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Issue 23



Empowering African Writers

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Zambia

BENNY WANJOHI
Kenya

RIDWAN ADELAJA
Somaliland

OLOFINNIKA OMOBOLAJI
Nigeria

SINASO MXAKAZA
South Africa

OMADANG YOWASI
Uganda

NNANE NTUBE
Cameroon

REFILOE THATO
Motswana

**MUHAMMED TAMBEDOU
(HAMLET KID)**
The Gambia

NAMARA LWANSA
Tanzania

MEAZA AKLILU HADERA
Ethiopia

and many more...

Sandra Unlimited

The Billionaire Writer

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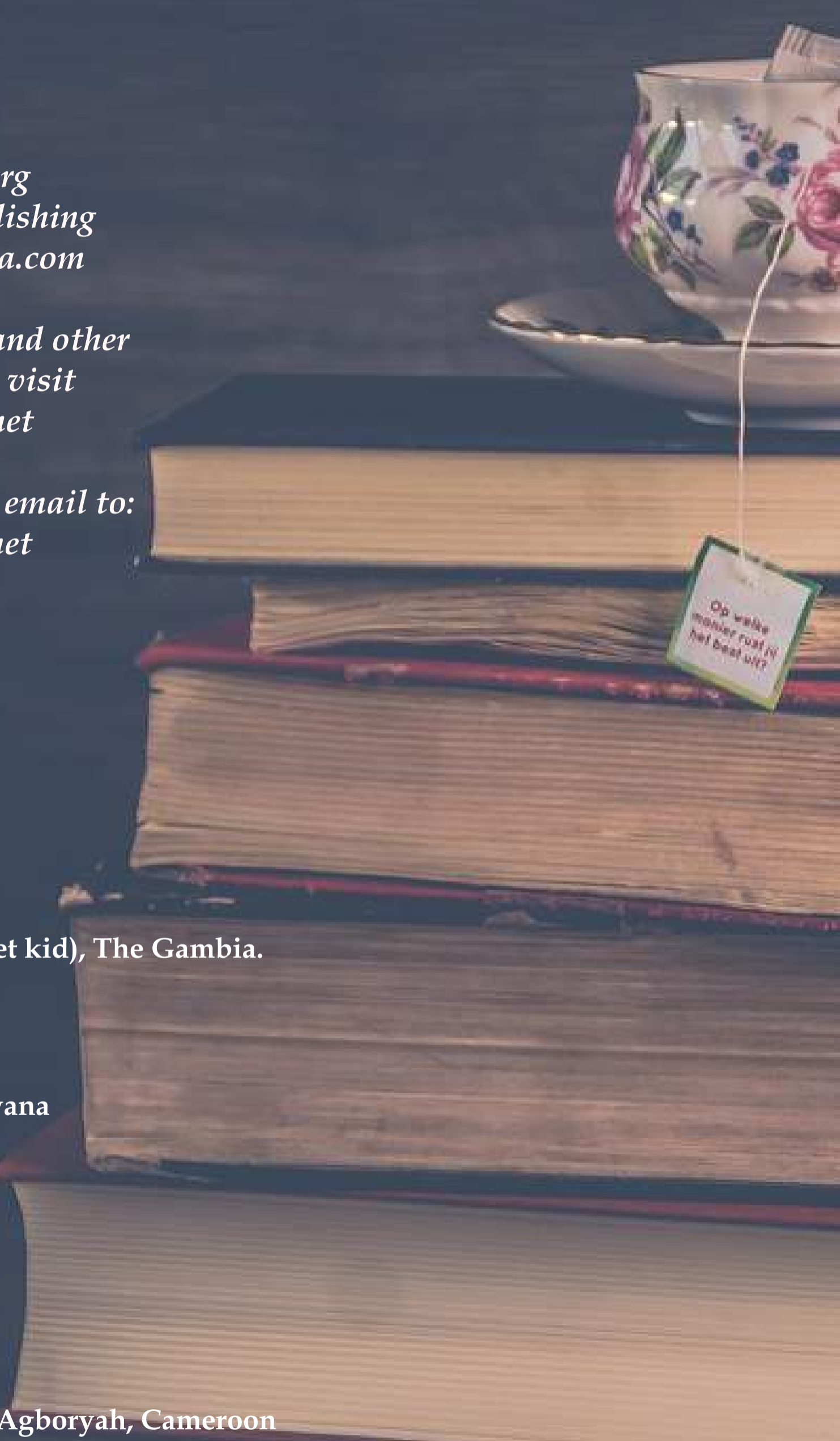
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Refiloe Thato, Botswana
Brian Ngoma, Zambia
Mylord Zulu, Zambia
Benny Wanjohi - Kenya
Tshiamiso Makole - Botswana
Muhammed Tamedou. (Hamlet kid), The Gambia.
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Mbianyor Bill- Erich Nkongho Agboryah, Cameroon
Nonhlanhla Radebe, South Africa
Abu Blessing Nne, Nigeria
Meaza Aklilu Hadera, Ethiopia
Muthoni Nyaga, Kenya



EDITORIAL

There are two ways of spreading light; to be the candle or the mirror that reflects. - Edith Wharton

Hurray, hurray! The time we've all been waiting for is finally here. The conference!

The D-day that is on the 1st of December, we all shall be basking in the gift of life, under the glorious skies of Africa, proudly wearing the theme "Re-imagining African literature: New voices, New narratives in the fight for the girl child.

Now as per my culture, we give 3 ululations for the girl child. So here goes, Ariririri, aririri, aririri! Whoa, that surely felt good.

In the spirit of celebrating the girl child, the inside story rejoices our girl Sandra, the billionaire writer! This beautiful soul interviews for this magazine, is an advisory board member of the African Writers Development Trust (AWDT) our publisher and is one of the guest speakers at the conference. This time around, she is the one to be interviewed, to give us insights into her passion for writing but also her thoughts about the conference and the theme.

The month of November continues our introductions to the conference and the guest speakers, but it also presents new celebrations:

- Our first ever physical conference.
- We introduced a special children's section for our young readers, by our young writers.
- This issue carries the most entries from many a corner of our motherland than ever before.

And then to add icing on the cake, to make this issue even more special, our editorial team is spreading roots across Africa. We proudly welcome into our fold, three new members: Nnane Ntube (Cameroon), Alhassan Faisal (Ghana) and Nahida Esmail (Tanzania). Welcome on board guys.

Speaking of cakes, happy happy birthday Sandra. Please, promise that we'll cut the cake at the conference. (winks)

**Wakini Kuria,
Kenya,
Chief Editor,
WSA**





AFRICAN WRITERS
DEVELOPMENT TRUST
To Empower Writers of African Descent

When you look into my eyes, who do you see?

“Yourself?” That shows we are one.

- By Nora uc. Nwobodo, Nigeria



Sandra Oma Etubiebi

Guest Speaker,

2018 African Writers Conference

Sandra Oma Etubiebi is the Billionaire Writer! And not only that- her writings that are much sought after, have not impeded her successful decade long career in Project Management as a support lead, for NGOs and Organizations with CSR initiatives. She has also spearheaded several social and health programs in Nigeria like the Child Learning Assisted (CLASS) Program, National Sickle Cell Walk for Life (NSCWL) program, the Maternal Education for Child Survival program, Street clean-ups for Nigeria @50 among many others. In addition to planning and developing program activities, she also coordinates International Business Conventions for Corporates and business executives around the globe.

As a professional writer, Sandra develops research based content for Entrepreneurs and is also renowned for her articles and essays that cover productivity. What's more, she has authored two books; *Secrets of the Anthem* and *Is God Making You Lazy?* And that's not all for this unlimited powerhouse; she also counsels, teaches and



mentors teenagers in four different countries across Africa. And In recognition of her transformative work in the lives of people, programs and processes, she received the 2017 HRL Prince Saka Dbosz Junior Merit Award for Excellence in Leadership and Mentoring.

She is commonly referred to as Sandra Unlimited-(we don't need to guess why)

Personal Take

Sandra loves words- Whether the string of alphabets from an encyclopedia or rambled writings of a six year old; she is in love with the English language.

She has a penchant for productivity, performance, and profit.

She writes against laziness, lethargy, and loss.

She is the first born in a family of seven girls.

She is a wife and also a mother to four fantastic girls aged twelve, nine, seven and five

She lives in Abuja, Nigeria.



FLASH FICTION



DISGUISED BLESSING

Kapela smiled at herself in the mirror, her rosy cheeks inflating like a balloon as she did. It was only three months back that there was a hollow in them, that extended to her heart. Despair had struck deep within her as an anchor of a ship not likely to leave the harbour soon.

At the funeral, her late husband's family had descended on her like a wake of vultures on a lamb. Women in small clusters threw her furtive glances, their mouths contorted as though to avoid a surging aversion. Harsh hisses accused her of killing her husband. Her own husband! Whom she did not choose to marry in the first place but had eventually become fond of. But what did that matter to them? She must pay! Off with her head, if they could get away with it. A life for a life! Or her life for their bread?

After the burial relatives from both sides met to decide her fate. The deceased's committee narrowed their eyes with hatred and disgust, piercing them at her through slits as they spat their venomous words at her, "We refuse to cleanse her! She will forever remain cursed!" "She was no wife of our relative! We don't know her!" the women screeched in unison.

"Nika fwiti!" [Small witch]

"Murderer! How does one die without an illness first?!"

Thinking of her children was all Kapela could do to keep the reservoir of tears from flowing. But now she had more to look forward to.

She smoothed her crisply ironed uniform, savouring the fresh scent. The curtain on the only window in the dingy room fluttered, sending in streaks of sunlight as it did. Kapela could not contain her anxiety to meet with other children her age.

by Muyambo Mwenda,
Zambia



WORDS TO RICHES

My single parent had always been the pioneer and pillar of my strength, despite our unfortunate circumstances. She valued life. For somebody who had never been to school, she always emphasized the importance of education and how she believed in me. I despised school. Having to stand in a midst of students, their shirts nicely tucked in their trousers, shoes shining and I feeling like an intruder with holes in what supposed to be my school shoes, with an empty stomach anxiously waiting for tea time, my breakfast every school day.

We were queued at the assembly point, my mind gallivanting all over the place because I had left my mother sick at home with me being her only care taker. I was trapped in my own world when the Principal called all those entered an essay writing completion upfront.

“The winner of the essay entitled ONE IS ONLY POOR ONLY IF THEY CHOOSE TO BE is Goodwill Size”

I panicked, I thought I heard my name, everyone looked at me in disbelief.

“Goodwill, where are you, come here, this is a life changer, the African Union gives the winner the opportunity of a lifetime”

by Refiloe Thato,
Motswana



DO NOT OPEN

An envelope lays on a busy highway with words imprinted on it in caps lock which reads 'DO NOT OPEN'. The breeze blows it up and directly gets stuck between a White Range Rover Evoque's windshield and wipers.

"What's that Dave?" A woman in the passenger's seat asks the man driving.

"How would I know Kara?" Dave sulkily responds as he tries to wipe the envelope off the windshield.

Kara gets curious as she reads the imprints. "Have you seen what's written there?" She stares briefly but evasively.

