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# GRACE AUSTINA OKPO

The African Storyteller



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# Editorial

## WELCOME TO A BIGGER AND BETTER WRITERS SPACE AFRICA

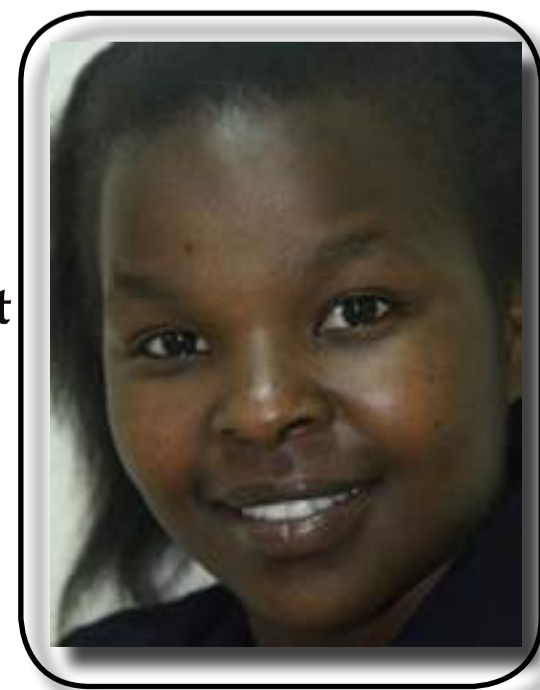
Africa's fast rising e-magazine - Writers' Space Africa (WSA) - is proud to bring you its August edition.

In the inside story, find Grace Okpo, an African storyteller on a wake up call to parents today bringing to their attention the realities present in our society of child abuse which includes but is not limited to sexual abuse only.

A big segment of this issue holds master pieces from poets across the continent. Others include short stories and flash fiction.

At Writers Space Africa, let your articles find a new home. We welcome your feedback. Send your comments to the editor: [editorial@writersspace.net](mailto:editorial@writersspace.net).

Wakini Kuria  
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# Waiting

Angela Onozare Umoru

‘It happened on a hot afternoon. That day the school bell rang—we were finally going home, away from the teachers who constantly bombarded us with mathematical formulae that had no practical working in our lives. Our voices drowned that of our teacher as a bubble of conversation arose amongst us.

We had extra homework, but also had no worries because we didn’t have to see the annoying teachers till Monday when reality would dawn on us once again to drag ourselves out of bed as early as 6 am.

Finally, tired of trying to speak above the hubbub, she opened the doors and we pushed past her to the freedom that embraced us at the gates. Some of the younger students ran, but my classmates and I were much too old for that. As SS3 students, parents and even teachers had been drumming into our ears how responsible we had to be, thinking of our future and how to

make the most of our lives and all that gibberish. Obviously, I cared nothing for all that. The talk

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I carried the pain with me wherever I went, causing me to float through life as though dazed. The uncertainty my mother lived through hung over my head consistently and formed a fog over my future.

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of university was like a universe away for me. I was barely done with all my life encompassed to think of the next few months when admissions will be on.

The street outside the school gates was busy as Muslim faithful returned from the Mosque. My friends babbled excitedly all around me about girls and the movies they would watch over the weekend. I remained removed from the conversation until we stopped at our favourite spot—a stream—to cool our parched throats. Then, for no

just cause except that it was our custom, we removed our soiled socks and stuffed them in our bags. It was then that my friends realized I had been quiet all through.

“Guy, how far now? Why you just mellow?” One of them called out to me.

I shook my head wanly. “I dey.”

With that he let me be and turned to our two other friends. They were all used to me and my mood swings.

I was lost in my thoughts yet they dwelled on nothing in particular. At a point I focused on the sun threatening to blister my scalp and for the umpteenth time, I wished that my hair was not all shaved. Then, my rubber school sandals drew my attention as the tarred street burnt my feet. Each car that passes by took its turn at lingering in my thoughts till I drew close to home. I thought of the quietness I would find there and dreaded it.

True enough, when I bade goodbye to my friends and pushed the gate which was always left ajar, the atmosphere became stifling. It was choking. I stepped into the house, already certain of what I would find: my family speaking in hushed tones; prayers being offered so incessantly that they became as evident as wisps of smoke curling up to Heaven; handkerchiefs that men of God had prayed upon hanging on bedposts; unvoiced thoughts that hoped the end was near suspended like a criminal at the gallows. Our eyes always darted as we searched for roaming ghouls that wanted to claim my mother’s life as she lay in bed.

