carried the bird outside, her heart pounding. She opened her hands, and the bird hesitated for a moment before spreading its wings and soaring into the sky. She watched it go, its red plumage a streak of hope against the endless blue.

As the bird disappeared from sight, she felt a tear slip down her cheek. It wasn't a tear of sorrow, but of something she hadn't felt in a long time: release. The bird's flight became her own, a silent promise of redemption. For the first time in years, she took a deep breath, letting go of the past, ready to embrace the possibility of a brighter, lighter future.



SUNRISE

Christiana Agboni
Nigeria

The early morning sky brooded at 3am and Ojotule's heart was a beehive of activities. For 30 years, she had wallowed in confusion, anger, and now a deep-seated sadness; weariness that nothing could shift.

As Ojotule approached her destination, her heart took another turn. 30 years of emptiness. Of pain, and tears with no succor. Like the elegant spear grass, poised and waiting, for the carefree child's finger to dance along its tip, only for it to tear and wound the tender hand.

Her neighbor, Iye Uyo had expected to see a hysterical young woman last night. "Cry it all out dear, we're here for you." She had said. Ojotule remained as stiff as the body of her sister that had just been on the bed they were standing beside. Her eyes stung.

She had no tears left. She had used it all at a similar location the year before and her mother's body had gone as stiff as a board

too. And the years before that, one by one for her three hefty brothers. And years back, when she was a little girl and thought her father was just sleeping and would soon wake.

The river looked as deep and dark as the sky matching her moods. She was ready to follow her paths of thorns and thistles to go meet with the one who lives on the streets paved with gold, and ask why her life was a mockery.

She dipped a leg into the waters, and in that moment, she saw a gleam on the surface, she looked up in surprise and saw the sun coming out from behind the deep dark sky. She watched as the sun rose and rose and lightened the sky, and the waters. The sun had never risen so early before.



OBLITERATED

Omondi Owino
Kenya

That week was abnormal in many ways. For one, the sun feared opening its eyes; any time it tried to peep, fog forced it back. One could not tell whether the fog was man-made or natural. For another, it appeared to squeeze life out of beings. The air was so bitter that it choked. Life seemed to have given up living in the hell of a world. On the contrary, guns and other massive weapons yelled at each other competing on who was mightier.

Another abnormal thing about the week was that the ever-jovial flowers just stared at the wind; they never danced, neither did they shine bright. Mornings were so hopeless that Joan lifted up her head and dropped them back with no resistance. Artificial birds filled the air with their frightening sounds.

After several unsuccessful attempts, she lazily dragged herself towards the pond. Joy, her younger sister, had fixed her motionless eyes on the water. Even after dropping some twigs as she normally did, the water remained undisturbed. The gluttonous tilapia had no appetite nor the power to scramble for food. A mixture of oil spills and algae made the water surface appear nauseating.

'Let's go,' was all Joan could manage.

'Where?'

'Somewhere, anywhere, everywhere, just

not here.'

Shoulder to shoulder, they walked towards the city. The ever bright and welcoming woods were skeleton twigs. The sweet undergrowth seemed to have left in a hurry without saying good bye. The streets were scarier than the horror movie, *Wrong Turn*. Souls gave up and flew from their bodies.

'Oh! Nooo.' Joy exclaimed.

'What?'

As if some ghost was hanging on her throat that no word could escape, she lifted her hand. It rose as if it never wanted to. Joan sent her eyes towards the direction and saw it all. With her camera, she captured them shoot the head of state. And a white dove flew past.

Creative
SPOTLIGHT

Patrick Nzabonimpa (Tom)





*In this edition, Lise interviews Patrick Nzabonimpa (Tom), a Rwandan writer, poet, and journalist. Patrick, the Country Coordinator of WSA-Rwanda since 2020, shares his journey from high school essays to a forthcoming short story collection, *A Thread of Silent Echoes* (2026). He reflects on the importance of staying true to African identity in literature and highlights the role of WSA-R in promoting creativity and collaboration among writers in Rwanda.*

Lise: Hello, Patrick, it's an honour to have you today. May our audience know more about who we have today?

Patrick: Patrick Nzabonimpa (Tom) is a Rwandan writer, poet, journalist and communications enthusiast. He is also the Country Coordinator of WSA-R since 2020 where he oversees the community's initiatives and facilitates some creative writing courses. His favourite genre is short story and his debut collection "A Thread of Silent Echoes" is forthcoming in 2026 from Vine Leaves Press (Greece, UK). Apart from his professional endeavours, Patrick is also a tea lover, a spoken word performer.

Lise: Kindly take me through your writing journey. When did you fall in love with writing and how is it so far?