Dave doesn't respond.

"What's wrong with you?" She bulges her eyes and raises her arms. "You've been acting weird all day. Is this about your gun license?"

"Have renewed it," he shakes his head and presses his lips firmly together. "Let's just get home. Tanashe is alone. The house help has probably left."

They reach their home in the suburbs around 8pm. With Dave out of the car, Kara remains to lock it down. As she walks round the car, she notices the envelope still stuck on the windshield. She grabs it.

DO NOT OPEN

"Is this a joke?" She puffs.

With ease, she opens it, finds a letter and starts reading it. Abruptly, her body becomes still. Her mouth slightly opens and her eyes widens. Everything in her hands drops except the letter and envelope. Voices start echoing from above.

DO IT! DO IT!

She walks to the trunk, opens it and sees Dave's gun. She grabs it and walks to the door. She enters and closes it.

From a distance, gunshots are heard across the neighborhood.

"Mommy no!" A little girls voice fades with the gunshots.

Dire silence returns. The door frailly opens on its own. A well closed envelope fly's out of the house and disappears into the darkness.

by Brian Ngoma,
Zambia



Darkness Unleashed

The phone rings as Josh is coming from the grocery. He answers, "Hello, Patrick, what's up dude?"

"J-josh, many in our class are dead!" Patrick said frantically.

"Dude, chill, speak slowly."

"I was attacked too... I'm at the hospital. Everyone in our class was attacked, except you..."

In fact you are the last one so you better run!" Patrick coughs a number of times.

"Really? Who attacked you?" Josh asks feeling anxious.

"Our te--"

Josh turns as he felt a grab on his shoulder. As he turned, he dropped his phone and flinched.

"Whoa! You startled me... Mr Phiri..." Josh takes a deep breath.

"Oh, I'm really sorry," Mr Phiri says, crouching down. Patrick was still speaking but was cut off as he picked up the phone. "The phone must have disconnected when it fell, I will pay for the damages."

"Yes, you should. My parents will be pissed, and I have to call Patrick. Damn, no airtime," Josh says as he pokes at his phone.

"It's late, go home."

"That's my destination, obviously," he says sarcastically.

"Goodnight."

"Later, teach," he waves his hand without looking at him. He receives a message. As he's about to open it, he hears a loud splash. He turns and sees blood dropping just before him, Mr Phiri squashed and killed by a large dark figure .

"You stubborn little prick!" the figure declares as its eyes light up. Immediately it grabs him by his neck and slams him to the wall.

"You-you killed my teacher," he coughs blood.

"Why do you care anyway? You and your classmates only caused him pain and misery," it laughs hard. "Your classmate's demise was... Memorable, though one escaped. Yours, will be too too sweet."

Half of its face opens to reveal a familiar face.

"Teacher?" Josh gasps.

by Mylord Zulu,

Zambia



**AFRICAN WRITERS
DEVELOPMENT TRUST**
To Empower Writers of African Descent

2018 AFRICAN WRITERS CONFERENCE AND AWARDS

NOV. 30 – DEC. 2, 2018

**Theme: Reimagining African Literature:
New Voices, New Narratives in the Fight for the Girl Child.**



CHAIRPERSON
Hajia Hadiza El-Rufai
Her Excellency, First Lady of Kaduna State
& Founder of Yamin El-Rufai Foundation (YELF)



HOST
Mrs Halima Usman
Chairperson, Association of Nigerian
Authors (ANA) Abuja Chapter



KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Nahida Esmail
Tanzania



SPEAKER
Sandra Oma Etubiebi
Nigeria



SPEAKER
Faith Mutheu
Kenya

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 30 (ARRIVAL) • A NIGHT WITH STARS (STRICTLY BY INVITATION) – 5:30PM

SATURDAY DECEMBER 1: • AFRICAN WRITERS CONFERENCE – 9AM • AFRICAN WRITERS AWARDS/DINNER – 5:30PM

SUNDAY DECEMBER 2 (DEPARTURE) • FAREWELL AND DEPARTURE - 10 AM

VENUE: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE ABUJA, NIGERIA

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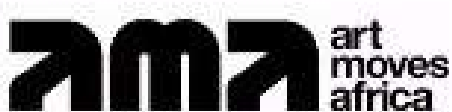
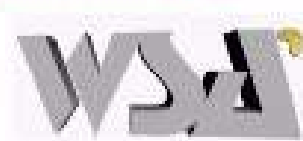
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POETRY



BLINKS OF HOPE

My skin shines black
That the world thinks
That my heart is also dark
The art of their judgmental ink

There are moments I wonder
Whether the fields yonder
Have a better future for my parents
Because poverty rules their wallets

Tough years I spend in school
Barefoot, hungry, working hard
Hoping I won't end in the jobless pool
So that I save my nation
from the third world

Benny Wanjohi,
Kenya

DEAD BONES

I am the dead bones of my ancestors
cut short in the rehearsal to breathe.
I am the sieve
between marrow
and the iron ring
around my neck.
I am untaught to speak.
Often times I am scared of what I have become.
I am a half breath
that was never complete
I lie oblique
in the pens of doctors
that are about to dismiss my arrival.
I lie at the mercy of a mother
who has become my rival
But I am forced to leap.
Am I not a calling anymore?
Am I a criminal that they should crucify my breath?
Cutting my prayers short?
I was still talking to God before
you forced me out of the womb Mama...
I am the recycled bones of my ancestors.
I am the silent cry of crows that won't feed on me...

Tshiamiso Makole,
Motswana



Helpless

Today the cloud is dark.

The monstrous beast is aiming to gulp innocent blood,
and the devil's feet is over heard fiercely cracking the skies.

Quickly the devil's teeth on the child's heart septum,
Joyfully casting sadism!
Forcing himself into this child's mouth as a comfort casket.
Squeezing tears in his eyes...
To flow like the high tides of the red sea
With uncontrollable sigh!

Today is another day of onslaught,
Slaughtering innocent,
And spill blood to dye the town red!

Vultures perching on bodies like branches of a tree,
Children sleeping in strange dreams,
Seeing the beast, the monster, the devil walk away leaving
Human skeletons and foot print behind,
As a reminder of his wrath!

Being born in Africa's become an opening to the gates of hell
To kiss Boko Haram with red lips, here I'm, rub me off my parental love and joy!
And prey with the Al'Shabaab, here I'm, make me an orphan
Where herdsmen choose life of a cattle to worth more than me!

Tears of the African child!
Children are in total bewilderment wailing "Save Us"
Parents sniffing their last breathe wailing "Save my children " ...

Muhammed Tamedou. (Hamlet kid)
The Gambia.



EGRET

EGRET, RISE!

It is time,
the tempest rain is over
though, the wind is at traffic
and your plumage, like a laundry
mop, drunken.

EGRET, FLY!

Rest is the
nest, far away. Home
is calling, just
behind those barricades.

EGRET, EGRET!

Cork now
like a soldier's barrel,

boot-friend the crust – home is
straight and stranded down the lane.

EGRET SOAR!

Fight that blur-r-i-ful cloud,
dodge the whirling gale -
let this clothe-line-peg hovering
meet Menopause.

EGRET, NOW

...rise, fly and soar -
the sky is all a sea, so, sail.

Ridwan Adelaja,
Somaliland

Not This Dust!

Call me lazy!

Call me dumb!

Call me stupid!

Call me foolish!

I'll take them all and make them my companions

They shall be the ladder on which I'll climb to reach your height

Have you ever wondered?

Have you ever wondered why I left school in the first place?

Classrooms, decayed in dust

Benches, broken; nails wounded my buttocks

But the teacher never cared. Her care was to her nails.

Who even cares? Youths are abandoned to their dreams

No one to help them stand up,

You claim to be in possession of the torch to illuminate our future

That same torch whose light you ceased in front of us

Throwing us in a pit of darkness, pulling us around with a rope of confusion

I'm lost, tortured by untold truths

Attacked by disillusionment

Buried by greed

Deserted by corruption

My hope is languishing in the bushes

My heart bleeds, my eyes swell

I'm drowning in tears, but I know I shall swim through

I shall wash off all the dust and tears

Nnane Ntube,

Cameroon



BEAUTY

Beauty is the currency of the world.

A dime a dozen.

Come collect your offer;
Fill your coffer with material
bound to unravel.

Beauty is a beast.

I remember being younger,

I was told,

“African men like big women,”

“Vibrant women.”

The Dark Continent hides its secrets
in the rolls of flesh.

In the shadow of the scale.

In the extra portion of bread on the plate.

Lucky for me.

I hear;

The weight is hidden

in bundles of clothing,

In chitenge and bomber jackets,

In the soup of oxtail,

In the burden carried by ambuyas.

I’ve lived on the scale for a decade,

or since I could remember.

Whichever comes first.

Whichever haunts me more.

Exchanging air is an exercise

I can’t afford.

The longer I hold on to it,

The less I’m here.

The less I feel.

The better I feel.

Chitenge - African cloth/wrapper.

Ambuya- grandmother

Petronella Nyirenda,

Zambia

TAMED MIND

An African child cries
Her tears bleaches the beautiful,
Charcoal tinted eyelashes
They sizzle and boil the once fertile land
They tickle the armpits of starvation

When the rain clouds scatter
And never comes back again
An African child weeps
The land becomes too stubborn to be tilled
And refuses to be generous
Corn seeds are buried now and die later
There is no food for tomorrow

Fate tamed the mind of an African child
Before Stone Age
Oracles foretold that
Agronomy is the future and glory of Africa
Boys sweat in vain behind the rows
Oxen draw ploughs on hot,
dusty afternoons
Their ribs are like guitar strings
as they hold their breath
To revive the glory
that their ancestors obtained in field

The mind of an African child was tamed and cursed
By the societal norms composed by their forefathers
It is designed to make them go to sleep
on empty bellies when The rainfall
never pays a visit again
and agriculture is impossible.

Cynthia Katlego Matale,
Motswana



Tears That Come No More

All the tears have reached the city:
Strolling down the red streets.
Yawning invalid at miracles' best;
Seated still since then.
Rotten eggs still in the incubator:
The black cock is impotent.
Ride me not further this street:
Trespass is in the statute book.
Bread's not meant for us here;
Did you hear the perimeter wall
Shriek with laughter of pride?
See the scalded bitch over!
Tears that come no more:
Where did they relocate?
My skull's a dry coconut:
I hardly posses my colon.
My socket's a dry oil well:
Drilled till mourns no teardrops.
Rest me down this golden street;
Till a super-natural flys by.

