

WRITERS SPACE

AFRICA

MARCH 2025 EDITION

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The best of African Literature

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- **Best African Writer Promotion platform 2024**
(Global Business Insight Awards 2024)
- **Monthly Digital Literary Magazine of the Year - 2022/2023**
(The Corporate LiveWire Global Awards 2022/23)
- **Best Monthly Digital Literary Magazine (Africa) - 2022**
(Global Business Awards 2022)
- **Writer Promotion platform of the Year - 2021**
(The Corporate LiveWire Global Awards 2021/22)
- **Best African Literary Magazine - 2021**
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M a g a z i n e

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In this edition, Lise interviews Elizabeth Dwamena-Asare, a passionate African creative who masterfully balances her roles as an HR officer, creative writer, and dedicated volunteer. From her early love for storytelling to winning the prestigious African Writers Awards (Short Story), Elizabeth shares her journey, inspirations, challenges, and triumphs... page 22

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Welcome

Paws, Claws and Hearts:
The Magic of Pets

Hello, cherished readers from Africa and beyond. It is my utmost pleasure once more to engage you as we outdoor another edition of your favourite digital literary magazine.

Animals have cohabited with humans from time immemorial and have become great neighbours to each other; seeking solace in difficult times and re-joining together in happy moments. As we celebrate the human-animal bond, we are reminded of how humans have been able to tame some animals to become pets and companions; even snakes and tiger cubs as well as the bonding power of pets. From the fun of a playful pup to the comfort of a faithful friend, pets bring us laughter, love

and a sense of belonging.

In the 99th Issue of the Writers Space Africa magazine, we celebrate the amazing world of pets. Our writers have shared stories of pets who have changed lives like Toby and Kaya in *The Green Whiskers Pact*, overcome obstacles and shown us what loyalty and dedication mean in *Living with Tim and Spike*.

Through a million alphabets carefully woven together, our writers have highlighted how assuring these pets can be in times of doubts like *The Storm that brought the Calm*.

As you read these pages, we hope you will be



inspired by the mysterious human-animal chemistry. Whether you are a seasoned pet owner or just an animal lover we invite you to join us in celebrating the magic of pets as they touch our hearts, change our lives and bring us joy in abundance.

Happy reading!

Comfort Naana Adwoa Okyere

Chief Editor



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Empowering African Writers



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

THEME: YOUTH

Writers Space Africa (WSA) is accepting submissions for its 101st edition (May 2025 Edition).

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

DEADLINE
MARCH 15, 2025

TO SUBMIT
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The Magical PET-KEEPER

CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE



Author: Abdullatif Khalid

Country: Uganda



It's dead ... no, it is alive ... ooey! It's just sleeping! Martha grabbed the closest chats and handed them to Mr. Ki'ogora. He flipped through their colorful pages filled with animal sketches.

"Are these your pets?" Martha asked curiously.

"Not just pets," Mr. Ki'ogora said, adjusting his round glasses. "They're my special helpers, born from my stories."

Kiki's eyes sparkled with excitement. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Ki'ogora pointed to a fluffy white dog wagging its tail by the door. "That's Luna, my loyal pup. She helps me think. Over there is Patches, my mischievous kitten, always climbing where she shouldn't. And see those two bunnies hopping near the couch? That's Bounce and Fluff. They bring a little magic to the room."

Martha gasped. "They're from your stories?"

"Exactly," Mr. Ki'ogora replied with a grin. "When I start a new story about an animal, they appear to help

me finish it. They're not just pets: they're partners in imagination."

"Wow!" Martha exclaimed, watching Patches playfully swipe at a ball of yarn. "What about the kitten? She looks like she's up to something."

Mr. Ki'ogora laughed. "Patches is full of energy because her story isn't complete yet. If I don't finish it soon, she might cause even more mischief!"

As they spoke, Mr. Ki'ogora went to the kitchen and returned with bowls of food: kibble for Luna, crunchy carrots for Bounce and Fluff, and a dish of milk for Patches. He placed them on the floor with care.

"Breakfast time, everyone!" he called.

The animals dashed over, happily munching away as their tails wagged and noses twitched.

"They're so well-behaved!" Kiki said in amazement.

"That's because they know they're loved," Mr. Ki'ogora said, patting Luna's head. "Each one has a place in my stories and my heart. They're more than pets: they're family."

"What happens when you finish Patches' story?" Martha asked.

"She'll settle down and stay with me, just like the others," Mr. Ki'ogora explained. "Every completed story finds its home, just like every pet finds its family."

At that moment, Bounce hopped over to Martha and nuzzled her gently... meow meow

"I think Bounce likes you!" Mr. Ki'ogora said with a chuckle.

"Really?" Martha asked, her face lighting up as she petted the bunny.

"A pet chooses its person," Mr. Ki'ogora said warmly. "Take good care of them, because pets bring love, laughter, and magic: they make every day an adventure!"

Jasper

CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE



Author: Favour Ehijokwu

Country: Nigeria



Birthdays were always a special day for me, and I looked forward to them throughout the year. However, my parents didn't fancy celebrating birthdays. But there was one person who shared my enthusiasm - my grandma, Nana. Nana was a strong, positive, and lively person who possessed boundless energy, similar to mine. I always eagerly anticipated her gifts, often more than my own birthday. My mother believed birthdays weren't meant to be celebrated elaborately. "It's a day to give thanks to God Almighty

and your parents for your existence," she'd say. "Without them, you wouldn't be here." Grandma would counter her argument, "You should thank her for choosing you as her mom. I know what I would have missed if she hadn't chosen you!" This exchange would often happen between them.

On my 14th birthday, I woke up to the melodious voices of my parents and Nana singing for me. After hugging and thanking them, I rushed to unwrap my gifts. But I noticed something was

off - there were only two boxes instead of the usual three. Who hadn't gotten me a gift? I soon discovered the boxes were from Mom and Dad, containing my favorite book and a colorful dress. But where was Nana's gift? I felt a pang of disappointment, and tears began to form in my eyes considering the fact that I waited. That's when I saw Nana walking in with a little puppy.

It had been a week since Nana left Jasper in my care. At first, I wasn't thrilled about having a puppy, but I was taught not to reject gifts from elderly ones because they have more wisdom than I could ever have. Mom said I would eventually find out the reason why Jasper was given to me. I didn't play or talk to Jasper, despite his efforts to connect with me. In fact, I was upset when I found out he had played with my favorite toys and scattered my room. Mom had to intervene and send Jasper out of my room. Days passed, and Jasper stopped coming to my room. But one morning, I was frantically searching for my notebook, which contained my weekly assignment. Mom helped me search, but we couldn't find it anywhere. Just as we were about to give up, Jasper appeared with my notebook in his mouth. I was overjoyed. I hugged and kissed him.

From that day on, Jasper and I became inseparable. We did everything together - eating, sleeping, playing, and even doing chores. I allowed him to play with all my toys, and we played fetch together. I began to hear him talk, mom wouldn't believe but I

did. When I was feeling down, Jasper would bring his leash, encouraging me to take him for a walk. When Jasper fell ill, I was worried sick. I checked on him every hour, and Dad took him to the vet. Thankfully, Jasper recovered quickly. Grandma visited us after hearing the news, and I thanked her for giving me the best gift ever - Jasper. He wasn't just a pet; he was my brother.



Call for **SUBMISSION**

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

Waters, more than just a natural element, raise many questions about their context and content. Mysterious in certain African cultures, they're believed to host deities and are attributed more than the human eye can see. In this light, tell us what waters mean to you.

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>

SUBMISSION IS OPEN FROM FEBRUARY 11 TO MARCH 10, 2025.



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The Heartwarming Journey of Living With Tim And Spike

Author: Innocent James Matekere

Country: Tanzania

CREATIVE
NON-FICTION

"Dogs teach us valuable life lessons, reminding us to live in the moment, appreciate small things and love unconditionally. They don't hold grudges, dwell on past mistakes or worry about the future. Instead, they focus on the present, urging us to slow down and enjoy life's simple pleasures."

Pets are not just animals in our homes; they are family, bringing joy, comfort and companionship words can't fully capture. Among all pets, dogs have been "man's best friend" for centuries. Their loyalty, playfulness and affection make them beloved companions worldwide. For me, dogs are family, each holding a special place in my life. Moments shared with them are filled with love and connection, creating lasting memories. Their ability to understand us without words and offer unconditional love is rare

and precious, making them irreplaceable members of the homestead.

I remember the first time I held a brown puppy in my arms. It was a moment of pure innocence and wonder. The tiny creature, barely a few weeks old, curled up in my lap and looked up at me with soft, trusting eyes. I felt a connection that would last a lifetime. I named him Tim, my first dog. Tim was a rambunctious little creature, always full of energy and eager to explore. His excitement was contagious and I

couldn't help but smile watching him chase sticks, balls or even his own tail.

Dogs have a unique way of making you feel loved without asking for anything in return. Unlike humans, they don't judge or hold grudges. Their love is unconditional. Tim, with his youthful energy and occasional mischief, always comforted me after long days away. No matter how bad my day was, his wagging tail and warm companionship erased all my stress. His love was pure, and I loved him back with all my heart, always wishing to see him happy.

As the years went by, Tim grew older and so did I. I learned that dogs, like humans, go through different stages of life and with each stage comes a new set of experiences to embrace. When Tim turned five years old, I noticed his once boundless energy was fading away. The short walks we used to take seemed longer and his playtime became less frequent. It was hard to watch him slow down, but even as an older dog, Tim's love never wavered. He still greeted me with the same enthusiasm whenever I came home, even if his body wasn't as agile as it used to be.

One of the most striking things about living with dogs is how attuned they become to your emotions. On days when I felt overwhelmed, Tim would sense my sadness and rest his head on my legs, offering quiet comfort. Without words, his presence spoke volumes. In those moments, I realized dogs have an incredible ability to empathize with

their human companions. Their intuition is something we often take for granted, yet it's what makes them truly special.

After Tim passed away, I was devastated with sadness. It felt as though my heart's ventricles had been ripped away. The home was quieter, the days lonelier and I struggled to imagine life without him. But I knew that Tim had lived a full and happy life and it was time to let go and honor his memory. It wasn't long before I found myself welcoming a new puppy into my life. His name was Spike, a spunky, playful puppy with a heart as big as his energy. While Spike was different from Tim in many ways, he brought with him a new kind of joy and excitement.