Patrick: That's a big one. My journey is long but let me try to be brief. As far as I can remember, I started writing when I was still in high school, mainly senior two, writing essays and compositions that fellow students came to love. In 2018, that's when I started writing things not related to academia, starting with poems. I was inspired by a friend Ange Theonestine Tuyishime (Marayika) who used to post some poems on her WhatsApp status. I tried to write one imitating her style and later on, I started reading

poetry books and listening to poets on YouTube. Eventually I started writing my own poems inspired by my lifestyle and what I observe around me. In 2019, I broadened my skillset and started writing prose. I wrote a CNF about my family which was submitted to Pen Pen African Writers Residency in 2019 and got selected to attend it in early 2020. When I returned to Rwanda, I started writing short stories as I had grown to love prose and fiction as well and in April 2024, I started WSA-R to share what I've learned with fellow Rwandan writers. The community helped me to write more and more. In 2021, I joined The New Times and started writing

news and features as a journalist. Now, I am also into copywriting, editing and content writing. So, it has been a challenging but rewarding journey — from just having a passion to write to establishing a community with other writers and making a living out of my writing skills. The journey continues.

Lise: A. In three words, how would you describe WSA?

Patrick: Inclusive

Artistic

Supportive

Lise: B. Explain in details

Patrick: WSA first of all is a community which welcomes all writers from all walks of life, whatever genre you write and wherever you are based. That aspect of inclusivity is commendable. Then, there is art in this community, mainly creative writing. We don't just focus on writing but writing creative works that are also original. In addition to that, there are poets who are artistic as well as other artists who do really great things. So, I would say, it's a community of not just writers, but artistic writers. And lastly, the support in this community is huge. This is a community that allows you to grow for free, of course if you commit to learning, networking and collaborating. You get to connect

with amazing like-minded people who can take you places or become a stepping stone towards your dreams.

Lise: According to you, is there anything wrong with the way Africans express themselves in literary world?

Patrick: I believe that African writers need to stay true to their identity in their literature and not be influenced by western literature. Although we adopted their language, but we can still express our beliefs, traditions, cultures and other elements of identity in it. Where necessary and fit, we should write in our mother tongue as well as vernacular more. This means that if I read a work of an African writer, it should reflect the true life of Africans or a particular population in Africa and avoid stereotypes. Africa is developing and we also have technology, so our stories shouldn't be about bad stuff happening but also the unique good stuff we have.

Lise: Would you say that a writer's craft gets better as he grows? Why?

Patrick: From a personal experience, I agree. My craft has grown over the years. For instance, there is a big difference between the way I expressed myself through writing in 2018 and today. I've accumulated new skills, new experiences as well as wisdom to cater to even an older or wittier audience. But again, a writer shall keep reading more and different materials and immerse in different experiences to be able to grow their craft.

Never stop reading and writing as well.

Lise: Who are your top 3 favourite authors of all time?

Patrick: My favourite authors include Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, Stephen King and Michael A. Singer

Lise: You are WSA Rwanda's country coordinator and Rwanda will be hosting AWC this year. What would you like to tell us about it (WSA Rwanda) and its contribution to the growth of Rwandan literature?

Patrick: Good question. Yes, WSA-R is hosting African Writers Conference 2024 from October 22 to 27 in Kigali. We are so excited for this opportunity to connect writers, artists and literary enthusiasts from across Africa to share ideas and discuss the ways to advance African literature, mainly focusing on children's literature. We look forward to having engaging and insightful conversations as well as having fun with fellows across Rwanda and other African countries in attendance. So, nobody has to miss.

This conference seeks to significantly contribute to Rwandan literature as it will connect local writers which rarely happens here. Through book exhibition, creative writing workshops, panel discussions, we hope to see new ideas and connections emerging leading to more collaboration. Also, this will put WSA-R and WSA in general on spotlight which can lead to future partnerships and

opportunities.

Lise: Tom, what do you do in your free time? I mean, your hobbies.

Patrick: In my free time, I either read something, watch comedy or go out with a close friend or visit them. Sometimes, I also use the time to look for new opportunities in my field and share it with others where necessary. My hobbies include hiking or walking, travelling far from the city and mindfulness meditation.

Lise: Is there anything else you would like to share with our audience?

Patrick: I want to encourage you to build your dreams and where possible, focus on that. You can still help build someone else's but yours should remain a priority. And if you can't manage now, you should aim to get there. Don't let your dream just die like that. It's not really fair. Make a plan and start writing that book, ask for help and keep reminding yourself that you should achieve it. I would also love to take this opportunity to invite you to join us for AWC 2024. You can attend in-person or virtually. See you.

Lise: Thank you so much for your time, Tom.

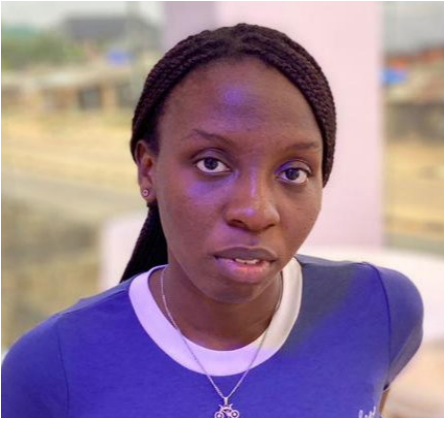
Patrick: Thank you too.