Omadang Yowasi,
Uganda



Beautiful

Our families are museums that look like ruins
And smell like ointments and herbs for the healing we always need
When people come to visit us we are told to clean ourselves up
Because dignitaries might want to touch us and take pictures
When they show you the pictures and say look at how beautiful you are
You see yourself looking like changing times and sales
Nothing at all like your mother
Beating your soul to let yourself out of this skin
At home they ask you what's wrong with you
You always go home to find your name
They call you your mother's daughter
You look at your mother carrying age and blessings in one body
She divides herself between the world's needs
Her lover still needs her to make room for him too
"What's an angel like you doing keeping a body like this together?"
You ask her, terrified with how she comes home to disaster and still says it's okay
She says I'm preserving my parents and their parents
I can't leave before I show you how to live

Sinaso Mxakaza,
South Africa



THE YEAR WE DIED

It was the year of the lords'
A year of saints and devouts
When the furnace of religion
burned high
And the embers of love waxed cold

It was a year of change
When we became sisters
of the order of Rose
A Rose wilted and striped to thorns
Where we substituted beds
for grasses
And walls for stalks

It was a year of coming of age
When womanhood was forced upon us
Innocence lost in
a-not-so sacred grove
When the realities of Mans' heart dawned

It was a year of rude awakening
When we saw hope drift on smoke
in the horizon
A year we lost the faith to fate
This was the year we died

Olofinnika Omobolaji,
Nigeria

WSA Personality of the Month

SANDRA UNLIMITED

THE BILLIONAIRE WRITER

BY GABRIELINA GABRIEL ABHIELE





A successful writer possesses a vocabulary of over fifty thousand words. From the stables of Nigeria is the word witty Sandra Oma Etubiebi whose mental capacity accommodates that and more. She has a magic wand for words; don't ask where. It comes easy for this graduate of Accounting who has found her occupational fortress in writing. Popularly known as Sandra Unlimited, she is the founder and CEO of The Billionaire Writer where she delivers research-based content and copywriting as well as editing services at world-class level.

In an Interview I had with Sandra, she talked about her recent book, 'Is God Making You Lazy?' which has received hundreds of great reviews within a short time of its release; the inspiration backing the writing of the book; her life as a professional writer; family; fashion; and what I call a writer's diet.

Give us a background to your passion for writing.

I burn for words. I always have. My earliest memories of my passion for writing dates back beyond three decades. My story reads like a common thread though: I was in Primary three when I was selected to join the debate team, and my mum wrote the text of my first debate. That experience introduced me to one of my first big words, which became my best and most memorable word: "buttress."

"I am here again to buttress my point that..." It was such a big beautiful word at the time. I used that word so much I should have worn it out -if possible. LOL!

I must have displayed a love for words, reading and writing -even before then - because I remember my parents always bought me storybooks to read. I heard that I appreciated book gifts than dresses or any of those girly things. Before I left primary school, I had read almost all of the 'PACESETTERS' book series. Then, the Pacesetters book series was a thing! How I looked forward to ending and starting a new story afresh. In Primary school, I found and grew in love with Literature. I cannot forget my first read of "A Tale of Two Cities" by

Charles Dickens. I was teleported into Old London, Paris and the world of Monsieur and Madame Defarge, and Dr Manette. I went on to read other literature pieces and enjoyed every single one of them.

Interestingly, after that first debate experience, my longing for big words grew to a fever-pitch notch so much that I began to read the dictionary as a novel. It was an enthralling experience at the time. The words would pile in my head, and when occasion presented itself –the words would come out at the right cues in every sentence. In Secondary school, I was tagged “Dico” –for dictionary, and my essays or scripts were exemplary.

My burn for words was legendary. You could find me picking up dog-eared burnout snatch-



es of paper from the dustbin to read. I would read a book simply because others said it was boring and could not be enjoyed –and I would always enjoy the read. Nothing was too boring. Nothing was too thick to go through. I would read and suddenly turn deaf to my surrounding like today’s kids with their headphones.

I burned for words and still do although you will no longer find me reading just anything. I have learned to pick my teachers. I have learned to choose. My burn for words goes beyond the written pages. It reaches even to words spoken, conversations with strangers, and technical articulation for the

expression of a client's copywriting brief. I believe it is this lust for words, to hear it, see it, speak it, and write it, that fuels my passion for writing in general.

Writing is a career not really viewed by family members as lucrative. So, then, how does your family react to this path you have chosen?

Interestingly, I have two families now. Before I got married, I had my parents and six younger sisters. Although everyone knew I was a lover of words, they knew me for many other things. I was intelligent, loved technology, always inquisitive, and was book smart in Mathematics. For the life of me, I would still wonder why I didn't just fail Mathematics so they would know how much I cringed from numbers. My father had great plans for my intelligence. So did my mum. I cannot forget the words my mum said to me when I turned 16 and out of Secondary School after declaring to her with fire and light in my eyes that I wanted to be a Writer. She said, "It is when people have run around in life and can't find anything else to do that they begin to write." Those words burned in my brain and for a long time I was disappointed at the world for belittling the value of something I so longed to be. But I later learned that my mother wasn't the world, not at all. She was only a little part of it and while her opinions counted, they were misinformed. Nonetheless, while in my parent's house, I embraced other things and even graduated as an Accountant -thanks to my Father the Accountant!

After I got married, I became what I wanted to be. My kids see me writing every single day, talking to clients on the phone, negotiating my fees, leaving the house to a client's office and returning with 'gist' for my spouse. They feel the energy and zest with which I approach each day. They see the reverence and passion I have for my laptop and writ-



ing space –my family loves their Writer Wife and Mother. Now, my parents have come to appreciate and understand that those writing sparks were not false fires but indications of a lifelong engulf in penmanship.

You are popularly called ‘The Billionaire Writer.’ What inspired the name?

I gave myself the name and it stuck. The inspiration –as is for a lot of things I do– did not come from a singular event. It’s actually combustion of insight, desire, and Rhema. One of my highest levels of motivation is relevance –I have to be relevant. My words have to be relevant. I have to make impact, and give someone else a reason to love life, love themselves and perhaps add to the value-chain of relevance for someone else. I have always thought like this. And, I have been successful in being relevant to people I meet, work with, and work for. Now, I want more. I would like to scale up on my relevance. I would like to reach a billion people with my words and writing. That’s where the idea of the Billionaire Writer sprang up from. Then, I read about J.K. Rowling, her background, her writings, and her status as a ‘billionaire author.’ It resonated. I wanted that also. Finally, I saw the scriptures and I understood from it that I can have what I say. That was all I needed to go public with my name; The Billionaire Writer.

Interestingly, the clients, the money, recognition, and relevance has been on an ever upward and forward trajectory ever since.

Writing professionally for fifteen years is a milestone. What kind of clients have you dealt with so far?

I write for Business Executives, NGOs, and Organizations with CSR initiatives, Institutions, MBA Students, and others who don’t fall into any specific category but can pay my fees.

Can we have an insight into the kinds of writing projects you handle; ghostwriting, editing and the likes?

I have a powerful ability to put words together and that has helped in my versatility across a broad range of writing genres and I keep learning every day. I write nonfiction and fiction, technical and expository writing, proses and verse, business and casual. However, for most of my clients, I prepare business documents, company profiles, copy for brochures, marketing materials, web contents, project documents, articles, speeches, essays, and book editing. Owing to my years of participation and experience working with NGOs, I handle a lot of NGO documentation from NGO naming, developing program concepts and communication materials. For the most part, I am that writer contented to write and be paid without attribution. I am a ghost. I have been so for a long time except for my books which I authored.



You just dropped a book on the shelf, 'Is God Making You Lazy?' How did you come about that title?

'Is God Making You Lazy?' is actually my second book 'on the shelf.' My first book, *Secrets of the Anthem*, dissected the Nigerian National Anthem into seven principles that make for individual, organizational and national success -if fully implemented. It's a good book you should read sometime.

The motivation for my second book and the title, 'Is God Making You Lazy' came from my personal experience and my observation of the

lives of a lot of people like me -talented, full of dreams, and Christian. Even with all my love for words and writing, there was a time I took a back seat to my life and watched time pass. On face value, I was going through the motions but not living intentionally. I was waiting for something to happen and doing nothing to make it happen. Until one particular day, I looked at my life and bank account, I looked at my hubby and our kids -we were not doing okay. Something was wrong. I asked myself a lot of questions and 'Is God Making Me Lazy?' was one of those questions.

God is not lazy, does not do lazy, and doesn't like laziness. In my book, you will find references that would actually make you see laziness as an abnormality for Christians in particular and everyone in general, so the 'sit-down-look' 'pray-only-do-nothing' syndrome isn't endorsed by scripture.

What's the response from your audience like regarding your book?

Wow, I have been inundated with feedbacks, questions and appreciation. It has brought me in contact with a lot of writers who want to get off their couches and create something tangible with their abilities. I have spoken with young people who don't want to get trapped in a web of mediocre thinking and unproductivity. And, I have met people of like

minds who appreciate and share my views.

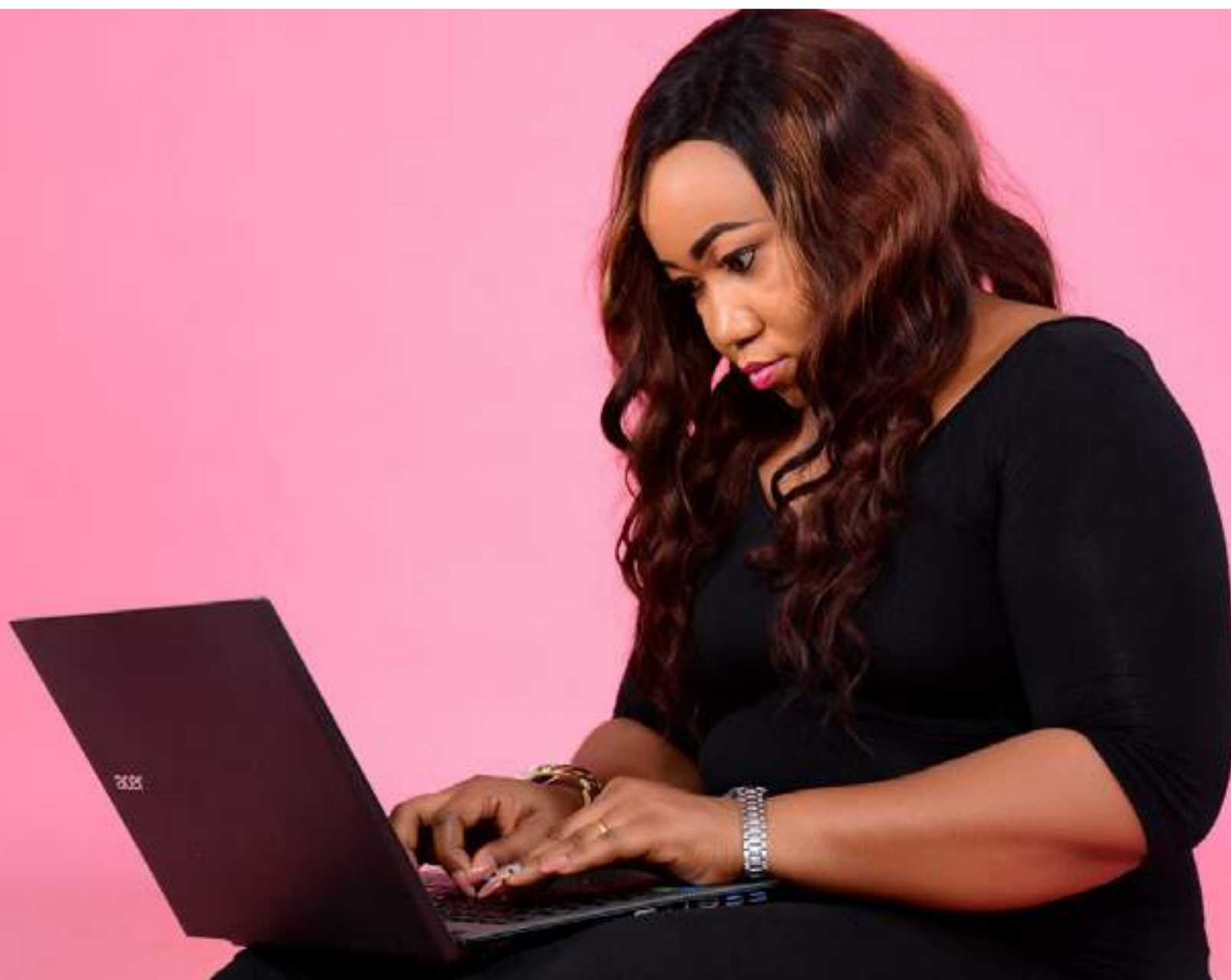
In the first chapter of the book, you talked about a life of mediocrity which you had to consciously rise above. Briefly tell us the challenges you faced in the journey and how you were able to overcome.