For such a long time, we had been waiting around, absolutely unsure of what fate would deign to give us. It was as though our lives had been on a prolonged pause.

I carried the pain with me wherever I went, causing me to float through life as though dazed. The

uncertainty my mother lived through hung over my head consistently and formed a fog over my future. My mates talked about what to study in tertiary institutions while I talked about my mother getting through just one more day; they calculated living expenses in school, I calculated the cost of medication; they dreamed of becoming excellent professionals and I dreamed of when the waiting would end.

But that day it was different from the moment I stepped foot into the living room. For some weird reason, my steps were light. The air was brimming with relief. My relatives were everywhere, relatives that I had not seen in years and those I had never known. The look on their faces told me all I needed to know- the waiting was finally over on that sunny Friday afternoon. Breath escaped my lungs noisily. My hands shook and tears flowed freely down my cheeks as I smiled. The vortex I had been sucked into finally let me go. We could speak loudly now. We could cry for the pain she had endured. We could laugh now without fearing that we might upset her. We could now miss her. We could stop waiting and start living again. ■



## *Eternity*

Oghenede Fidelis

Where will I spend eternity  
When I succumb to infinity  
Will it be in his dynasty  
Or in flames worse than purgatory

How can I find the peace within  
When his voice I lost in sin  
How can I see well in the dim  
When his light is not within

Will I be under his wings,  
When the last bell gives a ring?  
Will I bear witness to the king,  
When the condemned will be grim?

Oh touch my heart to give a jolt  
So I won't be the unhappy lot  
Purge me through as pure as gold  
And bid me welcome to thy loft.

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## *Me*

***John Ifechukwu***

My life right now,  
A Cascade of effusions,  
An outpouring;  
spontaneous, effective,  
honest, elaborate and Deep.  
The real me  
No curtains, No façades  
A glorious awakening,  
An awesome unveiling,  
Dramatic, elaborate, meaningful.  
Authenticity normalized.  
Beauty redefined.  
Humanity purified.  
Self love, my Acropolis!  
Love my Sanctuary!

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## *Green-White-Green*

Asudemade Habeebullah (NiraLAWp)

When our fathers talked with their tongue twisted  
Pronouncing unity on the jaws of tribalism  
We are the scars painted of those words  
On the black skin of Mother Africa's David

When elders told tales underneath shaded trees  
We could not ask why our tribe was always right  
For in Africa, grey hair comes before infant gums  
And so we took the stories to heart over head  
So when we keep painting red on our dear Picasso  
It manages to remain green, white, green

When mothers talk to our soul in unvarying terms  
That your wife cannot be from here, there or both  
You do not ask why, for mothers are gods  
They know what's best even when they are wrong

When the cleric shouts "be your brother's keeper"  
does he not mean that you keep your brother's share?

Whether or not he shares your belief in God?  
Could he not mean that you catch him when he falls?  
Whether he is your blood or just from Nigeria?

But when you want to paint a picture in white and green  
You do not see the giant of Africa so called  
And when you alter to paint a David in green and white  
It is still mother's unvarying words that you remember  
That only you cannot change the world

# Running

*Adewusi David*

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*But moments later, you would be with her on the phone, chatting like old friends; her loud voice sinking into the deepest embers of your ear. But you...*

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You were sitting beneath the shed at the bus-stop, praying silently for a bus in the rain. All the danfos skidded past; empty. How could they not just carry one passenger? You checked your wristwatch. Seven thirty p.m! It was getting darker.. and scarier. This was Ogudu for God's sake!

You raised your face in time to see a soaked lady rush into the shed. She smiled at you. Her face was a smooth curvy one, balanced upon a long neck. Her dimple shone as she smiled, you noticed. She edged closer to the only bench and said, "Please can you adjust a bit? Please.." The man at the extreme end of the bench glanced at you, his eyes filled with plea. You move to the left a bit, creating a space in the middle. She quickly plopped in between.

Her long, wet hair brushed your cheek. You re-adjusted; close enough to allow her wet skin touch yours. She brought out her phone and switched it off, mumbling incomprehensible words. Soon enough, a conversation struck. Later, when she finally saw a taxi she said, "Let's exchange numbers.." You did. She left. Thirty minutes later, you did too.

