

# WWSA



**JUNE  
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Edition**

*Empowering African Writers*

## **FEATURES**

### **ON SECOND STREET**

**Edith Knight**  
*Kenya*

### **THE GHOST IN OUR TOWN**

**Neema Komba**  
*Tanzania*

### **YOU ARE STILL THE LAST PERSON I KISSED**

**Kimberly Chirodzero**  
*Zimbabwe*

### **OLD MAN SUNSHINE**

**Joy James**  
*Nigeria*

### **HEARTBREAKER**

**Maria Nicole**  
*Benin Republic*

### **TETRIS**

**Biniam Getaneh**  
*Ethiopia*

### **FIGHT TO THE END**

**Wanangwa Mwale**  
*Zambia*



# **NSAH MALA**

## **THE WRITER AND HIS HONOURS**

# CONTENT

CREW - 3

EDITORIAL - 4

CON - VERSATION by Isaac Kilibwa, Kenya - 6

BLACKBIRD by Omemu Moyo Esther, Nigeria - 7

LULU, YET AGAIN by Shimbo Pastory, Tanzania - 8

GHOSTS by Gabriel Owino Junior, Kenya - 9

HEARTBREAKER by Maria Nicole Enwonwu Gandaho, Benin Republic - 10

BLACKLIGHT by Andrew Huje, Zimbabwe - 11

OLD MAN SUNSHINE by Joy James, Nigeria - 12

MELON OF THE TOWN BY Gift Samwel Ngamanja, Tanzania - 13

FIGHT TO THE END by Wanangwa Mwale, Zambia - 14

TETRIS BY BINIAM GETANEH - ETHIOPIA - 15

ON SECOND STREET by Edith Knight, Kenya - 18

INTERVIEW WITH - 20

THE ISLE OF MAN TT RACE by Joyce Nawiri, Kenya - 27

WEEDS by Williams Olaide Oladele, Nigeria - 31

THE GHOST IN OUR TOWN by NEEMA KOMBA - TANZANIA - 33

BLUNTNESS IS BRUTAL Column by Gabrielina Gabriel-Abhie - 36

LITERARY NEWS with Nyashadzashe Chikumbu, Zimbabwe - 39

EKI: The PRINCE'S BRIDE by Patience Saduwa, Nigeria - 41

YOU ARE STILL THE LAST PERSON I KISSED by Kimberly Chirodzero, Zimbabwe - 46



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# EDITORIAL

## NO CAMERAS PLEASE

I admire the selfless people who engage in charity work once in a while. You know, visit children homes, homes for the old, the sick and randomly drop a few coins in the begging bowl along the streets. I appreciate the good work from a kind heart. May the heavens double your blessings!

But, here is where we have a problem. Is it so hard to help and not leave the camera at home? Why do I feel the need to help only through the lens? Clicking away, capturing creative moments of my charitable nature. How I visited the homes, donated blankets during the floods, sent relief food to the fire victims, donated tents to the refugee camps etc.

I'll then splutter photos of my kind selfless me, with the unfortunate kids, whom the world has been cruel enough to cast orphans and probably ailing. Why do I feel so compelled to let the whole world know that, I attended some charity event? Forget politicians and NGOs. They need such stunts to woo supporters, voters and sponsors respectively. How else will they convince the world that they care? The camera must tag along, full battery. But do you?

On blowing own trumpet, the good old book advises to let not thy left hand know, what thy right hand giveth.

