

WRITERS SPACE

AFRICA

JANUARY 2025 EDITION

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Passion, Perseverance, and Creativity

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<https://www.writersspace.net>



writersspace.net

The best of African Literature

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(Global Business Awards 2022)
- **Writer Promotion platform of the Year - 2021**
(The Corporate LiveWire Global Awards 2021/22)
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WSA
Writers Space Africa
M a g a z i n e

inside this edition...



In this edition, Lise interviews Adrian Nyarko-Boateng, a 14-year-old award-winning writer from Ghana, who shares his inspiring journey to winning the African Teen Awards. Adrian discusses his passion for writing, the influence of his upbringing, his aspirations as a writer, and his advice for fellow young creatives striving to achieve their dreams... page 17

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Welcome

“Humans, not places, make memories.”

— Ama Ata Aidoo

Happy New Year, dear readers!

As we welcome 2025, we are grateful for your loyalty and continued support throughout 2024. The past year had its share enveloped with ups and downs, and we acknowledge that while some people navigated challenges unscathed, others bore scars that still linger.

In embracing the promise of a new year on a positive, vigorous and innovative note, our theme for this month’s edition is FRESH PAGES, symbolizing new beginnings and limitless possibilities. We invite African writers from around the world to share their stories, embracing the promises of a brand-new year.

Embarking on this fresh start, I encourage you to step up, walk into the fresh threshold and join us in painting off old memories and scars while re-writing a new narrative. It provides an impetus to redefine our roles in this newly born epoch and let’s celebrate the 97th edition of Writers Space Africa Magazine together!

In this edition, you will discover captivating literary masterpieces that reflect the importance of a very new beginning, carefully crafted by African writers. Our creatives have poured their hearts into their work, and we are honored



to share their voices with you. Enjoy the 97th edition of the Writers Space Africa magazine as you tuck away the old memories to make room for a brand-new beginning.

Wishing you a bright and beautiful new beginning. Cheers to 2025!

Best regards,

Comfort Naana Adwoa Okyere

Chief Editor

Writers Space Africa Magazine.



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Empowering African Writers



Call for Submissions

THEME: PETS

Writers Space Africa (WSA) is accepting submissions for its 99th edition (March 2025 Edition).

We accept: Children's Literature, Creative Non-Fiction, Flash Fiction, Poetry, and Short Stories

Deadline January 15, 2025

Submit to: www.writersspace.net

wsa@writersspace.net



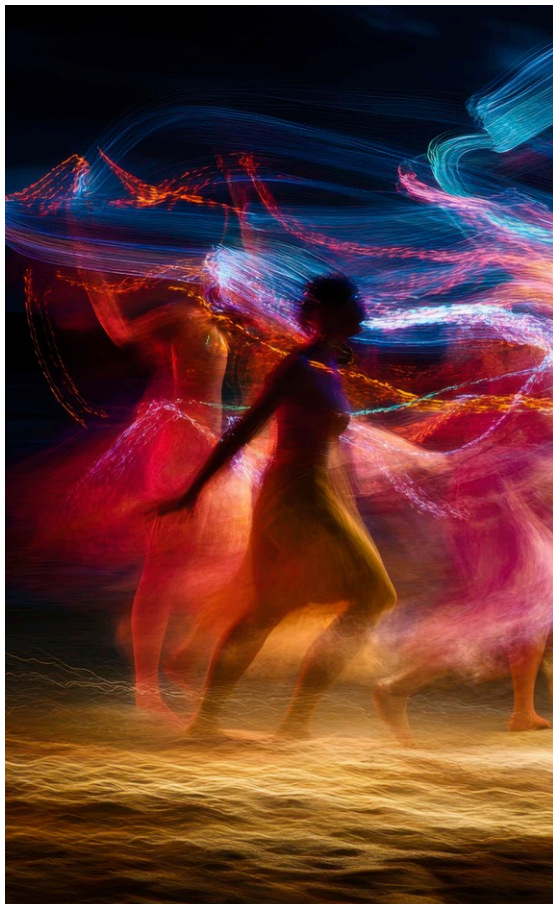
Utomba the Spirit Dancer

CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE



Author: Mary Uduma

Country: Nigeria



Chikaima sat cross-legged as she listened to Grandma's tales of the famous Iyi Nzu, a renowned river in Chekwurube village.

"Once upon a time..." Grandma began, her eyes lighting up as if she could remember vividly all that had happened when Chukwuabiana was still living with the forefathers of Chekwurube village.

Utomba was the village princess. Her eyes shone like the moon and her skin was brighter than the sun. People called her Omalicha because

she was the prettiest maiden in the whole land. She lived by the riverside and nobody knew who her parents were. Rumour had it that she was created by the mermaid that lived inside the Iyi Nzu River.

Year in and year out, troops of young men from all around the world would visit Iyi Nzu River just to watch her do her famous agbara dance. Whenever she danced, her body quivered and bounced, and her legs would move in beautiful rhythms to a music that

only she could hear. Rumor also had it that she might have been created by Chukwuabiamama himself who occasionally came down from Eluigwe to keep her company. On days when he was busy answering the prayers of his children all around the world, he would send down his servants to come down from Eluigwe to play beautiful songs for her.

"Are there instruments in Eluigwe?" Chikaima asked. Her big brown eyes dazzled in awe as she imagined what Eluigwe music would sound like.

"Of course." Grandma replied. "Eluigwe music cannot be compared to any other music in the entire world. They have Udu, Oyo, Gongo and so many other instruments that we on earth have neither heard nor seen."

Chikaima frowned as she asked again, "What of Violin, Guitar and Piano?"

Grandma smiled and patted the little child on the cheeks. "Those were handmade and will not sound as sweet as the ancient instruments carved

by Chukwuabiamama himself." "So, what happened to Utomba, did she die?" Chikaima asked again.

Grandma's eyes took on a sad expression as she heaved a bitter sigh.

No one can tell exactly what happened to her. She took advantage of the fact that men worshipped her beauty and started demanding meat, yam, palm wine and other things from the men who usually went to watch her do her yearly agbara dance. But, one day, there was a great noise at the Iyi Nzu River. A palm wine tapper who was nearby at that time, said he saw her battle with a big python that had wings. A few days later, she disappeared and to date, no one knows what happened to her.

"Could it be that Chukwuabiamama was angry at her for collecting food items from men when he was already supplying her with all she wanted?" There were tears in Chikaima's eyes as she asked the question.

"Maybe she ate from a tree that Chukwuabiamama warned her not to eat from." Grandma replied quietly.

Was it an Udara tree?

Some say it was an Ube tree.

Why did Chukwuabiamama tell her not to eat from the ube tree?

Nobody has an answer to that. Maybe he was trying to protect her from something we don't know about...

Unique Snowflake

CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE



Author: Rambelani Mbedzi

Country: Zimbabwe

Tick tock
 Time is moving
 Look at the clock

Be wide awake
 School term is starting
 You're now grade one, cupcake

From the rest you took
 It's time for bathing
 For a fresh new look

Come let's cook
 I know you love eating
 Let's see what we can make

Grab that book
 The school bus is waiting
 Education isn't something to lack
 You're a unique snowflake
 Everyday you're growing
 Protect your spark
 Shine in the dark.





Call For Submission

PoeticAfrica, Africa's first trilingual (English, French, Kiswahili) poetry magazine, calls for submissions from poets for her February 2025 edition.

Superstitions have influenced African parenting and beliefs. While some have proven true by chance, others have been debunked. Though less common today, many cultures still uphold them. Given this, write a poem highlighting your thoughts on superstitions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Your poem should be rich in creativity and poetic devices
- Submissions are accepted in English, French and Swahili
- French or Swahili poems should be submitted without equivalent translations in English
- To submit, please visit <https://writersspace.net/poeticafrica>

THE DEADLINE HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO JANUARY 10TH, 2025.

The Books Within

Author: Shalom Ayerwot

Country: Uganda

CREATIVE
NON-FICTION

Many people face a great deal of resistance when asked to begin anew but it is time we step into the great unknown. Overcome the financial struggles by tracking our spending, creating a budget, or cutting non-essential expenses. Change the talk from "that one is a drug addict" to "he is sober".

I am a book! Well, to so many other people, books are a fountain of wisdom. Key to the greatest treasures in the world, or a bound set of blank sheets. But I must say, I am more than just a book! For I hold the weight of endless possibilities yet to be realized. I am a source of inspiration and I give a chance to thousands to narrate who they are or who they might become. However, the question is, how many people do believe that we have a chance to redefine our narratives? Or, how many people believe that

each day, life presents us with fresh pages?

It is how we choose to fill these pages that actually matters. Unfortunately, we do not believe our worth.

