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December 2017
EDITION

The Second Judgement

Bernard Aloo
Kenya

Christmas at the Cemetery

Kimberly Chirodzero
Zimbabwe

Drowning Christmas

Wanangwa Mwale
Zambia

Christmas Blues

Carolyn Miriam Acen
Uganda

When Christmas Falls

Awuah Mainoo Gabriel
Ghana

Red Christmas

Ebohon Blessing
Nigeria

Mourning After Dark

Esther Wangui
Kenya

I Died On Christmas

Omemu Esther
Nigeria

Where's the Mass for Christ?

Edith Adhiamobo Osiro
Kenya

Christ's Birth: The Hope for
Humanity

Christopher O. Kingsley
Nigeria



Emeka Nobis

Nigerian Writer and Thought Leader

EDITORIAL

Ushering in the festive season, receive this gift from Father Christmas. A neat collection of organic stories and poems from African pens. This time Santa has finally gone digital. Today he came via the internet and not the ancient chimney.

On the inside story, meet Emeka Nobis, a Mechanical Engineer who spent a decade working for a multinational oil servicing company and did not think twice about resigning to chase his passion for writing. True, the power of the pen, so alluring that no amount of oil could keep him away from dipping in the ink.

To find out more about this wonder guy and how Africa celebrates the birth of Christ, be inspired as you turn over the pages. Catch you new year when the boy can already gift a toothless grin.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AFRICA.

For comments or queries. Contact at us at:
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Wakini Kuria
Chief editor
Writers Space Africa,
Kenya

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*“Let us continue to tell our stories
in the most honest ways possible,
regardless of the different forms we use.”*

- Sbonelo Mgilane, South Africa



Flash Fiction

A person is silhouetted while sitting on a swing that hangs from a large tree on the left. The scene is set at night under a dark sky filled with stars and the Milky Way galaxy. In the foreground, a rustic wooden fence made of vertical slats and horizontal rails runs across the bottom of the frame. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

CHRISTMAS RAPE

Adedokun Emmanuel Tijesunimi
Nigeria

Pain and hatred coursed through my veins as he came in and out of me rhythmically and tore my innocence into bits and pieces. Too weak to shout, tears flowed ceaselessly from my eyes. I wondered why this heinous crime was being committed on the day “Our Lord” was born. He climaxed, stood to leave, and muttered hoarsely, “stupid girl.”

In my village, we report acts of sexual abuse to our fathers but now that my assailant is my father, am I to report my father to my father?

MID OF NIGHT

Pinkett Wambui Muiruri
Kenya

December, the 24th, a girl knocked and left a note at the boy's door then rode back home. Found family and friends face down, her mother breathed no more. Her tears could bear no hope, so she set out to free her own soul.

Mid of night by the cliff, the boy found her before her demise did. Held her close with the words 'I love you too, I'll always do'. And in the mid of that night, there was death, there was love, all born on that same ground.

Only the stars saw how hope finds its way home.

RED CHRISTMAS

Ebohon Blessing

Nigeria

It was her first Christmas Eve with Dad since he had her under sole custody from her bipolar disordered Mum.

The balloons were blown; the Christmas trees decorated. There was just one more ritual left for the night: the arrival of Santa Claus.

Getting dressed, she heard blasting sounds. Santa Claus is already here and falling over balloons splattered on the floor, she thought.

She hurried out and there he was, on a chair, covered in red. But it wasn't Santa Claus. It was her Father, in a pool of his own blood: her Christmas gift from Mother.



A person wearing a dark jacket is sitting on a rocky shore, looking out over a calm lake. In the background, there are dark, forested mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Everybody's got a story to tell.

*From the cradle's cry and each step in every life;
mountains in our strides, pressures on every side..*

Everybody's got a storyline.

Sandra Unlimited

*Essayist, Ghostwriter, Author
Nigeria*

Poetry

When Christmas falls

Awuah Mainoo Gabriel
Ghana

When Christmas fall by your balcony
Up, up to your neighbors
'Haps to Abe, and bid him
"A merry Christmas and a happy chicken"
And when Abe, had had a sweet night
And dreamt of Santa Claus, of red, of white
Of glamorous furnishings, of pretty fireworks
And the grace Christmas brings
Of church, of jingling bells, of hymns, of carols
Of praises, of melodies and the gratification music gives
Of chicken wings, of bottles, of wine, of aromas
Of candies, of Pavlovas, of diabetes
And cavity after New Year
Of gold, of myrrh, and of frankincense
Of thankfulness and reconciliation
Of stars, of mangers and the success of the three sages
Of an infant emperor, long birthed in Bethlehem
And the merry of a new year's eve
Of how he, Abe rendered to the poor
Like him, Abe, go dream, love, learn to give
Find cheer, but friend, you better be wary.

I DIED ON CHRISTMAS

It was Father's arrival today
On that beautiful 15th of May
We dressed from Mama's handmade best
And with pearls from her jewellery chest
We rubbed our skin with olive and ointment
Our bodies dipped in sweet smelling myrrh
Mama cooked a gourmet like we were expecting an army
Well maybe we were, Father was an ardent soldier
Running around with smiles on our faces and haste in our steps
We awaited the return of a lost King, our Father after many years
I checked for stains on my dainty yellow dress
And fixed my little brother's tie until he begged to be let free
I was too fussy and too happy, Father was everything to me
Mama was the most excited but she remained collected
Wrapped in beautiful sequin dress, red, Father's best colour
We held flags and sat eager on the well-dressed table
Minds in sync with the old clock as we sat in wait
Well, that was many years ago, Father never returned that day
All we had was his uniform and tag, buried beneath clay
Mama never recovered, she still dresses in her red sequin and sit by the door
My little brother is grown now, a moody teen who still can't speak
Father wasn't the only one who died that day
I did too and every other Christmas day.

Omemu Esther
Nigeria

ON CHRISTMAS

It is 11:55 pm, Twenty-Fourth December, the streets are empty.

Light from festive ornaments obscure the silent night.

He can hear the echoes of celebrants;

their joys heavy the wind.

It is cold and his body is bare,

so he leans on the walls of the bridge

Dying to fetch a final embrace from stiff clay.

His cardboard bed is being chased by thick breeze

But he is too weak to join in such jamboree.

It is 12:00 am, Twenty-Fifth December.

His body is slowly sinking free of a fight.

His lips are blue like the sapphire sky,

Bent with a sour smile.