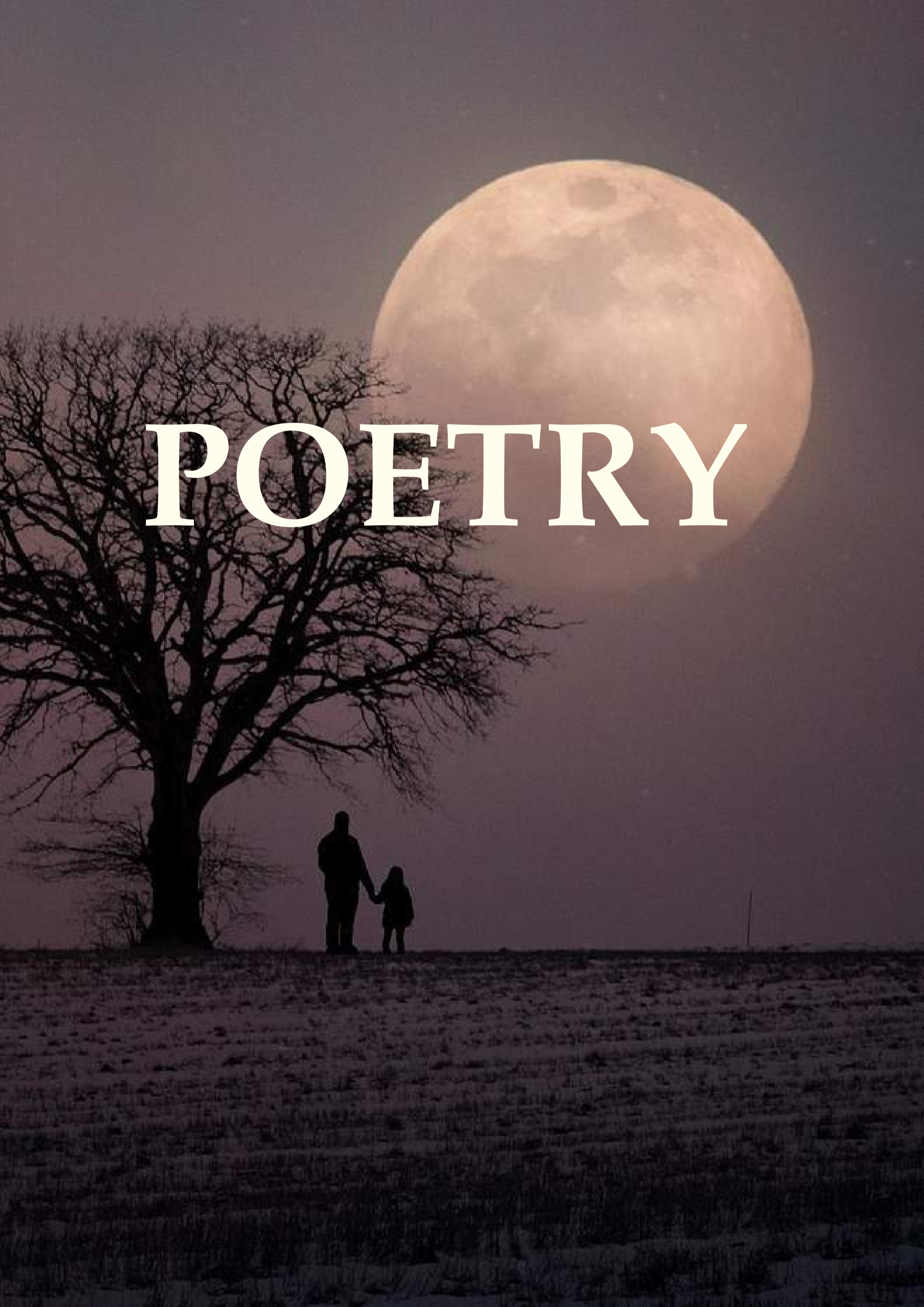
Help the poor, visit the sick, surprise people at random without expecting anything in return. While visiting take something little with you. Sympathetic smiles and prayers alone aren't enough. Let not your intention be to collect news to feed your bloated ego and gossip sites.

This spirit of bragging, putting on display your generous self, craving and seeking attention from the public, at the expense of someone else is not nice at all. The internet does not forget. Those pictures carry the impotent danger of injuring the victim's esteem in future.

Honesty is a virtue. What did you give to the creator? How many cheques did you write Him? How many cows did you bring? How many acres did you bribe with to be where you are?

Wakini Kuria  
Chief Editor,  
WSA,  
Kenya

# POETRY



# CON - VERSATION

Isaac Kilibwa, Kenya

"Days are long when nights are wrong  
Stuck in the throng; playing strong..."

She gestures, she shrugs, she sighs,

"One selfish world it has been -  
You want to trust you would rise  
What would you do to spite sin?"