It didn't take long for you to realize heartbreaks were the reason for your existence. On that Saturday, you were in the house. Telemundo was on the TV. Your phone was on the table. As usual, you were cuddled up, crying. It amazed you how your heart wasn't used to all the pains already. It was then, like a revelation, she came to your mind, scuffling through it like a thief in the dark. No, you told yourself. You barely



even knew her.

But moments later, you would be with her on the phone, chatting like old friends; her loud voice sinking into the deepest embers of your ear. But you sound down, she would say. I'm okay, you would tell her, hoping she wouldn't press. Where's your place, she would ask you. You would laugh and tell her how far your place was from Ikeja where she stayed. Don't joke with me, she would warn you. Okay, I stay at Festac. Okay I'm coming. And then the line would go off.

You imagined this was just a prank. And you hated her for it.

Hours later, she would call to ask for your address. And the moment she drove into the compound, you wouldn't know what to think. You just stood at the balcony; surprised at her arrival. Again, you cried. She came upstairs and on seeing you, drew you in her arms. Her breasts were soft, her shoulders comforting. You stayed glued to her, all the while sniffing and letting the pain out. Then she let you go, holding your hand as you both walked back into the house.

She took the TV remote and changed the station. It was Soundcity. Wizkid's Daddy Yo was playing. She stood and twisted her body like a worm caught in water. How do you do that, you asked her, jealously. After dancing vigorously, she soon settled beside you on the sofa, and dozed off immediately.

Her black hair shone under the fluorescent. For the second time, you saw how her beauty was resonant in every part of her body. Her breasts stood like rocks: firm. Her black skin was without blemishes. Your eyes were fixed on her lips. They slowly parted. You edged closer. She moved and you stopped, making her moan silently in slumber.

At night you were both on the bed, asleep. Then you heard a sound; a loud shrieking noise from the sitting room. You sat upright to realize you were alone on the bed all along. Startled, you called her, "Maria.." But no reply.

With your eyes widely opened, you strolled to the parlour, and your eyes caught it. It was astonishing, prickling with your common sense. Maria was with three other girls, all naked and you being one of them. You screamed and made to run back to the room, only to be obstructed by a woman; a slim black woman. It was you. You glanced back at the girls; they were embroiled in a cacophony of sexual pleasure with one exploring the body of the other. You watched in amazement as Maria dug her left hand into your open thighs..

Surely, this wasn't real.

You woke up immediately, to large, bulgy eyes peering into you. Her hands were on your legs; stroking it gently. She bent and kissed your navel. Her hands slowly crept to your breast. You retreated. She smiled. The nightmare flashed before your eyes. You jumped off the bed and ran out of the room, out of the house, out of the estate; barefooted.

You just didn't understand why. But you kept running





## YOU AND I OYINKANSOLA OGUNYINKA (GRACEOLA)

I laughed to myself cynically as I thought about it. I liked him too much; so much that it hurt. He was my knight in shining armor and I, his princess but there was one problem: he didn't know that yet. Ever watching him, I felt every emotion in me as real as could be and yet...he didn't even know. Trying but failing to keep my eyes from staying glued to his every move around the school cafeteria, I stared and drooled on in my head.

He was tall, light skinned and just plain beautiful. The dimples that adorned his face whenever he gave that heart-stopping and mesmerizing smile of his had me completely hooked. The worst part was that he seemed to do it so annoyingly easily. He was always so impeccably dressed and was the school's basketball star. Every girl's dream in this school; including the ones already in relationships. I never stood a chance but...whatever. How could I when I was as good as invisible in this school?

Although we attended classes together, we never had any cause to talk to each other. Not to forget the fact that, I prayed to God every night

that the next day, some miracle would happen and he would somehow look at me and deem it fit so say as much as a simple 'hi'. Sadly, it was all in my dreams and in reality that was my life, dreams didn't always come true.

Like the stalker I was, I knew that the only time he would be without his ever-present clique of friends and the harem of girls that followed him everywhere would be some minutes to the end of break time when he always snuck off to the secluded bathroom on the third floor to do whatever he usually did there. Please don't ask me how I found out, I just did. As usual, I subtly followed him and waited just around the corner that led to the hallway.