We are still settling for less yet we let our hearts shutter into flakes of pain. The unheard whispers of our souls for freedom from dark corners continue to resound in the hearts, and minds of those who yearn for normality, peace of mind, and the sight of dawn break.

So, I ask!

How long shall we continue to sink under the hurt covers of our pages?

Claude Bernard once said, it is what we already know that often prevents us from learning. And indeed, his acknowledgment is lucid because, the comfort of the known can be hard to leave behind and start over again. Same as bringing past experiences and failures into new ventures causes us to hesitate and second-guess ourselves with wonders of, "What if things don't work out?"

Many people face a great deal of resistance when asked to begin anew but it is time we step into the great unknown. Overcome the financial struggles by tracking our spending, creating a budget, or cutting non-essential expenses. Change the talk from "that one is a drug addict" to "he is sober". This can be done by avoiding triggers and considering medication-assisted treatment! Let go of the identity crisis. Be content with that which we have at hand and embrace our imperfections for they are not

just imperfections but rather, our uniqueness's. We are all books and each one of us has the chance to erase our past pains and failures by simply flipping a page and rewriting our stories. Yes! The fear of failure may make us hesitate to even begin, but the pages of our lives are ours to write.

Things may look dark and bleak now but we are the ones to light it all up! Block our ears from negative statements and listen to no other but words of wisdom, growth, and inspiration to aim for the seemingly unreachable. No matter the discouragements and heartbreaks. The failures and tears shed. A blank page does not judge or carry any preconceived expectations. For it is filled with capacity waiting for our unique marks. Therefore, as books, we are canvases of potential, and just as Leonardo Da Vinci would, we ought to paint the kinds of pictures we would love the world to see. Or rather, take up our pens, write our stories anew, and make every page count. For we are

concepts that transcend paper.

Thank You!

In the Hinterland

Author: Chiamaka Ogbuife

Country: Nigeria

CREATIVE
NON-FICTION

Each time I thought I understood, I found myself more confused, as if my very self was at odds with their unyielding standards. I've never wanted to be a speck of dust until a school staff pointed out how my skirt rested inches above my knee, or how a perfectly fitted mid-length gown became too raunchy.

Control has always felt like a suffocating weight on my chest. I despise it deeply, and I often find myself reflecting on the six long years I spent in an authoritarian-style Christian school where every thought, every step, and every gesture was policed. With each passing moment, I felt myself slipping away. I wondered how everyone around me seemed okay. No one appeared to care, and over time, my desire to just be treated with respect felt foolish, irresponsible, and far-fetched.

I struggled to make sense of

their rules concerning modesty. Each time I thought I understood, I found myself more confused, as if my very self was at odds with their unyielding standards. I've never wanted to be a speck of dust until a school staff pointed out how my skirt rested inches above my knee, or how a perfectly fitted mid-length gown became too raunchy. And the most ridiculous of them all, how a T-shirt that had a cat mapped across was too vulgar to be seen in public.

Recently, I graduated from the university with a degree

in medicine and had to spend some days in school leading up to my graduation. It was so amusing walking through the hallway of my dorm and being told “Your lashes are way too long”. I watched as they continued to pick apart everything: “This necklace isn’t allowed” “Tie your hair”. I replied firmly “I am not a student of this school anymore” and walked past to my room. It felt exhilarating knowing I was officially free from the constraint of organized religion.

I was free from the thoughts of “what ifs” that plagued my every day with fantasies of a life somewhere far away beyond this mess. When you voice out your feelings about a particular treatment, you’re manipulated by the group into thinking everything is an act of care. Never control. You have to see the light; whatever is done is done for your own good, you’re told. Whatever resistance you have to these so-called rules is the devil speaking. And soon enough, you will be tamed, reared to become docile, complacent, silent.

This is the goal, I suppose.

The car rides back home were one of my favourite. It felt like being thrown back into normalcy each time I left the school gates. I would sit in the car just enveloped with relief. I needed those times- leaving, being back home with my family, seeing my friends in Lagos again, eating the best home-cooked meals, dressing freely, going to places because I finally could without filling an exeat or writing some ridiculous letter.

I wasn’t home often, but one of my most treasured memories was coming back to Lagos for my 20th birthday. Celebrating with one of my best friends, talking, eating Japanese cuisine in the most elegant restaurant, taking pictures and exploring the surroundings of the place we were in. I am so thankful I did something for my 20th. Because it’s so easy to just let plans dispel into nothing. I fought against that and just let myself be happy.

Turning twenty marked a significant turning point for

me, I found myself slowly shedding the bitterness I harboured towards my institution and just started living despite it. I experienced a profound shift in perspective, moving from resistance to acceptance, recognizing that this journey was mine to own. Despite the weight of everything pressing down on me, I became fiercely committed to my joy.

In retrospect, I question whether things were as bad as they seemed. This chapter, once overwhelming, now poses as a strange yet pivotal part of my life history. It persisted for a really long time then on a random Tuesday morning, it ended and became my past.

In ‘Women Who Run with the Wolves’, Clarissa Pinkola boldly states that “by laying out what one experienced, what one has made of it, what is admirable. It is the admiring of it, rather than the being of it, that releases the person.” The weight of it all now settles upon me like a benediction.



FLASH POETRY 3RD EDITION CONTEST

\$30
1st

\$20
2nd



SUNDAY 19 JANUARY, 2025

TO ENTER:

- Join the contest via the WhatsApp Group Link
- You will be paired with another poet on the contest day
- Check the prompt and write with your partner upon request



5:00
-PM-
CAT

• Benny Wanjohi (Kenya) • Nicole Gandaho (Benin Republic) • Omadang Yowasi (Uganda) • Funminiyi Akinrinade (Nigeria)

J u d g e s

The judges select the top two teams To join, WhatsApp: **+254 702 447049**

Dots from the Rain

Author: John Adeh

Country: Nigeria

FLASH
FICTION

I miskenly invited a gust of wind into my room. It caught up my blank sheets of paper and scattered them across the room. I didn't blame the sheets. Had any of them had as much as a dot, maybe they would have been heavier. I sighed and picked them.

A day earlier, I saw a documentary on how to move writer's block with one's mind, two plates of pie and fruit juice. After eating my pie, I downed the drink and braced up for the magic.

I yawned three times and from nowhere, inspiration flowed. I knew what to write and how to write it. The plot was clearer than crystal.

I placed my fingers on the keys and struck the first key. Then the flow flooded my head and streamed down my veins through my hands onto every strike that appeared on the page. Within minutes, a page was down. I removed the paper, reeled in another and before I could stop, 50 pag-

es were down.

"Whoops!" I stood up, stretched and cracked my knuckles.

It was a success. I sat back and some breeze rushed inside without my permission.

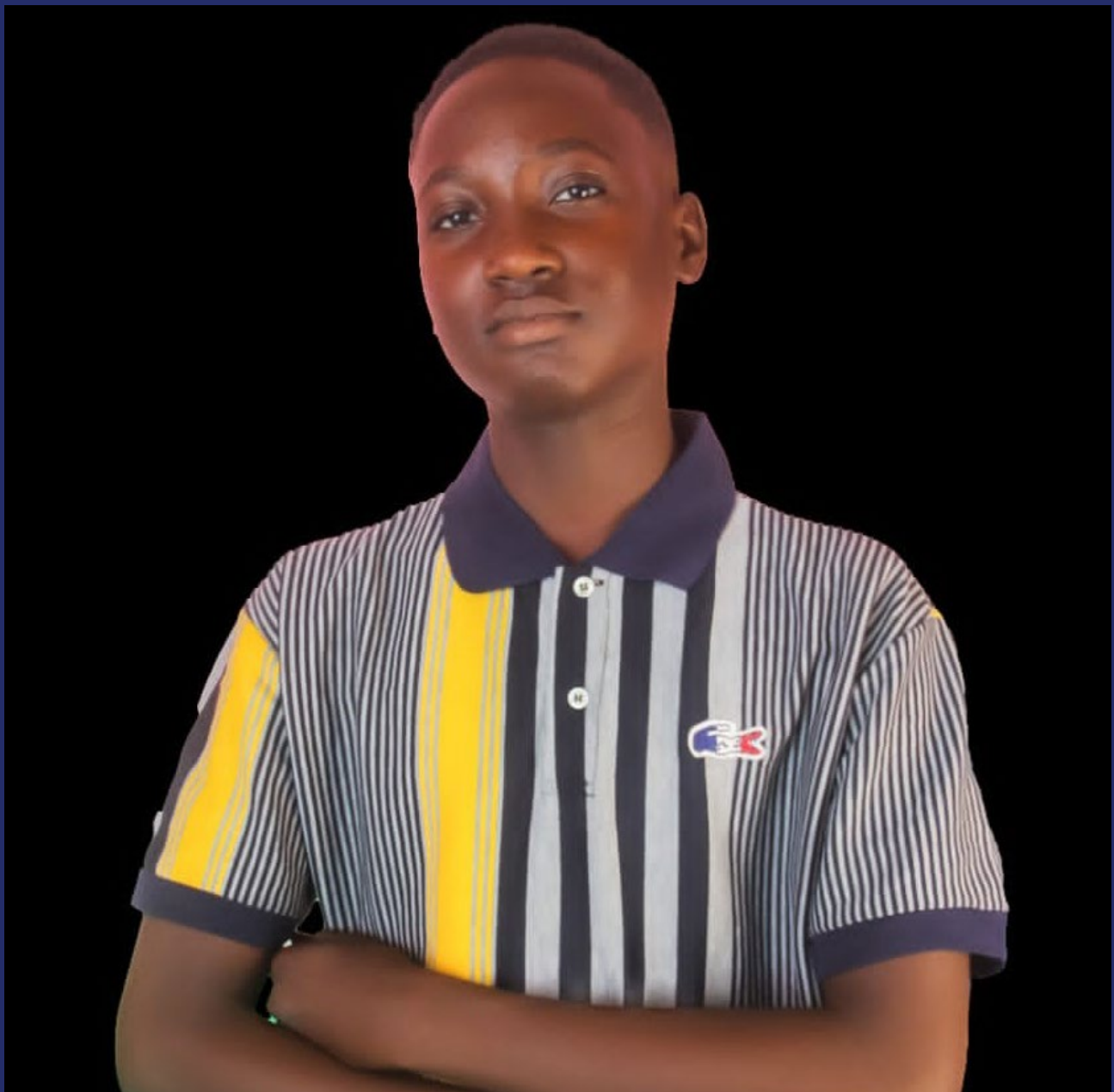
Yeah, cool my nerves, I thought. I deserve this.