I have always been ambitious, hardworking and excellent, but like I said, there was a space of time I found myself negligent about what I wanted. It was an unfamiliar place that almost lasted four years. Although a little traumatic event signaled off those pity-party years, I found more and more ways to excuse myself, waiting for something to happen –all the while observing that I was really doing nothing. I had no push, and life too, returned with no push. When the truth hit like a hammer on the head, I made up my mind to go for the things I wanted. I started reaching out to friends who knew me in the past. I started being more proactive with my time. I set up shop again, after four years of little or no activity.

For such a powerful book as yours, why did you choose to make it free download for readers?

I have a third and powerful book to hit the market soon. ‘Is God Making You Lazy?’ is a prelude to that book. I decided to make ‘Is God Making You lazy?’ available for free so that more people will read and embrace this direction of thought and embrace the author as well.

For those who are yet to read the book and would love to, kindly avail us the information on where it can be accessed.



Interested readers can send a mail to 'thebillionairewriter@gmail.com' requesting a free download or visit www.billionairewriter.com

After reading your book, people seem to be asking for more from you. How soon should your audience expect another release from you?

January 2019 and I'm keeping the title a secret for now.

You must be feeling fulfilled having great reviews from readers about your book.

"In every labour, there's profit," the Bible says. Great reviews are a part of the profit, so I'm grateful for that.

Let's talk about family. How do you merge your family with your career in writing?

My workspace is a sweet corner in my dining area 120 inches away from my kitchen and walkable distances from every other room in my house. The fact that I do most things from home helps and when I absolutely have to be out of the house, I have the unflinching support of my husband of 14 years and my first daughter who turns 13 in December, this year. I love my writing life and all the drama that comes with it.

You have four beautiful daughters. Can you say your career as a writer has influenced your daughters in any way?

I tell my daughters stories all the time, and they are almost always the first to read my many unpublished works of fiction. They know that "mummy is a writer" and they tell me things like "you are always writing" "you are addicted to your laptop" "when I grow up I will have my own clients" "why do people ask you to write for them?" "How much will they give you?" "How can I write and let everyone read my book?"

I want to believe that this engagement with my writing process and the vibes they receive from me, helps them to think 'entrepreneurial', think 'independence', and raise their own sense of self. Presently, we raise our kids to be independent as much as possible. My first and second daughters, aged 12 and 10, write stories and essays, they sew clothes, my second daughter creates designs from nothing and makes animated videos, while my two little daughters, aged 8 and 6, have shown affinity for coding, graphics and language. My job as a mother is to fan alive every spark till it becomes a fire that can burn down any forest.

On fashion, what's your taste like?

I cannot be called 'fashionable' –although I always managed to look appealing. Growing up, I was the girl who wore "everything but what made her look hot!" That was something



a friend said a very long time ago. I was your big shirt and jeans only kinda girl – who buried her head behind her glasses and in a book. All that changed after I left the university and got married to a fashion forward kinda guy. I owe my appearance, largely, to my spouse who like Michelangelo carved out a hidden beauty. Yet, I basically wear what makes me comfortable –even if it’s a hot pink skirt.

A healthy diet has a lot to do with mental efficiency, especially for a writing profession where the brain is constantly at work. Share with us briefly your kind of diet.

I eat anything, really. But being a writer means you are mentally active but with low physical activity when writing. So, I try to eat less carbs and increase physical activity when not writing.

You are a wordsmith. How do you play on words so easily?

I wish I can say precisely how it works but there isn’t a formula. It’s a flair fuelled by

years of exposure to the English language, literature, reading and writing.

What do you do to improve yourself in your career?

I am committed to lifelong learning. I take online courses on Udemy, Edx, and Alison. I read a lot and study the best of samples in writing that’s available in any genre I’m interested in. I joined several online and professional Writer groups especially in my copywriting field, and WSA -Writers Space Africa. Interaction and opportunities for learning are the environments I constantly expose myself to.

Can you boldly say that writing pays your bills?

Writing pays my bills - but not all of it. Earnings from my writing has seen my family through the roughest of times before my spouse began earning 5 & 6 figures from his real

estate business. Writing has put food on our family table. I have clients within and outside Nigeria, and as the exchange rate kept soaring, so did my bank account. I remember some couple of years back when people put hands on their heads in alarm for the spike between the naira and dollar exchange, it felt like I was the only one smiling. \$300 for a writing brief suddenly left me with a 25% increase when I received my money. But I'm not there yet, writing can and will pay ALL of my bills with lots of cash to spare. After all, I am the billionaire writer. When that happens, we should do another interview, don't you think?

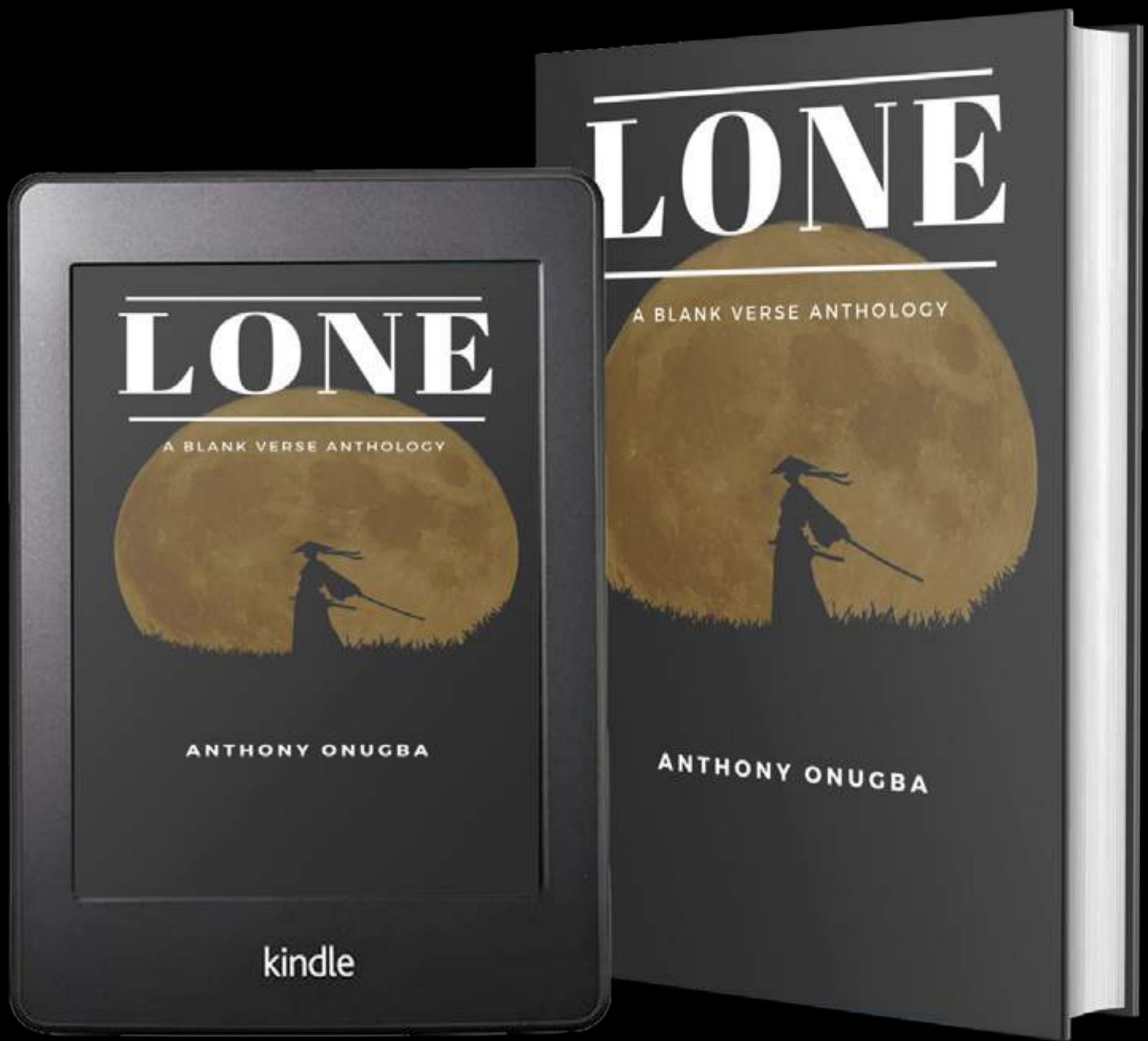
Any plans in view to organize a platform where other writers, established and aspiring, can tap into your wealth of knowledge?

It is in the works, really. But seeing as that will be a whole new branch of service, I am not in a hurry to take on that responsibility just yet. However, we have Writers Space Africa where I am ever willing and ready to make out training sessions for the members.



Hair: SoPretty

Makeup: @Ashantymakeovers



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ETHIOPIAN MEDICAL JOURNAL

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EDITORIAL

TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE, NOT TUBERCULOSIS

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

LATENT TUBERCULOSIS AMONG ADULT ETHIOPIAN PATIENTS AT CHEST CLINIC, TIKURANBESSA SPECIALIZED HOSPITAL, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA.

BURDEN OF TUBERCULOSIS AMONG STUDENTS IN TWO ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITIES.

ART EXPERIENCED PATIENTS FOR TACKLING ATTRITION FROM HIV CARE: A MULTI-SITE COHORT STUDY

PREVALENCE OF RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MID-EASTERN ETHIOPIA.

HIGH PREVALENCE OF ATRIAL FIBRILLATION IN STROKE PATIENTS ADMITTED TO UNIVERSITY OF GONDAR HOSPITAL, NORTHWEST ETHIOPIA.

RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF PATTERN AND OUTCOME OF NEONATAL SURGICAL CASES AT TIKURANBESSA UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA.

REFERRAL OF EMERGENCY SURGICAL PATIENTS IN A TERTIARY HOSPITAL, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA.

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RECURRENT MYXOMA ARISING FROM MULTIPLE CARDIAC CHAMBERS WITH SYSTEMIC EMBOLIZATION.