Spike's arrival didn't replace Tim or diminish the bond we shared. Instead, he taught me that love for a pet isn't limited by time. Each dog offers unique gifts. Spike was younger, more active and more independent than Tim but made me feel special. He followed me around, wagging his tail, eager to play as we walked or ran. His infectious enthusiasm brought positivity and I enjoyed more than I had in a long time. With Spike, I rediscovered the joy of puppyhood, endless fetch games, playful moments with my shamba boots and the unconditional love only a dog provides.

Through my experiences with Tim and Spike, I've realized the unique bond between humans and dogs. Dogs need so little, food, water, a place to sleep, and love, but offer so much in return: loyalty, joy and

comfort. They sense emotions and reassure us, whether through a wagging tail or quiet presence. Their happiness connects to ours as they become family, sharing playful energy that brightens dark days and calmness that soothes us. Tim and Spike remind me I'm never alone. Their loyalty enriches every moment, inspiring me to treasure life's simple joys.

Dogs teach us valuable life lessons, reminding us to live in the moment, appreciate small things and love unconditionally. They don't hold grudges, dwell on past mistakes or worry about the future. Instead, they focus on the present, urging us to slow down and enjoy life's simple pleasures. Whether it's an evening walk, a trip to the shop or a game of hide-and-seek, dogs show us the joy of being present and finding happiness in little things.

Reflecting on my journey with dogs, I am filled with gratitude for the love and companionship they've brought into my life. Each dog has left a unique paw print on my heart, and I will forever cherish our memories. The joy of having a dog is immeasurable; they truly are "man's best friend." Their loyalty, unconditional love and companionship make them irreplaceable. Whether in moments of celebration or sadness, their presence has always been a source of comfort and joy.

No matter how many dogs come and go, the lessons they teach us and the love they give us remain. Tim and Spike, along with

every dog that has been part of my life, have made me a better person. They've shown me the true meaning of unconditional love and have taught me to appreciate the simple joys in life. Living with dogs is a reminder that love, in its purest form, transcends time, space and circumstance. It's a bond that lasts forever, even when they are no longer physically by our side.

In the end, pets, especially dogs, are not just animals. They are teachers, friends and family, showing us the best parts of life through their simple yet profound love. Their devotion knows no limits, bringing happiness even on the hardest days. Their love is a gift that keeps on giving, a source of comfort and joy that transforms our lives. I am forever grateful for the dogs who have walked beside me, in both joy and sorrow, sharing life's ups and downs with unwavering loyalty.

If you have ever experienced the love of a dog, you know it is a bond unlike any other, a connection that leaves an indelible mark on your heart. Their presence reminds us to cherish the little moments, like a playful game or a comforting snuggle, moments that bring light to even the darkest days. They become our steadfast companions, teaching us about loyalty and unconditional love. Their memory stays with you long after they are gone, a lasting reminder of the beauty they brought into your life and the lessons they taught us about living fully and loving deeply.

Pets

Author: Toluwasale Solomon
Country: Nigeria

CREATIVE
NON-FICTION

"I dropped the phone and whispered, "God, please vindicate me," tears falling faster than my prayers could rise. My bunnies jumped onto the couch beside me, their soft fur brushing against my arm as if to say, 'we're here'. But I pushed them away. I didn't want comfort. I wanted answers."

I came home early that day, the office left behind like a battlefield where I had lost a fight I never started. My pets stared at me, their wide eyes full of questions they couldn't ask but seemed to know. They always knew.

"I'm on probation," I told them, my voice cracking under the weight of the words. "They say I didn't do my job, but I did. I swear I did. The secretary lied, and now I'm paying for it." My pets didn't blink, didn't move. I almost wished they could talk, could tell me what to do.

I called my friends, desperate for comfort, but their words hit harder than the accusation. "Your good-girl attitude won't get you far," they said. "Look where it's landed you now."

I dropped the phone and whispered, "God, please vindicate me," tears falling faster than my prayers could rise. My bunnies jumped onto the couch beside me, their soft fur brushing against my arm as if to say, 'we're here'. But I pushed them away. I didn't want comfort. I wanted answers.

The night stretched long and cold. I cried myself into a restless sleep, the weight of injustice pressing against my chest. Melody, my cat, curled up by my head, her purring like a lullaby. For the first time that day, I smiled.

The next morning, I dragged myself out of bed to feed the pets. At the aquarium, Presh, my parrot, and Scent, my goldfish, seemed oddly animated. Presh squawked something unintelligible, while Scent splashed water onto my face. It felt deliberate, like they were trying to wake me from my fog of despair.

“Okay,” I said, wiping my face. “I see what you’re doing. Thank you.”

On the weekend, Bell, my dog, refused to let me sulk. He wagged his tail, barked at the door, and dragged my pajamas until I gave in. “Fine,” I said, grabbing his leash. “But just a short walk.”

Five blocks from home, fate shifted. A colleague saw me and asked if I had received the email. “The bosses need to see you today,” he said. “They’ve found something.”

I rushed back home, my heart pounding. My pets watched as I gathered them for a quick prayer. I left, hopeful but cautious, and when I returned, they were waiting at the door, their eyes as expectant as my own.

“The truth came out,” I told them, dropping to my knees. “They found the real culprit. I’m free.”

That night, I thanked God for seeing me

through. My friends came over to celebrate, but my heart belonged to the ones who had stayed by my side in silence. The ones who had listened without judgment, who had given without expecting anything in return.

The fish that splashed me awake. The bunny whose soft body could replace a pillow. The parrot who never stopped yapping. The cat who brought me warmth. The dog who refused to give up on me.

They aren’t just pets—they are companions, healers, and friends. They may not speak the way we do, but their love speaks volumes if only you’re willing to listen.



LESOTHO 2025

October 27 - November 2, 2025

Theme:

**Celebrating African Narratives:
Uniting Cultures and Empowering Creatives**

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Avocado

Author: Sima Mittal

Country: Tanzania

The olive carpet, pistachio walls, lime curtains and the jade sofa, all stood drab.

Croc couldn't peel his eyes off the instructions that lay on his emerald desk.

1. Wrap the ENTIRE body with WET towels.
2. Place the cadaver in the fridge. (NOT FREEZER)
3. You have 5 days to successfully extract and secure live cells.
4. Use nitrile gloves to pluck samples of the fur.

He had scanned these words everyday for the past 255 days! His thoughts ran back to when Juniper was dying. Detachment was impossible.

At first, the thought was amoral and vile. The process would be butchery. But the yearning comfort of companionship persuaded him assertively.

He contacted the Carinvorata Cloning and Biotech Foundation of Korea. Their pluripotent quantum somatic stem cell and transgenic technology would help the cells from the tissue to be cryopreserved. Their innovative biophysics was a coupling advantage.

Now he smoothed his hands over her photo. The firm had promised a perfect copy. Speculation and curiosity sang through his being.

Would she dig into cucumber pickles? Would the new she be the old she?

Tring! Tring! The doorbell. Croc dashed to the open door. The expert from the Foundation placed the tiny animal in his hands. Croc examined her closely. She was a tinge less greener than Juniper. "It's because of the oocyte genetics of the surrogate," explained the veterinarian.

She licked his cheeks just the way Juniper did. But she was positively different. He stroked her soft fur. It felt buttery.

"What will you call her?" asked the veterinarian.

"Avocado!" He said. It sounded perfect.

Croc wrapped Avocado in the soft Verdun shawl that he had woven from Juniper's fur. Avocado and Juniper amalgamated. Croc sighed with relief. His heart breathed in whispers.

A new miraculous soulful, evergreen day!

The Whispering Cage



Author: Immanuel Mwendwa Kiilu

Country: Kenya

FLASH
FICTION

The antique birdcage hung from a rusty hook, its brass bars glinting faintly in the moonlight. Inside, a single feather lay motionless—a ghost of the creature that once inhabited it. Old Man Hemming's, his face etched with time, shuffled towards it, a bottle of whiskey clutched in his gnarled hand.

He poured a generous measure, the amber liquid swirling in the glass. "To you, my friend," he croaked, raising the glass to the empty cage. "To the memories."

A sudden gust rattled the windows, and a mournful cry echoed from the nearby graveyard. Hemming's shivered, not from the cold, but from the memory of that cry—the cry of Corvus, his raven.

Corvus had been his only companion. They had shared secrets, whispered conspiracies, and, Hemming's swore, even debated the nature of reality itself. But then Corvus had flown away—

vanished without a trace, leaving only the cage and the haunting silence.

Hemming's took a long, shuddering gulp of whiskey. The silence was deafening, the emptiness unbearable. His gaze fell on the feather, now trembling slightly. A chill ran down his spine. Corvus wasn't gone. He was watching.

The wind picked up again, carrying a soft whisper. Hemming's turned, his eyes scanning the shadows of the room, heart pounding. From the corner of the room, a faint glimmer caught his eye—a shadow darting past the window.

He stared at the birdcage. The feather wasn't alone anymore. A single obsidian eye, gleaming in the dark, met his own. Corvus had come home.

Can't Take the Heat



Author: Rose Wangari Kinyanjui

Country: Kenya

FLASH
FICTION

"Mummy. I think she is not feeling well. She hasn't eaten the whole day and keeps groaning. Maybe she has a stomach ache." Kui's daughter announced as soon as the mother walked into the house.

Kui looked at her and smiled softly, just to be sure she was not showing emotions on her face.

She felt for her forehead. The temperature was in between high and low. She did not have a thermometer to confirm the degrees, but she was a bit concerned.

She looked into her mouth and tried to scan the eyes like doctors do.

She had barely felt for the heart beat when Waitherero collapsed on the ground, groaning and writhing in pain.

It was clear now that Waitherero needed to see a doctor.

Almost in panic, as she kept an eye on her, Kui quickly reached out for her phone and called her personal paediatrician.

"Doctor! You need to see Waitherero right away. She seems to be getting fits and a lot of other things that I haven't seen before. I really can't explain what is going on with her." She said as she tried to swallow saliva to wet her dry throat.

"Kui!!! Unfortunately, I am out of town for work. I need you to first calm down and then give me details that would help me help you. Okay?" the doctor responded.

After listening to the details, the doctor sighed and responded to Kui. "You don't have to worry. Your cat is on heat."

A Burden of Love



Author: Kaone Tebelelo Tafila

Country: Botswana

FLASH
FICTION

I remember the day I brought Robbi home—a golden bundle of fur with eyes that sparkled like sunlight on water. He grew into my shadow, following me everywhere, his tail wagging like a metronome of joy. My favourite memory is the afternoon we spent in the bushes, chasing locusts. His leaps were poetry in motion, and I laughed until my sides hurt.