Then I woke up. The pins of the rain and the cold wind woke me. Almost all my sheets of paper were touched; not by keystrokes but by the rain-drops. My right elbow unintentionally flipped the plates of pie and I realised when I left reality train and stepped into the dreambus. I counted the smeared sheets of paper and guess what? Yeah! You are right.

I moved the block—with my mind—I did. And the 50 blank pages were not that empty anymore. Maybe still fresh, at least they had pages with dots from the rain.

Creative
SPOTLIGHT

Adrian Nyarko-Boateng





In this edition, Lise interviews Adrian Nyarko-Boateng, a 14-year-old award-winning writer from Ghana, who shares his inspiring journey to winning the African Teen Awards. Adrian discusses his passion for writing, the influence of his upbringing, his aspirations as a writer, and his advice for fellow young creatives striving to achieve their dreams.

Lise: Happy New Year, Adrian. Can you please introduce yourself to our audience?

Adrian: First of all, I wish everyone a happy new year, and I would like to say that I'm delighted to be interacting with you on the Writers Space Africa magazine. My name is Adrian Nyarko-Boateng, I'm from Accra, the capital city of Ghana, to be precise, and I'm fourteen years of age. I grew up, being home-schooled by my parents alongside my two siblings, and writing and reading was a very natural and frequent thing for me.

Lise: How long have you been writing?

Adrian: Well, I started writ-

ing at a very young age, and given that I was exposed to reading and writing at that tender age, I developed great writing skills and had it at my fingertips. My parents, who happen to be very good authors always tutored and encouraged me to gain the knowledge and skill of writing. They have shaped me to be able to conquer this competition today.

Lise: What inspires you?

Adrian: Well, what inspires me to be the best of myself is the urge for a brighter and better future, not only for me but for my family and friends. With this urge, I push myself to work hard every single day so that I can achieve my greatest goals

and pursue lifetime success.

Lise: How would you describe the world?

Adrian: I will describe the world as a very wonderful place filled with loads of God's creations, and people are the most special of all. Unfortunately, I see our beautiful world to be slowly declining of its once fabulous nature, and it's all due to human carelessness and ignorance. I know together, we all can make this world a better place and not watch it totally crumble

Lise: I agree. Anyway, congratulations on winning the African Teen Awards. Can you share with me your journey to winning that?

Adrian: Thank you very much. It's an honour to have emerged as a winner. It took a lot of hard work and determination on a long-term basis. As I mentioned earlier, I started writing at a very young age, which equipped me with all the knowledge to be able to write and win this spectacular Teen Award.

Lise: *I love that for you. Your hard work and determination paid off. By the way, what's your way forward as a writer?*

Adrian: Well, winning this award has given me a very great boost of confidence already, which should drive me to even more success as a writer. Also, I have a very good level of consistency in writing, and with the right determination, I see even more success ahead. I'm also into the writing of fictitious novels, which bring a lot of pleasure and entertainment to the reader and I'm looking to publish most of my works over the years and eventually become a best-selling author.

Lise: *Wishing you luck.*

Adrian: Thank you

Lise: *Do you have any hobbies? If yes, what are they?*

Adrian: Obviously, reading and writing are some of my hobbies, which I frequently do for pleasure and my entertainment. Besides that, I'm also a sportsman, and I'm pursuing a career in football as well. I sometimes play the sport with my friends at home during my leisure time. Even though I don't have the

means to do so right now, I look forward to visiting attractions all over the world in the near future.

Lise: *Aww! That's so beautiful. Adrian, which advice would you like to give your fellow young writers?*

Adrian: Okay, to my fellow young writers, I would like to encourage them to keep working hard and keep writing until they achieve their goals. I also want to say that in writing, creativity is key, so I urge them to be more and more creative when writing and be the best they can be.

Lise: *Fantastic. Is there anything you would like to add?*

Adrian: I would also like to thank the management of the Writers Space Africa for giving an opportunity to young teens in Africa to express themselves through writing. I also want to say it has been a pleasure interacting with the WSA team, and thank you for having me.

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

Adrian: Thank you, ma'am

COMING SOON

month

Feb

year

2025

NENTA
Literary Journal
A Journal for Ghanaian Literature



www.nentajournal.com

   #nentajournal

POETICAFRICA



AVAILABLE FROM FEBRUARY 10, 2022
WWW.WRITERSSPACE.NET/POETICAFRICA

PoeticAfrica

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

PoeticAfrica

<https://www.writersspace.net/poeticafrica/>

Seasons



Author: Johanna Ataman

Country: Nigeria

Flowers bloom brightly
A touch of orange sun rays
The onset of spring

Rainbows in the sky
Birds soaring above the clouds
A kiss from the sun

Old and wrinkled leaves
Like memories in my heart
Fade and fall away

Snowflakes on my skin
By the fireside, I drift back
To things that had been

Blank Canvas

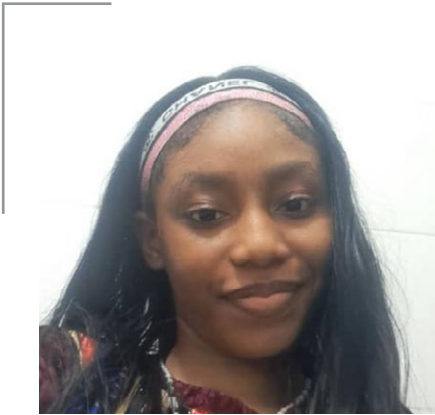


Author: Nanyanzi Leticia Hope

Country: Uganda

A fresh sheet waits, like morning dew
Unwritten, untold, with stories new
A canvas of promise, stretched wide and bright
Inviting brushstrokes, to paint life's light.
The past recedes like fading hues
As new horizons stand with vibrant dyes
The future unfolds like an unsealed scroll
A chance to rewrite, with a courageous soul.
With every step, a path straightens
Through lands where dreams begin
The blank canvas whispers, begin anew
Finding a voice with possibilities new.

I Live Again



Author: Ifejika Oluchukwu

Country: Nigeria

How long shall I look at myself, through broken mirror pieces
That reflect not only my face but heart?
How long shall I dine with darkness and drink of anguish's cup
When there's light, a door opening away?
I do swing open the door, and though I cannot see the light,
I know it's there for I cannot see.

I let the wind take my hands,
No questions asked
And reach for a moist leaf
That drops water like the tears I've cried.
It runs through my veins,
Like gushing waters down a hill, crystal shining stone by stone,
Washing me clean, bone by bone.

I feel it, I feel It
Awakening my soul, a candle fire at midnight.
That resist all winds, it keeps burning and burning.
I feel it, oh yes I feel it
Melting my burdens like a thawing Ice,
And as the water flows out of me,
I feel it,
Alive.

New Beginnings

Author: Rodrick Kasuzumira-
Country: Malawi

Let the new year be spring,
Full of green, high and low,
Seasoned by the aroma of flowers,
Which paint a rainbow in the fields,
with the mixture of their colours.

Let me be a busy bee,
Collecting nectar before it's too late,
For soon the leaves will wither.