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





MY REDEMPTION WOULD DAWN

Titilope Taiwo
Nigeria

I spent my life in a haze, a suspended animation
With every breath taking me farther from the surface
And every sigh pulling me deeper into the void.

I never had grand ambitions, nor did I keep any lofty aspirations
For which one would have to fight or kill

I simply tried to live
And yet life dealt me hands as though I committed immutable sins
Wrongs of which I had no recollection.

I was quite the tragedy; onlookers would often shake their heads in pity.
Some said death would be a kindness
Even I thought that,
But refrained, solely because of hope
A promise, one I knew the universe was sure to keep.

To it I cleaved, no matter how low I sunk
I believed, that you
The seas and tides would someday bring.

And as though emerging from my most recent thoughts
Here you are!
With more brilliance than I could have ever imagined.

Giving me beauty for ashes
Making my darkness into light
I always knew that you would come,
That one day,
you, my redemption would dawn.



HILL OF LIBERATION

Thompson Emate
Nigeria

*“Redemption is the pathway that is trailed by perpetual light.
-Thompson Emate*

Freedom from the night
Walking towards the light
Darkness seeks for the escaped souls
It's like running on hot coals.

The light beckons on us
We're led to embark on the redemption bus
As we sojourn to embark
We're assailed by creatures cloaked in the dark.

Journeying across the turbulent sea
We begin to see
Hope holds our hands along the way
Redemption is the piercing ray.

I'll sing songs of freedom
Until I arrive at the celestial kingdom
Monsters will no longer stare at my window
I'll see an ever-blooming meadow.



SPINY

Steve Otieno
Kenya



The world,
comes to us
in the form of a balloon,

we,
go to it
dressed like cacti,

and wail,
about the noise it makes
when it bursts upon us,

We long to be redeemed.
“Touch me. Hold me,” we say to it.
“For that, you have to undress,” it responds.



ONLY BY HIS GRACE

Neba Terry-Phebe Ngum
Cameroon

Aching bones and fading goals
Fainting knees and weeping lips
Forms, overburdened by affliction's kiss
And we laid still, like a silent wind.

Then,
In all honor and humility notwithstanding
His majesty descended;
Journeying through the gates of a virgin's veil
And tearing down the cloaks that kept us caged.

We have been restored
By the power of his grace and washed by his blood
Empowered to outshine every hazy day,
No more sorrow, the way has been paved!

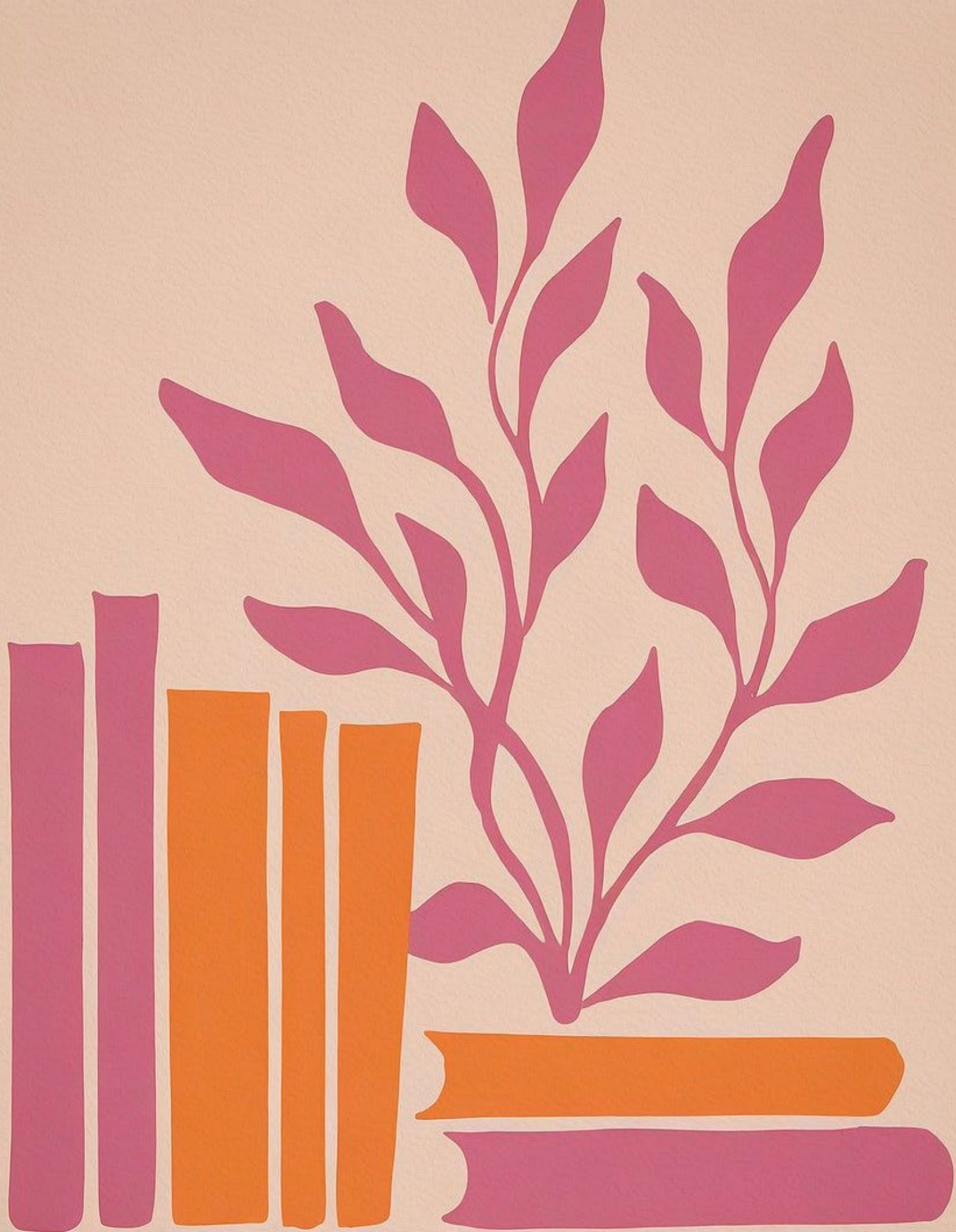
For whosoever he sets free is free indeed!
We are proud recipients of the peace he breeds;
Rescued by the ransom of his precious blood
Pawned at Golgotha for soothing of the lost.