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Children's Corner



Wait For the Right Time

Standing on the tallest tower,
I think I'm full of power,
Wishing I could fly,
But alas! I can't try.

If I could,
I would,
But I can't,
So I shan't.

Silly me,
To think I could be,
A ruler with a twirl,
Yet I'm just a girl.

Wait for your time,
My friend tells me,
The climb is steep,
The fruits are sweet.

Namara Lwansa,
Tanzania



Namara is 11 years old. Her hobbies are dancing, reading and poetry writing. She would like to grow into a responsible, productive and independent person. Her ambition is to be a journalist. Namara was the third place winner in a nationwide poetry writing competition in Tanzania (August 2018) dubbed "A Poem for Peace". The competition was organized by The American Embassy, Soma Book Café and Waka Poetry Consortium.

I'll Never Give Up

I am a child with dreams
Forever I must scream
I have goals to achieve;
I won't change them
No matter how much you persuade me.

Sometimes life is tough
But you must be tougher
Oiling it with laughter
Lifting your dreams farther.

But I will never give up
No matter what comes my way
I will always man up
Because nothing is impossible
The word itself says 'I'm possible'.

I have learned
The best way to predict your future
Is to create it
And the **ONLY** one to shut your dreams is you
Don't let anyone shut them for you.

People can talk about your dreams
And make them look like negative things
But I don't care
I believe, finally I will get my PhD

Lisa Ndobho,
Tanzania



LISA Ndobho is 12 years old. Her hobbies are singing, reading story books, dancing. She would like to grow into a person who helps the poor and needy and make her parents proud in all that she does. She would like to pursue her education to PhD level. Her ambition is to become a doctor.

ESSAYS





African Children Should Be Given African Stories

Two months ago, I was invited to a cultural weekend at a school in the western part of Kenya. A teacher at the school welcomed me and as he showed me the way towards the hall where the students sat to mark the final day of the event, he whispered a question to me. “What kind of stories do you write?”

“Fiction” I replied. Even though I had a few of my essays published and some read as speeches by different people.

“Do you think there is a hole to the

kind of literature we give our children and young adults?” he went on to ask.

I agreed. He explained to me what he thought was the lacking component. Our children were not being given the kind of stories that would build their knowledge about Africa.

“But you know everything is changing and we are getting modernized. The world has become a village and we need to give children a wider scope of stories to make them understand the world without

geographical limitations.” I said.

He sighed and faked a cough; I knew I had hit the nail right on the head.

I had not yet gotten over the discourse of that day that day when I found a piece of writing that talked about Chimamanda’s phenomenal speech; The danger of a single story. I read it and the reflection from the words rekindled the memories of the small discussion; that even though storytellers are trying, there is still deficiency in stories that tell the reality of the African world as to how the children should know. “The children need stories they can identify with” the writer stated.

Personally the two encounters have changed the way I write, especially to children, I endeavor to write more about mushroom soups, boiled beans and roasted potatoes more than I do write about ice cream and cornflakes. I am trying to adapt to writing about mountains and landscapes my small niece and nephew can relate with even as I try to make them understand that in this same world, there are places that have snow-The white thing they see in Christmas themed animations.

And the issue of Christmas animations brings me on to another thing- that we cannot only blame writers, poets and written content creators for denying African

children the knowledge about their home, equally film and its related companies have their fair share of blame.

Television, radio and other media outlets should reconsider giving African children something indigenous, more related to our homes than playing Christmas songs and animations that show much of the western cultures. Really in Africa children don’t – if yes then seldom-receive gifts from the chimney, they don’t skate in the snow. Instead they go to church and sing songs about baby Jesus, they wear new clothes and eat well, and they visit friends and get some gifts from parents. In some parts of Africa, the birth of Jesus is celebrated with cultural dances and native songs of praise, mixing it with the influence of the western religion, traditional musical instruments are played and native foods eaten.

When shall we give our younger generation something to be proud of? When shall the revolution start to make children sit down in living rooms and watch African animations, with characters living in homes like they do, playing village soccer without shirts and mothers carrying raffia, well pattered baskets to and from the market places and water pots from the river? Are we willing to give forth to a generation that knows Dwayne-The Rock-but doesn’t know Omotola and Nnaji? Are we willing

to build teenagers who watch Mexican and Thailand Drama movies yet they haven't heard of Sarafina? If the answers to these questions are yes, then we are already doing that. If it is no, then we have to reconsider every part of the kind of stories we give to our children. They need to know home before knowing abroad

When I read that Writers Space Africa was calling for submissions on the theme; The tears of an African child, I had to recount the memories and the encounters of my childhood to realize the kind of a world I was given and the world we are currently giving our children, For really there are unseen tears in the faces of these innocent young Africans. We should prepare them adequately for the life that is coming ahead of them. They are the future advocates of our diminishing culture and the pride of the future Africa. These children are the people who will make the West sit down and learn about us and respect us. We shouldn't feel inferior and always give them a reason to make other parts of the world more known, loved and respected more than we do to our own home.

And we blame them when we see them copying from the western culture, we see them do things and collectively say "That is not African." Of cause it is not and they have every reason to do that which you consider to be not African. Because that is the world they have grown to see.

Let's swallow the animal stories for a while and teach our children about mud huts with grass-thatched roofs, let's forget the beautiful houses with orchards in the backyards and instead have bananas and papaws. Let's show our children the real people of Africa, the Igbo, Swahili, Xhosa and the many others. Let's make more animations, cartoons, children and Teenage films that will first teach our children about our home as we teach them about the world. Why can't they pick influence from home and be well with the changing world than picking from foreign cultures that we end up sometimes blaming them for doing so?

And so I say, in as much as we might be trying to make our children understand the world, we should equally focus on making them more knowledgeable of the history, culture, landscape, religion and the life in their homes and neighborhood first. It is only wise to know home, before knowing and meeting the world.

**By Kelvin J. Shachile,
Kenya**

Moral Decay and the Future



Not long ago there was a call-in program on radio where the topic of conversation was moral decay in society. The case study was a story of a young boy (I believe he was in his early teens) who came home drunk. The father hit him because of it. The boy reported the father to the police and the father was arrested.

This case was being advertised as a paradigm case of the moral degradation of our society- And at this point, it is fair to ask which part of the story is a case of moral decay. Most callers to the program were clear that the idea that a child could come home drunk, and then have the courage to report his parents to the police for disciplining him, was unconscionable. “When we were children, such things did not hap-

pen”, one caller said (I paraphrase).

The part that however requires a serious conversation is the perceived causes and the proposed solutions to this ‘problem’. I put problem in quotes because I do not believe that there is a problem here, but that is beside the point. Apparently, the two biggest causes are: increasing access to information technology (specifically social networks) and the phenomenon of human rights. This was according to the callers to the radio program.

The idea is that because children are being exposed to social media, their morals are being eroded. How this happens is rarely ever convincingly explained. The other part is that as the gospel of human right takes

root in Africa, children are emboldened. They can now report their parents to the authorities for corporal punishment. The effect of this, the idea goes, is that parents and guardians are now having difficulties in inculcating good morals in the children. "Parents are now afraid to discipline their own children," one person put it on the radio program.

The proposed solutions are potentially problematic. They include; the reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools, and state run 'national service' systems where young people are taught to 'work for the country and be responsible'. This is rather disturbing news for the African child. Corporal punishment is not only bad because it is a form of abuse, but it also perpetuates the idea that violence is a legitimate means of getting someone who is weaker than you to do what you want. At bottom, that's what this is about. The word 'morality' in this context is really code for "behavior that is familiar and acceptable to me". I believe that there is a significant part of our population that is getting uncomfortable because the world that they have become accustomed to is slipping away.

The advent of new technologies like social networks and instant messaging is good to Africa. More people are getting to know how other people in different parts of the world are living. The possibilities of

humanity flourishing are expanding. The world is getting bigger. Xenophobia and prejudice is reduced when we can relate to people that are different from us. Internet connections are very important in this regard.

What about the moral decay that is being decried? It is plausible that some children can learn bad habits from other people over the internet. However, when you listen to the things that are being complained about, it strikes me not as moral concern but fear of the unusual. Children are learning that they can dress the way they like, they can love whomever they want and that the world is full of possibilities that are alien to older generations. This is antithetical to social conservatism.

I think that change for the better in the welfare of children in Africa is highly likely, but it is not inevitable. As long as ideas about corporal punishment and media censorship prevail in society, there is always the possibility that significant progress can be lost.

That is why it is important to stand up and be counted.

By
Robert Banda Jere
Zambia

LOST HERITAGE



I want to be happy! I deserve to be happy but happiness cannot come in black skin. My portion is the dank walls that forever trap me in this abyss of despair, and here, I struggle to make a fire. A fire of hope that burns despite the winds howling on it from each side- The winds that brings the ghouls to prey on my already bruised body.

Let me tell you my story, maybe you might understand the depth of my wounds and cry the tears I'm too broken to cry. Before they came, we had happiness. Our land was green, the trees flowed with sweet white wine, and our bellies went before us. We were brothers united by the sweat of our brow and our allegiance to our nchis. By the fireside, we told stories of our forefathers and the

wars they fought to make us many, yet one unique people. During the harvest, we gathered our first crops and offered to Ori, god of the land to thank him for the gift of rain and a bountiful harvest. And when the moon was full, we feasted with heaps of eba and bitter leaf soup.

Our maidens adorned themselves with the finest agada loins and cam wood, the young men with beads and we gathered under the icheku tree. With music so sweet and drums so loud, our praises flowed to our nchis. Whatever disputes existed met the wise and fair judgment of our Oba. Our children thrived and our parents lived till their bodies creased in many places. Those days were simple and we were content. Just when we thought nothing could go wrong, we heard from

distant seas, the horns that sounded our doom. Without knowing, our cocoons were shattered and the shreds taken to faraway lands.

We heard the rumors that the gods had come with houses that floated on water, that their skin was as white and their hair had the shone like the sun. They were clad in fabrics we had never seen before hence we immediately agreed it was superior to ours. On the tip of their noses, another set of eyes rested that we believed could see our souls, the language from under their breathe was foreign. Astounded, we looked on at the embodiments of deities that walked among mere mortals. Alas they came into our lands from their abodes and with them they carried gifts.

So began our downfall, with pipes that produced smoke, smoke we thought was flavoured, and flavors that made us forget the fire that succeeds smoke. To welcome them, we offered them the white liquid which trickled from our palm trees, our precious matango but that too they cautiously spat out. For what was raw sap compared to the distilled elegance of Schnapps? Ah! We exclaimed for the gods knew the desires that lurked beneath our black skins. Soon, they told us that the foods that we cherished, which had fed our predecessors, made our skin rugged so we quickly abandoned them

for polished cans of fish. We called ourselves modern but for the right price, fools could be thought wise. They knew that we were irresistibly drawn to the bright coins they threw at our feet, more sparkling than the antiquated cowries we had known all along. Silently, we each lusted after the rounds, flashy demons, each man harboring a fierce desire to possess his own bundle.