Let all the leaves of failure, error and badluck,
be gone with the autumn,
Paving way for new ones.
To dress nature with fresh foliage.

Each fresh leaf is a new page,
On which to rewrite wrongs,
Repair breaches, and mend fences.

Let the new year be a grafted tree branch,
That will bear hybrid fruits of hard work,
In gratitude to the life giver,
Who has sustained us this far.

Yesterday is gone into oblivion,
We will face tomorrow head-on
Having a foothold in today's new beginning.

When Time Holds its Breath

POETRY



Author: Mathalea Ntaote

Country: Lesotho

From yester ashes, tomorrow blooms in a single breath
Time is a river, unyielding and wide,
A winding path that swallows the goal
We are prisoners of its ceaseless dance,
Swept up in waves of moments barely cherished,
Bouncing off riverbanks

We are passengers in motion's grasp,
Caught between its endless hands

Yet here, between the embers
Just this space, both wide and tight
Between the heartbeats, quiet and clear,
Suspended in the flicker of light.

And in this space, where time does bend,
The world is ours to shape and mend
A dawn not bound by fate or fear,
We are born anew, as crystal clear.
Where we end up, we no longer belong.

Like a Rock Next to the Stream



Author: Kaosisochukwu Okafor

Country: Nigeria

Time to brace up and start again,
Look into the cloud and see more to gain,
Easing myself into the hurt and pain,
Only then can I come out of this sane.

Close your eyes and let go of the stones,
Remember all who offered their backs as bones,
Give no chance to any more punctured holes,
Lest your thoughts and voice be drown in unheard tones.

The clock is ticking quiet fast,
Leaving me no option to think vast,
There is no time to dwell in the past,
But I can choose to stand like a mast.

And like the rock, I weather the tide,
Enduring storms, where waves reside,
Yet, in stillness, I find my strength,
A refuge from life's length.

Like that rock next to the stream,
I sit, untouched by life's wild dream,
Water's gentle voice, a soothing hush,
Whiles the stream strokes, giving me a wash.

Rooted deep, I stand serene,
Unshaken by life's turbulent scene,
The stream's soft flow, a lullaby sweet,
As my heart finds its quiet retreat.

It's Okay



Author: Titilope Taiwo

Country: Nigeria

Understand, one must always rise to a cause.
Lest they remain seated forever.
I have only just realised.
That I am my cause.

You and I.
Polar opposites we are.
Like fire and ice.
One brings the end of the other.

I have come to a valiant decision,
for the good of my tomorrow.
That tonight your watch ends.
You are but a chapter, in the book that is me.

And that is okay.
It's okay to just be a page,
to turn another page.

There is so much more, I am yet to see and be.
So I will not tarry here with you.
Within these concluding pages.

I will press, I'll go beyond these settled accounts.
Out, into fresh and uncharted pages.

A Heart's Wishes



Author: Lydia Sokah

Country: Ghana

POETRY

An Evergreen ambience.
 The Calmness of the whispering dew.
 Sweet melodious chirpings.
 The coolness of a mighty wind.
 A new dawn with rays of sunrise creeping in.
 Through the crevices of the shut eyes.

Resolutions moulded and decayed.
 The burgeon of the conception of another.
 A new hope created in anticipation of a new season.
 New Dreams, New goals, New purpose.
 A drive for prosperity.
 A hope for fulfilment.

The heart wishes and the mind disposes.
 Alas! We strive. Hoping our motivation doesn't run dry.
 As we aim for a living that is worth the try.
 In our pursuance we seek the help of "The Deity".
 Because life has a way of blowing away our gaiety.
 But through it all, all we want is a happy new year

In a Perfect World



Author: Bernadette Chikapa
Country: Malawi

If only my life were like a notebook
So, when I have some god-awful days
I'd tear the pages and toss them away
Their existence gone before they hit the floor
All my words would be cautiously edited
My typos erased and crossed out
And each day would be like a blank page
A new chapter with my errors absent
As they'll burn to ashes in the trashcan
But it'll never work like that, will it?
Life's not a poem I can edit to perfection
My storyline remains crooked and flawed
So, if today doesn't fix yesterday's misspells
Should I still greet each sunrise with hope?
How do we get a 'fresh start' when life's faulty?
The only one I get is from ripping these pages

Off with the Old Pages!



Author: Lamaro Lindah Angel

Country: Uganda

I am
A whisper in the wind,
Winding down on my hours and weeks and days,
Filling my pages
With pain and purpose and progress,
Turning fresh pages.
New chapters to be proud of,
To bang my chest openly and tell the world
About how good an author I am becoming.
Coming out of my tight shell,
Boxing fear in his ugly face,
Stepping away from my own way,
Filling my fresh pages
With love and longing and lots of chocolate.
Turning fresh pages.
Finally plucking off those old pages.

Before the Mile



Author: Thompson Emate

Country: Nigeria

I'll find a new way with a clean slate,
Despite the hands of fate,
I'll seek the path to radiant light,
Freed from the tendrils of the night.

I'll look into the mirror and smile,
Holding the hand of hope with every mile,
I'll summon light into my room,
Disperse the pervading gloom.

As I walk into each day,
Optimism will be my guiding ray,
Darkness will no longer scare me,
I will have learned to sojourn across its sea.

Fresh pages breathe new life,
The onus is ours to still be enmeshed in strife,
Fresh pages herald a new dawn,
The night is past and gone.

New Leaf



Author: Perfect Miss

Country: Ghana

My life is on a turn-
A new leaf,
I thought they came in delicate green,
Pleasing to sight, soft to touch.
Why has mine come brown?

Turbulence;
Decay is the ground of my roots,
Feeding me death from the ground up.
How can a tree be so unlucky?

If there is truth in what they say,
That nothing lasts forever,
Let decay depart forever.
Turn me a new leaf to last,
Fresh pages to fill.

Potions to heal
And a song to tell
How I overcome
By your hands.



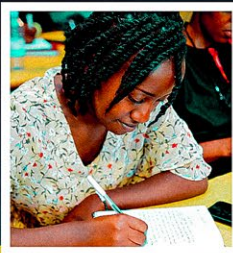
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Growth from Unprecedented Changes

Author: Aaliyah Chemutai

Country: Kenya

SHORT
STORY



“I have always feared change. But why the embracement now?” She looked at him hoping that all the hatred she felt towards him then was conveyed. The message was passed. He could feel each one of her intense emotions through her heated stare. The animosity her eyes showed could not be mistaken. Nonetheless, he knew that it had to be done. There was

no other way, and if he had to disregard the feelings of the person, he most loved, so be it. It was either her or everyone else.

“You of all people should know we must do this!” he said, angrily. He wanted her to understand the situation.

“So what? I can’t just go against everything I

believe in," she said.

"Is this the time to let your pride take over?" he asked. "I know you don't like this, but I don't like it either. I just know that we must do this. You should know that too – the world doesn't revolve around you."

"It did before, why can't it now?" she said.

"Stop being a sore loser and accept the fact that things change!"

Chepngetich looked at him, silent, dormant, unmoving. It was as if all the fight disappeared. The effect of being given the truth as it was. But it was the very thing she needed. It was what everyone needed. If no one was willing to accept the dire situation as it was, how could they rise from it? If they were not willing to do so, then they were all fools; they were guaranteeing their doom.

"You must accept that things cannot go back to how they were. From there we can move forward. But if you can't," he said as he turned around, "I would rather leave you here to rot." A braveness for him to say considering all that the duo faced together and what was happening right then. They were lucky to even have the chance to talk as long as they did. This is because outside the little dark hut they chose to hide themselves in, raged at them. They could hear the shouts of the brave young men who chose to risk their lives to fight for their safety. They could hear the horses of the opposition and their enemies in the dark times. They could hear their

hooves heavily fall on the rocky grounds. And they could hear the shouts of the men upon them.

As they were speaking, Chepngetich was having a hard time staying conscious – a stray arrow notched itself at her side. Its broken edge stuck out like a sore thumb. Ribbons of crimson ran down from her wound, creating an ever-so-grotesque sight. Swallowing back his fear, he held the broken arrow. "Brace yourself," he told Chepngetich. In a few seconds, he pulled it out, its iron head glistening in the red hue of fresh raw blood. Kiprono tried to show how worried he was about her. His panic grew as her breath became ragged and grew further as he saw how she physically struggled to breathe.

He tied a piece of cloth tightly around her wound; he had heard that applying pressure to the wound could lessen blood loss. But he was, unluckily not able to do that. Still, one would wonder why she was passionately arguing that she couldn't abandon the principles she grew up with when her situation became grave. That was another thing to add to his list of things to worry about. Yet he managed to keep his cool, calm demeanour and took strength which he wasn't sure he would recover, but that is how he always was.