That night, under a cascade of stars, I whispered, “You’re my best friend, Robbi,” and he nuzzled into my hand as if he understood.

But love, I learned, can falter under the weight of a moment.

It was an ordinary morning. I rushed through the house, late for school. Robbi, ever the playful spirit, darted underfoot. I didn’t see him. My foot came down, and the yelp that followed still haunts my dreams.

The vet’s words were sharp and sterile: a broken rib, internal bruising. I threw everything into his recovery—money, time, my heart. Each day, I sat by his bed, coaxing him to eat, stroking his fur, begging him to forgive me. His eyes, once full of life, dimmed but still sought mine, as if to say, “I trust you.”

One morning, I found him lying still, foam at his mouth. My knees buckled. I cradled his lifeless body, the weight of him lighter than the guilt crushing my chest.

I buried him under the Mopane tree by the goat kraal, where he once flew like the wind. A frisbee lay beside him, a token of happier times.

Now, I sit under that tree every evening, staring at the stars, whispering apologies to the darkness. Love didn’t save Robbi; it killed him. And I carry that weight, one step at a time.

Creative **SPOTLIGHT**

Elizabeth Dwamena-Asare





In this edition, Lise interviews Elizabeth Dwamena-Asare, a passionate African creative who masterfully balances her roles as an HR officer, creative writer, and dedicated volunteer. From her early love for storytelling to winning the prestigious African Writers Awards (Short Story), Elizabeth shares her journey, inspirations, challenges, and triumphs.

Lise: Hello, Elizabeth, how are you doing?

Lizabeth: Hi Lise. I'm fine, you?

Lise: I'm good too. Now, my first question is, who is Elizabeth Dwamena-Asare?

Lizabeth: Elizabeth is a proud African creative who juggles various roles. She works as an HR officer by day, as a creative writer by night, and volunteers in between. Her writing journey started in childhood, when, according to her mom, she'd sit in quiet corners to read and write and then fall asleep eventually. Her interest in writing piqued as she found herself joining writing clubs, working at librar-

ies in high school, and dedicating her leisure hours to writing. Upon completion of her first degree, she had the opportunity to offer her national service with Leti Arts, where she was privileged to join the publishing team; there, she decided to further explore creative writing by seizing chances to learn and participate in writing contests.

Lise: As a creative writer, what do you find yourself compelled to write? Genres in other words.

Lizabeth: Fiction, short stories, plays, and novels. These genres allow me to express myself and to bring my imaginations to life, as I always feel a sense of libera-

tion when writing in these genres. I flow like water without restrictions. Even though periodically I experience writer's block, I am able to get back on track without struggles.

Lise: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned about writing and storytelling throughout your writing journey?

Lizabeth: 1. Writing is not as easy as many think it to be. It requires a lot of brainstorming, detailed structuring, refining of sentences, relevant research, patience, and so much effort to bring a piece to life. And it can take months to birth a piece.

2. Writing is not just an innate ability; it is a skill that can be learnt, but you'll need discipline, passion, and consistency to grow it.

3. Some days you will win. Some days you will learn. Other days, you will experience rejections in the writing journey, but they are all forms of feedback. It depends on what you do with the feedback: quit or try again. I'd say try again.

Lise: Your number two point just answered what I wanted to ask you. I was going to ask, according to you, are writers born or made? Unless you would like to elaborate.

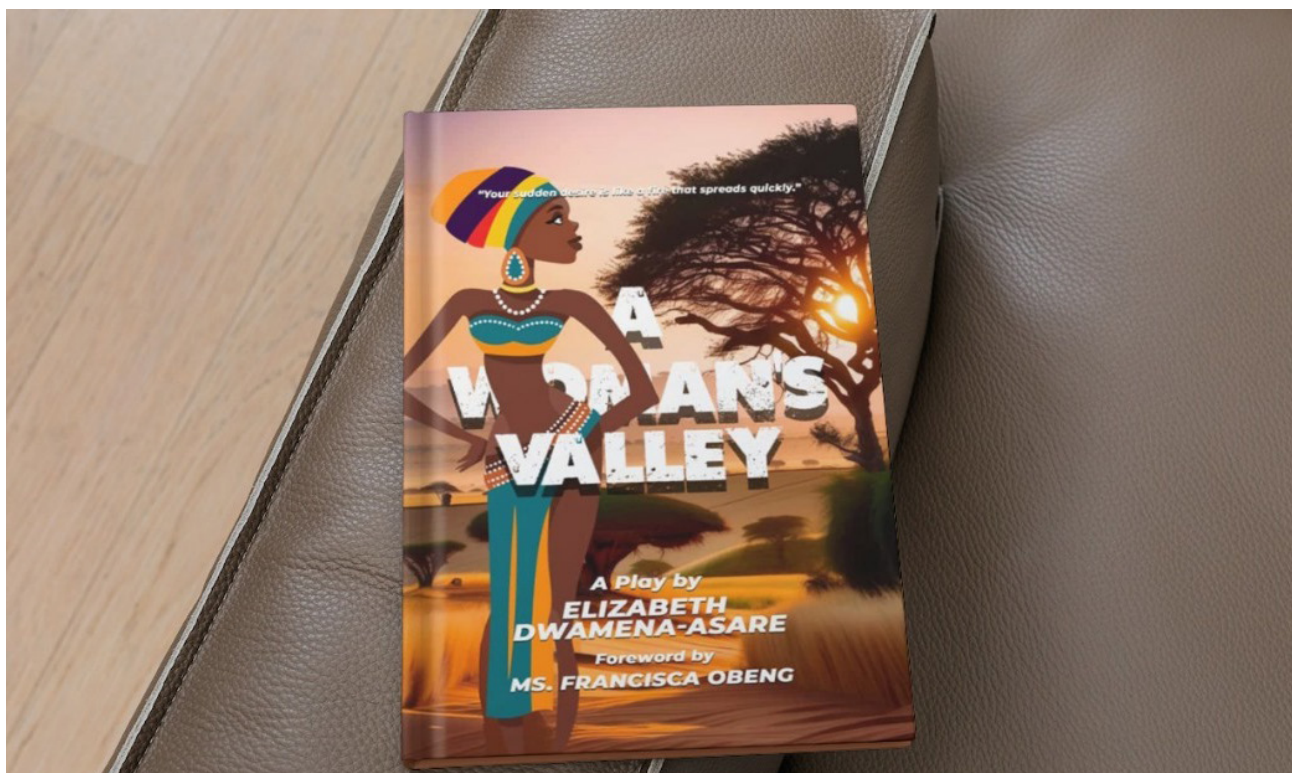
Lizabeth: For this question, I sincerely can't give a straight answer. I believe that writing

is a skill that one can either naturally possess from birth or acquire at any stage in life. It makes no difference if one was born with it or learnt it at a certain point in life. The focus should rather be on producing content that makes an impact, leaving a lasting legacy. People will remember that piece you wrote, but they won't remember or debate whether you were born a writer or learnt it.

Lise: So tell me, do you have a specific audience in mind while writing, or you primarily write for yourself?

Lizabeth: Interesting!

Writing for myself would go straight into my diary. Hopefully, I will publish something



"A Woman's Valley" is a play for young adults. The play centers around an aggressive feminist princess who encounters gender inequality in the royal household. Despite the challenges, she strives to ascend to the throne as a woman king, only to face obstacles from her mother's past. It is available at Booknook store.

such as a memoir someday. But whenever I sit to write, I call it bringing my imagination to life, and I do so with a specific audience in mind. This way, I am able to craft it to suit that audience. Usually, I love to write for young adults and children. So once I decide my audience, I craft my piece in such a way that they would be able to understand upon reading.

Lise: Do you have literary influences? If yes, who are they and how have they shaped your writing?

Lizabeth: Of course I do!

I cannot imagine being in the creative space and not having others to look up to. There are many, but there are three creative writers who I consider have significantly influenced the foundation of my writing journey, shaping my style, perspective, and approach to storytelling.

From Peggy Oppong, I learnt how to tell stories that focus on a specific audience and create suspense.

From John Grisham, I learnt the essence of researching details before writing a particular theme. His books consistently provide me with knowledge on various subjects before I finish them.

Although I knew Jared Angira as a poet, I learnt from him about a creative yet puzzling way to tell a story. His approach prompts me to reflect deeply and thoughtfully, fostering a

deep appreciation for literature.

Lise: What challenges have you faced in your writing career, and what have been the most rewarding moments?

Lizabeth: I've had to constantly deal with writer's block. There have been numerous times I have struggled to come up with new ideas or make progress on a piece. And I've had to take time off and come back to the piece.

Sometimes, I return to the piece with so little information or idea that it frustrates me. I only console myself with the fact that I'm making progress regardless.

Another one is rejection and criticism. I have almost lost track of the number of emails and phone calls I've received regarding applications and submissions. Dealing with rejection emails and some harsh critiques sometimes made me cry and question if I'm really a writer. At one point, I had to develop a defence mechanism to prevent me from breaking down mentally, especially when I received a rejection message.

And also, balancing my writing with my 9-5 job plus other engagements like family and social life made it tougher. I would often return home exhausted, yet I would still need to make time to write and meet submission deadlines, which is a challenge I'm currently grappling with.

Lise: Beyond writing, what are some of



Who Cares? An illustrated book about environmental sanitation for kids. (Available on Amazon and Booknook Store)

your favorite hobbies or activities, and how might they influence your creative process?

Lizabeth: I love to volunteer for communities and organisations. I see volunteering as a unique way to give back.

Also, I facilitate an interactive reading and writing session with children between the ages of 7 and 13 years in my community and in rural communities, with the aim of fostering a love for literacy, improving reading and writing skills, and empowering them with essential tools for lifelong learning. Aside from these, I love to watch comedy movies and stage plays. And I also love to learn DIYs on YouTube and Pinterest. Ever since I started these engagements, I have gotten ideas that assist me with being creative as a writer.

Lise: Tell me about your Award winning story “when love exits” and how you re-

ceived the information that you won African Writers Award (short story). Take me through that process

Lizabeth: My inspiration for the storyline of “When Love Exits” came from a friend’s situation.

Coming from a broken home, she’s been through a rollercoaster journey when it comes to matters of the heart. So I picked that story line to share creatively how broken home issues leave some individuals unhealed and damaged for life. I had mixed feelings when I heard I’d won.

Of course, I didn’t know the pieces that mine was competing against, so subconsciously, I used to panic at the thought of the outcome. Would I win? I don’t know why, but I lost confidence in my work and panicked so much that I decided against watching the outcome.