They had their cords secured around our throats in tight knots. Perhaps, it was from there that they found the courage to defy our culture and test our allegiance to our nchis. They taunted our priests and taught our women the ways of a more sophisticated God, who they claimed loved us more than our carved statues and did not desire the blood sacrifices we offered like Ori. They preached forgiveness in stark contrast to the severe punishment our laws meted out. Slowly they had planted the seed of their relevance while we had left to wither, the forest of our freedom. With trifles, they had won a bounty so they wasted no time in turning us on each other. For their coins, we gave our brothers, whom they shackled and brought to yonder shores. In horror, we watched as they tore down our shrines and replaced them with wooden altars while we begged. To save their honour, our deities withdrew from us, to the safety of their palaces from where they looked on at the sacrilege which we

had crafted from our greed.

They dethroned our rulers using our brothers as bait. Helpless, we watched as they seized our lands and burned our huts, a once mighty people brought low. How could we have seen the ugly faces hiding beneath white masks? Such wanton death and destruction as we had never known was dealt. Like dogs we had handed over our heritage, our destinies to the hands of strangers while we tumbled over the bones they threw. Soon enough, we grew weary of the bed of thorns assigned to us. If death was our sanction, then it must meet us on the fronts of war not reclining as cowards. After all, we were men of war, no strangers to battle and our ancestors had fought many before to leave us this heritage. With this resolve, we took up arms against our masters and revolted.

Seeing that they could crush our bones but not our spirits, our masters quickly came together to find a solution. To sail away would mean that they accepted that black skin, inutile as they thought it had bested them in the art of war with nothing but resilience. More so, it would imply that they had lost the very wealth that though they profaned, had stored up for their royal palaces. True to his nature, our masters came up with the perfect plan. If our only desire was to be free, then it was a simple matter. They had

uprooted our independence and we had let ourselves stray so far away from our way of life that our existence was now intertwined with theirs. Like footprints in the sand, the wind had blown away the paths that lead us to the people we were and this they were well aware of.

The exchange was easy. We were left with our farms to do as we please but they decided what became of the proceeds; they taught us to read but not to reason; they let us choose our leaders, but even then told them how to govern; they said it was better to pray to their God all the while smuggling the very carvings we had venerated. And when one of us tried to break free, they offered him the glory of their cities, in a bid to separate him from the rest. And so, they made us the perfect slaves. Yes, we had our freedom but they defined its pillars. Unsuspecting, our hearts rejoiced, for the writings on the wall remained invisible to our eyes.

My tears flow for you, who bears the brunt of our ignorance, for we forgot that when the mango shines on the outside, it's rotting on the inside.

By
Mbianyor Bill- Erich Nkongho Agboryah,
Cameroon

Holding hands is a sign of trust

*Let's hold your hands
through your publishing journey*



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Being a writer isn't always sunshine and rainbows. I remember the first time I told my mother that I wanted to be a writer, she completely lost her mind. At this point we had already applied to law school which is what I always wanted to do, so she didn't get where the writing thing was coming from. I tried explaining that my passion had changed and then she said, "So now your passion is to write? What good is this writing going to do for you? Will writing put food on the table? Is it even considered a career that people go to school for? How do you even know if your passion will not change after this?" It was at this very moment that I realized that the journey I wanted to take would be anything but easy.

Okay so first you must face all the critiques that undermine your talent. I call them the "Favor-rights", they make you feel like you they're doing you a favor by giving you work. They tell you how you are inexperienced and know nothing about the real world of writing. One of my favorites is, "You don't need to go to school to be a writer, you just need a pen and paper". However, sometimes you find that critiques help writers improve in their writing. They don't always dissect your work in a negative way, at times it's in a positive and guided way.

I mean, of course you'll face rejection even before you begin writing. Where everyone will tell you that you can't, before you can even attempt to do. That's life, we always have to take it with a pinch of salt on the side.

Now when you eventually decide to stick with writing you are faced with a higher level of challenges. You struggle to find a school that is specifically for creative writing and or just writing. When you are lucky to find such a school, you are required to write an essay/letter of inspiration telling them about yourself and why you believe writing is the right career for you. I mean it's like you must always prove that you love it [writing] and that you are sure about studying it. You apply [letter and all] then the worst thing happens, you get rejected.

This is where your patience is really tested. A rejection letter to any writer can easily be taken personally and is the biggest instiller of doubt. You start questioning the level of your writing, you even start thinking that maybe your mother was right, that everyone was right about writing not being a worthy aspiration. Oh, especially that first rejection letter, it really gets to you. You start thinking about backup plans, maybe writing isn't for me, like I mean maybe it could be something I do on the side. Thinking like this is the worst thing you can do to yourself, because the more you think like this, the more you believe it.

Ever heard the saying "you talk to yourself more than anyone else, so be kind to you".

The best way to deal with rejection is to always remind yourself why you started in the first place. Think about why you believed that this was something worth pursuing and this way you will triumph over any hiccup you come across. As a person, one needs to always remember that the only opinion that matters, is your own. Remember if you believe and work on your craft then nothing is impossible.

By
Nonhlanhla Radebe,
South Africa



Art by Stephanie Okpala

Stephanie Okpala is a 19 year old Nigerian who hails from Anambra State and schools at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

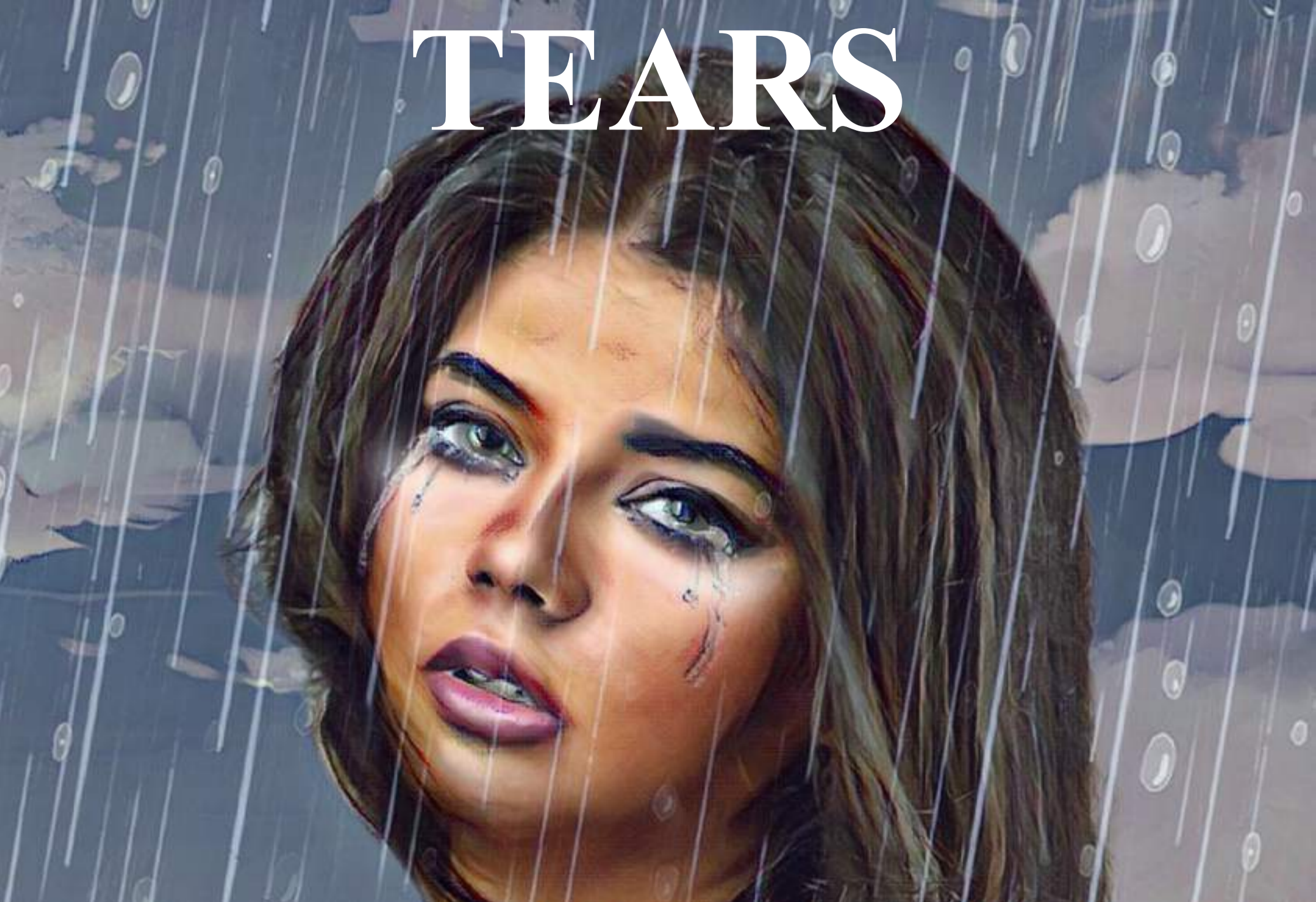
Stephanie is studying Petroleum Engineering.

The title of her artwork is: ANNIEART



Short Stories

TEARS



I closed my eyes and clenched my fist. My heart was pounding uncontrollably; I could feel my feet shaking. I held my breath as the speaker spoke. He had announced the second and first runner-up and now he was taking his time to fill the audience with suspense before announcing the winner of the competition. It was a championship final. I had made it through all the stages of the competition and I was finally at the championship final, the grand finale of the international spelling competition.

I was quite nervous and all I could hear myself say was: Lord please help me win, help me make my mother proud. Please let me make my family. . . before I could complete that statement, the grand announcement was made. I heard my name clearly from the speaker's mouth. It rang in my head. I felt a shiver run through my spine. Goose bumps appeared on my skin. As I walked up to the stage, the crowd cheered and screamed my name, Nne! Nne!!

The walk to the stage felt longer than before. I couldn't wait to get up there to collect my trophy. Yes, it was mine. It was in my name. The cheers increased, the applause became thunderous as I approached the stage majestically. The trophy was handed to me. It was even more beautiful than it looked from where I had sat. I was very excited. I lifted the trophy high above my head and I turned to face the crowd. A standing ova-

tion followed. It was like everyone had wanted me to win. I was overjoyed as I looked through the crowd for my mother. I heard her voice from behind me, I turned to look at her, and I blinked. When I opened my eyes, it was a dream.

“Who are you talking to?” She asked.

“No one, I was only dreaming about a spelling competition and I won. I was given a beautiful trophy in the presence of a big crowd,” I replied drowsily.

“You had better stop dreaming of things like that and face the reality. I have placed the akara and bread in your tray. You should get going before the akara gets cold.”

“Ok ma.” I replied.

“I hope you’ll have good sales today,” she said as she tied a black scarf around her head.

“I’ll do my best ma.” I replied.

I got up from my bed and changed my clothes. Ma helped me to balance the tray on my head. I stepped out of the compound and started shouting, “buy akara” as I walked from one street to another.

My mother never supported my dream of becoming a champion at spelling. She believed that the destiny of a female child lies in the kitchen. She felt I was going too far, she was scared for me. All she had was me and my little brother. My father had left us to the other side of the river shortly after my brother was born. I was barely eight years old and my brother was just a few months old. My mother was devastated. I could remember how she cried at his burial. We lost him to an accident. He was crushed by a car. Even with the way my father died, my mother was made to go through all the rigours of tradition. Her hair was shaven clean and she was forced to drink the filthy corpse water to show that she has no hands in the death of my father.