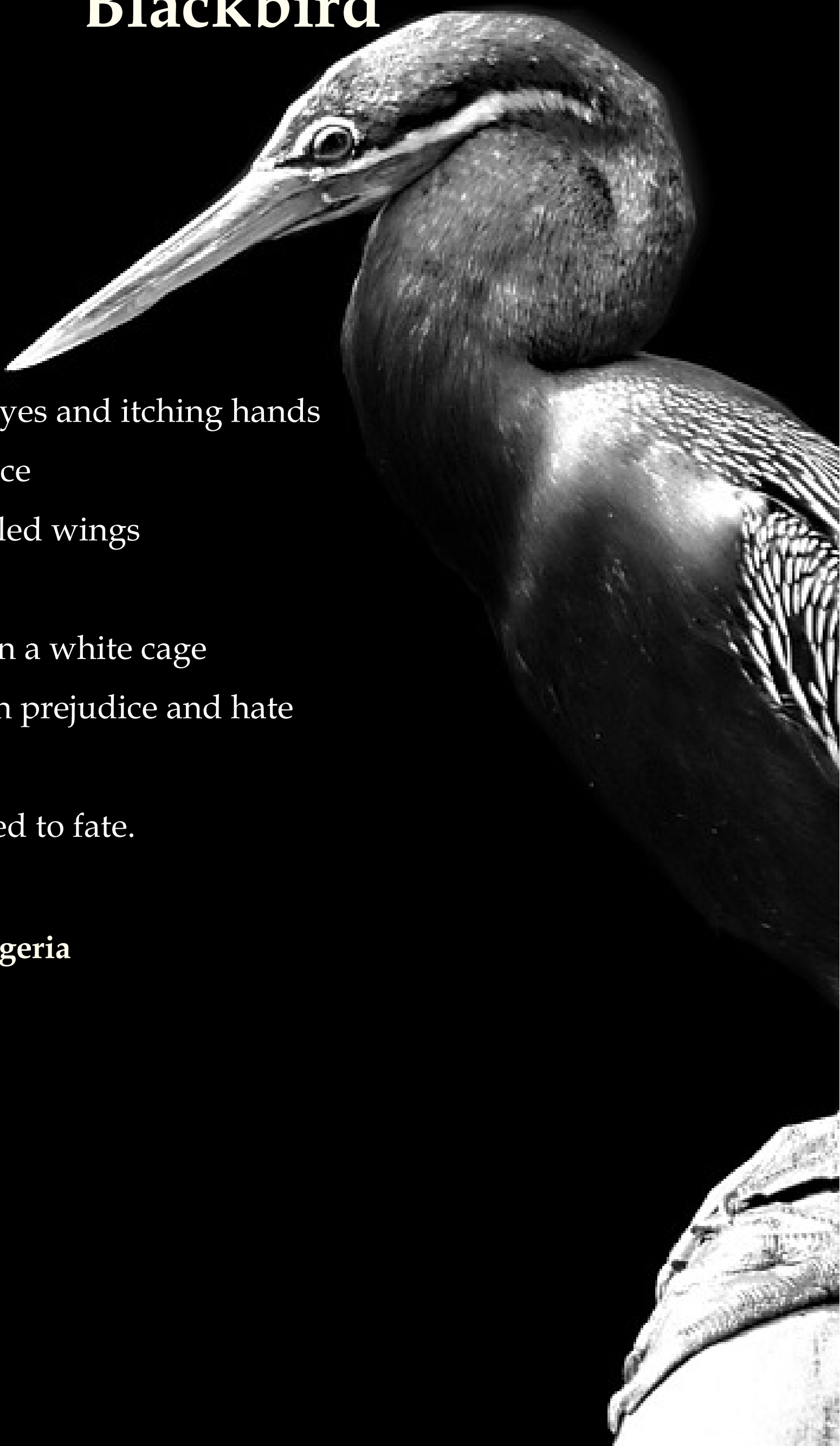
Fate stares at her unperturbed;  
His glazed eyes have her subdued.

"Would you grieve for your stray love,  
Cry out for what you could not save?

Would you set your eyes above,  
For what you would never crave?"

"I want to, I want to breath,  
All this pollen and dirt, breath."

# Blackbird



Blackbird,  
Chained in a white cage  
Surrounded by hungry eyes and itching hands  
Ready to rip piece by piece  
The treasures on its jeweled wings  
Blackbird,  
Held down by shackles in a white cage  
Blazing metal coloured in prejudice and hate  
Wings beg to fly away  
But blackbird has resigned to fate.

**Omemu Moyo Esther, Nigeria**

# LULU, YET AGAIN

Down the shadowy river bank  
The lone crumbling stony bridge, in sight,  
The blonde swift pacing sundown,  
And the dutiful whispering waters,  
Which nursed and romanced  
The busy starving gossiping winds, hovering  
Unto the grinning starry heavens,  
Remain the eyewitnesses  
Of that wonder,  
Love at first sight.  
Unbelieving thence you was, as how  
From the affluent a ripe lad falls on you?  
Lone, hurt lass, and at such odd an hour  
When poverty has crept  
All over; save soul,  
Your wheels then, now your legs,  
Hapless, would make it all worse,  
As worse as miracle;  
Thus you had thought.  
I knew not why or and how you were there,  
And need not now. Lulu,  
For, if we'd crossed that far  
Then when depowered, hinged down,  
Now sturdy, I trust, we shall cross yet again,  
For with love, the weak  
Is but stronger.