But a wonderful friend of mine, Joshua, called me in the afternoon to congratulate me. It came to me as a shock. Believe you me, I screamed all the way to my parent's end.

Once I had partially calmed down, I went online and started playing the session. I listened attentively as "PenBoss" mentioned the title of my piece and then my name. I screamed some more. It was real. It was true. I was extremely excited. That win felt so good that it made me forget all the times I'd received rejection emails.

Lise: What are your goals as a writer, and what advice would you offer to aspiring short story writers, particularly those seeking publication or prizes?

Lizabeth: My goals include developing young creatives in my community who will continue the creative writing cycle. Addi-

tionally, the goal is to create mind-blowing pieces suitable for use in movies and stage plays. They should be both entertaining and stress-relieving. To my fellow writers, don't give up. I kept doing my homework, making sure to develop my pieces better than before. Stay consistent and keep learning and applying it to your pieces. The results will become evident with time.

Lise: If you were to say something about "read, become and transform" what would you say in a few words?

Lizabeth: Read to awaken, become to transform, and transform to inspire.

Lise: And with this, we wrap up our conversation. Thank you for your time

Lizabeth: Thank you for having me



Elizabeth moderating one of the panel discussions at the 2023 African Writers Conference held in Accra, Ghana.



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Four Legged Family

Author: Nanyanzi Leticia Hope

Country: Uganda

Came to me on quite paws,
No words, just love without a cause.
Eyes that spoke, tails that wagged,
Hearts so pure, never dragged.
Through sunlit days and rainy nights,
Stays beside, with a bond so wise.
Four legs, but steps aligned,
With mine, in heart, in soul, in mind.
A wag, a purr, a bonding leap,
The joy runs deep, their love to keep.
No walls of doubt, no bridge too wide,
The silent strength, the gentle glee
A four legged family, always with me.
For home's not walls, but hearts that bind.

The Other Companions



Author: Thompson Emate

Country: Nigeria

They don't seem bothered about your feelings,
The blues are not a go-away for them,
The gloomy spell is not a leave-alone to them,
They just want to sit beside you.

They come running to you after moments apart,
Eager for your touch or a cuddle,
They're excited to see you even though deep down you are not,
A welcome embrace from you speaks volumes to them.

They're loyal to their owners,
Except when harm runs through their vessels,
They're devoted to their owners,
Except when darkness lurks within.

They're sunshine to those who have passed their prime,
They sit side by side watching, learning and documenting,
Until the night separates them,
Until the feeble tree is felled by time.

Love them or not,
They have a place with us,
Own them or not,
They're sheltered somewhere in the neighbourhood.

Through Their Eyes

Author: Anuoluwapo Aladeloye

Country: Nigeria

Small paws shuffle, unsure yet bold,
In search of warmth when the night turns cold.
Eyes glimmer, half-hope, half-fear,
“Will they love me? Am I truly here?”

Each bark, each purr, a question untold,
Fragile hearts wrapped in courage so bold.
A wagging tail, a cautious leap,
They trust us with secrets they silently keep.

In their joy, there's a trembling edge,
A love unspoken, a solemn pledge.
Yet in our arms, their fear dissolves,
Through every hug, a bond evolves.

They're anxious souls, yet happiness beams,
In playful bounds and mid-slumber dreams.
Pets, they teach us a sacred art:
To hold with care another's heart.

Their fleeting lives, a bittersweet thread,
Still, their love lingers when they're long ahead.

The Whiskered Wonders

POETRY



Author: Katlego Remelda Leboho

Country: South Africa

In a sunbeam's glow, they softly tread,
Paws padding lightly, where angels fear to tread.
Whiskers twitching with a curious flair,
Each fleeting moment, a bond we share.

Tails wagging like flags in a joyful parade,
A loyal companion, through sun and shade.
From playful barks to gentle purrs,
In their eyes, a world without slurs.

The clatter of nails on a kitchen floor,
A pleading glance, "Just one treat more!"
Chasing shadows, or napping in grace,
Every day is magic in this treasured space.

Oh, the secrets whispered in their ears,
The shared laughter, the silenced fears.
With a head on my lap, and a lick on my hand,
In the tapestry of life, they are the strands.

For in these creatures, so small yet profound,
We find our solace, where love abounds.
So, here's to the pets, our heart's tiny kings,
In their company, we discover what joy truly brings.
you're the oasis of delightfulness and ornamentation for homes.

Hamartia

Author: Aubrey Odirile Jenamiso

Country: Botswana

POETRY

I sit outside watching the rain pour
Nursing a steamy cup of coffee
I behold as the drops fall, awe filled

They're beyond happy,
Purring and curled up with each other
Their meows ring soft and soothing

They're beyond elated,
Running up and down in muddy puddles
The barks ring like memories of my childhood

Their puppies watch on, riddled with amazement
Wishing they could join in
Their litter meowing in sync to the little barks
Both camps barred from joining the parents outside

I am like one caught in a net of love
Forever bound to them, unable to let go
My ever-growing pile of pets, one I'm unable to purge
Achilles had his heel, this is mine.



COMING SOON

The Green Whiskers Pact



Author: Tonny O. Blair

Country: Kenya

SHORT
STORY



In the small coastal town of Kariba, nestled between lush mangroves and a shimmering blue lagoon, lived an unlikely pair, Toby, a mischievous tabby cat with emerald eyes, and Kaya, a lively African Grey parrot with a penchant for mimicry. Their owner, Nyah, was a gentle woman with a fierce passion for environmental conservation. Nyah ran a modest wildlife sanctuary that nursed injured marine animals, protected native flora, and provided

shelter to stray animals.

Nyah's sanctuary, aptly named Green Haven, was a refuge for both creatures and the environment. It, a belief that every being, no matter how small, deserved a chance to thrive. Toby and Kaya were her loyal companions, shadowing her every move and causing occasional mischief. Toby would chase shadows along the mangrove roots, while Kaya perched atop Nyah's shoulder, squawking the mantra,

“Protect the earth! Protect the earth!”

But one fateful morning, Green Haven was thrown into turmoil. A company had begun clearing the nearby mangroves to build luxury villas. The mangroves, which were home to a plethora of wildlife and protected the lagoon from erosion, were being razed at an alarming rate. The symphony of birdsong and rustling leaves was now replaced by the growl of chainsaws.

Nyah’s heart sank as she witnessed the destruction, but her resolve hardened. “This isn’t just about us,” she told Toby and Kaya that evening. “It’s about the ecosystem. If we lose the mangroves, we lose everything.”

That night, as the moonlight bathed Green Haven, Toby and Kaya gathered at their favourite spot, a large baobab tree in the sanctuary. For the first time, the two animals shared an unspoken understanding. They decided to act, not as mere pets, but as guardians of their home.

Toby, agile and curious, would scout the mangroves at night. His sharp senses and nimble paws would help uncover the plans of the developers. Kaya, with her intelligence and ability to mimic human speech, would relay messages to Nyah and the villagers. Together, they would become the voices of the voiceless.

Toby began his nightly missions. His emerald eyes glowed in the dark as he slipped into the mangroves, his striped fur blend-

ing with the shadows. He eavesdropped on workers’ conversations, his ears twitching at every word. One night, he discovered a discarded blueprint showing the full extent of the planned destruction, it was worse than Nyah had feared.

Meanwhile, Kaya took to the skies during the day. Her sharp eyes scanned the village, and her piercing voice carried warnings. “Save the mangroves! Floods will come!” she squawked repeatedly, landing on fences and rooftops. At first, the villagers dismissed her as a noisy bird, but her persistence began to stir curiosity.

One evening, Toby returned from his mission with the blueprint clutched tightly in his jaws. Nyah’s heart raced as she spread it out on the table. It was a roadmap to ruin. “This is our chance,” she whispered. “With this, we can prove what’s at stake.”

Despite their efforts to rally the villagers, the company dismissed their pleas. The developers argued that the mangroves were expendable, promising economic growth and jobs in return. Frustrated but undeterred, Nyah devised a bold plan: a peaceful protest at the construction site, featuring the voices of both humans and animals.

The protest day dawned bright and tense. Villagers gathered at the edge of the mangroves, their placards swaying in the breeze. Kaya became the unexpected star of the show. She flew into the crowd carrying a small banner tied to her leg that read, “Man-

groves = Life.” Perching on Nyah’s arm, she echoed Nyah’s heartfelt speech. “Save our home! Save our future!” the parrot repeated, her voice ringing like a bell.

Toby, meanwhile, led the children on an educational walk through the mangroves. He guided them to hidden nests, scuttling crabs, and vibrant mangrove blossoms. The children’s awe was contagious, and their excited chatter moved their parents to action.

The days that followed tested the town’s spirit. The developers intensified their work, chopping trees with relentless precision. One stormy night, a heavy rain fell, and the waters of the lagoon began to rise. Without the mangroves to absorb the deluge, the nearby village flooded. Homes were submerged, and families were displaced.

Nyah worked tirelessly to help the victims, her heart breaking at the sight of children clutching soaked blankets and families huddling under makeshift shelters. “This is what we feared,” she whispered to Kaya, who perched silently on her shoulder, her usual chatter replaced by a mournful coo.

The flood became a turning point. It awakened the villagers to the truth: the mangroves were their first line of defence. Suddenly, Nyah’s fight wasn’t just hers; it was theirs too.

The next protest drew national attention. Media crews descended on Kariba, their cameras capturing the unity of the town

and the bond between humans and animals. Kaya squawked Nyah’s words, becoming a symbol of the struggle, while Toby sat proudly beside her, his green eyes reflecting the determination of a town unwilling to back down.

The developers, overwhelmed by the negative publicity, finally relented. They agreed to halt construction and reforest the damaged areas. The mangroves were saved, and Kariba celebrated with tears and laughter.

Toby and Kaya became local legends, their story spreading far beyond Kariba. Inspired by their bravery, Nyah launched an environmental education program called ‘The Green Whiskers Pact’; She used the tale of Toby and Kaya to teach children about conservation and the interconnectedness of all living things.

Green Haven flourished, its mangroves teeming with life once more. The lagoon sparkled in the sunlight, a reminder of what could be saved with determination and love.

Every evening, under the shadow of the baobab tree, Toby and Kaya sat side by side, their eyes scanning the horizon. They had proved that even the smallest voices could roar, that even the smallest paws and wings could carry the weight of a cause worth fighting for.

As Kaya often said, “Protect the earth! One paw, one wing at a time.”