After some minutes though, I finally grew the nerve to do what I had been thinking about for some weeks now. Sneaking slowly closer, I put my ear to the door of the bathroom and was dumbfounded by what I heard. He was singing "I just want to be me" in the most angelic voice I had ever heard. Another surprise, he was an amazing singer. Seriously, what did this guy not know how to do? Then, I started to hear a



few silent sobs and then, silence. After some-time, I heard a tap open and close, a few sniffs and then, silence. I waited again to see if I'd hear anything but was caught off guard when the door suddenly flew open and I fell face first at his feet. Thank God for his shoes that saved my poor head from hitting the ground but embarrassment was killing me so I couldn't even look up at him and see whatever disgusted expression he had on his face.

After what seemed like hours instead of the seconds that had passed, I raised my head slowly to look at him. Surprisingly, he was smiling and I, as usual, was dumbfounded.

"Are you okay?" he asked in that his oh-so-deep voice. I willed myself to give a sweet reply but my mouth had other plans. "Sure. I'm having a wonderful time cuddling the floor you know. It's kind of one of my hobbies." The sarcastic reply flew out of its own accord. If my best friend were here right now, she would probably tell me that I needed to think more before I spoke but oh well, the deed was done and my guy, was

laughing. He had his head thrown back, laughing heartily and I just lay there staring at him until he was done.

Then, he stretched his hand to me. "Here. Let me help." I took his hand and muttered an almost inaudible thank you.

"So...care to tell me why you're stalking me?" He had a funny smile on his face. "What makes you think you're that special?" I said, hoping to wriggle out of this dilemma.

"Oh, so you just somehow love using the abandoned toilet on the third floor, right?"

"Uhn-hun." I lied through my teeth. "Yeah, right. Tell that to the marines. I've seen you watching me," he replied, with an almost arrogant hint to his tone and I felt my face firing up. "What? I don't watch you." Another lie.

He suddenly stopped and pinned me to the wall. He's staring at me and I can feel my heart rate increase. Then he says the most unexpected thing I've heard since forever. "Don't worry. I don't mind. I stalk you too. I'm just better at it." ■

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## Nubian Princess

### Nonhlanhla Radebe

I describe her as a girl of no discrimination, a person who never beats around the bush. A being that is invested on, filled and cursed with extraordinary powers.

With cheers so loud they can be heard on the other side of the world. A person with mysterious powers which are possibly felt in the next dimension and the richness within her can fertilize the galaxy, nourish the universe and give birth to the next rising star! A woman that kicks off the blanket, pushing her way through the darkness, fueling the earth with enrichment, painting the sky with the red dusk of dawn.

Dark as I am, I want to be known as the light in a dark heart, a heart with no sense of being, a heart where love and fantasy are nonexistent, where I as the afflatus will fill that impuissant heart with gigantic ambitions

Because I am Nonhlanhla Radebe, a Nubian Princess in my own right! ■



# TALKING L.O.V.E

With  
**SAKA DBOSZ JUNIOR**



## EPISODE 5: STAYING IN THAT UN-USEFUL LOVE

Your so called love is only a time consuming, energy sapping venture when it cannot solve problems or fails to be useful. Love that cannot work for you is a wasteful venture.

Thus said you must make your love purposeful or bail out of it. It is foolish to keep staying in love that has no purpose and does no work for you.

We have love that cannot even accommodate a joke; we also have people sitting in that hoping, e go better.

A respondent said, "I was just teasing my lover who I love so much and we were both laughing heartily when we heard a knock on the door. She responded to the door and returned. I continued but instead of laughing; she was angry with me. I later found out that she had a problem with my neighbor who knocked and do not expect her enemy to knock on my door. The truth was I had no idea of their beef. She never told me still she expected me to know about it and also be in her court."

Communication is important and still love should not encourage beef within and outside the circle. Loving hearts glow in all directions. Again true love should not encourage bitterness. Also note that it feels like heaven when love is returned in equal measure though this rarely happens. Today we have people in so called love fashioned towards Tom and Jerry concept of hunting and running for your life. In others, we have boxing bouts with Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson intensity. Some instead of making sweet love they practically live on WWE Royal Rumble. Every day is a new bruise, more plasters and all. When you ask, "Oh I hit my head on the wall." You are not blind.