Shimbo Pastory, Tanzania



# GHOSTS

Fear kept us alive,  
I mean close,  
Enough for life to notice us.  
But we never really lived,  
We rode horses made of clouds,  
Fought death with wooden swords,  
Hoping that it would spare us.  
  
But we died in the safety of our fears,  
Our hearts strangled by emotions we feared.  
Now we play tag with the angel of death,  
Hoping to haunt those who brave their fears.

Gabriel Owino Junior, Kenya

# Heartbreaker

Ode to a fiery heart,  
A smile so bright, no one can see the fire that burns inside  
Her body a work of art, her voice a raging current  
Her words drive men to insanity  
The look in her eyes brings them down their knees  
She breezes past in freedom and glee  
Long, shiny hair flowing like a river of dark ink,  
Fluttering in the morning wind  
She leaves a trail of broken hearts in her wake  
Heart so fierce no one can take  
Touch her and she'll burn you to the ground  
Just look, look at her go again  
Looking for a heart to break.

Maria Nicole Enwonwu Gandaho,  
Benin Republic

# BLACKLIGHT

Smiling faces I turn to see  
Masquerades the blinds that kiss their souls to eat them away,  
Slowly and daily,  
Into horrified a race without a home;  
Darkness comes crouching into our bones,  
It grips with its cold hands our temples  
That the eyes see nothing better;  
Black lights shine in a times  
Set as a place, a home of peace to strive for.  
Little hope only, little hope!  
Breathing and the sound of ticking time,  
The melodies we value,  
They nurse us through a pain,  
A life of misery,  
A cold blacklight.

Andrew Huje, Zimbabwe

# OLD MAN SUNSHINE

She wakes one morning to greet old man sunshine  
Spotted his gray hair one side mourning  
His light so dim you couldn't help but notice  
Old man sunshine lost in thought  
She blinked to see but all in vain  
His mind made up to cease his shine  
She tried her tricks to change his thoughts  
Yet it took a while for him to say  
I'll shine my light with fury I'll burn  
She smiled and talked some sense to him  
You're who you are encourage yourself  
The whole world need your light to see  
The sky is near just stretch further  
I believe in you no matter the cloud  
So arise and shine your time is now.

Joy James, Nigeria

# MELON OF THE TOWN

The age of yours is very teen  
But hardly imitate deeds of "sabini"  
Like a dog game of thighs in street open  
Without earn even ten shilling from men  
Because you're terrific, you'd feel not pain  
Save the pleasure to quench your gain  
All you know is spreading the thighs twain  
Serving fast lunch and dinner to men  
Sympathy on you beloved of mine  
For when it rains soon will drain  
And coil you in the midst like a hungry python.

Shining from parched facial fraction  
You've changed, both name and walking motion  
Fame all over, best bitch of the town  
Cooling all town chaps 'elections'  
Sweet potato, cheap melon of town  
Lost, turned garbage, turned clown.

**NB: Sabini means: Seventies**

**Gift Samwel Ngamanja,  
Tanzania**

# FIGHT TO THE END

Maybe my weak faith is right  
Maybe I am losing this fight  
Maybe I ain't as strong as I thought  
Giving in to self-doubt  
Between walls of the trenches  
I hide from nothing but myself  
I am losing the war inside me

No light  
My life is a plight  
I hope for a rope  
To pull myself up the top  
With no sight  
Of what's to come ahead

I cope; I invent a light inside me  
I shine, as darkness persist around me  
One at a time, I create steps in the wall  
As I push myself up and rise above the war

Maybe life is not about waiting for the rope  
But finding your way up, as you shine from within  
Giving out light and hope to the darkness  
And fighting to the end

Wanangwa Mwale, Zambia

# TETRIS

I spent my life trying to fit in

To fit in to the cool guys circle chilling

To fit in to the Box that society sets

To act a certain way and become one of the pretenders

To conform into the calibration of masculinity

Or the “beauty”, the “sassiness” and the “humbleness” of femininity

To acquire the perks of fine modesty

To toe the line of “maturity”

Little did I know?