REDEMPTION

Jane Frances
Nigeria

Reaching out my tainted hands
Empty of purity
Discord, my identity
Eclipsed by the world and 'of the World',
Mundane... my priority.
Prints of destruction
Taking a toll on my soul
In all of this,
Offered He, His hands of Love to me,
Never a thought of taking it back.



Short Stories



A KNIGHT'S SECOND CHANCE

Micah Angel
South Africa



A small body is impaled on the other side of my broad sword. I watch in horror as the life fades from the little boy's eyes. His mouth agape, the remnants of a bloodcurdling scream. Hooves clatter by followed by the battle cries of my fellow soldiers. The sounds

echo past me as they push our full-frontal crusade forward.

We breached the gates mere moments ago.

Where are the men? Where are the sinners? Surely God doesn't want us, his holy

knights, to strike down innocent women and children in cold blood.

I remove his body gently from my blade. I lift him gently and carry him away from the main road. I spot a house nearby which I enter.

I glance around to make sure we are alone. Once satisfied, I place the young boy on the nearby chair, laying him in a sleeping position. I turn my back, and even though I can hear a squeak and some shuffling, I refuse to kill more innocents.

I exit through the door, walking down the path in the opposite direction from the rest of the so-called holy hoard. I don't care if I am hunted down for the rest of my life as a deserter. What the church has done today is unspeakable.

I pass the large wooden gates, and there is nothing but splintered corpses. I head towards the horses which were stashed nearby, looking for my beige mare, Bristle. Finding the girl, I mount up ready to depart.

"Sir Knight?" A young girl's voice is heard behind me.

Eyes widened; I accept my fate for a mere moment. Surely, I will be punished for all this blood on my hands.

"Excuse me, Sir Knight?" the girl clears her throat.

I slowly turn around and see the young woman. So young.

"Yes, sorry my lady. How can I assist?" I ask.

Her brown hair rips from her shawl in the sudden sandy gust. I block the wind with my left gauntlet.

"Could I perhaps leave with you?" she asks loudly.

I'm aghast. My lids flutter as I try to comprehend what she just asked.

"Don't you have family to return to?" I ask her, baffled.

"I do not, Sir Knight." Her voice is catchy, tears forming in her eyes.

The horrors this poor girl must have seen. "All right," I sigh, "pardon me, I never asked for your name."

"It's Anna." She states, her eyes burning brightly.

I dismount and step towards her, "You can call me Gaspard." Stepping back, I collect Bristle and lead her to-

wards Anna. "Its best if you ride her."

She seemed flabbergasted at my suggestion. "Sir Gaspard, I have never ridden a horse before." She gasped.

"Don't fret, I will be handling her reins." Her cheeks flush red. "Will you ride as well?"

"What? No!" I clear my voice and gain my composure, my ears burning bright red.

"It is not wise for two people to be on top of a horse."

"Ah, I see." She seemed disappointed.

"Come let's go." I hold out a hand to make her mounting easier. She is dwarfed compared to my steed. "Hold on tight." She nods. "Come Bristle." I mutter. The three of us set off, hoping to reach a new town before the rest of the crusaders catch up.

By nightfall, we still haven't found a safe place to set up camp. "I suppose we will be sleeping here for the night." I mutter rather disappointed.

"Will we be safe?" She asks.

"We should for now." I help her down. "Besides, Bristle here needs her rest and some

food and water.”

I remove a cup and feed bag from the saddle. It’s not ideal but for an emergency this should do, I have noticed some farmlands in the distance, an excellent opportunity for her to graze. They should also have clean, fresh water.

“I do not have many rations to keep us going for long. I will have to find a town or at least an opportunity to hunt if we are to survive all of this.”