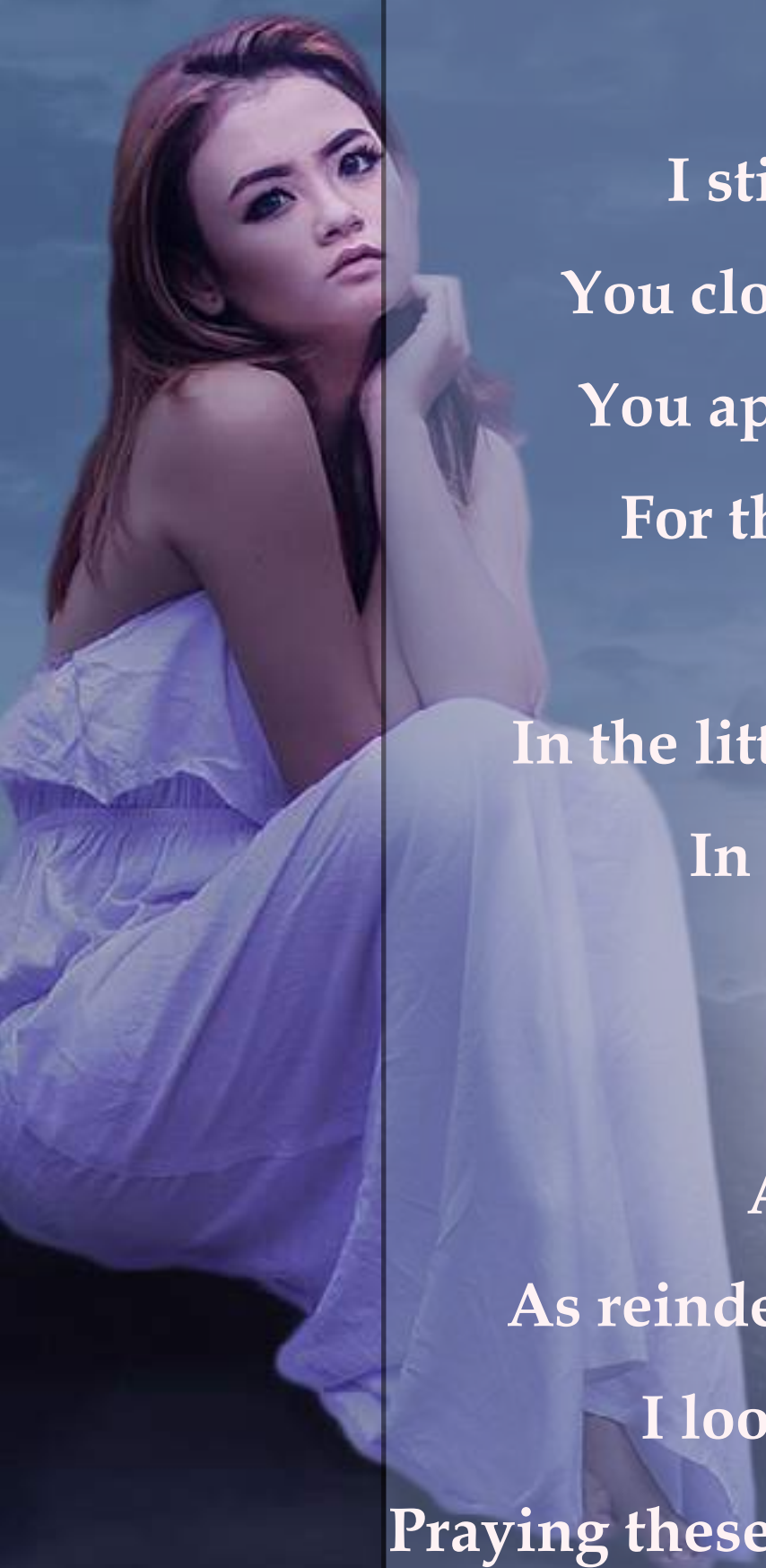
It took him five minutes to die

A merry painful death.

Ajoke Oyindamola Bodunde,

London

A BROKEN CHRISTMAS



I still hear the songs, see the lights,
I still hold the scents, hear your colours,
I still share your hopes, and all your cares,
I still cherish your fetish, and miss your hairs,
You close besides me, your head on my shoulders
You appear in my faintest, haunting and turning,
For there's so many things, but you I'm missing
Missing you, missing you, I ache,
In the little space within my heart, the perfect place
In the crannies of empty that were my solace,
But when thoughts are filled with love
I am left thirsty, longing, hungry for you,
And turmoil within is softened from above
As reindeers, snow, fail to erase the pains, the tears,
I look back at Christmas past, and happy times
Praying these memories don't grow edges, into daggers,
For a special time like this is not a time to grieve

Christopher Rosana & Wilfrida Achieng'

Kenya

Si(gh)lent Night

The nigh night navigates through the clad cloud,
And she teases the sky to cry aloud.
The twinkling tears make a resounding sound;
As they jointly find their ways to the ground.

...
The voices of choirs of angels 're heard
As though the rapt rapture has just occurred.
Silent night, holy night...they gaily sing
As they humbly welcome the greatest King.

...
Then, a hand moves back and forth on the knob,
And the being stands as though he's come to rob.
My dead voice silently screams 'oh! My God',
As he forcefully inserts his raw rod.

...
My dry holy hole has been drilled again;
Now, my life's basket is full of disdain.
I pray, may my pain beckon at the ray,
To darken the ape that made me a prey.

...
I silently sigh, and gaze at the night
Till her garment transforms to broad daylight.
Will my defiled body bear this plain pain?
Ah! Yet, another Christmas without gain.

©Akinrinade Funminiyi Isaac
(Esv_Keks)
Nigeria

Black Christmas

Tis the end of another year

Smell of festivities roamed the air

All in shades of green and red, dancing in pair

Enticing, enchanting, beautiful the fair

A reminisce of what was, a topic of despair

Laughter, romance in my face I couldn't bear

In that hour, regret took a seat in my hearts' lair

Having attended a reminder of that which made both eyes of mine tear

In that moment, emotions surfaced, hate and fear

Just then the genesis of my hurt and his new half did appear

Oh no! Not another wound to heal, not another need for repair

.....I thought I was strong, how could I be wrong.....

Amidst the loud echoes of sing along melodies, whispers remained all I could hear

Deep breaths, fastened pulse, the night felt long, my life can't recover from its smear

Drowned in thoughts, walking out, screeches, screams, bright light, black out.....

Otaru Mercy

Nigeria

Christmas Blues

Tonight, Scrooge's ghost of Christmas past
haunts my consciousness.

I sleep on the leeward side of happiness
with the season's poison foaming out
in my mouth.

The radio drones out a reminiscent dirge.
It's another Christmas without you.

Tuned wind chimes create a funeral
procession in my heart.

I watch the world celebrate my distress
with Christmas trees decorated with
tinsel and lace.

I dodge the blinding neon lights in the city.

The Christmas carols sound like funeral hymns.

Missing you feels like swerving into Kampala traffic.

I'd rather sleep in the middle of the road than
fondle memories of last Christmas's pain.

Carolyne Miriam Acen

Uganda

Christ's birth: The Hope for Humanity

It's another time once again to mark His birthday
An unforgettable day for all to appreciate not only to celebrate
Apart from the revellings, jubilees and all the merriments
The mistletoes, Santa, fireworks and the decorative ornaments
It's still a day that resonates one man's offering of hopefulness
Where would you and I had been if not for His benevolence
We would have been doomed for inescapable despondence
His journey was envisioned to be full of untold sufferings
Yet He still decided to embrace the path of the hellish treachery
The heathens and the atheists said it was a myth just to distort the story
The blasphemers has sworn to derisively cheapen His glory
We all remain indifferently aloof to the significance of His coming
Our sheer arrogance has driven us to the point of ingratitude
Instead of us to be in the state of sober reflective mood
We go about like the Pharisees disdaining His noble mission
The time has come for us all to be weaved into His vision
This is the moment for Christmas to be marked in reverentiality
Because the birth of Christ is the only hope for humanity

Christopher O. Kingsley

Nigeria

A woman in a white dress is walking away from the viewer through a doorway. The doorway is framed by dark wood and has a rough, torn edge. Through the doorway, a woman in a white dress with a dark sash is standing in a lush, green forest. The forest has a path of stone steps leading up a hill. The scene is lit with soft, golden light, suggesting a magical or dreamlike atmosphere. To the right of the doorway, a large, open book is visible, with text and an illustration on its pages. The floor is made of dark wooden planks.

Heroes left us names.
Legends left us books.

Elias Mutani

*Multiple winner of
Burt Award for African Literature,
Tanzania*

Essays

Mourning After Dark

The very day my best friend got married, I got divorced.

The time difference between these two events was exactly ten hours. As her best friend, I was bound to be part of the bridal team. We planned for it over and over and settled on the month of December, one week before Christmas. It was convenient, she was on leave and the festive mood was a thrill.

On the wedding day, at the church in the morning, my best friend got married. In the night, at the bar where the evening party was held, I got divorced.

Everyone at my table was drinking and making merry. The music was too loud to allow a sensible conversation, so I sat there in silence, staring at the white light flickering at a distance, pausing once in a while to check on my phone for messages and the time.