Chepngetich could not recall a time he crumpled under pressure. That was a part of him she always admired; it was one of the reasons she began to provide likeness for him.

Yet there were a few aspects about him she didn't quite like – she didn't like how headstrong he could be. He could be quite determined if there was something he wanted, he always had it. She never liked that side of him because she knew that it would sometimes force her to accept the things that she never wanted to. He was always right, but that did not mean she was willing to accept it. As they were in that hut, the representation of what they had for refuge, deep inside her heart, she knew he was right. She declined.

She dared to hope that things would become better for her, that things would go back to how they were. She never thought that there would come a time when she would have to part with the kind of life she lived. To say goodbye to her precious memories. She

would never agree to that; she would rather fight to hold on to everything till her dying breath. That time came sooner than expected. She didn't know what to think, neither did she know what to say to Kiprono; that, to some extent, she believed him. Her pride caged her. The worst part is that even though signs conceived of the war era were lucid, her reluctance heightened the arrival. It was as if all the air was pulled out of their lungs the moment a gunshot was heard. To use such weapons in a small-scale battle was only proof that things were more serious than anyone would have anticipated.

“Chep, please,” Kiprono shouted, “I’m begging you, don’t let this be the end!” Chepngetich was surprised by the desperation he voiced. Her senses dulled due to both the shock she felt and the blood loss.



“Don’t let it end – I still need my family. I can’t lose them. I can’t lose you!” Tears brimmed in his eyes. She was lost for words. Were her poor decisions the cause of all this suffering? Was she the reason that Kiprono was crying? She feebly held onto Kiprono’s hand as her own eyes started to water. She couldn’t believe that she let her own selfish pursuits lead to the potential doom of her family and her community. In her mind, she saw her mother’s sorry face as the strangers entered their home and apprehended her husband, the father of Chepngetich. She heard her uncanny screams as she tried to resist them. What they did to her, she wouldn’t dare try to remember. She wondered where her humanity had gone as she saw the limp bodies of the attacked. The only thing she thought about was the fact that she would be able to keep things as they were. She was sorry that realization hit too late. So much damage had been done, was she able to right her wrongs?

“Kiprono, I shouldn’t have conspired with the enemy,” she began to say. Tears crawled. Kiprono did not expect that sort of sincerity from her so suddenly.

“Tell me.” Her voice was so much stronger. “Look me in the eyes and tell me that I can fix this.” Against all odds, Chepngetich saw the corners of Kiprono’s lips curved into a smile. He lifted his hand and placed it on her brow. “As long as you have the will to completely change everything, you can.”

Chepngetich was completely reassured that Kiprono’s words were enough to put her at ease. The warmth in his gaze further contributed to her sudden sense of relaxation.

“It’s nice to see that you have finally grown, Chep.” Perhaps she had finally grown; she may have gotten rid of that selfish side of her that only wanted everything to be done for her benefit. But to redeem herself, she would have to make amends with many of her demons. She would have to face her father and her entire community. Of course, she would not evade punishment, but she would save so many people from suffering the consequences of her poor decisions.

“Do you think I’ll make it through?” Chepngetich asked Kiprono.

“I will be there, right by your side, and make sure that you do.”

“Okay then,” she said as Kiprono pulled her up. “Let’s do this.”



A New Page

Author: Chiamaka Favour
Country: Nigeria

SHORT
STORY

“That’s really you!” Mma pointed to the television and clapped.

“Yup,” Marie said, smiling. She had worked so hard to get to the cooking championship show; this was the semi-final competition, and she had made it to the top 6 best chefs so far.

“You know, Marie, I want to be like you,” Mma said, fiddling with the biro she found on Marie’s table.

“There’s just one problem,” her face dropped as she drew with the biro.

“What is it?”

“I do not know what I want to do,” her voice, teary. “It’s so hard deciding. Mother wants me to be a surgeon; father supports her, but I...” She paused as her voice almost became a whisper.

“Oh no, you don’t,” Marie walked over, arms spread. “Listen, big girls don’t cry. You are 14 and you get to decide what you want to do, okay?”

Mma nodded as she wiped her tears with the back of her hand.

“I want to be a fashion designer,” she broke the brief silence. “I have a lot of designs in here,” she pointed to her head.

“You are a great designer, Mma. I mean, look at this,” Marie held up the paper Mma had earlier drawn on. It was a flower-laced gown.

Mma giggled slightly.

“You know what, Mma? I will talk to your mother about it. I know they want what’s best for you.”

“Thank you, aunt Marie,” the smile on her

face made Marie's face lighten up even more.

"So, aunt Marie..." She was halted by the sight of Marie on the floor. She was gasping for air. "your mom," she managed to say.

At the hospital, Mma's mother sat outside with her. She ran her hands through Mma's hair while Mma laid on her lap, wondering what was wrong with Aunt Marie.

Just as Mma's father came running in, the doctor appeared too.

"What is wrong with her?" Mma's father enquired, trying to catch his breath.

"It's a severe food allergy case. We've successfully stabilized her respiratory rate, but she's still unconscious," the doctor said, observing their faces.

Mma breaks down crying.

"It's okay, darling; she'll be fine." Her mother patted her.

Weeks later, Marie woke up to the beeping of the machine. The rays of sunlight made her shut her eyes immediately.

Mma's mother, Mrs. Gloria, noticed this and called quickly for the nurses.

"Do not worry, you will be fine," the doctor assured her.

"Uhhh, may I have a word with you, Mrs. Gloria?"

"Sure," she followed him out.

"I am afraid she may not be able to differen-

tiate the taste for now," the doctor explained.

"Oh poor child," Mrs. Gloria whispered.

"I learnt she is a chef; I'm sorry she'd have to wait until she's recovered." He pulled out a card and handed it to her. "She has a condition known as 'Aguesia' which is a loss of taste. The good news is that it's not permanent, but we do not know how long this would last," he glanced at his watch and excused himself.

Mrs. Gloria did not know how to break this news to Marie. Marie already missed the finale of the cooking competition; that news was enough of a heartbreak on its own, and now what? A loss of taste?

"Marie, you're back?" Mrs. Gloria said, closing the door behind her. She turned towards Marie, heaving a sigh. She went close to her and placed the back of her hand on Marie's head to feel her temperature. Marie turned to her; she looked at the paper and then back to Mrs. Gloria's face.

"Oo this? It's nothing to worry about," she said, putting it between her back and the chair in which she sat.

"How are you feeling now?" She held Marie's hand.

"I feel a little dizzy, and my mouth is dry," Marie whimpered softly. Wincing every word, she said, "Talking... is hard."

Gloria held her hand, gnawing at her lip with worry.

"This is sad, honey. Should we ask the doctor to break the news to her?" Odunze, Mma's dad said, slowly chewing on the grape he had in his mouth.

"I don't know, dear. The doctor doesn't really know how much this means to her; I feel like he isn't going to say it in the best way," she sat on the kitchen chair, rubbing her forehead with her fingers. As she did, she noticed a bee flying around the flower she had kept on the windowsill. She stared at it for a while, and soon enough, it left.

"Are you with me?"

"Oo! I'm sorry, I got carried away," Gloria said.

"Alright, honey," he walked over and began massaging her shoulder. "I think you're thinking about this a lot.

She's still hungry; the doctor has asked us to feed her, and that we must do. I'm sure she would be able to pull through," he said, taking a seat.

"Most importantly, she has us," he continued, holding her hands.

"You're right," she stood up.

"Let's get this food for her."

After a few debates outside the room on who would break the news to her, they stood in front of her with the food pack in their hands.

"Marie, there's something... we... I mean, my husband needs to tell you," Mrs. Glo-

ria said. Her husband turned in shock; this wasn't the agreement.

"Well, we... we brought your meal," he said, handing over the pack, "but... excuse me, I need to..." He cleared his throat. "I'm thirsty," he hurried out.

"You may not be able to taste food for now, Marie," Mrs. Gloria said, a pang of regret and relief hit her. That was too direct, but she deserved to know.

Marie looked at her; she had no words. Her heart raced, "What do you mean I can't taste?" She asked, letting out a nervous giggle. She looked at Mrs. Gloria, the look of pity in her eyes. She opened the pack in a hurry and first took a grape. Aunt Gloria was right; there was no taste. It was bland!

Weeks after Marie was discharged, she had herself locked in. She stopped going through her mail; it was only filled with a reminder of what she was missing; her passion was dying away. Aunt Gloria had told her that this was temporary but, this was just a few days to a new month. A whole month, and she can't even taste a watermelon. She grew lean from skipping meals some days.

"May I come in, aunt Marie?" Mma's tiny voice came from the window.

"I do not wish to speak now, Mma. Come back some other time." Marie said.

"You promised you'd let me in today," she pestered. When there was no response from

Marie, she slipped in an exercise book.