Yes I am aware that violence stimulates some people romantically and some beating is their con-

firmation of true love but while that is discussion for another day love the best explanation for a relationship that has shifted into violence is simply irritation and hatred, the answer bail out. Too weak to take a walk afraid of impending loneliness because you already have your God sent? Well, good luck. Anyway, there is something called learning too late. Now why do we stay in that un-useful love, simple, "what can I do?"

### THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF LOVE

Here we are referring to the ever changing nature of love as controlled on our mood, temperament, environment, time and place among other influencing factors that affects our relationships even momentarily.

One respondent said, "I was walking hand in hand with my girl one evening when suddenly she pulled away. I later found out she had spotted her pastor down the road."

Another said, "I was surprised that my guy was angry at my greeting his elder brother. I had always done that. Later I found out that they were at war."

Some people have found a simple demand, laughter, word, suggestion, whisper, request etc irritating at one time of the day and fun at another.

The gist is to read the mood and know when to tell a joke and when to give peace a chance. You must understand that human beings could be unsteady sometimes, that's your joke could just attract the wrong response, sometimes.

## I Write Winifred Felix

I write in total absence of my being  
A letter not posted in paper being  
A thought, a simple thought,  
From the hollows of my heart

A liquid letter strolls by my eye,  
Painting my face with washed mascara,  
As I view the fallen towers before me,  
How did we let them get this far?

Dear Lord, hope we haven't traded our sanity?  
For their bellies shine from crude oil,  
And their bodies expand from imports  
They make their offspring dual citizens  
And feed our offspring with dual raffles.

We have looked at them as blind men  
Our sight they replaced with currency lens,  
No way! This has gotten too far!  
Our knees will no longer bend to slavery  
Our kinsmen will no longer deceive us with bakery.

## Reincarnation Saviour Ukpaski

Ever since I made Poetry my wife,  
She has made a Lot in my life.  
Like a Lot, she had taken me  
away from Sodom,  
To Jerusalem, my new home.

She has taken me to scary and lovely places,  
And has shown me to beautiful and ugly faces.  
She showed me originality and the true me  
And spoke to me, through me.

She held my nose and stopped my breath  
And led me silently to my death.  
She killed me, even though she was my buddy,  
And made me resurrect in another body.

She remained a widow, a husbandless wife,  
Until my new body gained a new life.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH Grace Austina Okpo



*What was growing up like, being born to a soldier father?*

I was quite small when my daddy left the army. I recall seeing him in uniform only once. We never quite lived the 'barracks' life but the soldier in him never left. He was a strict disciplinarian.

*How long have you been writing?*

Unofficially, since my teens. Officially, I would say since 1998, though I only just published my first work in 2014.

*What are those themes in the society that catch your interest as a writer?*

Women in desperate situations, vulnerable children, grass to grace situations. I believe in happy endings. I call myself an advocate for women and children; I hate to see children suffer.

*That means your writings are basically comedy; ending happily?*

No. I suppose you have read *The Break*, *Onion Tears* and *Momster*? None of my stories are comedy. What I mean by happy endings is that I take my characters from grass through to when they end up as successful or as heroes.

*What does writing mean to you?*

Writing is my life...when happy, sad I write. When I have things bothering my mind, until I write them down, peace somehow eludes me.

*Having identified your passion for reading and writing, why did you study Laboratory Technology?*

When I was in Secondary School, it was common place to see brilliant kids in the science class. My parents wanted me to either become a doctor, pharmacist or an engineer. That was their definition of “a success” I ended up a scientist to please them but I knew where my passion laid.

*Afterwards, did you take up a professional degree or course in Writing/Literature?*

Yes, one or two short writing courses here and there. But basically, my writing stems from my insides. I have read over 200 novels, at the risk of sounding immodest.

*200? Impressive!*

I guess it's a whole lot more if I pause to actually count. I love to read, and as I read, I learn also. I have also vested a lot in books that teach creative writing, grammar, and composition.

*Besides writing, what else do you do?*

I've been a Sales Marketing Executive for years. I still consult in that capacity.

*You're an author of My Friend The Returnee, how do you keep your inspiration to complete a book?*

Like I said before, my stories are about grass to grace situations and my desire to see the outcome turn out well is all the inspiration that I need. Often times, I begin the story with an end in mind, so necessity now behoves me to work my characters and scenarios towards getting to that expected end.