My husband had not arrived for the party as we had agreed. Every one of my friends was with their partner except me. To make things harder for me, it was raining but for them, it was the perfect moment for romance.

If you are alone when you are with yourself, you are in bad company.

I had never been alone with myself my entire life. I was addicted to this man. I couldn't enjoy myself without him around. He was me and I was him. Unlike my best friend, we had become one without a marriage certificate. No crowd was present in our union except God and our own abandoned loneliness, for us

we became one the day we had sex.

For the first time in my entire life, amid a crowd, I was truly utterly alone. I and that flickering light to witness it.

Happiness, as a package, to me was incomplete without him. I didn't have life besides him. We have been made to believe and understand our addictions to drug, food or stuff but never our addictions to other human beings.

As the hours dwindled, my heart sank deeper into sadness. I had been super excited during the day for my friend but this evening, I was sad for me. I had shed tears of joy in the morning, when evening came; I was shedding tears of sadness for me. The unpredictability of life at that very moment disgusted me; I was drained for having to bear both emotions. I finally understood our obsession with permanence and why we live as if death were an illusion and not a reality. It's exhausting not to know.

Three hours later, he arrived. He was soaked with rain water and I with tears. He stood at the doorway. We stared at each other for a while; we didn't need vocabulary to know that we were poisoning each other. He walked towards me slowly and got to our table. He whispered "am sorry" as I stood up to greet him. I hugged him and in my ears he whispered, "am sorry am late, I was with her. I can't keep doing this to you anymore, I want a divorce."

To say my heart broke is an understatement but something was different, he had finally found the courage to tell me that and I had finally found the courage to let go. I couldn't pretend anymore, I hit rock bottom that night, without fear.

I walked towards the bar and ordered a whole bottle of vodka. I drowned all my sorrows as he sat there in silence and watched me.

When I woke up the next morning, it was the first time in my adult life that I didn't know how I ended up in my bed. He had cared for me one last time, the last time I would ever let someone be my happiness.

When Christmas arrived I was nursing my heart. I was in rehab in my own house, dealing with the symptoms of the withdrawal of my drug, my husband.

I felt grief, I felt sadness, and I felt anger. The Withdrawal symptoms. I didn't

tell my friends about it, there are moments of redemption in life that only you can do and this one was solely for me for I knew already what they would say, “we are sorry”. I was ready to handle it on my own, to fix my own mess which summed up as pain on my being. I couldn’t function normally again. My heart was a mess and so was my house, for as it was within inner, so it was with the without. For the first time, I didn’t care about Christmas.

When my daughter arrived, she found me lying on the carpet in my sitting room. She knew what had happened. She lay on the floor with me and looked directly into my eyes.

“Mum,” she called out as tears rolled into my eyes.

She lifted her hand and massaged my back slowly. I didn’t say anything but sniff.

“Am here mum, take all the time you need,” she responded as she stood up. She understood what it meant to hold space for another human to grieve and that it was ok to feel your own emotions with-out being judged.

In two hours that I laid there, she managed to fix the house and cook me my favorite meal. She put on my favorite music.

“Shower,” she said when she come to the sitting room.

I didn’t resist her. I followed

I took a shower and laid back on the couch as my daughter fed me. I had children to honor life, but this moment, my daughter lived just for me. She told me stories of Christmas and how it had become syn-onymous with love and renewal. In my silence, it hit me that my brokenness was the start of my re-newal and that was the message she was trying to pass to me.

Healing starts with being wounded. There is no use for healing without a wound. As Christ is born so should we by letting all that happened through the year be in the past. Christmas is for renewal.

Esther Wangui

Kenya

WHERE'S THE MASS FOR CHRIST?



For the fools, first of April all the way back from 21st March used to be the big deal that December 25th to 1st January is. It is called Christmas and no matter how new you are in Jerusalem everyone knows that this is the day for remembrance of Christ's birth. The tenet of God-made-man-to die-for-man is the anchor of Christianity, this tenet often makes for a good discussion and will inform my diatribe against consumerism.

This billion-dollar big deal may not pass for a Biblically sanctioned holiday. Rather it is a sanctioned by-product of edicts which some Christian sects dissociate from: stemming from a possibility of interreligious interactions. Delving into the history of Christmas gets as interesting as any perusal through history can be, as well as a futile attempt to understand why human beings are as complicated as they are.

This billion-dollar big deal is a National holiday in most Christian or open societies. Even funnier, cosmopolitan free-worship societies will see members of the opposite religion partake in some celebratory ambience. In Kenya, one will see Indian Buddhists visit children's homes like the fictional Santa Claus while Muslims will be guests to the buffet tables of

their Christian neighbours. Parks, malls, hotels and the like will be thronged with a diverse populace as most businesses cash in on the festivities.

The billion-dollar big deal is so profitable that societies which would ordinarily restrict Christian worship -think Dubai and China- have a Christmas ambience in December. Give us the Christmas, keep your Christ- it would appear businesses would say. Yet from Dickens's "The Ghost of Christmas", Christmas past may seem to many, a case of having had too little to celebrate with yet much to celebrate. Every adult I know may profess that their childhood Christmas seemed more festive where there was less to spend. Family was more than enough.

The reality of Christmas present in the urban Kenyan society is commercially stuffed with black Fridays and the foreboding frugality of January. Imagine transporting a pine tree over a two thousand kilometre distance, from frosty Limuru to sweltering Kisumu for a week's use! In Africa, the economies of scale are not that big to warrant this as a popular business venture. Safe to say, most will share the communal city or church trees. Interestingly though, the ghost of Christmas future will have the current generation of children look back and remark," Those were the best of times."

Is it too preposterous to imagine that this billion-dollar big deal may be stretched too thin? The Christmas cow, supposing it was from the Biblical stable where Jesus was born, should be dead or milked dry at the very least. Strangely though, the corporates are still metaphorically selling the proverbial cow after the milk. Do not let that fool you into believing that this commercial jingling of bells and riding of reindeers will end. Christmas carols and albums will be sung and redone. Christmas stories will outspin the true humility of the birth of a saviour who is vehemently deliberated as a prophet or mystic at worst. If recent emergence of alternative lifestyles, enlightenment and freedom of expression (at the expense of traditional religious foundations of society) are anything to go by, retirement looms. It is not too insane to imagine a retirement package for Old Saint Nick, his

elves and reindeers as soon as corporates jump on to the next moneymaker holiday. As I see it, if the American founding fathers are mandated not to impose their trust in God on non-believers, then that same currency on which the very trust was embedded might lose its Christmas allure.

This billion-dollar big deal will slowly cease centering on Christ and His Mass. As with other religions that come across the sea to Africans, Christianity might follow the aforementioned trend of Western countries. The melting icecaps spell impending doom for Santa Claus and with the emerging African Renaissance; perhaps Santa can relocate here for a Christmas cart driven by donkeys. We might even make it easier for him to work: no sneaking down chimneys. I am very sure Africa can pull off the genuine Nativity Scene in every homestead.

No doubt that the appetite for Western culture has fuelled the demand for imported consumables from these countries; a job for Father Christmas. Our signature Christmas dishes will remain to be of meat varieties for our family get-togethers. If Limuru and Nyahururu are anything to go by, some might even get regular snow with this global warming package. Perhaps the equatorial countries will be the only ones left with an enviable warm Christmas.

This billion-dollar big deal begs the question: If we do not spend, have we failed to celebrate? Recession and depressions prompt the need to shift focus beyond twelve spendthrift days of gifting and indulging. In Kenya, we say January is equal to two Februaries. January is for weaning off hangovers, grappling with a surge in temperature and financial needs like school fees for the new school year. We have until Easter to get back on our feet and by that, I mean a holiday to indulge in.