When the crowd I’ve been trying to fit into turns into nothing

The expectation I was so keen to meet keeps on vanishing

The box I thought I would fit in goes into disappearing

The more I try to fit

The more I lose my bits and pieces along with it

Here I am, wondering before I lose myself altogether

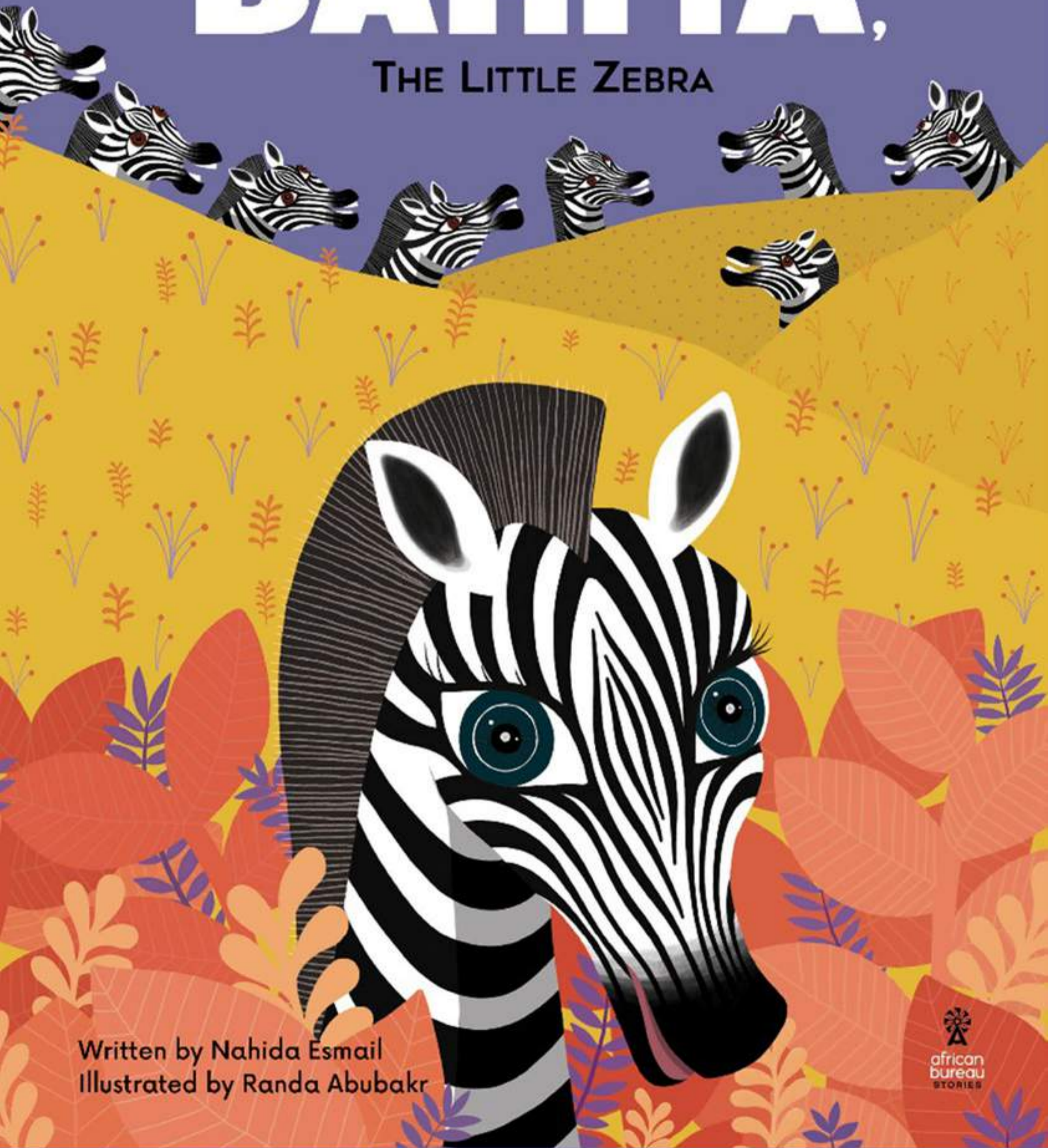
Is it worth it? ..... Ever?