*So what challenges have you faced in getting published?*

It is difficult getting publishers to work with you as a budding writer. I have personally funded my works so far, which ought not to be so. My initial intentions had been to write to fulfill my long time passion. I never factored in the costs I've incurred so far in the course of pursuing the said passion. But each time someone reads any of my books and tells me how much inspiration was derived, I am happy and say to myself, “It was worth it after all!”

*What fears do you struggle with in your writing career?*

The fear of not turning out an interesting read is every writer's dilemma. There's also the fear of not having an impactful influence with your works. I believe every writer is on a mission to influence, no matter how little.

*Okay, so would you say Writing is a lucrative discipline for one to enter full time?*

There are factors to consider especially in a society like ours, however all things being equal, I would advise that the intending writer does so, first for the love of the profession. That way, money or not, you will not give up.

*Do you feel fulfilled being a writer?*

Yes and no. I believe better days are coming.

*Can you tell us the significance of your book title “Onion Tears” to the storyline?*

Onion Tears was inspired by the stories of three different women, mine inclusive. As you would have noticed, the story revolves around a polygamous setting and the neglect that a part of the family had to suffer (in silence) as a result.

Mama Stella depicts the many women in abusive marriages all around us who would rather stay in the marriage and endure all forms of maltreatment and/or abuse, in the name of doing so for the sake of their children. They would rather claim it is “Onion Tears” to their children instead of opening up to their children about the pains and emotional trauma they suffer.

*When was the fiction “Momster”, published and what inspired you to write it?*

Momster and Onion Tears were published by Acacia Publishers this year. I was inspired to write Momster after listening to the story of three different women who grew up around the same time I did. Parents then errored lots in the name of upbringing and discipline. I for one, was a victim of much verbal and emotional abuse in the course of growing up, so listening to them recount their experiences took me down memory lane and so Momster was born. I had earlier used the working title “Child Interrupted” but changed it later on to Momster.

It is a wake up call to parents of today, in bringing them face to face with realities present in our society of child abuse, which is not necessarily sexual abuse alone. Gather five people together today who were raised in the 70s - 90s and three out of them will have almost identical encounters that you could almost think that all parents attended one school or perhaps, were taught by one person. And much of what they called discipline or upbringing in those days were just plain cruelty.

Momster is a cry as well, to parents of today (many of whom suffer what I did) that we ought to be better and not necessarily follow after the mould of our forbearers.

*How can one get your books? Any link?*

My books are on Amazon and lulu.com for now. You can buy any of my three eBooks (The Break, Onion Tears and Momster) just by typing the title. ■



# The Wealth We Have in Common

Emelie Ndubisi (Emelie)

I was not born with a silver spoon; I don't think I have ever seen one, most times I think to myself if I was even born with a spoon.

The very first time I heard the metaphor -born with a silver spoon- I was six and I was stunned, "could it be that when children were born, they came out with a spoon in hand?" I wondered.

When I got home from school that day, I went straight to the kitchen, picked up my favourite spoon(it was made of stainless steel but looked more like silver to me then), and asked my mother, "Is this the spoon I was born with?"

She was thirty-six and I'm quite sure she was stunned; "could it be that when kids go to school, they become foolishly smarter?" she must have thought.

I asked again, this time with other questions too; "Is this the spoon I was born with?" "Is that why I like it?" "Why do we have many spoons if everybody was born with just one spoon?"

We also had very big soup spoons, small plastic spoons, and even tiny spoons for feeding our

baby and my imagination began to run wild.

She started smiling, I think she was beginning to understand my question, and then she burst out laughing, laughing in that way an old wise geezer would after hearing an ignorant young man ask a foolish question. Then she picked me up, sat me down on her laps and began to explain life to me, life as I have come to understand it.

"To be born with a silver spoon means to be born into a wealthy family." The words came out of her mouth quite simply and entered my ears simply too, but on getting to my mind, it began to knock on so many doors.

Still staring at the spoon in my hand, I pictured a wealthy family in my head and looking about me, the image didn't seem to match, not even closely.

"Is mummy lying to me?" I asked myself, "What does she think I am, six?"

She continued, staring deep into my eyes as if by doing so I would become immediately wiser, thinking back now, I think it worked; "my son,

children don't come out of the belly with a spoon in their hand, they don't come out with anything at all, if they are born into a wealthy family, they become rich and if they are born into a poor family, they become poor..."

I interrupted her with a question; "Mummy, are we poor?" 'No' she said and smiled and heaved a sigh that made me understand now that the answer was not coming from the present, possibly from a future she hoped for.