My mother was very young when she got married to my father. She never went to school. I guess that is why she got married so early. That was also why she did not value education.

In the short time my father spent with us, he made sure he sent me to school because he believed in education. He was quite educated. He completed his secondary education and was about to commence his tertiary education when his father died. He had to stop schooling as the responsibility of the whole family was upon his shoulders.

I always wondered what my family would have been like if my father had completed his education. Maybe we would have been rich. My father put so much effort in teaching me how to read and write thereby arousing my passion for spelling. I was really good at spelling. Once I represented my school in an inter school spelling competition

and I had won. Things were going on fine until I lost my father. A year after my father's death, I dropped out of school. Ma could no longer cope with paying for feeding, clothing, rent and school fees all by herself. Even though we had cut down our expenses, we could barely afford two meals a day. All we had was akara and bread I and my mother sold. However, things had gone from bad to worse.

A lot of thoughts passed through my mind as I walked through the streets with my tray full of akara and bread. I imagined myself at the championship finals. I imagined that I had won the competition. I saw myself holding a trophy and everyone was screaming my name. I imagined the joy on my mother's face as she watched me receive the trophy. I imagined how happy little Emma would be. I gazed intensely at the sky and I noticed the weather was changing. The sky was dim and the clouds were pregnant. It was obvious there was going to be a heavy downpour. I adjusted the tray on my head and headed home with my dress being blown to and fro by the wind. I managed to keep my tray balanced on my head despite the wind. I had walked a few miles and was quite close to my house when the wind became unbearable. I had dust in my eyes. I stopped under a mango tree and waited for the wind to calm down. The wind blew and blew some more, sweeping the ground and making the trees dance to its beat. It blew for quite some time before it calmed down.

When it did, I balanced the tray on my head and continued my journey. The road was littered with dried leaves, empty sachets of biscuits and many other kinds of trash. As I made my way through the trashy road, a piece of paper caught my eyes. I stopped, brought my tray down from my head and picked up the paper. It was a flyer for an international spelling competition. My eyes flung wide open in wonder. I checked the date and it was in the next two weeks. I could not believe my eyes. I was standing before a once in a life time opportunity, the answer to my prayers. In my hands, I was holding the key to my dreams. I rushed home to tell my mother the good news but she was not excited to hear it. She did not even like the idea.

I continued to sell akara and bread on the street, trying hard to make money for my family to survive. One afternoon while I was hawking, someone called out to me. "Mai akara!!" I rushed to where the person was standing to sell my akara. He handed the akara he had bought to some children whom I later found out were his students. He was a tall well-built man, he was dark in complexion and his name was Mr. Dan. He asked me about my school and I told him my story. He said I could join his class. He taught children how to read and write for free. I was excited; it made me feel like I was in school.

I attended the class for a few days and Mr. Dan was really impressed with my spelling ability. I told him about the competition; it was only a few days away at that time. He encouraged me and taught me new words. He trained me physically and mentally until I could say for a fact that I was ready for the competition. Meanwhile at home, I was having problems with Ma due to the massive downturn in the yield of my merchandise as I spent most of my time at Mr. Dan's class. Ma suspected something was wrong and she found out soon enough. She trailed me to Mr. Dan's class and embarrassed Mr. Dan and I in the presence of the other students and everyone who cared to be a part of the audience.

She dragged me home by the ears and severely punished me. She forbade me from going to Mr. Dan's class. I begged and begged but she did not change her mind. Four days away from the competition, I tried hard to convince Ma to let me go. Mr. Dan also tried his bit but Ma turned deaf ears on all our pleas. Mr. Dan had already bought the registration form for the competition; he had also booked our flight. I cried but Ma was still adamant

Three days to the competition, my brother fell ill. He was vomiting at intervals; he had severe diarrhea and abdominal pain. The symptoms were clear. It was cholera. The thought of it sent shivers down Ma's spine. She had just lost her husband, was she going to lose her only son as well? I felt sorry for my brother as I watched him cry out in pain.

Then I made Ma a promise, that I would win the competition and come back home with enough money to treat Emma. If only she would let me go. Ma finally gave in and gave me her blessing to go for the competition. She prayed for me and wished me success. I had one day left to make the journey to South Africa where the competition was going to be held. I spent a whole day at Mr. Dan's place preparing for the big day. With my preparations and Ma's prayers backing me, I was unstoppable.

Very early the next day, we were set to travel. Ma could not see me off to the airport because she had to stay home with Emma. I never imagined it could be so difficult to leave Ma and Emma. It was at that moment I realized I was leaving home. My heart was heavy as I turned back to look at Ma. I saw tears in her eyes and tears rolled down my cheeks.

A few hours later Mr. Dan and I arrived in South Africa. We were just in time for the registration and we headed straight for the venue. We had no idea that the state had been placed under a curfew. We noticed that the streets were empty but since it was our first time in the country we assumed that it was a norm. We were arrested for vio-

lating the curfew rules. We pleaded with the police officers but they turned deaf ears on our pleas.

Our case moved from one desk to another and from one office to the next. They talked to us harshly and repeatedly told us that a Nigerian was never to be trusted. We spent a lot of money paying fines and we were finally deported.

As the plane touched down at the airport, I realised my doom. I remembered my brother's illness and the promise I had made Ma. Now where were we going to get the money to treat my brother? What was I going to tell my mother? My heart melted as I stepped out of the plane. I was back at home. I was back with nothing to show. I fell to the ground and let the tears flow freely.

When I got to the house, the door was open. I went in and I found no one. The house was empty, our property was gone. I was scared. "What could have happened to my family?" I asked myself. "Where they evicted from the house? Did something happen to my brother? Did Ma travel? Well at least she wouldn't travel with all the furniture!" So many questions ran through my head.

I asked the neighbours, they told me that the landlord had evicted us from the house but no one knew where my mother and brother had gone. With the help of Mr. Dan, I was able to find my mother and brother. They were staying in a nearby abandoned farm house.

My brother got better. Ma had treated him with herbs. I continued selling akara. My dreams of becoming a superstar at spelling had died. The profit we made from the akara we sold was just enough for food. For a while we were fine, we had enough to eat and we even had savings. And for the first time in a long time, we were happy. But that happiness did not last.

My brother fell ill again and it was more severe than ever. It was cholera in its ugliest costume. It was more than we could handle. We rushed him to the hospital, paid the numerous bills before they could admit him in the so called government hospital. He spent two days at the hospital and those two days he completely drained us. We had spent all of our savings and we even sold some of our property. And just when we thought things could not get any worse, NLC went on strike and so all government parastatals went on strike including hospitals. My brother was discharged abruptly. His condition was even worse than it was when he went to the hospital. We could not afford a private hospital so we treated him with herbs. He was not improving at all. In fact, he was getting worse. My brother was dying. I was scared. My mother was sad. We had no one to talk to.

Mr. Dan came to visit us. He told me he had no money. He handed me an envelope, he said it was all he had. I opened it, inside was a piece of paper. It was a ticket for a local spelling competition. The competition was three days away. I thanked him and dropped it on a chair. It was quite obvious that I wasn't interested in it. The next day I came across the paper; I picked it up and looked hard at it. Then I said to myself, "there is no harm in trying." And my mum replied, "this could be the light at the end of the tunnel." Surprised, I turned and looked at her. She had a faint smile on her face. I caught the smile and smiled back. Her optimism gave me hope.

Throughout that night and the next morning I studied for the competition. It was a small one; an inter-state competition. I won it but for some reason I wasn't very excited. All I wanted was the money to treat my brother. When I got home, my mother was outside waiting for me. I was holding my prize in my hand.

"How was it," she asked.

"It was fine. I won," I said.

"Congratulations dear. What did they give you?"

"A book and a pen," I said sarcastically. She looked at them and burst into laughter. And I laughed too. We laughed for a while and then she said, "why don't we feed your brother with the book and treat him with the pen." Her countenance changed, she became really sad. She had built her hopes on my spelling competition and once more it had collapsed. It was yet another fruitless one, she thought within her. I read her mind, I looked straight into her eyes and then I screamed, "congratulations Ma!" You are now the proud owner of twenty thousand naira!"

"What? She jumped out of her chair like someone who had been stung by a scorpion. Looking into my eyes, she knew I wasn't joking. She then screamed for joy. I had never seen my mother that happy my entire life. She had such a beautiful smile. And that smile is what keeps me going.

Now here I am, standing in front of the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland, Washington. I am in the United States, the venue for the 2018 International Spelling Bee with my mother by my side holding my hand. Emma is right beside me holding on to Mr. Dan.

Yes! There was light at the end of the tunnel. We didn't just get to the light, we came out of the tunnel. Now we are heading for the spotlight and we are here to win.

Abu Blessing Nne,
Nigeria

DUSK IS BAD NEWS FOR GIRLS

Meaza Aklilu Hadera,
Ethiopia

My heart is beating fast. It is getting dark and my little sister is not home yet. Unlike any other day, my baby sister is two hours late today.

For a village like ours, dusk is bad news for girls. I still remember my incident. I was only twelve back then. I remember I was getting back home from the market place. I was singing happily because I was going to live with my brother in the city. I had bought everything that I thought I would need in the city. I had been walking for a while when I heard someone's foot steps behind me. I was too afraid to turn around and I was still too far from home.