“Don’t worry Sir Gaspard. God will provide for us.” She smiles broadly.

I don’t feel so sure, would God have wanted any of this, and if she is a believer, if her family are believers, why did we strike that town under the impression that they weren’t?

After splitting a loaf of bread and sharing a hefty drink of water, the two of us lie down for the night.

“I will keep watching.” I state.

“Aren’t you tired?”

“Perhaps.” I can feel the sleep lulling at me, my lids growing heavy, my body weary from weeks of countless battles.

“If you’re tired, you should rest as well.” Her tone is soft and gentle.

Lying down, she turns her back towards me and quickly falls into a deep slumber. I sit and watch the twinkling sky, waiting for any form of movement over the flat horizon.

Soon, my vision is plagued with all the faces of those that I ran through and struck with my sword. I jump awake, body drenched in

a cold sweat, gasping for breath.

“Are you, all right?” Anna’s voice is terrified.

“It’s nothing, just ... a bad dream.”

She pulls a tiny cloth from a pocket in her tattered, dirtied skirt, pressing it gently on my forehead. “It’ll be okay. God is watching over us.”

“How can you be so sure?” I ask her, questioning my own faith.

“If he wasn’t, I wouldn’t be here, by your side, and you wouldn’t have walked away back there.”

I think back to that moment. Noticing all the injustice, did God really show his hand and guide me from the crimes of the church? “Perhaps...” I look at Anna, surely, he saved her as well.

Packing up our little camp site, we press on. Soon enough we find ourselves on the outskirts of a farm, cattle moving about and enjoying the warm sunlight.

“Look there!” She states atop the horse. “A road of some sorts.”

Sure, enough there it is. “Let’s follow it and see if we can settle here for the day. Bristle really needs the rest.”

Anna claps her hands together in excitement. A thatched roof peeks out from beyond the horizon. Once we reach outside the gate, I help her down and make my way towards the door. Knocking. A middle-aged woman, large from her pregnancy, opens the door.

“Can I help you?” she asks nervously.

"Would you mind if the young lady Anna rests here for a moment?" I ask, gesturing to the young girl behind me.

"Oh, you poor thing." She pushes past me and takes her tiny hands in her own. "You must be famished."

"I could eat." She smiles.

"If I may ask, would it be fine for my horse to graze between the cattle? She has had a rather long journey."

"Oh, what a beauty." She states glancing towards the gate where Bristle stands idly. "Sure, let her have some fun."

"Thank you for your hospitality, ma'am." I bow slightly and head towards my steed to remove the saddle and reins. "There you go, have some fun." I give her a gently stroke down her neck. Leading her onto the grass, I leave her to do her thing. I turn towards the lady standing in the doorway and bow again before I step forward, ready to proceed with my travels.

"Aren't you coming in for a wash and a warm meal?" She calls behind me.

I feel a tear flow down my scruffy face, such kindness. God, I hope this is your hand at work. I leave a quick prayer. Turning on my heel, I head towards her.

"Once again, thank you so much for your hospitality, though I don't believe I deserve it."

"Pish posh," she counters, "No person would deny a weary man, a warm meal and a chance to clean up."

I cock a smile. I am filthy. My once white garments, my symbol as a crusader, are no longer pristine.

"You can leave the clothes to me; I will ensure that it is washed and returned to you upon nightfall."

The two of us just gazed at her.

"I should have some spare clothes around here somewhere. My eldest son is about your age, Anna. I hope you don't mind wearing breachers." Anna just shook her head. "My husband is a bit burlier than you sir, but it should do for the day."

"Thank you. I will repay you one day, I swear."

"There is no need. Kindness is always repaid with more kindness. It is God's way." I sit and ponder on her words.

As the seasons passed, the crusaders did not come past the farmlands. They didn't launch an assault at any of the villages I visited to spread God's holy word. I do wonder. Perhaps this is what He truly wanted, not the unbridled war in His name.



SECOND CHANCE

Thirikwa Nyingi
Kenya

It had been a tough day for Mutero whose career as the football coach of Tembo High was teetering on the brink of collapse after the humiliating defeat at the hands of Masii High. With a frown on his face, he replayed the events of the ill-fated afternoon in his mind as he raced up the winding road in his Toyota Premio. As the trees along the highway whirled past him at great speed, he could still hear the deafening roar of the cheering fans as the shrill of the final whistle signaling the end of the tense and foul-tempered match pierced the air.

Two players, one from either side had been given their marching orders following an altercation between the two that turned physical and almost escalated into a full-scale war among the players of both teams but for the intervention of riot police who restored order. A full ten minutes elapsed before the match could resume. By then, Tembo High was trailing by a solitary goal and looked well set to even the score before a penalty awarded to Masii High at stoppage time sealed their fate. Hardly had a minute gone

by after the penalty was converted, when the game ended sending their fans into a mad frenzy of celebration.

The sky, as if on cue, had suddenly opened and rain fell in buckets but Masii High crowd was not one to be dampened by the weather and round the field they danced in the rain in jubilation before trooping back into their buses drenched to the skin.