The Pet I Never Wanted

Author: Fidelugwuowo Nneoma Sally
Country: Nigeria

SHORT
STORY

The reception was at Grandma's house and as we drove down the crowded road, I clenched Grandma's brochure over my chest and watched as her compound came into view outside the car window; the unexpected. There were canopies everywhere, but what shook me was the two-story building behind the canopies. It was never there before, and I felt this undiluted rage as I alighted. I looked around the compound, and felt unfamiliar.

I walked down to the canopies. The chairs under the canopies were arranged around the tables. I grabbed a chair, sat looking around for a while, for something that would remind me of time. My eyes landed on a palm tree close to the fence, and it tugged at my heart. That was where she had laid Bintu after the accident. A flash of her bloodied goat hair appeared in my mind before it was replaced

by the too many tables that held food for the mourners.

I hugged Grandma's brochure and began to wonder why burials couldn't just be a private family gathering. The Igbo people are known to throw these extravagant burial ceremonies for their dead ones, inviting everybody as if they are celebrating a birthday party. What Grandma deserves is a private gathering of her loved ones, not this! I felt like my anger was spiralling over the rim of my conscious mind, and it took me squeezing my eyes and fisting my hands to keep it at bay, but it was so hard to keep it at bay. She took care of me, especially when Mum and Dad were too busy.

She even got me a pet I never wanted because she thought I was lonely and needed the company, but I made her feel bad for giving me that pet. Bintu was a vibrant, hungry goat

that didn't know when to stay quiet, but she didn't deserve to be treated the way I treated her. The day Grandma brought her home was bittersweet because it was the last day of school, and I was getting ready for the holidays. At the time, I've always had the thought that Grandma was a village idiot that had none of the old wisdom that people always relate to elders, and when she gave me Bintu, I think it tipped me over the edge.

I was perhaps twelve or thirteen at the time. I was peeling egusi seeds in the kitchen when I heard her bleating. It didn't really occur to me to look out the window and see what's going on because we don't have a goat, but I guess I must have thought nothing of it until Grandma brought her into the kitchen. She was so ecstatic that I could feel her vibrant energy from where I was sitting. I stopped what I was doing to look at her and her goat. She smiled so broadly as she said, "Here's your new friend. I was very." I was confused by that statement, but she was looking at me expectantly, and in hindsight, probably wondering why I hadn't hugged Bintu yet.

To my very little self, Bintu was a small goat that smelt a lot like a wet cloth left inside a large bag filled with dry clothes or like the fat market women I always saw at the market. She had short legs, and her eyes looked like beads, and her hair was as black as night without the stars. The first thing she did was to sniff at my legs and lick my knee. I remember feeling so disgusted that I pushed her away from me and screamed at Grandma,

"This is the worst thing you've ever done for me. Get that thing away from me."

My outburst made Grandma's smile fall, but she still tried to keep up her upbeat attitude. 'I got it for you, Amara. You are always alone, and you don't mingle with the children in the neighbourhood.'

I was frustrated with her.

'Why would I mingle with village children? If my parents weren't busy all the time, I wouldn't be here.' I had said.

I didn't mean that, even back then, but I couldn't take it back. After that outburst, she had stayed quiet throughout the day, and my little self hadn't realised that she wanted me to apologise. She kept the goat in the kitchen, and before she went to bed, she told me that the goat was my responsibility, and I hissed.

Back in the present, I stood up from the chair and walked out of the canopy. I walked around the main building to the backyard, and to my surprise and happiness, the kitchen was still intact. I ran down the rugged path and pushed the kitchen door open. It still retained that smoky Grandma smell and the darkness I was used to when I was staying with Grandma. I entered the kitchen and blindly started searching for the small side stool I would sit on when we cooked. I always kept the side stool behind the door, and when I found it, I sat on the chair, felt nostalgic, and my memories started flooding

in.

In the middle of the kitchen, a palm frond lodged. Grandma would always tie Bintu's rope around it every day, and every morning before she goes to the market, she would tell me to feed Bintu, and every time, I would tell her that I will do it. But every morning, I would force-feed her human food and would beat her and ask her why she couldn't eat the food I gave her. She would bleat continuously until evening when I would get her foliage from the back of the kitchen. Grandma would come in and nod in approval before asking for her dinner.

Back then, the kitchen smelt a lot because of Bintu, and I hated to cook there. So, I would untie Bintu and leave her outside the kitchen, and she would wander around the compound bleating to herself all day. One day, she wandered outside the fence and got hit by an incoming vehicle, which happened to be my parents' vehicle, and they were sorry when Grandma came back. I've never seen Grandma so angry at me like that, but I thought her anger would cool off after a few hours like it usually does, but unlike other days, she never spoke to me throughout that day. In the evening, she told my parents to take me home, and she told me never to come back until her funeral. At the time, I didn't really understand the gravity of what I did, and neither did my parents. They thought it was just a goat and they could buy her a new one, but she said that she didn't need another one.

My little self was ignorant and selfish, but my twenty-one-year-old self was mature, and she understood the gravity of what she did. She gave this guttural cry before I caught on and noticed that I was on the kitchen floor. At that moment, I felt like I was very close to Bintu and Grandma, and my eyes closed in the darkness. It was quiet until my mum came in and asked,

"Amara, what are you doing here? I've been looking for you."

"Mum, what happened to Bintu?"

"Who's Bintu?" I sniffed and got up from the floor.

"The goat you hit with your car when I was twelve. I never came back to Grandma's after that."

"Oh that, I don't really know. I believe your grandma sold her meat to the next-door neighbour. Why do you ask?" I felt a blow to my guts, and a thought floated into my mind, "Would I have cared if Grandma hadn't died?"

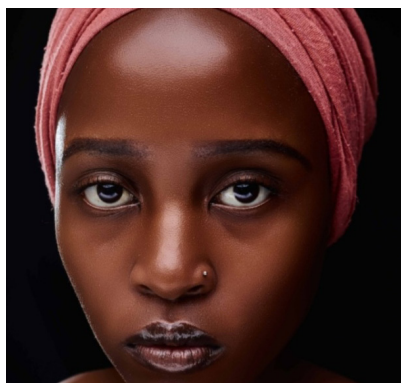
"Nothing. I'll be right down," I said.

"Don't take long," she said and left the hut. I sat on the stool and hugged myself.

"I'm so sorry, Grandma. I'm sorry, Bintu. I..." What can you say to your dead pet that you never loved? The thought sat with me until I felt numb and couldn't get up again.

Good Little Minx

SHORT
STORY



Author: Valerie Chatindo

Country: Zimbabwe

Do not pet me.

Again, I repeat, please do not pet me!

To experience the sensation of a human being's course hands running through my fur is not an event I take pleasure in. Sure, most would say that I am naturally evasive because of what I am. But I would contend with these same people and mention that all of us are different and would not like to be subjected to your stereotypes which you so self-righteously pour out upon all my kind unfairly. No. My aversions aren't a by-product of my species, they are simply a personal preference.

Ever heard of those?

If you have not, then I truly suggest you acquaint yourself with the concept and rid yourself of the one size fits all mentality. For who knows if it might earn you a scratch or

two from that feline friend you might render unintelligible. We are quite smart, and we are everywhere. Your homes, your streets and even your grocery stores, watching and contemplating with those big orbs that your species seems to be transfixed by.

And while we are on that, there are perhaps a lot of so called 'givens' about us I'd like to question. We don't all like milk. I mean sure the lure of that white liquid is quite tempting I too must admit. But oh! The tummy aches and diarrhoea that precede such an indulgence! The deadly vices! To have your bowels spewing from the back of you while you try to contain and direct those contents into the little box you are designated to poop in. What cruelty! It has happened to me twice and twice I have been put out of the house as punishment because my mistress has taken my desperate

and uncontrollable actions as deeds of spite towards her.

The scoundrel.

Does she not know that a cat would never resort to faecal revenge? What does she take me for? A dog!

But I must give it to the old girl. She's not the worst mistress. I do go hunting after all. And yes, hunting for I am not one of those poor creatures unfortunate enough to live life caged up in a house. The ones whose faces I see, pressed against those glass barriers that provide them an outlook on how the rest of us are carrying on. I can only imagine what it's like to see the world through your window and never live to experience it. I have the luxury of coming and going as I please though I must confess that my admittance into the house depends on my physical appearance. I recall how on one night on my sojourn home, from visiting with a friend, who lived 5 miles away and had just birthed a litter of three fine young kits, I was accosted by two wretched dogs of indistinguishable breed. In hot pursuit of me and in my fleeing, I somehow ended up falling into some tepid waters and had to make haste the rest of the way, cold and afraid. As I administered my usual 'meow'; for admittance my mistress had taken one look at me and scrunched her nose.

"You bad little cat. Bad, bad cat"; She had reprimanded whilst performing that finger wagging business in my face. Did the idiot

truly believe I had gone for a dive in the shits voluntarily? What a stupid being she was indeed! I thought to myself as I was dipped into a bucket of water too warm for my tastes and scrubbed like a carpet that very night. My skin tingles still from memory of that beat down.

At times my ruminations lead me to envy my friends who have no masters or mistresses. Who have no-one to torment them with baths, unwanted kisses and strict rules. There are no prejudices in the cat world, those who live with no owners are just cats to us. When we gather at our designated spots, with close to a hundred other cats, in the late hours of the evening, there can be found not a one pointing a paw and saying, 'that one is homeless, that one isn't'. We are just cats. Equal in each other's eyes. Only human beings are superficial enough to discriminate. Either way, I look forward to these nightly meets. Sitting as I am right now in my little basket; I feel my tail curl from excitement. It is a time to catch up and sniff butts with old acquaintances, to ascertain good health and any new developments. Most human beings study this nighttime behaviour and call it odd though I'd say people are even more odd.

My mistress for one is quite the curious creature. Wild and eccentric I'll go as far to say. Even after five years, I still cannot predict the patterns of her behaviour. One week, she will adopt one routine and the next forsake it for a completely new one. It is enough to

give me quite the headache whereas my life revolves around consistency and order. And boy, is she impulsive.

One moment I can be in deep slumber and the other I'll find myself suddenly roused and being picked up to be lathered in kisses. Worst of all, she insists on carrying me like an infant, cooing and rocking me to and fro. The woman is crazy I say and perhaps she should find herself a husband and have herself a real child of her own for these administrations are not well received. Did I also mention the ingratitude of that creature? How when I bring back home a token of my appreciation in the form of a rat or bird, she proceeds to shoo me away with a broom. No, she should not be any unfortunate creature's mother.

I can no longer have children. I was spayed. She thinks I don't know, but I do.