Biniam Getaneh,

Ethiopia

# BAHIYA,

## THE LITTLE ZEBRA



Written by Nahida Esmail  
Illustrated by Randa Abubakr



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# FLASH FICTION





# ON SECOND STREET

**Edith Knight, Kenya**

**It was a beautiful morning, one worthy of shopping; and so I took a walk down Second Street. The first shop I visited was the second heart store. I moved closer to read the labels of the hearts on display. Broken hearts on sale: Fragile, please handle with care. Angry, anxious and depressed hearts on offer: Buy one get one free; Pure hearts: Unavailable, please try next shop. The only thing I would have bought was unavailable; heartless, I left the store.**

**The next shop was the Second spouse store, and just like the first shop, all items were clearly labelled. Widows, widowers and divorcees on sale: Fragile, please handle with care. Lying, unfaithful and broke spouses on offer: Buy one, get two free. Rich, God fearing, faithful and good looking spouses: Unavailable, Please try God. I left the store feeling lonelier than I had been.**

**Since it was lunchtime, I decided to visit the second food parlour that was across the road. All foods were priced and labelled. Overcooked food on sale: Please eat with moderation. Junk food on offer: Buy one plate get one free. Healthy and green foods: Unavailable, Please visit a farm near you. I left the parlour, feeling hungrier than I had been and decided to go home.**

**The taxis on the second bus park were clearly labelled. Not roadworthy taxis with unseasoned drivers: Fragile, pray before boarding. Over speeding and drunken drivers with police records: Pay half price, arrival not guaranteed. Law abiding drivers with no police record - Unavailable. Please walk or fly. It was a long walk home from Second Street.**

# SOLITUDE

Itohan Osadiaye, Nigeria

I have been struggling deep down on how to best approach my father. The thoughts of whether or not I should tell him, is a question I've been wrestling with for the past one month. The event of the past turned our relationship sour even before it had the chance to start.

After five years of marriage, my mother finally got pregnant and gave birth to a boy-me. Death was however so unkind; he took the life out of her. I grew up to be a brilliant young man and a model to my peers yet he never took notice. I had everything I ever wanted but, lacked one thing; the love of a father.

"What happened to my father that made him so cold towards me? Each time I try to get close, he keeps building a wall. What did I ever do wrong?" I had asked my father's closest friend.

"He caused her death. He never gave me a chance to enjoy our blossomed love. He took her from me; I will never love him!" My father had vowed. I got to know about everything, a month ago.

I tried to mend the broken pieces of his heart but all I ever got was a reminder of who I am; the boy that killed his mother and took away his father's love. I tried all I could but the words of a broken father were beginning to break me too. I finally found solace in the arms of Jasmine.

I summoned the courage to tell my father about my love- Jasmine. Even when I thought I found wholeness and solace in Jasmine, the love of my life, he somehow found a way to stain the picture perfect world I had found. I could either take his brokenness with me or take a stand and put an end to this. I took a stand and this time, though I walked away from his presence broken, it was different.



# The Writer and His Honours **NSAH MALA**

by  
Sandra Oma Etubiebi

*It felt like a meeting with royalty. My interview with this amazing writer was more rewarding for me than I would have imagined: Nsah Mala is a luminary who has put time, effort, passion, and diligence into his journey towards his emerging persona as one of Africa's finest.*

*His honourroll is massive with irrefutable evidence of a life lived on purpose and producing remarkable results. As you read his bio and the stimulating interview that follows, be equally inspired as I was.*

**- Sandra Oma Etubiebi**

### **The Bio of Nsah Mala:**

Nsah Mala is a Cameroon-born writer and poet who began writing plays in the second grade of secondary school. He wrote four plays before high school and wrote another in the university, but hasn't published any play yet. Little wonder that he was national overall best candidate in Literature in English in the 2009 Cameroonian GCE Advanced Level. He has published four poetry volumes: *Chaining Freedom* (2012), *Bites of Insanity* (2015), *If You Must Fall Bush* (2016) and *Constimocrazy: Malafricanising Democracy* (2017). His self-published books are: *Mounting the Stairs of Challenge* (2011, 2017) and *Do You Know Mbesa?* (2013). His short stories and poems have won prizes in Cameroon and France.

He has featured in numerous magazines, journals and anthologies in Cameroon, Nigeria, India, USA and Canada. He attended the Caine Prize Workshop in Rwanda 2018 and his story is forthcoming in *Redemption Song*, the 2018 Caine Prize Anthology. Other notable anthologies featuring his works include *Wales-Cameroon Anthology 2018*, *Muse for World Peace Anthology 3rd edition 2018*, *Best 'New' African Poets 2017 Anthology* and *Hell's Paradise 2016*. Meanwhile, his first poetry volume in French is under consideration in France. He has read his poetry in Cameroon, Senegal, France and UK. He writes in English and French, also being a trained teacher of these languages for Cameroonian secondary schools. And he is beginning to write in his native Mbesa (Itangha-Mbesa).