It had never happened before in the history of Tembo High. Losing at home was simply inconceivable least of all under Mutero's tutelage, who had been sourced from one of the country's leading clubs. He had cost a dime but the school's management still went ahead to okay the move. His hiring caused not a minor stir in the world of sports, some hailing it as the best move Tembo High – known for producing world-class players – could make as the school continued their tradition of being the trailblazers in football. But others thought that the school was over-doing things. Any qualified high school football coach could have done the same job for

less, so they argued.

Tembo High were the reigning regional champions and now they had their sights trained on the continental cup. They were sparing no efforts towards this end. Now, after the devastating loss, even their qualification for the national finals was not guaranteed.

Mutero had less than a week to turn the fortunes of Tembo High around. The make-or-break second leg match would be played at Masii High grounds. While driving out of the school car park after the downpour had dwindled to a light drizzle, he received a call from one of the school directors ordering him to tender his resignation pending a review of his contract. Meanwhile, he had to let his assistant coach take over from there. He parked his car again in disbelief and shock at this sudden news. But what did he expect in this cut-throat world of soccer? His was a strictly result-oriented job, and it was clear he had not kept his side of the bargain and was therefore being pushed out.

He pleaded his case, prom-

ising that he would deliver the coveted trophy the following Saturday. There was prolonged silence on the other end of the line before the gruff voice of the director came back, saying he would call him back, and then hung up. He was close to tears at the thought of losing his job when he needed the money the most. He had recently taken out a huge mortgage loan on his house. His marriage, too, was going through a rough patch, the worst in his seventeen-year-old marriage.

He was just driving into his compound when the phone rang. It was the director. They had reconsidered his case and would let him stay as long as he won the next match. He let out a big sigh of relief. He had pinned all his hopes on Jack – the burgeoning striker – during the just-ended match, but it was like Jack had developed leaden feet in front of the rivals' goal, wasting chance after chance, drawing loud boos and jeers from the crowd.

Still, he retained Jack on the field against his better judgment, hoping that he would recover his form in the few

remaining minutes and turn the tables against their rivals. It was not to be, and everybody now was blaming him for failing to take charge of the situation. This was Jack's only chance to join the prestigious Vintage University on a scholarship awarded to the best player in the final.

Yet the boy was blowing the chance just to spite him. They were not even on speaking terms since last evening after he shouted at his mother in anger, causing her to cower in her seat. The boy had gone to bed without touching his supper. Mutero regretted his actions and felt it was his duty to apologize. He had no option but to make peace with both of them to save his job and marriage.

Now he turned to talk to his son, but the boy had already gotten out of the vehicle before he could even turn off the engine.

"Jack!" he bellowed after him as he marched into the house, but the boy did not even falter in his step to acknowledge he had heard him. "Damn!" he cursed to himself. But a bright flash of lightning streaking across

the darkening sky, followed by a deafening crash of thunder that seemed to split the heavens in two, made him forget his anger. He picked his duffel bag from the adjacent seat and made a dash for the house as fat drops of rain made soft plopping sounds as they struck the roof.

It rained ceaselessly with short breaks until Saturday morning – the day of the much-anticipated match – when it suddenly stopped and the sun came out in all its glory. There was a lot of kicking up of mud as the two teams tested each other’s defense on the muddy pitch, but neither yielded to the other. Mutero had benched Jack, who sat there with him looking gloomier every minute. Mutero’s efforts to make peace with his son had yielded no results, and he could only pray that his team would win this match to help him retain his job.

Unless they won this match by more than two goals, they were going home. And then something happened. One of Masii High’s defenders handled the ball inside the box, and Tembo High was awarded a penalty kick, which they

easily scored, sending the whole field into an ecstasy of celebration. But from that point on, it was impossible to breach their defense, and things were looking gloomy for Tembo High as minutes ticked towards the end of the match with no sign of another goal.

The match was now in stoppage time and could end at any moment. Mutero looked at his son, who was now on his feet urging his teammates to pile on more pressure. He made a quick decision and signaled for a substitution. “Son,” he whispered to him, “this is your chance now to save the situation,” he said as he pushed him onto the field to the consternation of everybody who remembered how poorly he had played in the last game.

No sooner had Jack stepped onto the field than he received a long pass and sent a curling shot into the top left corner of the net, eliciting wild cheers from the crowd as Tembo High evened the score just before the match ended. They went into penalty shootouts, which

Tembo High won by five goals to three. Jack became

the hero once again when he was announced as the player of the match.

The sun was a giant red ball hanging over the western hills as Mutero drove into the sunset. He was in an upbeat mood and smiled at his son in the passenger seat. “We did it, son!” he told him.

“Sure, Dad,” Jack answered as he smiled back at his father. Then he stared out of the window, enjoying the scenery as it fled past, and thought about the delicious supper awaiting them at home.



LEAVING CHAOS BEHIND

Sarah Ikogba
Nigeria

Aba.

22nd, July, 1998.

Papa burnt down Mama's farm the day we left. It had rained heavily on the night Mama had finally asked for a divorce.