I was taken away for two days. A lady came and picked me up and I was placed in a little cage only to be let out when they administered to me some vapours that put me in a deep slumber. When I at last roused myself, I discovered that my stomach had been shaved and from it a piece of knotted string held together on my belly. I never had other children after that, nor did I seek the attention of the several Toms that once frequented my residence. Whatever they did to me certainly altered me.

After my return I slept in my mistress's room less and less. She mistook my avoid-

ance as a sign that I was embittered towards her. How could I explain that when night-time took over, the shadows took form at her bedside? That I did not fancy the man that always stood above her as she slept. He meant no harm, but he put me at unease.

"Muffins! Pssss. Psss. Psss."

I always ignore when she calls. I find that name abhorrible. Muffins! What do I look like? A piece of cake!

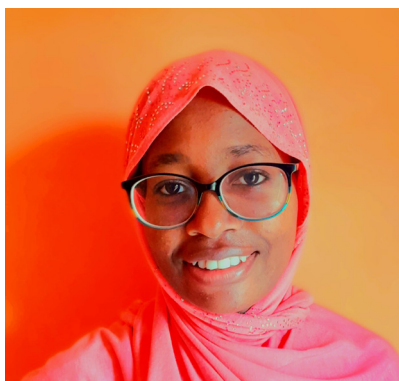
"Muffiiiiiiiiins. Fooood."

Now that's a call I will heed anytime. For that particular call, I will endure the name, the kisses, the rules and the finger wagging. When later that evening I'm sitting in my little bath, I simply meow my objections until it's over and soon I'm in a warm towel with my mistress'; body warmth warming me. When later we are sitting in front of the fire, she with her coffee and me my sardines, our eyes meet, and she smiles.

"Who's mommy's good baby?"

I purr in response, pupils contracted knowing that I will forever be her good little minx.

The Troubled Ninzduga



Author: Husna Omari

Country: Kenya

SHORT
STORY

“Are you that desperate to be different?” Mwanakombo’s mother asks her daughter, holding her breath from all the talking and scolding. The girl looks at her mother still not understanding whatever it is that’s making a grave ordeal. The 11 year old Mwanakombo Ninzduga holds a clear interest for pets. The interest too strange that her family and neighbours point fingers at her whenever she is out playing with other children. Her mother stays worried about her poor naive child. Although today, this day, an ominous Saturday, Maua, Ninzduga’s mother sets to put all this stupidity to an end.

Their house, from the ground to the rusty steel roof, is all squeaky clean courtesy of Maua. Stubborn as Ninzduga is, her mother gets her clean and settled, seated on a palm leaves’ mat waiting for who knows what, just outside

the door to their house. By the right side of the calm Ninzduga, is one of her favourite hens its legs tied up together by a string.

Ninzduga’s tiny brain wonders as she awaits for the guest whose arrival would have her taste this meaty savoury hen she has been raising for long. Of course not forgetting her pet that she had hidden away from her judging community, she was already planning a detailed route to her successful feeding. Her pet was going to enjoy all the insides and even have a share of the chicken. She smiled beneath, excited.

The guest then arrives shortly after the family occupies each corner of the palm leaves’ mat. Mwanakombo’s parents and grandparents sit in an order that places the young girl at the centre of the mat. The guest’s attire fills Mwanakombo with questions. He is dressed

in bare cloth materials of three different colours, white, red and black. In his right hand, he holds a covered used gourd and his left a polyethene bag. His ankles are full of jingles that jingle as he walks to the family.

After mutual greetings, Mwanakombo's mother welcomes him to the family grounds and instructs him to do what they agreed on previously at his kaya. The strange man begins his chanting, he chants as he faces East, West, South and North sides of the sat troubled girl. Slowly he approaches the girl while pouring onto her head rice and wet herbs, still in chants. Finally he calls her name three times and as she watches he unseals his covered guard to reveal his chaste.

A tiny green mamba snake shakes the man's left hand and the crowd goes into a soft cry. Ninzduga recognizes the snake. "Mwananyasi!!," the girl shouts sprouting from the crowd trying to run to the crazy man but her father holds her back. The man then continues to behead the snake as the little girl watches. He clears his throat after putting its dead body back into the now empty guard.

"This was a spirit sent to harm your child. Since I have dealt with the thing she will be free, happy and live like the rest of the children," he says as he finally completes the ritual by slaughtering the hen, "she is now free from whatever spirit that was trying to turn her into a witch."

The girl in tears screams for her dead pet snake. Her tiny body rushes to Mwananyasi

where she mumbles how she failed to protect it.

"Mwananyasi was my baby. You killed my baby. I hate all of you," the girl's cries get louder but the family does not seem intimidated.

While other children found kittens and puppies cute, Ninzduga was fooled by the beauty of snakes. She found them mesmerizing and unique. The same creatures that brought sin in many religious tales which was not different from her East African beliefs of how evil snakes are. The family, as the exorcist cooks the hen on fire, they get together to burry Mwananyasi's head by the compound's pathway.

"Can I burry her and say my prayers?," Mwanakombo tries to take this matter positively and put her heart at peace, still determined to get another similar pet in the future.

"Snakes bite and so do dogs and cats, why me God? I'm sorry Mwananyasi," she says as she fills the rest of the hole they dug with soil, her voice shaking as she grieves. The family burst into a thunderous laughter.

Maua is grateful that her daughter has gotten a proper treatment because there is no way her daughter is keeping a snake as a pet. The girl had begged for months to let her keep a snake and suddenly she begun coming home late which was unlike her. The spirits knew to protect Ninzduga since her mother

found out before a disaster found her. Ninzduga did keep a snake hidden at some abandoned house. This was strange and needed ritual cleansing.

Ninzduga after the chicken is served, she refuses to eat and wishes to come by another snake to keep, her dream still stands. Unshaken. Snort and tears cover her face but has the energy to mumble to herself.

“What a waste of feathers,” she says as she wishes she could take a bite from the well-cooked hen as the aroma fills their house and the neighbourhood.

The girl is the first to get up the next morning and after sweeping the compound, Ninzduga and her 3 friends visit a local pastry stall. The woman makes pretty delicious pastries freshly each morning for the neighbours to buy. “Here comes the possessed little girl” the women in line say among themselves. After getting the commodities, the 4 girls jump around as they thread back to their homes but then on their way back, Ninzduga stops after spotting an injured cat.

“Oh look at that poor thing,” she says as she hands over her goods to one of her friends, proceeds to pet the cat and finally carries it back home. The friends plot to keep the cat and feed it behind Nindzuga’s cattle shed. Before even notifying her mother of the breakfast she brought, the girl springs to hide her new pet. She prays to God and thanks Him for whatever miracle consolation this is. How heavens work.

In the middle of her lunchtime, as Ninzduga sits eating boiled cassava and fermented shark chops, the black one eyed cat walks into the family eating grounds. It definitely smelt the cooked fish. Maua tries to shoo it away as her drafting daughter sits silently praying that she stays in character. Suddenly, Maua picks up a stone and hits the cat.

“ Mayo...!!,” the girl shouts drifting all the feasting family’s attention to her.

“You said I should get a cat so I got one, please let me keep it.”

Maua’s mind swamps with worry, “Cute cats are kittens not adult cats, and a black one at that. What’s wrong with you?”

Her father fed up with her behaviour, picks up a twig and beats the trouble out of the girl. The family then refers to the exorcist and to him, her name is the cause of all this mischief. Mwanakombo that can mean the daughter of Kombo also means a mischievous child.

“We can’t change her name because that is her grandmother’s name,” Ninzduga’s father says knowing deep in his heart, his daughter’s weird pet obsession shall never seize since his mother was just the same. He remembers how dearly she cherished a calf that she would cuddle with, if only it was possible.

MAIA

Author: Katlego Keabitsa

Country: Botswana

SHORT
STORY

The sound of barking fills my ears as I lay down on my blanket, placing my head on the ground just in front of my paws. I try to silence the noise and close my eyes until I hear a little human speaking.

“Daddy! That one. I want that one.” The little human points at me as she speaks in both a hushed and loud tone. The man beside her whom I could only presume as her father chuckles at his daughter’s shy excitement and nods at Tom.

My cage is unlocked and Tom walks in, rubs my head and proceeds to try and lift me.

“Hey buddy...guess you’ll be lucky after all.” I whimper and lift my head up in appreciation. I like Tom a lot. Ever since I have been put in the cages with other dogs he always took care of me. He was nicer to me than all the other humans I have seen in the kennels. I always wondered why though. He lifts me up and walks in the room where we get our

monthly check-ups with the two humans following us.

“Sir I’m just going to do a little check up to ensure that he is healthy to be adopted. Feel free to take a seat.” Tom sets me on the vet examination table and gestures to show the humans the chairs to take their seats. “Thank you.” The man speaks holding his little human’s hand walking to the seats and sitting down. “What does this check-up entail?”

“I need to do a physical examination first which includes the eyes, mouth and ears. This is to look for any signs of infection, discharge, redness or dental issues.” Tom replies as he acts out exactly what he just said. I wasn’t really jumpy because it was Tom doing the checks, he was particularly gentler than the others. It seemed there was nothing wrong so he moved on.

“Next is the skin and coat. We look for any signs of parasites, infections or abnormalities

like lumps. Fortunately, he has a nice and shiny coat as I thoroughly took care of him." He finishes his statement with rubbing my cheeks. "His limbs and joints are healthy, there is no sign of pain and swelling. The dog doesn't have

mobility issues." "He has perfect lungs and a strong heart with an ideal weight for the pup he is. He is good to go. All vaccinations, deworming and disease tests have already been run though. He is a healthy eight month Bernese mountain puppy. What would you like to call him?"

The man looks at the little human beside him and lowers his head to the human. "What would you like to name him pumpkin?" The little human lowers her head. "I don't know daddy maybe.....uh Milo" her hushed high pitched baby like voice filling the room. The father smiles. "Why Milo pumpkin?" She looks up to face her father and looks at me.

"He has some brown fur which kind of remind me of the Milo drink you make for me every morning before school."

Tom smiles at the cuteness just displayed over our eyes. Even I can admit that the little human was adorable. The father smiles and looks over to Tom and stands up. "Milo it is then."

Tom scribbles a few words on a card and hands it to them. He turns to face me and pets my head. "I love you buddy, you do good yeah? I'll miss you." With that he hands

me over to the man who then hands me over to the little human.

"Are you ready to go Maia?"

"Yes daddy." Maia...that is a pretty name for a little human. She holds me gently but

protectively almost as if she's afraid someone will take me away from her.