Two days later, the smell of food coming from Marie's kitchen had Mma running towards her house.

Marie had seen her from the window and smiled; her little trouble was here.

"Aunt Marie! You're cooking again!" She screamed excitedly.

"Well, a wise woman said, 'We define our passions; our passions don't define us,'" Marie said, smiling. Mma bowed her head, feeling slightly embarrassed. She had written a lot in that note—anything to stop her aunt Marie from becoming a shadow of herself.

"Mm, what is this about the fashion design brand you told me about?" Marie asked while dicing ginger.

"Well, mom and dad agreed. I'm starting my own fashion brand," she reached out for the apple on the fruit bowl and washed it. "They think it's a good way to delay me a bit, but it's good still," she shrugged and bit a mouth full of the apple.

"What do you say about joining me every evening to taste my meals?" Marie asked, holding her hip.

"Since I can't taste, I'm going to make these meals using my intuition; the next cooking championship game is around the corner. I'll try going for it." Marie said, her face lighted with enthusiasm.

"Yes, we gladly will," Mma's dad interrupt-

ed as he stepped in with his wife. Tears gathered in Marie's eyes; to her, this was a fresh start. A journey to becoming something better beyond the limitations, a journey to fulfilling dreams regardless of uncontrollable circumstances.

These Coily Roots

SHORT
STORY



Author: Oluwabunmi Adaramola
Country: Nigeria



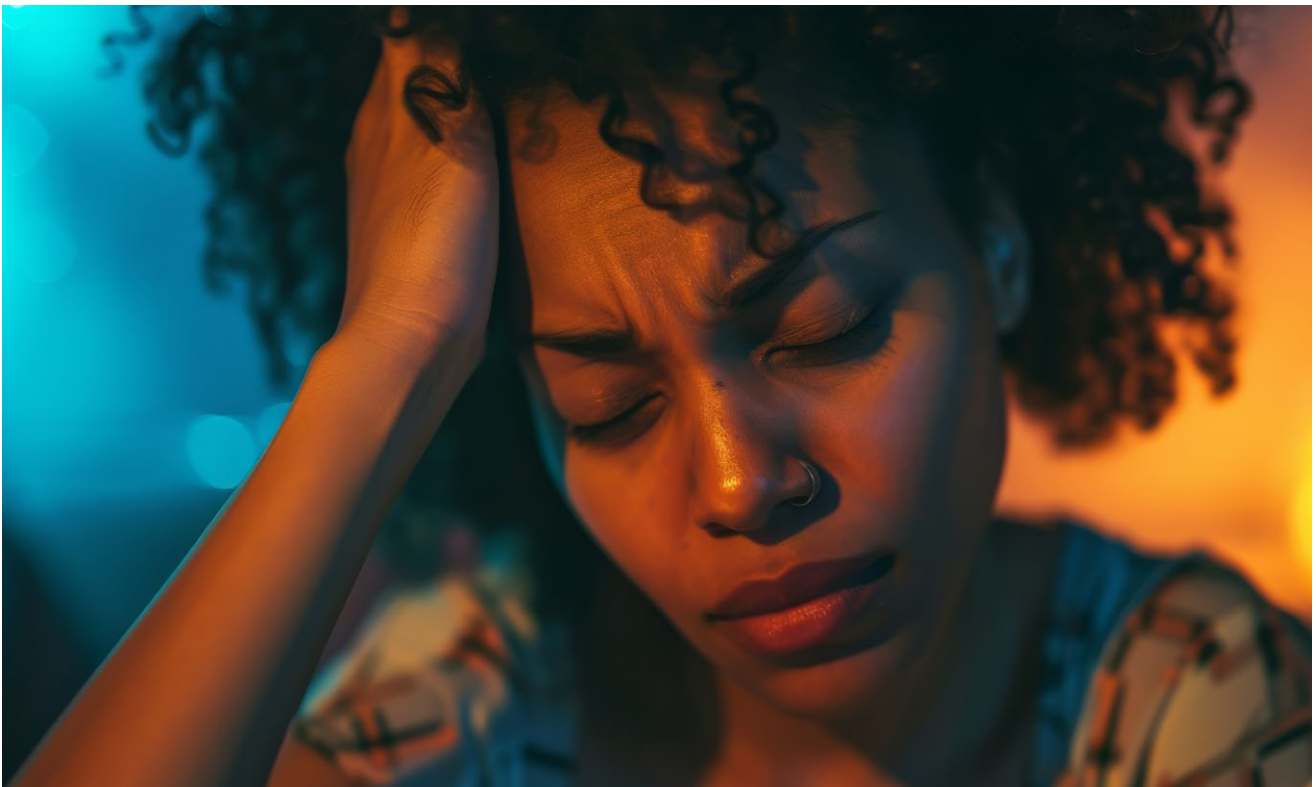
“Mo gbadura pe o ko gbagbe ara re.” Words meant to serve as a carapace, a reminder of self, yet bent on haunting for an eternity. Iya—fondly renamed Iya Tógùn by Tòşò and the rest of her siblings as a tribute to their first brother who they never met—had gripped the sides of Tòşò’s cheeks as she whispered them that day at the airport, eyes bearing the weight

of unshed tears and the fear of giving up her first daughter to the demands of a land foreign to the both of them. Iya Tógùn’s fingers tightened around Tòşò’s face in hopes of passing all her unspoken pleas in that very prayer. May you never lose your sense of self. It had been an odd way of bidding goodbye, yet there was something about the way her mother had

uttered them—each shaky word and syllable punchier than the previous and heavy with an expectation to hold on identity. Five years down the line—five langarous years of slowly chipping away self and nimbly folding to the whims of identity erasure until she’d become a puppet to social ideations and colonial acceptance—and the words held more weight to Tòṣò than they did in that simple embrace.

Ma padanu ori ti ara rẹ. Ọmọṣò laughed with resigned acceptance as she held the split ends of her once bouncy curls, now limp and near lifeless from over manipulation driven by a compulsion to satisfy a supercilious society unaccepting of ethnical nonconformity as Iya Tógùn’s words continued their violent ringing in her head as though refusing to release her until its subtext fully registered.

Standing in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirror in her recently purchased Manhattan apartment—a fruit of four years toiling to climb corporate ladders and capitalistic bridges as an Investment Analyst—Ọmọṣò could confidently admit to herself that the scrawny girl folded in her mother’s arms that day at the airport—desperately clutching an overused Ghana must go bag with no idea on how to navigate this new immigrant life—was lost. Tòṣò had grown up with an increased sense of belonging and self-ownership—amidst the obsequious poverty and hardship she was used to—doggedly protecting her outlook on life with a head full of springy waves and a matted corn-rows that had become a landmark of her personality in the unassuming hometown of Ìlèkè.



Tilting her head to the side, Tọ̀ṣọ̀ gripped the back of her head, as an unfamiliar sound—yet accurately reflecting her inner turmoil—left her lips and wondered who this person that stood in her living room was. These nappy curls, an uneven texture—some coiled, some frizzy—malleable into different forms and styles telling cardinal stories from long generations ago, forcefully tamed into a more ‘becoming’ form—instead of hanging free and wild like it was created to—because of society’s punishment of the desire to hold on to self-identity. And in the same way, Tọ̀ṣọ̀ realised she’d unwittingly done the same to her character and every element that made her her.

The change wasn’t instantaneous, neither was it calculated, yet it had crept in as unobtrusively as it could. From days of dimming the lights of the eccentric Yoruba dialect that followed her English since arriving in New York to nights of pretending to be an avid wig lover on night outs to detract the attention her unruly hair garnered from curious onlookers with questions of “can I touch it?” on their lips and long weekends of burning and straightening the roots and ends to look more like her white colleagues’ hair after ‘friendly’ HR reminders to fix your look throughout the week she’d made the unfortunate mistake of wearing a wash-and-go style into the office.

Iya Tógùn’s constant plea of remaining true to herself had become an anthem whenever she spoke with Tọ̀ṣọ̀. Because while Iya re-

fused to be plagued by the demons of westernisation and vices of wokeism, there was an intrinsic wisdom she embodied when it came to issues of identity and culture that she’d been adamant on passing down to Ọmọ́tọ́ṣọ̀. Ma gbagbe ara re. Never forget who you are.

Watching pellets of rain run down the windows—the gloomy September day enough to match her mood but not adequate to dispel the sad euphoria from her mother’s words—Tọ̀ṣọ̀ wondered how she’d quickly allowed herself to become sunken with the world’s expectation of her blackness when it had only ever been loudly celebrated back in Ìlẹ̀kẹ̀. It didn’t make sense anymore, this idea of shrinking and reshaping to conform, instead of embracing individual identity and cultural continuity especially in a new land that encouraged detachment and disconnection from true self. Lifting the scissors to her damaged roots, Ọmọ́tọ́ṣọ̀ knew with utmost certainty that it was time to reclaim her true essence and live in alliance with her mother’s words: Ma gbagbe ara re.