"Look at your hand," she said. I dropped the spoon and spread out my palm. "Look at your fingers, how many are they?" I counted out loud from one to five and shouted five! "Good! Clap for yourself" I jammed both tiny hands together six times as was customary following such injunction as we had been taught to do in school.

"Now, your five fingers can never be equal no matter what, God made them that way for a reason and though they have their different functions, they also have one thing in common -their service to the hand. If one of them starts feeling proud and decides not to work again, then your hand would not work how it should. Our people also say that the palm oil that stains one finger is the same one that stains the rest of the palm, so know also, that whatever happens to one of them must affect all of them."

We were four children at the time, I was the second child and she was pregnant with the fifth. As she kept talking, my mind wandered off once more trying to assign fingers to my siblings. My elder brother definitely had to be the thumb, but I had difficulty choosing between the second and the third finger because although I was the second child, I was also the tallest. I finally settled for the second finger and assigned the others their respective fingers according to age.

"You're not listening" she said and I sprung back to reality, "that someone is born into a poor family does not mean he or she will die poor" I think she used poor so that I could easily relate to the words she spoke, "that is why your father and I are doing the best we can to make sure that all of you go to school and become useful in life, but you must work hard and pray very well. Again, that someone is born into a wealthy family does not mean he will die rich, if he does not work hard or is careless, he will lose everything he has and die poor."

"Now, hold your ears", (where I come from, this is a cue for; very important information or warning is about to be given, maximum attention is required) I grabbed both ears and pulled hard to show that I was paying full attention, she continued "wherever you find yourself in future, no matter who you are, you must never forget your brothers and sisters, all of you must work together and tolerate and help each other."

This advice was too great to be given to one child and in the spirit of fairness, it had to be shared. "Kenechukwu! Oluchi! Chibuzor! All of you come here!" she called out for my siblings who trooped out from the bedroom like the Captain's children in the 1965 musical, *The Sound Of Music*.

"All of you hold your ears" I was on the floor already, still in maximum attention position along with my siblings who were staring at me as if I had initiated judgement day. "Look at your fingers, you are all like these five fingers" we all let go of one ear and stared at our palms, I'm quite sure they assigned fingers to themselves and to others too "you can never be equal, God made it so but you must always work together, tolerate each other and help each other no matter who or what you become in life, if one of you tomorrow becomes wealthy and your brother or sister is still suffering, then you are not rich, do you hear me?" "Yes ma!" we chorused, "good, you can go now." They scampered off; I walked away like one stung by wisdom. I was six but I was wiser.



Afternoon's food for thought had just been served and I had had my fill.

Thinking back on this experience has filled me with so many questions, questions for which I hope to get a reply.

As a Nigerian, I can assume that the Commonwealth is our family and Britain is our mother and her realms, and the countries she colonized are her children, would we be right to say that we were born into a wealthy family?

Judging from the fact that some of us are "poor" and others "rich", could it be that we missed an afternoon's lesson on the "Analogy of the Palm"?

Could it be that some of us have not worked hard enough or prayed very well?

Or is it that our mother did not do her best to give us the best?

I know my country was born with a spoon, made of gold and with diamonds encrusted into it, but from what I see presently, could it be that we do not work hard enough?

Could it be that we are careless?

Could it be that our mother did not call us out to share in the wisdom of her years?

Could it be that our siblings have failed to help or tolerate us?

Could it be that we have all forgotten this lesson or that our mother never taught it to us?

Finally, could it mean that our mother thought us six and stupid and plain lied to us?

Today, as this family grows, it asks us to think of the possibility of living inclusively and tolerantly, confidently I can say that this is possible if only we can stop for a while and take a look at our hands. ■

## Human

Hauwa Saleh Abubakar (Ibreathemagic)

Tell them that your throat is sore from all the screams you had to swallow.

And your depression has gotten stronger , Yesterday tied you onto an iron bed.

Tell them that bipolar made you break your favorite mug.

And the little monsters under your bed , Have now moved to your mirrors.

Tell them that you're afraid of the dark and Even their voices telling you that

'real men' are never scared Cannot make you stay alone.

Tell them that you want to wear the purple shirt hidden in your closet, And you cried over Titanic.

Tell them that your tears still want to fall against injustice

That you had been sexually assaulted at the age of nine,

and you want to talk about it.