He was selected in the pioneer cohort of YALI Regional Leadership Centre West Africa -Dakar in 2016. He received the US Department of State E-Teacher Scholarship in 2015 which enabled his participation in an online teaching course at the University of Oregon where he finished with a 100% pass. He is also a recipient of the Erasmus Mundus Masters scholarship which has taken him across three universities in France, UK and Spain. As a literary scholar, he has published peer-reviewed papers and book chapters.

## **The Interview with Nsah Mala:**

- *What is the most interesting or exhilarating moment for you as a writer? Is it when you get the idea for a book? When the blank pages start filling up? When you finish? When you publish? Or when you receive recognition?*

**You know what? My answer to this question will surprise you. It'll elude all your suggestions or prompts. My answer is this: connection. The most exhilarating moment for me as a writer is when I discover a reader who feels connected to my work: a reader who feels healed, a reader who will most likely take action to ensure a better human society, after having read my work. The rest – especially recognitions – are simply secondary.**

- *Since you started writing, what has been your most challenging moment with regards to writing in general? And how did you overcome the challenge, and what did you learn from it?*

**Two things constitute a challenge to most, if not all, writers, and most especially writers from Africa. They're publishing and readership. I've been no exception to them. But advancement in technology is, substantially, helpful in overcoming them. For instance, my books are readily and easily accessible online and in the western world, but not in our continent and my country of birth, Cameroon. And this is sad, of course! Often, I try to do local prints, though sales sometimes can be timid. And luckily, because literary magazines and journals are freely accessible online, I never hesitate to submit to them, since my goal is to have my work circulate and get read, not primarily to make money from writing.**

- *What would you say to a writer who wants to be like you receive the kind of recognition and awards that you have? What steps should that person take?*

**This is a tricky question. I say so because writers have different writing objectives. Basically, some write to earn a living and get recognized whilst others write to catalyze societal improvement (or simply for fun). And I belong to the latter category. Let me digress a bit here. It is true that nowadays many African writers take to social media debating and questioning literary prizes and sometimes even daring to recommend what African writers should write about or how they should do so. Inasmuch as I believe that every writer should strive to improve their writing, I cannot buy the idea of dictating content and style to others. That is condescending, to say the least. While some are writing to prove to the rest of the world that Africans can experiment**

too and handle any topic of their choice, some (like me) still believe in exposing the traditional ills of our society. So I will only advise each and every writer to determine the category to which they belong and focus on reading and writing. Whichever category one falls under, one thing remains constantly true about writing: a writer must be reading and writing. Anything else will follow. Next, they should seek advice and orientation from published writers about how to get published once ready.

- *Were your accolades totally free from any external influence and totally based on merit? If yes, tell us what you think it takes to produce such creative works of quality.*

Only judges can say why they award writers accolades whenever they do. But, I don't think 'external influence' is ever a criterion in the process, except by 'external influence' you mean the artistic politics outside texts. And this ushers us into the avoidable terrain of subjectivity. Writing is part of art and all art is subjective. It's all a matter of taste. Yes, many people can agree at one point that cook X's meal is so good, but never everybody. What about those who are allergic to that meal? What about those whose culture forbids that meal? Remember too we've entered the post-truth era where the nakedness of subjectivity has been exposed in every sphere of human life, including the erstwhile purported objective field of science. So I believe in 'merit,' but with all the subjectivities inherent in judges. And above all, I believe in God's unbeatable power to reward His obedient children in every good thing they do. This is where my Christianity steps in, and unapologetically so!

Against this backdrop, I therefore recommend nothing except extensive reading and writing interlaced with unflinching commitment. Complete dedication to our writing careers pays. And 'pay' here doesn't necessarily mean money. It means any form of satisfaction one sets out with the intention of achieving as a writer. Make friends with writers and collaborate (not compete!) with them to improve one another's work. The importance of belonging to literary circles, especially with writers who have similar visions like you, is indisputable. In summary, here goes my recipe: read and write with all your energies, and if a Christian like me, pray with all your soul and heart =SUCCESS, no matter how you define success.

- *If you could go back and change anything in your career or experience, what would you change?*

I would have read more than I did when I was younger, in my teens. But then, how could I get the books when I was barely struggling to acquire school textbooks? Reason why I prefer not to go back but to go forward, with God's help, and contribute

my little quota in making books available by creating local libraries in my native Mbesa and possibly beyond our national boundaries.