The world needs Christmas in its full meaning. There are extremes: privilege and poverty, survival and sumptuousness, peace and persecution. It

is in this globe of atrocities by man, beast and nature alike, that we should embrace the humility of privilege reaching out to poverty. My heart is in the right place, as frugal as I can get, when I reveal that the joy of sharing in Christmas beats the joy of self-serving interests all year. Sharing time, company and gifts from what we have helps fill that vacuum of love that consumerism capitalises on. I welcome a buffet invitation from the richest of people and offer or even expect one from the poorest within my scope.

Sharing has been replaced by giving which translates to buying. We all have a list of people who want but very few who give. Then there are those who give to receive and unfortunately stop giving when none gives back. These lists suffer bias when it comes to monetary allocation of gifts and the subsequent devaluation of time and other intangible gifts. When people save all year to afford a bus ride back home or work all year to afford a few off-days with the family, I can sanction this expenditure as people are availing themselves. Sacrifice and reflection on the gifts from Christ, yes Christ the reason for the season, is paramount. That is why there is a mass where we meet Christ on His terms then we can go give and celebrate what we have received from the source.

Therefore, make sense of your Christmas. Those who have done so will need a sweet memory to anticipate the next one. They will celebrate it daily or more often, as those who embrace Christ will testify. I still welcome the diversity of religious affiliates engaging in the celebration. This is a world rocked by so many divisions such that when tolerance becomes peaceful coexistence, I am not one to argue. Otherwise, we have Boxing Day and we can celebrate the billion-dollar big deal that it should be and leave the Mass for Christ on its right day.

EDITH ADHIAMBO OSIRO

Kenya



TALKING L.O.V.E

With
SAKA DBOSZ JUNIOR

EPISODE 9: LOVE: THIS CHRISTMAS

Yippee! Dear me, December loading and Christmas is in the air once again. The holidays, visits, friends, carefree hours and endless fun readily come to mind but what about why we celebrate Christmas in the first place? So many of us either do not know that Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ; an embodiment of love and forgiveness or do not care.

It has been written that forgiveness is the first realm of love meaning that you cannot claim to love without forgiveness, the crux that love is about. We may encounter problems on the walk of life and have to deal with it. This is saying that in life, we are wronged and we must learn to forgive. Vengeance, we were told; belongs to God and to love we must forgive.

In love we must also learn to give. The Bible tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave ..." This is saying that we must give pardon, money, time and strength to appease God first. Afterwards we duplicate the same to our fellow human beings. Again, we must give without expecting anything in return. The beauty of it all is we actually give a little with love and get much in return.

Somebody once said "Love is not all about just

forgiving, but to forgive and forget." Therefore, let us learn to forgive and forget just like God does. God's perfect love is that we forgive and forget. As the Bible says, "Give and it shall be given unto you."

If we can love like God does, we will give and get in return. On the other hand; we will forgive and forget whatever offence against us. We may even manage our neighbours better and make a better world.

The Bible says, "God is love (1 John 4:8)" and again, "the love of God has been planted in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5)". However, we have approached love with our head and flesh instead of our hearts. The point is the love of God is in our hearts and we have been given the grace to spread that love.

Actually, there is nothing I have said here that you have not heard a thousand times over and even better said. However, my point is this Christmas do not just make merry. You must make a difference by forgiving, giving, and pulling down those walls and thus create a better society. Collectively, we must make a better world where we all shall all live in peace and harmony. db.

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December 2017
EDITION



Emeka Nobis

Nigerian Writer and Thought Leader

As a Mechanical Engineer, Emeka Nobis spent ten years working for a multinational oil servicing company, until he resigned to exert his intellectual energy on where he truly belongs which is consulting, coaching and training interventions through writing. He has authored several books, among which are 'So You Call Yourself a Writer?' 'Abandon the Dots' and 'Stiff Nipples' (a poetry collection) Recently, he recorded huge sales of his electronic books which amounted to over one million naira. Also, he is currently working with one of the electoral candidates as a propagandist for the candidate's campaigns. He blogs regularly at www.emekanobis.com and has a thriving social media followership.

Find out more about him in his exclusive interview with Writers Space Africa

A portrait of Emeka Nobis, a Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is sitting and looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. His hands are clasped in his lap.

EMEKA NOBIS

Emeka Nobis, you are a writer and a thought leader. Tell us how the two relate.

A writer is a weaver of words. He turns thoughts into words and nails them on white sheets or virtual plains. A thought leader is an expert in an industry or space. He's unique with his approach to issues of life and he communicates those so as to lead as many people to review ways of doing things. He does that via the instrumentality of words.

Had you been writing before you resigned from your job?

Yes, I've been writing for years. I started writing as early as seven or so. I decided to go pro in 2010. I resigned from my job on February 18th, 2016.

How did you manage to resign from a multinational oil servicing company to settle for your present career?

I put it in my plan. I had an exit strategy plan. First, I dealt with emotions, especially fear. I was scared about survival, leaving a secure environment where salaries are paid regularly without delay, to a life where I cannot control with accuracy when money would get into my pockets. I had to deal with that for six months through prayer, therapy, expanded mastermind network and confidence in the close people who truly appreciate my efforts and journey.

Secondly, I worked so hard on my visibility. I knew that perception would play a role in the success of my new path, so I began to grow my platform by myself online, showing up to write consistently so that I would be bestowed with celebrity status by those who loved my works. I kept doing so and it worked.

Finally, I had to work at getting consistent clients that would ensure that I got paid regularly every month. That would ensure inflows monthly. Also, I began developing my product suite to make sure I had products I was selling to the audience that I serve to make sure income was assured.

Did you actually envisage a brighter future outside of the oil firm prior to your resignation?

Absolutely. I had read books, followed masterminds, and engaged intelligently with people on the path who exposed me to the beauties and the possibilities of achievement.

Did you at any point in time feel like throwing in the towel?

I still do. It's the constant nag of the freelancer till at some point when the enterprise is on a coast. Sometimes, all the pressure that comes to me - home pressure, bills, creation, clients and expectations - make me want to shout, "Who sent me oooo?" But then I have realised it's part of the game. Just like how I contracted chickenpox and the doctor told me that it's a viral infection that will run its course, I've learnt to ride through the waves.

You founded the "Pen and ink masters." group on Facebook for Writers that has survived and is bubbling up till date. How do you keep it going?

Writing is my core. It makes me feel alive. The group and the members in there give me reasons to show up daily to keep creating because I know I'm serving them with all I have. We are growing daily. I'm yet to do half of all I have planned out for the group, but I'm taking it gradually. It all boils down to waking daily and sharing valuable content with the participants in the group. As long as they're getting results, I will keep being a blessing to them.

How were you able to build the number of your followers to over 6000+ on social media?

It was purely by showing up daily and sharing awesome value. The more I shared value consistently; value that made sense and connected with hearts, the more they shared and more followers!

Earlier this year, you released a poetry collection titled "Stiff Nipples" What was the inspiration behind it?

I used to hate poetry because of the way my teachers taught it back in the days. In retrospect, I think it's because they made poetry to always sound Elizabethan and restrictive. I could not connect with the descriptions and elements that were always foreign. I found it hard to imagine what snow and snowman and winter were like. The disconnection made me depressive. Sadly, I gave up!

When I went pro, I came across a man called Tomide Olukuade whose writing prowess was magical. I followed him on Twitter at the time he was writing what he called 'Virginal Letters'. I kept in touch till we met. When I asked him how he wrote so captivatingly, he simply replied, "Read more of poetry. It helps your imagination. You're able to capture lots and condense them. It's an art."

Poetry caught on me. I began to study the works of Dami Ajayi, J P Clark, Samson Iruesi Kukogho and Poet Tolu. Discovered that I could be expressive and not restrictive as my teachers made it.

Among the books you've written so far, which is your most remarkable?