Tell them that you are tired of hiding your fears and

Expressing only negative emotions.

Tell them that you have so much love to give, That you are tired of being 'just a man'

And being human from now on will suffice. ■



# EVERYTHING DIMS AT TWILIGHT

Olubowalo Johnson

Please, don't bid me rise Here with my eyelids close I lie For why's the haste into the day Whilst still so young If a little slumber can ease my fiery heart Leave me alone where I lie	hand wrought And despise the imperfect me  Please, don't ask me to drop my plough Until my honest sweat turn to gold For what is the difference between the furrows I plough and my grave Just a few feet you may say For the same place where my seeds lay Sprouts into vines Of which, soon, its grapes we dance upon in the winepress And thus drunk with our own blood we call wine, Wet with our own urine, We lose our sanity Less do we know true sanity is found in the silence of grave There where our bodies shall feed maggots and car- rion beetles However don't tell me about the dead while I live For I need not be told That everything dims at twilight
Please, don't calm the fluster of my youth Ebullient spirit like untamed stringed score of stal- lions Set loose with blazed tail Race across the battle line As I chase my own shadow while the noon is so high Or chase hare in the resplendent glade under the mellow moonlight	
Please, don't make me lick toes of my foes Until my tongue's as sharp as flint By which the flesh it cuts Is wet in its own ruddy sweat Or stare so hard at my own portrait which my own	



# DIGNITY LOST?

## Wachuka Njogu

Right now, I know of a girl  
She's in her mid-twenties  
She's about to acquire a new touchscreen  
Which is only a "touch" away  
Flights and trips she secures by trippin'  
Settling for false companionship just to quench her  
thirst for the finest royal linen.  
Tossed in bed like a robot for the cheque  
For every zero added, he rips the buttons off her  
blouse and loosens the hooks of her dress more  
ruthlessly than a dog left alone in a butchery.  
Shifting beds for the Benz  
Charges without cuddles or candles  
Mouths she waters just to swim  
across continent oceans  
A non-believer who religiously screams 'Oh God'  
so many times  
Drenched in loneliness perhaps but driven  
by monopoly  
No longer in pursuit of true affection  
but net worth projection

After all is said and done and done and done again,  
she does best to conceal her gratified desires.  
After all, it was a short lived bliss  
In her quest for extreme free wealth, like a swal-  
lowed bait, her flesh becomes slave  
to seasonal paid passions  
Sleeping with dignitaries, she loses her dignity  
Talk of unrequited love, but then again romance,  
huh, far fetched  
Led on by fleeting pleasures, she's laid on purpose  
But time heals all wounds,  
and sometimes opens new ones  
In time, with clenched fists, she will realize that  
they feasted on her gifts, preyed on her innocence,  
demeaned her very being.  
After all was said and done and done  
and done yet again,  
she was just a paid pleasure, or more professionally  
an escort  
She asked for it anyway

## A VOYAGE TO FREEDOM

EWA YAKUBU S

A perennial river  
Meanders and gorges on her skin  
Creaked from desolate slum of life  
Deep into the ocean of fortune  
Words rolled on roller-coasters  
Fluttered and hover over the cardinals  
Perching on the ears of juveniles

Generation upon generation  
Embarks on voyage to freedom  
Freedom from the tense grip of life  
Carving canoes, making paddles  
A journey to the coastline

On the 'sacred' shore  
Arrived the 'pilgrims'  
Some with canoes and paddles  
Other's palmer-flexion –creases unhidden  
A few murdered their heartbeats

And dive into the chancy currents  
Slowly, forward and fading into horizon

Dread stalwarts stood on the shore, gazing  
Embarking on massive funeral of dreams  
Lamenting 'misfortune' that befell them  
Through interlocking spur they journey back  
Home is safe, a comfort zone and free  
From the horror that the voyage brings





# WRITERS *Space* AFRICA

**W**e are happy to announce that Writers Space Africa, a free monthly literary publication aimed at creating a platform where new and emerging writers can publish their work, is accepting submissions for flash fiction, short stories, essays, and poetry. We are looking for something compelling, unique, original, enchanting, & remarkable.

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- The deadline for submission is the **15th August, 2017**. Submission received afterwards MAY be considered for the following Month.
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- There is no age restriction.
- The maximum word counts are as follows:

**Flash Fiction: 250 words.**

**Short Stories: 800 words.**

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