Fresh Page Fresh Start



Author: Asatu Jalloh
Country: Liberia

SHORT
STORY

I frowned at Mrs. Rose Rod’s cart. What are you cleaning?

“Hello, Tee.” Mrs. Rod waved to me as if I was miles away from her. “Still hiding your eyes? It does nothing but tell that they’re swollen.”

I straightened my black goggles. “My eyes are only a bit irritated, which is why I’m here to get some greens. Fresh greens and vegetables.”

“Oh. I thought you’re here for more sacks of sweets. What happened to your drive to shrink your waistline?”

Pain.

I turned my back at the questioning look from another customer. Kruman’s Mini-Mart was a one-room store, and the gondola shelving was chest-high so everyone could see and hear everyone.

“You can restart,” Mrs. Rod said.

I went close to her and tapped the only items in her cart – gallons of detergent. “Must be very tough stains you tackling.”

“Some stains are like a bad relationship that requires intense effort to erase.”

“Whoa.”

The fine lady in the exquisite house on the hill was the predominant description of Mrs. Rod. It made me seek her out and introduce myself days after I moved here, two years ago. She was everything I expected her to be. But later, I heard about her temper. They said it was always there. It just worsened when her best friend betrayed her.

She went to the cashier.

I grabbed a bag of cheap candies and stood

behind her. "Erasing isn't as hard as filling in the blank page afterwards."

"Put yourself on that page. It's your life. I'm happy. Now. Because I like me again."

The cashier chuckled.

Mrs. Rod paid for the detergents and my candies and pushed her cart with ease to the mini-mart's exit. Her grey hair came alive when she stood in the sunlight. Her stiff off-white dress reminded me of a character I saw in a movie once about women who failed but, after much struggle, reinvented themselves.

"You said before that you didn't like yourself? Ma'am?" I sighed. "You're hard to talk to like they say."

"I knew you would get sucked into all the gossip. But watching others' lives does help. To some extent."

She once asked me where I put my burdens when I'm tired of carrying it. I asked her where she kept hers. She rambled about her hill, how perfect its height was and so on. I wondered what she meant until I saw her standing behind her window, peering out at us.

She said, "Not keeping your word to yourself should offend, even sadden you."

"I do—"

"You should've bought at least a carrot. By the way, if you don't like Handsome anymore, stop entertaining him."

My eyelids narrowed. "His name is Gray."

"The instant I saw him I understood his gloom. Gradually he covered your sunny smile."

I opened the bag of candies and tossed one in my mouth. "It's been ten days since we broke up."

"So, the ache has you poisoning yourself with sugar?"

Nosy.

"When will you invite me over for lunch?"

"You really need to know what I need this soap for?"

Uh huh. "I just want to know what your parlour looks like. Your doors are always shut."

"I don't like people touching my inside walls."

"And seeing them too? Is that why your curtains are thick?"

"I intend to change them. You should also consider making changes. Sweets go better with tears of joy." Mrs. Rod strolled off to her car.

I shouted, "When can I see your parlour?"

"Before I begin!"

"What?"

"Just come! Tomorrow! Tomorrow is good!"

I smoothed my blouse, picked a bit of torn flower off my jeans and pressed the clean doorbell.

Mrs. Rod appeared in another off-white dress. "Welcome."

I entered her home and paled. The smell of soap scratched at my nostrils. Struggling not to sneeze, I took off my goggles. Except for a wall clock, the tiled walls were bare. And they were so clean they smarted. Faint, irregular lines showed where they were scrubbed too many times, as if something sinful splashed on them. The tiled floor, also stressed, cried clean. White curtains hung

like starched sleeves off rigid arms. The arms, bronze beams, stuck out at either ends of the windows like swords. The chairs wanted no guests. Their poise said so. On them were extravagant, embroidered dollies, bald, wide-eyed dolls and stuffed, checkered cushions.

"Please sit," Mrs. Rod said.

On your brittle brush?

"A good chair is like a good mind." Mrs. Rod felt the back of her couch as if examining it for a fault she missed during other inspections. "Supports you well. Too many people ignore the importance of caring properly for



their spines. With all the extra weight life programs us to carry, you would think they know not be so neglectful."

"The mind is the most important."

"How do you attend to yours?"

"I read. Motivational books. The Bible too."

"Since your belief should be your first source of comfort and motivation, your Bible should be the first book you mention when questioned about how you care for your mind. I was sickly as a child, so my mother taught me to pray. I would sit on her laps and listen to her read a Psalm from the Good News Bible. When I finally enrolled in school, I already knew a whole bunch of words and one of them was 'Pure'."

"I see that."

"Do you? Well, I'm now careful to wash my rags quickly when they get filthy."

"Repentance?"

"Smart girl. Do you want something to drink?"

I shuddered at the thought of touching her glass. "No. Um, please turn on the fan or open the windows."

Mrs. Rod tuned on the white ceiling fan.

I breathed a little easier. "Nice curtains. Great contrast from the others. And the walls..."

Smiling, Mrs. Rod went to a small, polished table in a corner. On it were a stack of leath-

erback journals. "A long time ago, I saw a young man spray his pain all over a wall. That reminded me of my mother. She taught herself to read and write. Her first paper and pencil were her village's dusty ground and a piece of stick. She told me, 'Write any how you can, anywhere you can, for there's something in this life, in us, like a thick coat of dark paint, that covers our memorable moments and leaves the painful ones exposed. So, if we're not mindful, all we'll think of is what we've suffered. But we must fight to remember our pleasures.'"

"How?"

"Store your pleasures as you experience them."

"Hmm."

Mrs. Rod studied me. "What's the status on Mr. Grayman?"

"He's not coming back."

"Then it's time to fight off the fog he left behind and move into the light."

"Easier said than done."

"Write out your ache and erase it."

"It's too complex to simply -"

"Ache, born of anger, resentment, and regret? Complex indeed." Mrs. Rod nodded at her walls. "My mother's genesis with writing got me interested in pouring my thoughts on surfaces other than paper. When my best friend tried to seduce my hus-

band and failed... and then came crawling back for mercy, I gave it to her and let her go. Afterwards, I beat myself up for putting my marriage in such a situation. No bowl was large enough to contain my tears. I vowed to keep away from people. Loneliness made my pain unbearable. I had to let it out, so, I took a crayon, went to my walls and drew out my pain. But I made a mistake. I kept the mess there and looked at it. Every day."

"The mess must have been very unsightly, judging by the cleaning you've done."

"You inspired the cleanup. Watching you stumble out of your door, going after a love that isn't reciprocated helped me see it's common for us all to trust and care about the wrong persons. I should forgive myself, trust me again and look out for fresh relationships. So, I stripped my walls. Now, I'll write in here." Mrs. Rod opened the journal. Its clean, crisp pages shone. "From today, I'll begin keeping only my happy moments."

"Beautiful."

Mrs. Rod picked up another journal and extended it to me.

I shook my head. "I..."

"Why did Grayman leave you?"

"He didn't say. But his new girlfriend is slim."

"Take the book and pour out how this makes you feel on the first thirty pages."

"And when I'm done?"

"Tear them up."

I... can do that. I took the journal. "And after...?"

"Have you ever seen in the Psalms that you're wonderfully made?"

"Yes. Psalm 139."

"Find a good chair. Sit and write every verse of scripture you can find on how wonderful and beautiful you are. Write them until you believe them."

"I will. It's a promise I'll keep. And when I'm done, I'll move on to fresh pages and paint my pleasures on them."

"Start with how much you enjoy greens and vegetables."

I laughed.

"See your eyes can sparkle."

February 14th



Author: Moses Tololo
Country: Zambia

SHORT
STORY

February 14th before, February 14th after and February 14th now.

All seemed the same. It was on 'February 14th now' that he stepped out of Peter Singogo Correctional Facility. It had been his home for the past five years. He had served for his supposed sins that he had allegedly committed. He had called this place home but now he had to face the world that lay ahead of him. He was scared of what life would be like. Here it was great. The authority cared for him. He was assigned a number and was budgeted for. He had a place to sleep and was surrounded by people who really cared about him.

He was hopeful while he waited to be picked up. His hope slowly slipped away. He became more and more desperate. For the first time in his life, he was petrified. He hesitated to go

forward but he needed to start his life on a new page. He felt stuck between, moving forward or going backwards.

When it became obvious that no one was going to come for him, he picked up whatever belonged to him and moved in the direction of the one place he still remembered. Home. His mind filled with blissful thoughts of February 14th before.