Oh well, I wouldn't want to classify my books in that category. I love all my works!

How do you come about your titling? Your books always bear jaw-dropping titles that compel buyers.

My desire is always to make people pause and catch their breath. I have a template, though. Titles on the front cover of your book matter a lot. Your titles can be short. Examples are Blink by Malcolm Gladwell, Outlier by Malcolm Gladwell, Think Big by Ben Carson, Brilliant by Adeoye Adekoya, and Mr Fantastic by Fela Durotoye. Titles can be shocking. Examples are 'From College Drop-out to Corporate Sell-out' by Steve Harris, 'How Stupidity Saved My Life' by Okechukwu Ofili, 'Engaged To A Job I Hate' by Bankole Williams, 'Free From Corporate Slavery' by Jimi Tewe.

A title can be a story or metaphor. Example is Eat That Frog by Brian Tracy, Skirts In The Boardroom by Marshawn Evans. A title can be a common saying with a twist. Example is Think And Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill and Grim White Grim by Leke Alder. Titles can also be made up. Examples are Chicken Soup for the Soul by Jack Canfield, The Dummies Guide Series, and Rich Dad Poor Dad by Robert Kiyosaki. It's along these lines that I create titles for my works.

Recently, you made millions from your ebook sales. How were you able to accomplish such a feat?

I had a lot of strategies that I am currently teaching folks who are keen. Between 2011 and 2017, I didn't write another book. I dug in to learn and learn and then rose in 2017 to put all my strategies to work, and I hit my goal. All of them are packaged in a course I have titled 'Book Marketing Mastery Course' It's a 15-day experience that embodies all I have learnt and practiced so that the participant can embrace, practice, and get results.

Your writing earned you a contract as a propagandist for a political campaign. Give us more insight.

I've always felt that politics can be played by different kinds of rules away from the way it is done in Nigeria. Unknown to me, the leader had been following my thoughts and the way I write so succinctly and descriptively over a period of six months. He reached out to me to help in portrayal of his vision in ways that represent his values and his desires. I accepted. We are looking forward to 2019 and being able to shape a few narratives and turn the current tide of things in the political space.

You are a coach and consultant as well. Each time you hear the positive testimonies of your clients, how do you feel?

Ecstatic. Fulfilled. Powerful. Grateful. A truckload of adjectives can't prop-

erly define how I feel and I mean it.

How do you balance family and work and still achieve much?

I have a very supportive wife. When I say supportive, I think that's an understatement. She's extremely supportive. She doesn't nag. She understands my desire to serve humanity. Sometimes, I feel like I don't even deserve her. She looks after the home front when I leave and travel. She takes care of our kids the way a mum ought to. When I am home, I stay with them and catch up. Moreover, I work from home most of the time, so I am around them. I watch Telemundo with my wife daily and it's bonding for both of us. I'm very passionate about my work, so I can be with her and still be typing away on my laptop, and she perfectly understands the passion to create. In all, I manage the hours the day offers me and I keep pushing ahead.

What's goals have you set for yourself for the future?

I try not to set over arching goals. This year I set out to write 12 books - a book every month. By the way things are, I'll be short by 3 books because of issues with work, health and some financial investments that I made. Next year, my goal will be to increase my foreign reach, launch my books on Amazon and Okadabooks, publish 3 printed works, launch 3 live training courses and create 5 more online products. I will revamp my site and host all my resources so that I can push more viciously. As for long term, I have them in my heart, but keeping it under wraps.

Share with us a hint on how to remain consistent in writing.

Consistency? Just show up. Write a word. Two words. Three words. Twenty. Two hundred. Write. Write more. Write more and more. That's my simple recipe to strengthening the muscles.

An open book with a green background and sparkling light effects. The book is open, showing the pages, and the background is a vibrant green with many small, bright, star-like sparkles scattered throughout. The text "Short Stories" is written in a white, serif font across the center of the book's pages.

Short Stories



THE SECOND JUDGMENT

10:43PM: Leila sat in the bus to Ongata Rongai staring at the crack on the window that appeared to have been cleverly covered by some kind of decoration making a spider web. “Some artwork,” she thought. She couldn’t go back to her house so she was to spend the night at a friend’s house. The only friend who wasn’t judging her at the time although she wasn’t convinced of her innocence either.

But as much as she tried to think over the events of the day, the blaring reggae music from the bus’s speakers silenced her thoughts. When busses look like discos, it becomes hard to hear your-self think. The sound was hitting from all directions, neon lights dancing and skimpily dressed girls on the screens in the bus doing things mightier than dancing.

Just then the bus hit three small continuous bumps and somehow the music stopped. Thoughts flooded Leila’s mind and she wished the music had not stopped so abruptly. The music acted so well as a barrier from the things she never wanted to think about. But the thought of Isaac brightened her face. If he had a conscious then the lie he told in court today might haunt him for a long time. The lie that set her free. The brightness was actually as a result of the thought of how someone could lie so well. In the face of the judgmental social media users, she was the adulterous wife who killed her husband for wealth. “What about his numerous affairs?” she wondered. “Why couldn’t anyone come up with a theory that was close to the truth?” All theories made Mathew the victim. “Maybe one day I will get a chance to set things straight,” she convinced herself. She would rather live with that lie for now than go to prison for the rest of her life for defending herself. Isaac was an angel, a dark angel. He took the role of her non-existent lover just to get her off the hook. Although he was also convinced that she murdered her husband, he did it for the money. She convinced herself that he lied for a better cause. Everybody was pointing a finger at her and she had to get out of it, she also had to point a finger at herself. Take a lesser crime for a bigger one. “Well, in the eyes of the Lord there is no lesser crime.” The prosecutor used that line. He was actually right. Sad he couldn’t prove it.

Then she saw his face. The beseeching and bleeding eyes. She blamed herself for not helping him. “How did I find myself here?” She asked herself loud enough for the passenger next to her to hear. “Hapana Madam. Hatujafika Bomas!” (No Madam. We haven’t reached Bomas) her neighbour responded. She did not want to engage him so she just thanked him. Well, she actually thanked him for not paying attention. Those eyes were back. The haunting eyes of Mathew. “If only he had just walked away and disappeared without trying to take a swipe at me with his blades,” she thought.

“If only he had loved me enough, but now he’s dead.” She didn’t have to but the decision was taken right from her by the blind moment of rage. Mathew’s rage. For eight years she was loyal, caring, supportive and submissive. For eight years she agreed to his every decision without question. For eight years she served him. For what? Nothing! She was angry again.

There was a moment in Leila’s life when all she ever thought of was making a happy home. Not just for her and Mathew, but for their children. She thought about the word for a moment, “chil-dren”. Maybe she shouldn’t have pursued that dream so aggressively. Maybe she wouldn’t have pushed Mathew away to the arms of vultures. Sitting in the bus, all she could think of was if she would make it through the week.

The music in the bus was back at its fullest. “Why do they do that?” Just then they took the bend to Bomas, leaving Lang’ata Road. “Do they ever change that tree?” She asked herself when she saw the well decorated Christmas tree right in front of Galleria Mall. It was exactly how it was eight years ago when she met Mathew trying to free his scarf caught in the Christmas spirit of the tree while holding a nicely wrapped box. She smiled a dry grin at the thought of helping him with the scarf and how he reacted. She then realized it was not a good idea going to this specific friend. Everything along that road and even her friend’s place would remind her of Mathew. Christmas always brought extremes of both worlds to her. “I’m so done with this year’s Christmas.” She thought even though Christmas was still three days away. It brought disgrace to her or so she believed.