We walk out the kennel building and I look over the little human's shoulder to find Tom standing by the door with a goodbye look in his eyes. The man opens the back door of a navy car and Maia gets in. She puts me on her shoulders as she puts on what looks like a strap that travels from above her shoulder to next to her hip, inserting something metallic into a hole resulting in a click sound. She holds me in her arms again and I nuzzle in her shoulder knowing that I am safe. I trust Tom to put me in the hands of a good family. I have nothing to worry about.

Four years have passed. The Thompsons have been treating me like a king. I have vague

images of my childhood from when I was still a young one and my mother took care of my brothers and sisters. I do sometimes wonder where they are. Life back then was harsh. We were stray dogs until Tom rescued my family after my mother died as a group of dogs brutally attacked her. That is a memory I am unfortunately stuck with.

I am getting old. Every day I am closer to my

death but this family truly cares for me, especially Maia. She makes sure I go see Tom and have him do my check-ups every twice a month since I get sick easily. When Maia would come from school she would immediately play with me. Her glowing face always filled with joy when she was with me though I immensely loved how her eyes lit up whenever she came back from school or an outing with friends.

“Do you want to know a secret Milo?” she whispered as she petted my head when I laid in her arms. I leaned into her touch as she said, “You are my most favourite thing in the whole wide world.” When I turned to look at her she had tears in her eyes. It would serve to make me a little sad how genuine she was so I started licking her face in attempt to make her laugh. It worked every single time. Her laughter filled the room until a string of coughs suddenly erupted from her chest. I stopped and her father immediately ran into the room and took her away.

I brush away the memory as I look at lovely Maia sleeping. I am waiting for her to wake up but I can't wake her up. I need to patiently wait for her so we can go on our second walk this week. Her face is paler than usual and she stopped leaving the house as much. Our walk three days ago was short so there I was, sitting with a leash in my mouth hoping she wakes up. Her eyes creaked open and after blinking for a while she lays her eyes on me. She looks so lifeless but her eyes are full of emotion. She extends her hand but to save

her the trouble I approach her and she pets my head.

“Milo...” her voice cracked. “I love you so much.” A tear streams onto the pillow. I could tell that something was very wrong. As old as I was, I was still looking forward to the walk so I put the leash near her hand and she smiled. The difference was that this smile was empty. I watched her body be soulless and I howled and whimpered hoping they would save her. To my horror she was gone. My little human was gone. I was reminded of the day my mother died. She'd had that look in her eyes. Maia's father could not take me for my check-ups, riddled with grief. He'd lost his wife, Maia's mom, about a year before they came to adopt me to the very same heart defects that took Maia from us.

I lay on the floor as I felt my breathing lessen. I tried to hold on as long as I could because how could I leave him when he was like this? I was fading and he couldn't notice and there was very little I could do to show him. So here I am, laying on the ground next to the reclining chair that Mr Thompson had sat in since the anniversary of Maia's death.

I make my last little whimper and let my eyes close. “Hang on Maia, I am coming.” I let the thought run through my head last time as I felt death carry me away.

A Dog, Cats and Night Creatures

SHORT
STORY



Author: Maurice Muthiani

Country: Kenya

*Yesterday, upon the stair,
I met a man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today
I wish, I wish he'd go away...
When I came home last night at three
The man was waiting there for me
But when I looked around the hall
I couldn't see him there at all!
Go away, go away, don't you come back any
more!
Go away, go away, and please don't slam the
door... (slam!)
Last night I saw upon the stair
A little man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today
Oh, how I wish he'd go away...*

Okay, I know you've all mentioned that this is a safe space, so I've decided finally that it's time to open up, just like everyone else here. But before I do, I need you to promise me one thing: that you won't judge me the way my family did. I mean, that's precisely why I'm stuck here at Mathari, with all of you in this... place for the mentally disturbed. They think I'm crazy, and honestly, I can't blame them. I've had my doubts, too. But please, just hear me out before you make any conclusions. I'm not trying to be rude, but let's call a spade a spade, right? Just know that what I'm about to say... it's real. It's all real.

Well, things started to fall apart the night I woke up in the wee hours, only to find my cats and dog staring intently at the door. It was strange—these two cats never left their spot, yet here they were, standing side by side, completely still. No sound, no movement, their bodies stiffened and fur bristling,

eyes locked on the door. The dog was even stranger. His eyes were wide and unblinking, his body frozen as if he were waiting for something to happen or an intruder to come through that door.

Now, bear in mind that I'm not an expert pet owner. I didn't exactly have the knowledge or experience to handle this kind of behaviour. So, to say I was alarmed is an understatement. It took me several moments to gather the courage to spring from my bed, my heart pounding, and twist the doorknob to see what lay on the other side.

The doorknob felt cold against my palm, sending a jolt through my fingers as I twisted it, the metallic click of the lock echoing in

the silence. My pulse drummed in my ears, each beat louder than the last, adrenaline flooding my veins. My mind raced with the unknown—what could be waiting behind this door? I pondered, I could almost taste the tension in the air as the door creaked open, the wood groaning on its hinges. I froze, eyes darting across the darkness beyond. The shadows seemed to swallow the light, and for a heartbeat, everything was still. I strained to see, but the room remained a black void, an unsettling emptiness that pressed in on me. As I stood there, my heart hammered in my chest, and I lingered there for what seemed like an eternity, half-expecting something to jump out at me. But after a minute, I rationalized it, my mind was



playing tricks on me.

As I retreated to my room I tried to calm down my pets assuring them that there was nothing outside. "It's nothing," I whispered, hoping to ease the unease that had settled in their eyes reluctantly they turned and shuffled back to their various resting spots, the dog curling up in the corner while the cats returned to their usual perch by the window. But I couldn't shake off the feeling that probably there was an actual person or something larking around.

You see, ever since my fiancée left me, my older sister had suggested I take in the family dog for company. He was a loyal companion, and for months, the two of us bonded—just the dog and I. Then, one day, two stray cats appeared at my doorstep, starving and wary, and something about them just clicked. We became a family, of sorts. And yet, now, with everything that had happened, I felt like I had to confront whatever this thing was that my pets seemed to sense. I couldn't shake the feeling that they knew something I didn't, something far worse than what I could ever imagine.

The days that followed were uneventful, or so I thought. I was away on a work assignment for a few days and as usual I dropped the pets off at my neighbor's place, just a quick handover, nothing unusual. Life carried on as normal. I didn't think about the strange events of that night, not once, you know what they say that out of sight, out

mind then again it might have been just another crazy imagination, right?

Upon returning home from my travels, I picked up the pets from my neighbor and thanked her before heading inside. Jet lag hit me hard, so I retired to bed early, barely able to keep my eyes open. Now, I am not sure how long I had slept but I remember being jolted awake. My two cats were standing at the foot of the bed, their fur bristling, bodies frozen stiff as boards. Their eyes were locked on the door, unblinking, and there was nothing visible on the other side, nothing I could see, anyway. The room was eerily quiet, save for the ticking of the wall clock hanging on my room.

They then both let out a soft, strangled hiss, but no sound came. It was as though the air had thickened, choking the sound from their throats. The dog stood frozen in the doorway, its tail rigid between its legs, eyes wide and unblinking. A low growl rumbled in its chest, deep, primal, but muffled by hesitation. Slowly, it began to back away, each step slow and unsure, its body trembling with fear. Its ears flattened tight to its skull, as if it expected something or someone to leap from the darkness on the other side of the door.

Here we were again, my pets and I, poised and caught in the grip of an unseen force, their every instinct screaming that something was wrong, though the room remained eerily still. My eyes darted between the door and my pets, then back again to the door and

this time, I saw it.

I couldn't move. My body was paralyzed. I couldn't make out what was on the other side of the door, but I felt it. Something was there, just beyond the crack of my door. A shadow stretched across the floor—long, fluid, not mine. It shifted slightly, as though waiting, leaning in. My breath caught in my throat, my heart pounding against my ribs. I was frozen, unable to move, every fibre of my being screaming to look away, to leave, but I couldn't. The dim light from the hallway barely filtered in, casting just enough to make my pulse race.

I stared at the shadow, frozen, unsure if it was a trick of my mind or something or someone out there. It stretched further, as if to taunt me, confirming my fear that something was lurking just beyond the door. We were locked in this strange, silent standoff. How long it lasted, I couldn't say, but eventually, the shadow melted away into nothing, and like a command from some unseen force, my pets and I snapped out of it. I didn't sleep that night or any other night after that.

For weeks, it became routine. Every night, at exactly 3:05 AM, my pets and I would wake up in a panic, paralyzed with fear, staring at the same spot near the door where the shadow had been. I started showing up to work with bloodshot eyes, looking disheveled and unwell. My boss accused me of being on drugs, and eventually, they fired me. I thought about telling someone about my or-

deal but then again who would believe me? Even now, I wonder if any of you will. I bet you all think I'm crazy, don't you?

Over time, I became a hollow shell of my former self. My family was convinced I was losing touch with reality, especially after I shared my experiences with them. The worst part? The only witnesses to this torment were my pets, and they couldn't speak out. They can't confirm that on the other side of the door, there was something or someone lurking, and it wasn't there before. How I wish more than anything that whatever it was it would just go away.

I have tried to make sense of it all, but nothing seems to fit, nothing can explain what's happening. Maybe it's all just my mind breaking down, but every night, at exactly 3:05 AM, I wake up terrified, hoping tonight won't be the night I'm forced to confront whatever's haunting me. Help me!

The Storm that Brought the Calm



Author: Chinomso Ngeni Inimgba
Country: Nigeria

SHORT
STORY

Lola let out a loud sigh and threw her laptop to the corner of the couch. A sense of uncertainty, doom, and utter exasperation had overwhelmed her. She struggled with surrendering to what seemed like a fact – there was no way she was going to read, let alone learn four hundred pages of Human Resource Management: The Ins and Outs in eighteen hours.

A powerful tap on the windowpane. One pop per drop in a tempo. There was a sense of nostalgic tranquillity that accompanied the grey clouds as they boldly took charge of the sky.

Tap. Tap. Tap. The sound of each raindrop entranced Lola into a calm void in the amount of time it took for her laptop screen to go dark.

As expected, a rowdy rumbling introduced a rush of rain. Lola sunk into the jumbo cord sofa and swirled herself into the soft throw blanket. The breeze that made it through the slightly ajar window gently brushed against her face before freely turning the pages of the

open book on the coffee table.

Tap.

Tap. Tap.