'February 14th before,' was a day filled with love. It was the day he wanted to show his loved one exactly how much she meant to him. He had gone out of his way to book a reservation at the most prestigious hotel in town, The Protea Hotel.

As the sun set, he had told her to wear the most

elegant dress in her wardrobe. Love was in the air. The time was set for 18.00 hours. He was head over heels for the woman who was carrying his fruitage. She was well along in a motherly way.

"You look beautiful." he complimented after her.

"Oh, thank you darling." She replied.

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on."

"Really?"

"One hundred percent."

"Have you ever been behind the wheel?" He asked when they got into the car he had just borrowed from a friend.

"No, I have not," she responded, "how is it done?"

"Come I will show you how to drive." He said as he ushered her into the driver's seat.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" She asked.

"Don't worry," he reassured her, "driving is as easy as drinking water."

After a few rocky attempts, she was driving on the road. It felt so amazing like a virgin touched for the very first time. She gained more confidence with each kilometre covered. She discovered the faster she went the more control she gained. She felt the adrenaline rush as she accelerated along Kabwe Road. She was in utter ecstasy, she climaxed. Similar to the rush one gets as they reach

their climax. Blinded by ecstasy, she did not see that she strayed into the opposite lane and she didn't hear the man screaming next to her.

After a loud bang everything went quiet. It was the longest thirty seconds of her entire life. She and the man next to her were uninjured, but the car facing them was covered in blood. Life quickly escaped. In dead silence the two love birds looked at each other in shock.

"Quickly come to the passenger's seat!" he yelled at her.

"Why?" she questioned towards herself.

"It has to be interpreted that I was driving," he said, "you don't have a license and my son cannot be born in prison."

"What have I done?" she cried at the top of her voice.

"Don't cry," he pleaded, "no one should ever know that you were driving."

'February 14th after,' he stood in a packed court waiting for sentencing. They found him guilty of murdering three people due to dangerous driving. He was sentenced to five years in prison on all three counts. She wept as she looked at the father of her eight months old baby. She was grateful for his sacrifice. Men like him were rare in the world. Men who put their families first before their own selfish goals. She wondered

how she was going to take care of the child once he was imprisoned. She has to start all over again on a fresh page.

'February 14th now,' he walked towards his freedom. His mind consumed by mixed feelings. How's the child going to receive him? He wondered, but he was ready to start on a fresh page.

Everything seemed the same with a few improvements here and there. He walked over five kilometres heading to the place he once called home.

The house was still there.

He knocked once, twice, after three times a child answered the door. He stood there looking at his younger self. She was the spitting image of him. He could hear the voice of a woman screaming from the other side of the room.

"Taizya, what have told you about opening doors this late?"

It was the sweet voice of his beautiful woman. She swung the door wide open to face the demon of her so-called husband. Their eyes met. His eyes scanned her from her face and landed on her belly. She was in a motherly way. From behind her a man emerged who took his place beside her.

"What are you doing here?" She asked.

"I am home."

"Aren't you supposed to be in prison?"

"I was released today."

"Oh."

"I am home." He said.

"This isn't your home anymore," she responded, "I moved on."

"I went to prison for you my love."

"That was your decision not mine," she cut in, "you knew that I didn't have a licence yet you allowed me to take the wheel."

"But...."

She slammed the door in his face before any more words could escape his mouth. He tried knocking again but it was ignored.

Motionless, he just stood there.



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TWO WHEELS SOUL MOVER

A Creative Non-Fiction by
Brianna Matheka, Kenya

Reviewer

Francis Mkwapatira
(Malawi)



Two Wheels, Soul Mover is a poignant piece of creative nonfiction that chronicles a journey of adaptation and resilience during the tumultuous period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the writer's lens, readers are drawn into a world where sudden upheaval paves the way for unexpected growth and connection.

The narrative begins with a promising start at a prestigious school in Kenya, starkly contrasted with the author's humble village beginnings, where English was a distant second language. This disparity sets the stage for the emotional and financial challenges that arise with the onset of the pandemic. The sudden job loss and the shift to online learning underline the widespread impact of COVID-19 on individuals and communities.

Themes of resilience and adaptation emerge as the narrator and their housemate, Mutava, navigate this new reality. The simple

act of learning to cycle becomes a powerful metaphor for overcoming fear and finding balance in an unstable world. This newfound skill, alongside innovative sack farming, not only sustains them but also fosters a sense of community and mutual support within their neighbourhood.

The story reaches its climax with a harrowing cycling incident on Nairobi's busy roads, highlighting the physical and emotional trials of this period. Yet, it also underscores the resilience and determination that characterise the narrative.

Two Wheels, Soul Mover is a testament to the human spirit and adaptability, offering readers a deeply personal yet universally relatable account of finding light in the darkest times. The writer's ability to convey complex emotions and vivid imagery transforms this piece into a celebration of overcoming adversity.

HIDE AND SEEK

A Flash Fiction by
Abdulsamad Jimoh, Nigeria

Reviewer
Akuei Adol
(South Sudan)



In life, some secrets are not buried in the earth but within us, growing heavier over time.

Hide and Seek is a haunting narrative that traverses the delicate boundary between innocence and tragedy. It recounts a memory steeped in loss and unspoken truths.

The story begins with the narrator reflecting on children playing hide and seek, which triggers memories of a similar game from their past. Through vivid flashbacks, we learn of a fateful night when the narrator's brother disappeared. Despite a frantic community search, only the narrator knows the grim truth: the blood-soaked Ankara their brother wore, is buried with a secret that has weighed on their conscience ever since.

The central theme is retrospection. The narrator's reflection goes beyond recounting events, becoming a confrontation with un-

resolved guilt and grief. This act of looking back explores how secrets and silence can haunt a person long after the events themselves.

The psychological depth of the story lies in the narrator's internal conflict. The deliberate concealment of the truth, akin to survivor's guilt in *The Kite Runner*, reframes the tragedy into a deeply personal struggle. Vivid imagery, such as "the rivers falling down my cheeks" and "buried your clothes in the earth and inside me," intensifies the emotional resonance.

In conclusion, *Hide and Seek* is an evocative piece that intertwines secrets and retrospection, delving into the complexities of guilt and humanity.

THE MOUNTAIN OF RETROSPECTION

A Poem by
Rebecca Eduah, Ghana

Reviewer
Funmi Richards
(Nigeria)



The Mountain of Retrospection offers a reflective exploration of the past year, using vivid metaphors and imagery to examine themes of growth, perseverance, and introspection. The mountain serves as a central symbol, representing an elevated perspective that invites contemplation.

The poem skilfully balances themes of success and struggle, capturing the duality of human experience through contrasts such as “beautiful terraces of hope” and “rocks of disappointment.” While it does not follow a strict rhyme scheme, its use of internal rhymes and an irregular rhythm mirrors the natural flow of reflective thought.

Rebecca Eduah employs a range of poetic devices, including metaphor, personification, and vivid imagery, to draw readers into a contemplative tone. The repetition of the line “the mountain of retrospection” acts as an anchor, reinforcing the poem’s meditative focus.

Evoking the reflective style of Wordsworth’s *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* and Emerson’s philosophical musings, the poem maintains a distinct narrative voice. Its call to reflect on the year’s victories and struggles inspires resilience and forward momentum, making it a poignant piece for readers seeking clarity and growth.

THE GENDER REVEAL

A Short Story by
Imade Ehigiator, Nigeria

Reviewer

Prudence Gakedirelwe
(Botswana)



In modern times, gender reveal events are typically joyful celebrations, brimming with love, excitement, and anticipation. However, Ose's story reveals the concealed complexities beneath such occasions. Her struggles after dark mirror a universal truth: the night often brings hidden battles to light. For Ose, the past is metaphorically represented as night, while the future before her symbolises day, both of which are shrouded in uncertainty.

Ose's vulnerabilities stem from her fears but are also balanced by her strengths. The silent pain endured by victims of sexual abuse, masked by a facade of joy, is poignantly portrayed in this story. These experiences shape her character and influence her interactions, particularly as she grapples with the paranoia that clouds her relationships with her family. Her presumption that the baby is a boy after the reveal, and her scepticism towards her family's excitement, highlight her emotional conflict.

Despite her struggles, Ose's faith and resilience shine through. Her constant prayers, fighting spirit, and desire to impart life lessons to her child are evidence of her determination to overcome her fears. These strengths ultimately surpass her paranoia and dread of having a girl, fears rooted in her traumatic past.

The story also explores the dangers of dwelling on the past, as Ose's reflections dredge up feelings of regret and what-ifs. This tension creates a dual existence for her: outwardly presenting happiness, while inwardly battling dread and uncertainty.

Imade crafts a compelling story that balances themes of family love, faith, and resilience against fear, paranoia, and pain. The depiction of Ose's scars from a painful rape story enriches her character, inviting empathy and deeper understanding from the reader.

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