A lady got into the bus at the Bomas Bus Terminal. Leila thought the lady recognized her from the way she was stealing glances at her. The lady then shifted her concentration on her big phone. “She’s probably tweeting about seeing me,” Leila thought. She had been trending for a while anyway, let her tweet away. Everybody had a version of the story. She couldn’t believe how imaginative people could be on social media. She might have escaped the conviction but the judgments made online since the tragic accident disturbed her to the core. “Do they even care that I’m hurting too?” she would ask herself every time she heard someone cork up another theory. Some even alleged she had planned it for a whole year. “How do you plan pulling a glass table between yourself and your aggressor a year in advance?” That’s all she ever did when her life was in danger. The rest was up to Mathew. Leila repeatedly told herself that she never did anything but not even her family believed her. She couldn’t prove that she did not do more than pull the table but she sure could prove that she wasn’t at home on the fateful day. Thanks to Isaac.

It was drizzling as they approached Ongata Rongai. She decided to get off at a distance so she could walk and clear her mind. She informed the conductor of her stop as she walked across the aisle to the front. At night these busses would drop you anywhere you wanted. In fact they never used the designated stations. So the bus came to a stop right in front of Masaai Mall. “It had to be a mall,” she thought. She got off as fast as the conductor wanted her to and made to cross the road.

She saw it coming but it was too late. She landed on the Christmas tree in front of the mall and only heard screams and voices around her. She saw Mathew’s face. This time he was smiling.

“We meet again by the Christmas tree Matt,” she whispered as she took her last breath.

BENARD ALOO
Kenya

DEATH-STAINED CHRISTMAS

Standing by her bedside table, she turned to look at the clock. It was 6:03am Christmas morning. She could feel it coming, the panic attack. Her heart was pounding out of her chest. Her hands were shaking like those of a malaria patient. Beads of sweat were forming on her brow. She could feel the light-headedness start to take over. She sighed, took a seat, and closed her eyes for a few seconds to try and steady her heartbeat. Her mind travelled back to the day when it all began.

It all started on the night of Christmas Eve six years ago when she was seventeen. The night had taken a turn she did not anticipate. It was supposed to be a good night, she was supposed to have been reunited with her elder brother Faraja whom she hadn't seen in months. He was coming home for Christmas. He had promised. He had called. He had said that he was on his way. But alas! In a cruel twist of fate, the rug had been pulled from right under her feet.

She remembered coming home from school to find a meal fit for a king on the table. Her parents had gone above and beyond to prepare for Faraja's homecoming. There was pilau, chapatis, nya-ma choma, roast potatoes, roast chicken, an assortment of vegetables, and maziwa mala; all Faraja's favourites. There were party signs all over the living room. She remembered how elated they all were. They had last seen Faraja last Christmas season when he had spent Christmas with them before heading back to university where he was studying to be a paediatrician. Since the university was so far away and his study schedule was very hectic, he could only afford to see them once a year and they all agreed that Christmas would be the time when they all got together. They had waited with big smiles on their faces and when the doorbell finally rang they all clamoured to the door, their hands wide open to give him a huge hug. But it wasn't him. Instead at the door were two policemen. "We're sorry to come bearing bad news especially since it is Christmas season, there is no easy way to say this, but Faraja is dead. He was involved in a hit-and-run accident. A drunk driver run over him. He was hit while pushing away a little girl from the path of the car. He saved her life. He was a very brave boy." The officers said.

The words themselves were soul-shattering. She could feel her world coming to an end. It was like someone was ripping her heart out of her chest. Her chest was constricting, she couldn't breathe. Her brain fogged up. She vomited onto the floor before letting out a loud wail and collapsing from the weight of the grief.

They had buried him a week later and life had never been the same since. The following year saw her fail out of high school and hence lose a scholarship to a prestigious university and her chance to go to university. Her parents' marriage broke apart because her father sought solace in the bottle and became hostile to everyone. Christmas had forever become a tainted holiday to the family.

Now, six years later, she was still grappling with Faraja's death. And although she had done better. She had redone her high school final exam, she had gotten into university where she was studying to become a paediatrician to fulfil Faraja's dream. And she had gotten a place of her own in the city, it was always during Christmas that it was the hardest. Her family may have stopped celebrating Christmas but the rest of the world hadn't. The Christmas songs, the Christmas lights, the Christmas cookies; even the Christmas shopping offers brought her to her knees, overcome with emotion, every single year. The Christmas season remained to be the saddest of her life and this year was no different. To her, Christmas would forever be a reminder of what she lost: a brother, a guide, a friend. She sighed, shook her head and walked to the bathroom. She took a lengthy cold shower then headed back to bed. She put a pair of headphones over her ears, plugged them into her laptop and blasted out Stephen Foster's Beautiful Dreamer to drown out the celebration that was happening all around her.

Yvonne Wairimu Wabai
Kenya



Baby Christmas

The baby decided to come on the 25th of December. The date marked by who knows who to celebrate the birth of Christ. They said Jesus would come as a thief and this baby was no different. It did not even consider the fact that we were in the middle of prayer thanking the heavens profusely for bringing the family together once again. My grandmother had been dragging on with her monologue with God for five minutes and we were beginning to fidget.

You try concentrating to the prayer of an eighty year old woman about how blessed she is to have such successful children while the aroma of pilau and nyama choma wafts in the air. It is a battle of the brain and the stomach and no doubt the latter is stronger. So my hand holding Uncle Sam's was already clammy with sweat and a little numb, my neck tired from bowing and after a few peeks at the buffet in front of me my eyes refused to remain closed.

I decided to look around at the family I call mine. The women, my ubiquitous aunties who always commented on how big I was getting. It always seemed to bother them that I ate just a little bit more than my other cousins and I was a little on the heavier side. Well, their comments were received with eye rolls and pretentious smiles.

My uncles, these were people from my family I actually liked. We the cousins, the teenagers liked our uncles. One, they were not stingy especially with the help of a little alcohol, which always seemed to loosen their tongues as well as their wallets. Two, they were never too keen on knowing the grades we scored, except uncle Kim the motivational speaker who always had a cliché quote about success at the tip of his tongue.

My eyes landed on my grandmother with her eyes closed, aunt Bess the teacher and my mother her favourite on her side. She had a solemn look on her face as she went on with her prayer and we could tell she was grateful. Mother and aunt Bess were

nodding their heads vigorously and I could hear Martha our Christ loving neighbour mattering words like hallelujah, yes Jesus, and a prolonged amen under her breathe.

My eyes finally landed on the x-generation. The generation whose thumbs were always busy clicking. Before grandpa quit earth he had a passionate hate for phones and he could not stand any form of technology. He had to be convinced to purchase a phone and finally bought one af-ter grandma's constant reminder that it could be used to wire money. I looked at the teenage girls with layers of makeup and the silent game of who wore it best among us. The boys with their rugged jeans and Jordan shoes, the girls in their crop tops and denim anything. By now every one's pockets was a series of buzzes as our phones had never gone unattended to for this long unless one was asleep.

I was holding Bella's hand, Bella who was studying medicine. The only doctor in the family amidst too many teachers and lawyers. She was always confident and never squirmed while speaking in public unlike me who found it the perfect time to pick my nails. She had been hold-ing my hand real tight and I was beginning to think she planned on hurting me.

She started squirming. Then a sniff here and a grumble there. My grandmother was on her climax as she was now praying about good health and the food in front of us and that's when Bella screamed. She was already writhing on the beautiful grass in my grandmother's backyard. She was holding her stomach which had been barricaded in a massive trench coat. She was one to show off her flat stomach so it was obvious she was hiding something and that something, or ra-ther someone was ea-ger to come out.

Her mother was beside herself with shock. Martha had already screamed to anyone within ear-shot that grandma was going to be a great grandma. Imagine finding out about your nineteen year old's pregnancy from a self-righteous woman together with fifty other people. Uncle George had already grabbed Bella and was taking her to his probox but aunt May wouldn't have her daughter bring forth a child in a car filled with the smell of cabbages so Bella was hurdled into aunt Bess' Mercedes. I guess the smell of leather and air freshener would be a great thing for the child. The Mercedes drove away followed by Uncle George's probox. My mother went along and so did grandma and some of my aunties went to be eye witnesses, who

would tell this incredible tale to generations to come. We were left to bite our nails with hunger and worry.