These ones were different. They were even sharper than the raindrops yet faintly buried in the gush of rain. A faint squeal she thought she had imagined, became stronger.

Tap.

This time, the sound was followed by a nail screeching on glass.

Fear almost pushed Lola off the sofa when her one open eye identified the silhouette by the corner of the window as a black-coated cat.

She took one courageous step at a time toward the window. Each step was accompanied with the roar of thunder like a cautionary sound from mother nature.

Was this a sign of bad luck? Surely that was

the only explanation, for what other role did a black creature have than to symbolize the underworld, and the gloomy mysteries of the unknown.

Meow.

"This must be a sign that I am going to fail the exams tomorrow." She whispered to herself.

The mere thought of a fated failure led to a reflex, which she often did to clean off any dark thoughts from the atmosphere. Her fingers clammed together at the starting point near her right ear, swished their way around her head and snapped when they arrived near the left ear.

She did it once more and murmured "Tu-fiakwa".

Determined to get the bad luck off her window, she picked up a pen and tapped it on the window.

"Shoo... Shoo!"

Meow.

Thunder roared again. This time, she was close enough to the creature to sense the

desperation and the dramatic plea to be rescued.

At the corner of her eye, Lola caught a glimpse of her neighbor running toward her bungalow with her toddler in her arm. Even a well-built quality umbrella would not have been able to stand the force of the pouring

rain and yet her neighbor held the only item she had, which was a flimsy shopping bag, above her child's head and nothing above hers.

Lola's eyes moved back to the animal gawking up at her with both paws now on the window.

"Fine..." Lola sighed. "I guess I have more than a shopping bag to offer."

She looked around her living room for a while before grabbing the pillow, which she had long thought of throwing out, and placed it in a corner next to the door.

When the window slid open, Lola expected the cat to rush in, but it hesitantly put one foot in and stared at her. It was when she put out her arms out to carry it that it swiftly dodged her and ran to where the pillow was placed.

"Oh. Good. You know where your place is."

With its drenched thick coat, it adjusted on the pillow all the while looking at Lola.

"You guys don't feel cold, do you?" She asked it.

"But still, you can't remain like this."

In a heartbeat, she was in and out of her bedroom with her least favourite ankara wrapper, which she carefully wrapped around it.

"You sure do stink quite a bit. Whoever owns you might also need to trim those claws." She caught herself crouched down, smiling

at her joke as she gently blotted its fur.

At her sudden realization, she gently let out: “You don’t have an owner, do you?”

The minutes of distraction were probably needed but she hurriedly went back to her laptop screen.

Tap. Tap. Tap. The sound of the keyboard was almost on a par with that of the rain. She paused every few minutes to open the weighty book on her table, before stuffing yet another cookie into her mouth.

Keyboard. Book. Cookie. Repeat. The cat’s eyes moved in a triangular motion with each movement she made.

She was so focused that she had not noticed the cat gradually getting closer to the couch until it let out a mewl next to her feet.

“Blood of Jesus!”

It stood still in shock for a few seconds before jumping on the couch.

“Uh uh. No, you can’t have my snacks” she pulled the pack of cookies from her left and placed it on her right.

She was about to switch it back when the cat gently laid on her thighs. In the blink of an eye, the laptop screen went blank once more and she found herself giggling at the little kitty adamantly rubbing its cheeks on hers, purring, and proudly showing its belly as it rolled around on the carpet.

She became less amused when the cat

jumped on her textbook.

“No. No. No! I’ve heard about you lot and papers! Don’t you dare!”

Before she could shoo it away, it randomly opened a page.

“Great. Thanks, now I can’t remember where I stopped.”

She turned back three or four pages and found where she had stopped. The cat turned the pages again. They went back and forth for a while before she let out: “Stop turning to Chapter 8!”

Her phone vibrated.

Messages.

“Girl! Did you just see Prof. Ejike’s email? Questions will only be related to Chapter 8!”

The rain rumbling slowly faded into birds chirping.



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THE WEAK WICK OF GLOW WHITE

A Children's Literature by
Rebecca Eduah, Ghana

Reviewer
Funmi Richards
(Nigeria)

The plot follows the candles of Candleland, who protect their home from Darkness and Fire by lighting their wicks each night. However, the White family, with their weak wicks, cannot participate. A twist of fate occurs when a strong wind extinguishes all the flames, and the White family unexpectedly discovers an inner glow that repels Darkness and saves Candleland. Ultimately, their perceived weakness becomes their greatest strength, earning them the name "Glow White".

The language and style are simple, engaging, and descriptive, making the story accessible to young readers. Vivid imagery, such as the colourful Candleland and the glowing White family, enhances the narrative. The dialogue between Little White Candle and Grandpa adds a personal touch, helping readers connect with the characters' struggles and growth.

Furthermore, the story conveys valuable moral lessons, emphasising that everyone has a unique strength, even if it is not immediately visible. It highlights perseverance, unity, and self-acceptance, showing that differences can be an asset rather than a limitation. More importantly, it reinforces the idea that hope can prevail in the face of adversity.

The characterisation effectively portrays growth and transformation. Initially, the White family embodies weakness and self-doubt, but through adversity, they uncover their hidden

strength. Little White Candle, in particular, represents curiosity and the desire to contribute, mirroring the journey of self-discovery. Meanwhile, Fire and Darkness, as antagonists, symbolise destructive forces that thrive in the absence of light and unity.

The story employs several literary devices. For instance, personification attributes human qualities to candles, Darkness, and Fire, bringing them to life. Likewise, symbolism plays a central role, with light representing hope, strength, and resilience, while darkness signifies fear and vulnerability. Irony is also present in the unexpected triumph of the weakest family. Furthermore, suspense heightens the emotional impact, especially when all lights go out, making the White family's revelation even more powerful.

The theme of an underdog discovering their hidden potential is reminiscent of *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen. Additionally, the story shares similarities with *Leo the Late Bloomer* by Robert Kraus and *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae, both of which highlight self-discovery and overcoming perceived inadequacies.

Glow White is a beautifully crafted fable that delivers an uplifting message about resilience, self-worth, and the power of embracing one's uniqueness.

ICE COLD

A Flash Fiction by
Bassey Martins (Nigeria)

Reviewer

Bohlokoa Lephoi
(Lesotho)



This flash fiction creates a gritty, emotionally charged atmosphere, drawing readers into a world of desperation, self-doubt, and temptation. The tone is raw, filled with a sense of alienation and quiet turmoil. The narrative feels fragmented yet purposeful, as though the protagonist is both lost in thought and caught in a chaotic moment—reflective but also driven by instinct.

The pace is brisk, with short, impactful sentences propelling the story forward. The fragmented structure adds to the urgency of the protagonist's emotions, as if they are overwhelmed by the rapid shifts between the external world and their inner conflict. The writing style is minimalist yet evocative—every word is purposeful. Imagery such as “swaying like she was caught between two worlds” and “heels scraping dirt, a queen on broken glass” effectively heightens the tension between the protagonist's desires and reality.

The choice of words is stark, deliberate, and often harsh, mirroring the protagonist's internal struggle and environment. Phrases like “frozen ice” and “temptation in my palm” encapsulate both emotional coldness and the physical urge to relapse. The depiction of the woman is almost surreal—an enigma who seems both distant and intimately tied to the protagonist's self-doubt.

The ending is poignant. The protagonist's attempt to reject temptation, despite its magnetic pull, mirrors their struggle to find belonging. The recurring line, “You don't belong here,” serves as both a curse and a challenge, suggesting that belonging is something the protagonist must actively fight for.

The piece expertly explores the themes of addiction, self-worth, and the tension between escape and self-destruction.

THREE CLOSE CALLS

A Poem by
Bokang Moshoeshoe, Lesotho

Reviewer

Francis Mkwapatira
(Malawi)



In the poem *Three Close Calls*, Moshoeshoe vividly portrays the harrowing experiences of an addict grappling with alcohol, marijuana, and ibuprofen. The narrative captures the persona's descent into addiction and their near-fatal encounters with these substances, ultimately culminating in a heartfelt warning to their teenage son to seek healthier ways of coping.

Moshoeshoe employs various literary devices to enhance the poem's impact. Through personification, substances like alcohol ("Mrs Alcohol"), marijuana ("Mrs Mary Jane"), and ibuprofen ("Mrs Ibuprofen") are given human traits, emphasising their sinister influence. The use of simile—comparing the persona's problems to "Russian dolls", nested and interconnected—illustrates the compounding nature of their struggles. Additionally, alliteration in phrases like "blind bloke broke" creates a rhythmic flow, reinforcing the chaotic turmoil of addiction.

The poem draws a parallel with the film *Leaving Las Vegas*, which tells the story of a man who moves to Las Vegas to drink himself to death, devastating those around him. Both the poem and the film explore the destructive grip of addiction and its consequences. In *Leaving Las Vegas*, the protagonist's battle with alcoholism leads to a tragic end, mirroring the poet's depiction of addiction's life-threatening nature.

Moshoeshoe's strength as a poet lies in the raw, unflinching portrayal of addiction, which resonates deeply with readers. However, a minor weakness is the occasional complexity of metaphors, which may require readers to pause and interpret the imagery fully. Nonetheless, the poem remains a powerful and evocative depiction of the struggles with addiction.

MOMENTS OF BLEAKNESS

A Short Story by
Esther Nnaemeka, Nigeria

Reviewer

Rose Kinyanjui
(Kenya)



“Curiosity killed the cat”—a proverb that warns against unnecessary investigation or experimentation. Equally true is the saying that experience is the best teacher.

The protagonist finds solace in the warmth of a couch, a comfort she has not felt in a long time. Her family is visibly worried, witnessing their once-bubbly daughter reduced to a frail, withdrawn figure. Their hushed conversations reveal their uncertainty about whether they can save her.

What began as a curiosity has turned into addiction—an addiction to painkillers meant to relieve excruciating pain. The duration of her dependency is unclear, but the long-term effects are evident.

She reflects on the path that led her here, regretting the choices that fuelled her addiction. Yet, she takes comfort in the fact that she can still comprehend the conversations around her—perhaps a sign that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

This raises a crucial question: at what point should a family show care? Should it only be when signs of psychological distress and suicidal tendencies emerge?

The writer employs powerful phrases, metaphors, and idioms to depict the protagonist’s transformation. The themes of depression, hopelessness, and loneliness are vividly illustrated through the protagonist’s experiences.

Despite the urge to surrender to despair, the protagonist clings to the hope of recovery, realising that her life has a purpose. In solitude, she yearns for recognition and the closeness of loved ones.

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