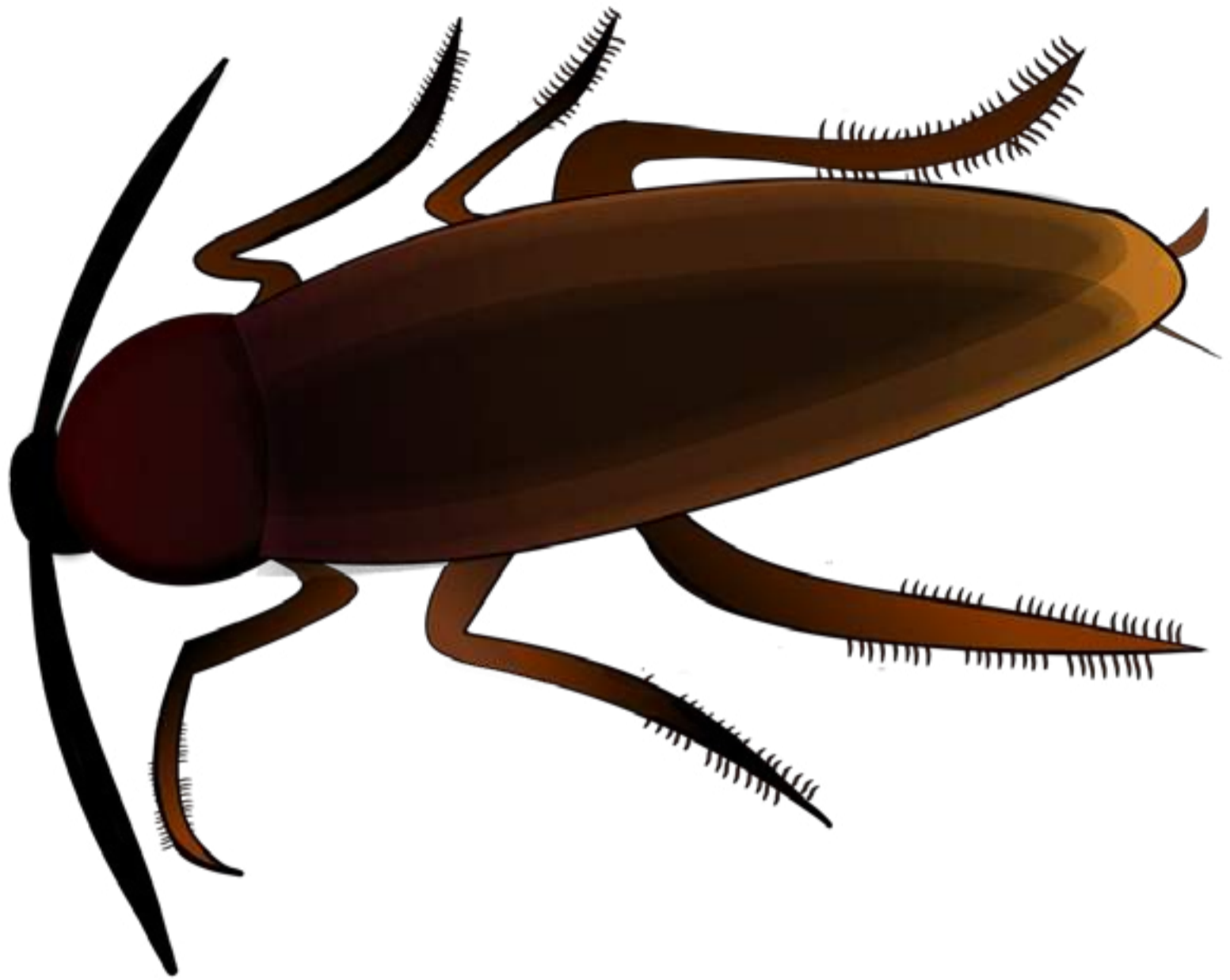
The footsteps got much closer to me. Then someone pulled me back by my hair. I screamed and turned around. In front of me were four boys, one from my village, his name was Solomon. Suddenly, something struck the back of my head and that is the last thing I remember. When I woke up, I felt dizzy and there was blood all over my legs and skirt. I walked home in pain. I found my mom sited outside our house waiting for me, a worried look on her face.

She took one glance at me and tears formed in her eyes. She guided me to the bathroom, washed me, then gave me clean clothes to change into. She told me not tell anyone about it and that with time I will forget it ever happened. So I kept it to myself. She said that if people knew they would talk and I would be shamed. The following week I went to live with my brother in the city, but I did not forget. Now I am a nurse, I came back to my village a few months ago.

I see my sister and my heart pounds in my chest. As she gets closer I notice the way she walks is not normal. I run towards her and hug her.

"Are you okay?" I ask, but I already know the answer to my question. "Solomon and his friends...?" She cries. My legs give way under me when I hear his name and I scream. I am angry, and I feel ashamed. He had taken my innocence, and now my sister's too.

THE COCKROACH



The cockroach crawled on the hole-riddled mabati walls of the single room that Neema lived in. The presence of the uninvited visitor disturbed her. It seemed many things in her life were uninvited. She slowly rose up from the mattress on the floor but her effort was in vain. The pangs of pain hit her again. The previous night he had come home drunk again and beat her up again. Just like all other nights, Neema had screamed for help. But her neighbors were now used to her screams and beatings. They knew it would happen again and again.

“Ouch, wooii!” She screeched in pain. Her effort to rise up was a dismal failure. Slowly, Neema laid back down on the stained dirty mattress. Her eyes slowly surveyed the single room. It was also drab and untidy. A kerosene stove, drugs, and dirty clothes were strewn all over the floor. Her eyes rested on the red worn out slipper. Then back to the cockroach that had now come into her direct line of vision. It seemed to draw her deeper and deeper into the nightmare she tried to forget.

“Mamiiii! Ichooloooo!” “Mamiiii! Ichooloooo!” “Mamiiii! Ichooloooo!” The mid-morning breeze carried the children’s voices and laughter. Children down the dusty Mzima Lane

in the Wizara Civil Servant Estate, Nairobi strutted along to join the rest of their friends. Holidays always meant fun and games. Neema too ran along to join in the singing game. She was always the bubbliest and most play full. At nine years old, you could tell she was destined to be a beauty. Her coal black hair, dark chocolate skin tone and the deep coffee brown eyes captivated many. They said she would be a head turner. For Neema, that was the least of her concerns. All she cared about was having a blast with her friends.

He came from Rwengo Village. He was waiting to join Masomo University, Nairobi and he was Mr. Rutere's younger brother. The children simply called him Anko ya Jemmo. In Rwengo, he had been known as the village's bull because of his ways with the girls. When he impregnated the chief's daughter, things became difficult for him in the village as the chief wanted him dead, so he took cover in his elder brother's home in the city. He took his bull-ish ways to the city and he had been having his way with house girls on Mzima Lane when their Madams were at work. He always watched Neema play, so he befriended the children. He bought them sweets but he always gave Neema more sweets than the rest of her peers.

"Ankoooo yaaaa Jemmoooo! Ankoooo yaaaa Jemmoooo! Ankoooo yaaaa Jemmoooo!" The children would shout excitedly when they would notice him standing by the playing field. They would run towards him and hug at his legs. But his gaze was always fixed at Neema.

For three months, Anko ya Jemmo meticulously planned. He had keenly observed their routine. Every Thursday afternoon Neema's aunty went to the market and she usually stayed there for about three hours. Since the holidays were now over, Neema was usually alone in the house after school. At that time of the day, the neighborhood was quiet. He was home alone since his nephews were in school for remedial classes and his sister in law had chased away the house help after she found out that she was pregnant. Everything was just perfect.

He called her to his house and gave her sweets. He told her they would play a game.

"What game?" Neema asked innocently.

"A very interesting game," He answered, breathing heavily.

"What kind of game?"

"The kind of game that big people play."

"But big people do not play games. They go to work, come home in the evening and bring

food.”

“Well, I’m telling you that they play games and I’m going to show you how to play it.”

He said, patting her coal black hair.

“They don’t play!” She repeated with a hint of annoyance.

“Do you want chocolates?” He asked her, rubbing her back. His breathing was becoming heavier.

“Yes!” Her eyes widened with anticipation.

“Well! You will get lots and lots of chocolates and sweets and ice-cream after we play that game.” His hands had moved to her little thighs, up her dress then inside her pants.

“Aww!” she exclaimed. “You’re hurting me Anko.”

“I will hurt you even more if you scream. And you will never see your mummy and daddy and your baby brother and aunty and all your toys and your friends. You get that.” He barked. “All those sweets were not for nothing.” Then he carried her to his bedroom.

Neema was scared and she cried. She knew he was going to hurt her. He threw her on his dirty sheet. He ripped her dress, then her tiny panties.

They found her in a thicket that night, cold, naked, and unconscious. She was rushed to hospital and it took three days for her to regain consciousness. She told them what happened. He was arrested, and then released a few hours later, Mr. Rutere knew people in high places. The next day he left Wizara Estate for university.

The cockroach moved again. Her eyes moved with it. It seemed to carry her life with it and her nightmare went on unfolding.

It was never spoken of at home. In fact, it was a forbidden topic. Neema learnt to be silent but she always felt dirty. Years passed on and she grew to be a stunning beauty. She grew knowing things. Things that helped her cope. Men wanted her. She hated them but she still yearned for their love.

At twenty she was already an alcoholic and a heroin addict. When her mother confronted her about the missing items in the house, she ran away from home. They found her in a drug den in the Shauri slums. They tried to take her to a rehab center but it was all in vain.

Anto was her main supplier. He too wanted a piece of Neema. So he began supplying

her with free doses of heroin and he was always kind to her. She thought he loved her. He wanted to have her and despite her drug use, her beauty never faded.

Neema moved in with Anto and it was all rosy in the beginning until the beatings began. First it was a slap and he apologized. Then more slaps kicks and apologies. She walked away but always returned for her free dose. It happened again and again.

After a few months he told her that nothing was free and that she had to pay for her keep. That night he came home with a client for the night. Neema resisted. Anto beat her up and threw her out into the dark rainy night. In the days that followed, he locked her up without any food and her lifeline, the dose.

After that she submitted and entertained Anto's clients every other night. They ripped her up little by little, until she had nothing else left to give.

The cockroach continued its journey on the wall. Then something inside her snapped. Suddenly a cloud lifted off her drug-dazed mind and it became clear. The floodgates broke open. Neema cried tears that had been locked up. Tears for her stolen innocence, her broken soul, body, and things that had been left unspoken.

She found the voice to cry and speak out. The tears had somehow revived her. She rose up from the mattress, picked up the red, worn out slipper and crushed the cockroach. She hit it with all her might as tears and screams flowed from her. The cockroach carried all her nightmares. She felt free, and the tears stopped.

That night Anto came home drunk as usual. He strutted in and stopped. She was seated on the mattress and as he stared into her eyes, he realized that something was different about her. He felt uneasy as she slowly rose from the mattress, her eyes never leaving him.

"Where is my food you little whore?" he barked. She laughed sarcastically. "How dare you laugh at me, you whore!" He angrily moved to slap her. She grabbed his hand before it landed on her face. "This is last time you will ever lay your hands on me and this will be the last time I will ever be silent again." She said furiously and walked out into the warm night.

Muthoni Nyaga,
Kenya



AFRICAN WRITERS
DEVELOPMENT TRUST
To Empower Writers of African Descent



Empowering African Writers

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

Writers Space Africa (**WSA**), an international literary magazine, published by the African Writers Development Trust (**AWDT**), is calling for submissions for its 24th edition under the theme "Christmas in Africa".

We encourage the submission of poetry, short stories, etc from children below 18 years of age. There is no word restriction.

In addition, we're accepting literary works from writers above 18 years in the following categories:

Articles/Essays – 1,200 Words maximum

Flash Fiction – 300 words maximum

Poetry – 1 poem, maximum of 24 lines

Short Stories – 1,500 words maximum

Jokes – 1 joke per writer

Artworks – maximum 3 artworks in high resolution

Personalised quotation – 1 quotation and must be the original work of the author

Please note the following:

- You're only entitled to submit for one category.
- The Deadline for submission is November 12, 2018.
- Our editors will revert to selected unpublished writers on areas of improvement in their work.
- Due to the number of entries we receive, only selected authors will be on our website.
- The author retains copyright.
- Your work must be thoroughly edited before being uploaded.
We will in turn edit selected entries to suit the publication.
- The magazine will be released on the 1st of December, 2018 on our website.

To submit, please upload your work through our submission portal below.

We **ONLY** accept MS word documents.

Artworks can be sent in either JPEG or PNG formats.

Entries can also be uploaded at www.writersspace.net.

In case of technical issues, please send an email to info@writersspace.net