After two hours of watching the younger kids eat and trying to trick our stomachs into not grumbling by drinking water, my father told us that he had received a call from my mother. “She said that all was well, the Mercedes had a puncture on the way and there was no time to change the tire so Bella was moved to the probox,” he announced. I must admit that was pretty laughable as we all remembered how aunt May had reacted towards Uncle George. Well we all knew aunt May would never know hunger after swallowing that pride.

The baby decided that it did not want its first sight to be white washed walls and masked faces. It got its wish and instead it saw grandma’s friendly and wrinkled face, and my mother’s frantic with worry. Instead of the smell of antiseptic, it smelled blood, a mixture of different perfumes, and of course the smell of rotting cabbage.

Bella and the baby were now in hospital. The baby was a boy, a healthy one and you can be forgiven to think that he would automatically be named Jesus, but no. Zayn became his name. Yes, he was named after the boy from one direction who chose a different direction. Teenagers!! With this piece of news, phones were put on flight mode and we swarmed the buffet and stuffed our plates with food. The arrival of this baby had stripped layers of what we all seemed to be. Aunt May was not the perfect parent as she always appeared to be. Uncle George, despite not being the richest was the most compassionate. Uncle Kim, to everyone’s relief was nowhere to be seen. No one needed his smart remarks at that moment.

Finally, to my stomach’s greatest relief, we ate. There was an aura of gratitude, one I had never felt before. We were relieved that Bella was fine and not as perfect. As we all ate and cracked jokes about the new baby and what being born on December 25th meant for him, we couldn’t help but think that maybe, just maybe, our family had received its own saviour.

Shiku Njeri

Nigeria



A MANYASI CHRISTMAS

My name is Oketch, which literally means man of hunger. I was born in the year of the locust invasion: the year of the famine or if you like in the year of “chira” meaning bad things. Twelve years later, we were still suffering from its effects and even the continuous manyasi cleansings which we performed year after year at the top of Ramogi hill, and was due in two sunsets had not appeased Nyasaye were ma wuon koth, the rain god. The adults had started grumbling against Jabelo, our diviner whom they said no longer found favour with the spirits. If he failed this time, a new one would be appointed.

We had always conducted manyasi before the initiation ceremonies, but this year, when Jabelo threw his shells and pebbles in the air, they all fell kagingiyore on the ground, which according to him meant we would do the rituals after the stone harvests. The end of the harvests always coincided with the birth of the white man’s god, the one they called Jesus. This is when the spirit men at the mission house who said we had to call them brothers, even though we were not related would teach us how to dramatize the Christmas Story. Our parts were always changed; I had played an angel, a shepherd and even a wise man. It was only Father Wilson; whom we suspected to be the real father of the brothers that would always play King Herod.

My friend Aniela, whose father cooked at the mission house had told us Father Wilson’s wife was called Mother superior and she lived with the brothers’ sisters, who

were called sisters.

When grandmother and I went to collect our weekly ratio of flour from the mission house on the eve of manyasi, Brother Michael had asked me if I could return later that evening to practice since I was going to play Joseph. Grandmother had vehemently told him that my responsibility to the land superseded the stupid role of dramatizing the birth of a god who could not even afford a midwife and was instead born in a cow shed. I did not tell her that it was actually called a manger.

We woke up with the first cock crow that morning. Grandfather smeared us all with ash and cow dung, father already carrying the hen for sacrifice and a goat as present to the gods. I could spot other villagers making their way out of their homesteads. We trekked as a single file up the hill; the diviner leading the way, the rest of us with our ashen faces and cow dung baked feet scrap-ing on the red clay earth until we were all assembled at the top.

Obongo nyakalaga, our big eyed god, whose eyes see everything,

Our big eared god whose ears hear everything,

Our large footed god, whose feet are in all the earth,

Bless your children with rain, oh granter of our requests.

The chanting had started, lying prostrate we invoked the spirits of our ancestors to let us alone so that ruothwa would forgive us and grant us rain, we went on and on, only stopping when we felt the cold trickle of cold chicken blood pouring over us. We then presented our gifts as an offering to the spirits.

Later that evening, watching the sunset with my grandmother, I could see a cloud the size of a man's hand in the sky; I thought of what Father Wilson had always said about Christmas being a time of hope for humanity, a time of God's pure love for man, and a time for miracles. I thought of Jabelos chants, calling to Obongo nyakalaga, whose presence was always with us and dwelt in our bloodstreams, who granted all of our requests because of his love for us.

What if when we bowed down and worshiped and presented our gifts to the Great Spirit at Ramogi Hill was the same as when the wise men worshiped Jesus and gave him gifts? What if the spirit of nyakalaga also dwelt in the Whiteman's bloodstreams? What if it was the white man's god who had instructed Jabelo to conduct manyasi the same time as the Christmas day so that we would all celebrate him?

"Oketch, stop daydreaming and get inside," grandmother interrupted me carrying her stool into the hut.

The cloud had grown big and dark, the entire sky tar black and heavily pregnant. The rains were here.

EDITH KNIGHT ADHIAMBO OCHIENG

Kenya

GRANDPA'S FIRST CHRISTMAS



He'd just spoken to Ifa like he does every morning, with a bottle of alcohol splashed over white sack clothes, he listened as the gods spoke to him. It wasn't clear this time, both in words and in understanding, had the gods gone dumb? They mentioned a journey for children. Aworele had never been more perplexed of the gods of his fathers, the more he sought clarification the more the gods gave him suspense.

Aworele's children left him for the city years ago after the death of their mother, they blamed him for her death as he refused her adequate medical care because of his beliefs, they had accepted the white man's religion and out casted their father. Aworele's time on earth was coming to an end, his bones told him so. Wrinkles layered his face. He needed a family to love as time flew by and time wasn't his friend. His confused thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door, it was the post-man. He had never had a postman deliver a letter to him. "Who knows me to send a letter?" He thought. He became furious at the sight of the letter. "Help me translate this letter," he asked the postman. It read.

Dear Grandpa,

How are you and how is Ifa? I have searched the world for you but mommy refused to tell me where you are, I decided to check her dairies and found this address. I used my savings from the press club in my school to send you this letter. I'll tell you what press club is when we meet. I've been in hospital for two months now, I have leukaemia but mommy says it's not serious and it's going to be fine, I'm sure I look like you with my shaved head, I hear only villagers like you shave your heads.

Grandpa, Uncle Funsho says Ifa is like a god in the North Pole and that's why he always wears white, I don't know if he's lying because Uncle Funsho lies a lot. But the North Pole is where San-ta stays and I want him to bring me gifts this year in the hospital as I'm not at home and will spend Christmas here, it's the central hospital in the city. Maybe you can tell Ifa for me so he can tell Santa my needs. Here are my needs;

- 1. 25 balloons for my hospital room*
- 2. A diary just like the one mommy has*
- 3. A pin to hold my hair once it starts growing back.*

Please don't forget to tell Ifa grandpa.

Mide

Your granddaughter

The letter had Aworele's eyes bubble up with tears, with the explanation of the postman he knew his granddaughter was really sick and needed love. He decided that if Ifa wouldn't bring the joy of Jesus' famous birthday to her then he would, he claimed the status of both Ifa and Santa-Claus and in the early hours of the 25th he set out for the city, he purchased the balloons on his way, inflated them and tied them together. He also bought other gifts in the bus park. He sat at the back of the bus and put his hand outside as he held the balloons high. Aworele was ready to enjoy this moment and make a memory for his granddaughter.