She had called me the previous evening, her voice shaking over the phone. "Nne, your father threw my things outside again." She had sobbed, leaving out the part where he had flung his walking stick at her, and had bashed her head to the mud cladded wall. I would later find out about this from my cousin, Oluchi.

"I told him that I am not doing it again. That I want to ask for separation."

"Where are you now, Mama?" I asked, pacing the length of my bedroom, my heart racing with each breath.

"I am outside with my load. I will sleep in the Nchikọ this night."

The Nchikọ was a detached house we used in

storing baskets of dried fish, tubers of yams, kegs of palm oil and bunches of plantain. It was no place for her to spend the night.

"You will not do that o, Mama," I said in a strong voice - to show her I was serious.

"It is better like this. I will manage."

"Look Mama, I am coming to pick you up first thing tomorrow," I said. "You will come and live with me and Tayo. Please pack a few things, but not everything. And no matter what Papa says or does, don't take back your words." I finished, and for the first time, she did not say, I will not leave my home, or these are the things I must endure.

A sign she had finally come undone.

The next day, before the fog rolled in, Mama was summoned by our umunna. The men, whose skeletons wobbled in their skins; their faces sunken and eyes hollowed, sat on low stools. They flapped their wrappers to swat away the early morning flies and mosquitoes that buzzed annoyingly around their legs.

"Ehem! Our wife. Jidenna has told us that you want to scatter this marriage. Why is that?" Chief Odibo, known for his loud mouth, boomed.

Mama looked around before replying. "I am no longer happy. I haven't been happy for some time now."

All the men exchanged graced glances. Her answer seemed to confuse them.

"Happiness, just that?" A shrill voice asked.

"Isn't that enough reason?" I retorted, locking eyes with the nuisance of a man.

"Keep quiet, Olanna." Mama tapped me gently on the arm. "Or they will kick you out."

"She says I don't treat her right. Can you imagine the nonsense," Papa chimed in. He was staring at us, with bewilderment dancing in the liquid of his eyes.

"Chelukwa! Didn't you just buy her a new plantain plantation last September?" A balding man asked. He was the oldest amongst them. "And even set up this amazing farm for her?" He nodded towards the land adjacent to our house.

"There is nothing Akuada has asked that I have not provided." Papa's eyes narrowed in slits and his jaw clenched. "But does she appreciate any of it?" He asked, still watching us.

"I am aware of that." The man smiled, his teeth, yellow stained like someone had rubbed the oil from an overnight okpa on them. He placed a hand on Papa's shoulder and said, "Jidenna, my brother, you don't need to explain yourself to anybody here. You are a good man, a good husband to Akuada, and a good father to Olanna."

"And what about the things I have never asked for?" Mama asked. It was almost a whisper. "The times I pleaded with you to stop, that I was sorry even when I didn't know what I did wrong?" Her voice cracked, as she fought back the tears pooling in her eyes. "It is now evident that you will never see how you've broken my spirit for the past thirty-three years."

"Which spirit?" Chief Odibo bellowed. The air was thick with tension now. Voices

rose and refused to fall. "Akuada, you are the one really saying this? Ah, this is why our fathers warned us not to take ungrateful women for wives."

The other men joined in supporting Chief Odibo, their voices ringing out from every corner.

Mama slowly got up from her stool in grace. She looked pointedly at Papa's scrunched up face.

"I've watched you take and take and take," she said to him in a steady voice, amid the noise. "For once, I am finally choosing me. I am choosing my sanity over responsibility, or the tag of being a good wife."

"Akuada must have swallowed a seed that was making her behave strangely,"

"She must have taken something foreign that was pushing her into destroying her home,"

"She was possessed by an unclean spirit."

Our Umunna concluded, their faces stern and unforgiving as they condemned Mama.

The meeting, as expected, ended in a tumultuous uproar. The feet of some members of the umunna scuffling away, sounds of chairs scraping the earth, hands waving wildly, fists slapping hard on thighs, filled the air.

The men tried to restrain papa from burning the farm. Mama and I seized the opportunity to escape, fleeing to the waiting vehicle that had brought me to the house that morning. Thank God I had paid the driver to wait behind.

As we sped away, we caught a glimpse of Papa's figure diminishing into the distance, running, yelling in rage and sprinkling the farm beside the house with kerosene. Some of the elders, the ones whose waists were still fit for running, gave chase, but soon realized that no amount of pleading or threatening could stop Papa from torching the farm.

They fell back, and watched in horror as the yellow-orange fury flames crept into the land, and spread into everything around it, consuming it, owning it.

"That is how he becomes when he starts." Mama shook her head.

"It's finally over, Mama. I am so sorry you had to endure all this."

"Nne, it's not your fault."

Mama took my hand in hers and placed it on her chest. "Olanna look, my chest feels lighter. It's almost as if a knot has come loose."

I nodded, placing my second hand on her chest, feeling the gentle rise and fall of her breath.

"And it will continue to become lighter and lighter. You'll never know what it feels like to carry heaviness ever again. I promise you this."