He strolled into the hospital with his gifts and balloons raised high attracting a gaze from every angle in the hospital. He was here for Mide, hoping he made it in time for delivery. He took the direction the nurse's finger showed him and walked into the room where he was met by the surprise stares of his children Bimbo and Funsho. "What are you doing here?" Bimbo rose from where she sat to question her father. Aworele was tongue tied, it wasn't pleasant for him as she asked again, this time raising her voice and waking the sleeping child on the bed. Mide smiled at him, "grandpa is that you," she asked in a low tone. His face melted and he made his way to her bedside whispering Yoruba to her and kissing her forehead, he then presented her with the balloons and gifts. "San-ta and Ifa really came through for me," she said excitedly. It was the first time she had smiled all day. Bimbo and Funsho stared, riled up with emotions as their father had given Mide her first smile on Jesus' birthday. They forgot their resentment and focused on the value which is family.

Oyeniya George
Nigeria

CHRISTMAS AT THE CEMETERY

Sharai had never imagined spending her Christmas like this but staring at the empty kitchen, she realized there was nothing to be done for it. Usually the kitchen would be filled with smells of her mother's cooking at this time of the year. She grabbed her bag off the kitchen counter and headed out. Her father was sleeping off the alcohol he had been consuming since the Christmas holiday started so she wouldn't be missed.

She hailed a kombi at the makeshift bus stop and tried to ignore the happy and festive mood of the other passengers. She lived only a few minutes out of Harare's town centre and soon enough she got off at the rank in town. She crossed the street to the vendor who sold flowers. He knew her by now; she had been buying from him for four months. "Sister, how are you today?" he greeted her. Sharai exchanged pleasantries with him then took her flowers and looked around for a cab. She dashed across the road, making a beeline for the only free cab. A white Honda CRV honked at her several times but she ignored it.

Once safely in the cab she gave the driver the address for Peace Burial Grounds. She did not try to haggle with him about the price she was sure he had just made up on the spot. At the cemetery, she paid the driver and carried her flowers to a simply cut headstone that read; Shamiso Maposa, beloved wife and mother. Sharai frowned at it; those words did nothing to even begin to describe the light that had been her mother. Kneeling, Sharai placed the flowers on the grave. "It's Christmas tomorrow mama. I don't know how to do it without you. Baba has fallen apart. No one will even talk about you and lately it seems all I want to do is talk about you." As she spoke she manoeuvred herself into a cross legged sitting position.

She was still talking when a white Honda CRV drove through the cemetery gates and came to park close to where she sat. A chill went through Sharai as she recognized the car as the one that had honked at her in town. She was on her feet dusting herself off when the driver got out. He looked to be in his mid-twenties, perhaps a few years her senior, tall, well dressed and very good looking. Sharai was pretty sure serial killers couldn't be that handsome. She relaxed a fraction but tensed again as he kept walking towards her though he was looking at the graves. "Are you following me?" she asked as soon as he was within hearing distance. He looked down guiltily. "In town, earlier I was just trying to talk to you," his voice was warm honey. "Why?" Sharai demanded.

"Well, to be honest you're really pretty and I couldn't help myself. I'm usually very well behaved but I was afraid I might never see you again," he defended himself, holding up his hands to add, "But I didn't follow you here. I'm looking for Professor Maposa's grave. I was told to come to this side of the cemetery." Sharai gaped at him and pointed at her mother's grave. "This Professor Shamiso Maposa?" she asked, still pointing. The guy looked at the grave then back at her. "Oh, you must be Sharai. Your mother could never finish a lecture without telling us a story about you," he said, and then noting her confusion he offered his hand. "I'm Alvin Tembo. Your mother taught me literature at the University of Zimbabwe. She restored my faith in the arts, changed my whole life."

Sharai shook his hand. "I was teaching in Tanzania when I heard the news," Alvin said, "I'm so sorry for your loss. Your mom was an inspiration to my class." A light was blooming inside Sharai. She sat back down and indicated for Alvin to sit too. "Can you tell me more, about the stories she told about me?" she asked. He grinned. "Sure, I have graduation photos too; she came to see us all get capped." Sharai smiled her first genuine smile that week; that did sound like something her mother would do. For now she just wanted to talk about her mother, she would deal with Alvin's obvious interest in her later. Losing her mother was a constant pain but talking about her eased it. Alvin was giving her the best Christmas present.

Kimberly Chirodzero
Zimbabwe

DROWNING CHRISTMAS

Jumping out of the bed placed in the middle of the room, the five year old Paul leaped to the ground and landed directly at the switch which had been placed very low to meet his height. He hit the switch with a fist to switch the lights on in his room. "Ouch," he blew his hand. Throwing himself back on the bed, Paul propelled into the air and down onto the bed.

"Paul!" a loud exclamation was heard down the corridor. "You will break your neck doing some Spiderman poses." Paul jumped in the air and landed on the bed repeatedly just like the posters on the walls.

"Can you please stop jumping on the bed?" Paul's mother cried.

"I am.....Spiderman," he shouted. Still jumping.

In her silk-blue long nightdress, long braids falling down her brown-skinned shoulders, Jane walked to Paul's room. Holding the door knob, she pushed the door inside to open. "Hey why is your door locked?" she asked through the gap in the door frame.

"This is my room mum," he answered, "leave me alone."

"If you don't open on the count of ten no Christmas present for you this year." she knocked twice. "Ten, nine....."

"Mummy." Paul pulled the door wide open and ran into his beddings and covered his head.

"Wake up!"

"No!"

"What did I tell you about jumping on the bed? And this early, look at the watch, it is only 5 o'clock in the morning," she said pointing at a little Ben-ten wall clock across the room. "Let go," she groaned pulling the blanket from his head. "Stop pulling it, you go back to sleep and wake up when the sun is out. Okay!?" she added staring down on the black scared forehead. "Look what you did to your face." Being a single mother wasn't as hard as many people had explained it to be. Paul was her joy; she always looked forward to his naughtiness, his questions and excellent performance at school. The only question she still didn't know how to answer was about his father. She didn't know how to explain as she was also still mourning though four years had passed since Paul's father had died in a road accident that claimed six lives.

Three months after their wedding Paul's father was travelling to Lusaka from Ndola on a business trip when he had the accident. Unfortunately on that fateful day he was among six people who lost their lives on the spot. Their son was the only thing he had left of him. Paul was Jane's precious jewel.

Being a holiday and Christmas for that matter Jane decided to clean the house instead of going back to bed. She wanted it to be more beautiful than the previous years which were spent looking after her sick mother.

With the sizzling sound of the hot cooking oil hitting in the kitchen, water running

down the kitchen sink, Jane filled the kitchen with some Christmas spirit as she sang some carols one after the other. Cunningly Paul sneaked out of the house and went to play with his friend behind the Pamodzi Complex which was home to ten families. It was enclosed in a brick wall fence and beyond that was the Chifubu River.

“I hope this one turns out better than the last one I baked a week ago,” She said to herself. Like she had promised, she poured cake ingredients into one bowl and stirred it for a while then she emptied the paste into the baking pan and placed it in the oven. Steadily and slowly she removed the pan full of hot cooking oil from the stove.

She removed her apron and thought of going for a quick shower but there was a loud knock accompanied with a lot of voices, she looked at the clock and thirty minutes had passed after 8 in the morning.

“I wonder who it is?” she thought out loud. Pulling the door open Jane’s eyes landed straight at what looked like Paul’s clothes. The crowd’s sad looks said it all. Before anyone could open their mouths she busted into a loud mourn.

“Mummy why are you crying,” Paul asked as he found his way through the crowd.

In astonishment Jane stood up, holding little Paul’s hand tightly she walked up to the man with a child in his hands; looking directly in his eyes she could see and understand the pain he was going through.

“Doctor Bwalya please help my son,” the man wept, “he just drowned”

WANANGWA MWALE

Zambia



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