Behind us, a thick black smoke billowed towards the horizon. It's smell filling our lungs, and causing our eyes to sting.

Suddenly, the sky grew dark, the clouds seemed to crack open and water poured down in a torrent.

A small smile creased Mama's face. She gently pressed her forehead against the blurry window, and muttered

under her breath, "Let my sufferings evaporate with the rains."

We drove on, leaving chaos behind, burying it in our past, along with every other thing that didn't need saving.



Liza Chuma Akunyili
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WORK YOUR IGNORANCE

Writing causes you to pay more attention to life than the average person does; you never know where inspiration will strike.

What this means in everyday interaction is that you identify how nuanced situations are, you see and hear stories from different points of view, and you are constantly spinning narratives and giving the wittiest responses (this is assuming you share your powerful opinions).

The downside of living like this is that you assume you always know what to say, but you do not! Just because you are a fantastic writer and have gone on to publish a book does not mean you know the first thing about business. Just because you read well does not mean you understand every legal contract you are presented with and its legal implications.

However, you will not ask for help because you are a

writer and expect yourself to have a mastery of how society works. Actually, I was first a writer before I became a therapist or even dreamt of doing business. Here's what I have found out: ignorance is a strong indicator of the areas where I have mastery.

When I walk into a room to negotiate and contracts come up, I don't know a thing about the fine print yet, but the therapist in me starts to notice if someone

is blackmailing, gaslighting, rushing or even belittling me. As my perceived legal ignorance comes to the surface, so does the area of my expertise.

Ignorance is not to be feared but to be listened to. It doesn't matter how sensitive I am to the power play in the room, at some point, I need to sign those contracts, which means that I get three options:

1. Quit
2. Get a lawyer (and pay the price)
3. Go in blindly and figure out what I am losing in hindsight.

It is not uncommon to find writers who unknowingly signed off the largest part of their royalty to the publishing company. Yes, the publishers were greedy, and yes, the writer was ignorant, but you guessed right; the writer did not listen to their ignorance.

The fear you have when it comes to publishing your work, distributing it glob-

ally, repurposing your work, and building a brand out of it has less to do with your incompetence and more to do with your unwillingness to partner with someone whose expertise fills the gap of your ignorance.

In 2016, I was going to launch a podcast, and I didn't know the first thing about editing, publishing, or distribution. I had met a new friend that day and considered the shame of looking like a fool versus the awareness that I could waste that day going home the same. So, I chose power over ego and told them my problem. This person taught me how to minimise disturbances while recording without a microphone, put my podcast on YouTube, and helped me distribute through Vocaroo.

I could have retained my pride, gone home feeling defeated and powerless about the things I could not control, or I could have simply asked for help and

gotten things moving, like I did. When I registered my first business, I had just made my first 100,000 Naira. I remember calling my lawyer immediately after I got the money because when I was cashless, I had met every requirement and knew exactly who to call, having scrutinised my options.

The second thing to confront is time. It is great to admit your ignorance and ask for help, but you must do that on time (ahead of time). Asking for professional help on the spot puts you in a desperate position. Imagine if I had started searching for a lawyer only after I got the money? Imagine how I would likely have paid off the first person to approach me or sound nice?

As a therapist, one of my preferred techniques to help my clients avoid abuse is to help them create their value system and define their boundaries. So, when people begin to access them, they have a

solid measuring line and are not driven by the initial excitement.

How many publishing companies have you read about? What scandals have they been involved in? How many of their writers are successful? Do they pay on time according to the contract? Do they randomly truncate contracts? What kind of brand do you need to build to work with Company A or B? What kind of brand do you need to build as an indie author? If you do not have time for this research, have you deliberately found someone to help you out?

Again, you are finally doing the right thing with your ignorance, but you're doing it at the wrong time (the spot where you need it and are desperate).

Finally, you work your ignorance by being willing to lose. You make a decision to learn on the job, regardless of how much it costs. I really want your first article to blow up the inter-

net and put your name on every magazine in your continent, yet I know that doesn't happen often.

Create frequently and make a decision to lose some. When working with wellness businesses, I make my clients create different categories of content:

⊙ Authoritative content: This type of content showcases what they have mastery of and invites people to see their professional journey. You can do this with your LinkedIn/Medium as a writer. Authoritative content is best shared on public platforms. It is very easy to redistribute and is used to get you collaborative opportunities.

⊙ Community content: This type of content is very conversational. This is the one you create and curate for those who are invested in you. This is home, so you are most authentic and adventurous here. Think newsletters, private groups, private so-

cial media (even public).

⊙ Collaborative content: These are content types and styles you reserve for collaborations. Think live events, projects, etc. These are focused on creating the shock effect around your work and personality. It leaves people wanting more of you and searching for you online.

You are not broke because you are ignorant. You are likely broke because you think every project ought to make you rich. So, you are missing out on opportunities to collaborate, be known, and then get paid.

I hope these tips help you as they have helped me.

Cheers!!! I cannot wait to get your feedback at authors@lizachuma.com

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