- *What are your general thoughts about the world of writing, and specifically about the role of Africans in that world?*

There is a lot going on in the writing world today, with technology giving writers unending opportunities to experiment and connect easily with readers. More and more people are grabbing their pens and papers and writing. Did I say pens and papers? Oh, sorry! I meant (also) keyboards and screens. The role of Africans is to continue to tell our stories, as many stories as our diverse cultures, as many stories as our imaginations can stretch, without minding about those who want to impose certain writing agendas and styles. Our stories have always been, and should always be, as plural as our cultural groupings and personal preferences. African voices have been reverberating on the global literary scene for a good time now. And we just need to continue to amplify the voices and make them more melodious in the global choir of cultures.

- *Are your writings relayed by a theme? What motivated you to write? What do you naturally write about?*

I write about many themes, including, but not limited to: politics, war, culture, religion, nature, and history. Add the interpretations of readers to these and the list becomes River Nile, or River Menchum in Cameroon. I entered writing in second grade in secondary school (GSS Mbesa) through the door of 'literary commitment' – the Achebean dimension of a writer as a guide, as a teacher, as a critic. Therefore, I write to motivate and to make the world better and more habitable for humans and other species. When you write as a guide, you never have a fixed theme. Your themes will move with the tides of society. I mean, as evil moves around suppressing the masses in society so too do I move with my pen in defense of the oppressed and exploited. Take this for example: As arms dealers make more arms to maim humanity so do I move with my poetic compass crying for the death of arms and the birth of peace.

- *Do you have any writer regime or strict schedule we should know of? What role would you say discipline and hard work play in evolving a writer?*

No, I don't have any fixed writing schedule. I write when inspiration and time coincide. Or permit. I juggle my time between many activities: teaching, studies, academic research, reading and writing, career and scholarship orientation, village development, and so forth. If in future I ever decide to embrace writing full time, I may then have a



strict schedule. But, until then, I write as the muses come, I should say. Let me take the last part of your question outside writing. As with every human endeavor, success is born from the marriage of discipline and hard work.

- *Any final words?*

Yes, at two levels.

First, if you want to be a writer, just start writing immediately. There is no best time to begin. And nobody can give feedback on ideas in your head or heart, except God. So pour forth your ideas and the rest will follow: whether feedback, publishing or earnings.

Second, do not be in competition with other writers! Collaborate and network with them in order to compete only with yourself, to improve your craft, although artistic 'best' is just a subjective label. Nobody can write your writing. Only you can do it. Even similar poems or novels end just at that: similar, never the same. Because all the billions of us on this planet are unique, so just be yourself. So, start, or keep, writing! God bless you!

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# ESSAYS

An open notebook with a blank lined page and a pen resting on it. The notebook is open to a page with horizontal lines. A pen is lying across the page. The background is a blurred bookshelf.

# THE ISLE OF MAN TOURIST TROPHY (TT) RACE: Where Death is a Split Second Away

And now hear me, Mother  
What thing has seized me and I have conceived  
In my heart  
I shall die, I am resolved  
~Euripides~

What would you be willing to die for? This question usually evokes passionate answers like dying for loved ones, country, religion, environment, honor and even something as abstract and intangible as an idea. Eight years ago death felt like a big deal to me, and despite accounts of romanticized and noble deaths, I believed that the grim reaper could be nothing short of a cold, dark and terrifying entity to encounter. But today, instead of being a woman on heels, I am a woman on wheels; wheels of a superbike and in me burns my lifelong dream of racing on a Kawasaki Ninja ZX-6R 636 in the world's deadliest and most extreme motorsport race: The Isle of Man Tourist Trophy Race.

The Kawasaki Ninja ZX-6R 636  
Source: [www.motorbeam.com](http://www.motorbeam.com)



The Isle of Man Tourist Trophy Race is commonly referred to as the TT death race because participating in it is what my tribe defines as inviting an elikuli, owl, to hoot on your window. But before I scare you off from continuing to read this piece, grab an oar, your life jacket, and a good selfie camera and let's kayak to somewhere in the middle of the northern Irish Sea. As we paddle away, imagine a beautiful sea-kingdom between the Great Britain and Ireland where fairies exist. Welcome to the Isle of Man!

Mann, as it's commonly known, is a self-governing British Crown dependency. Technically, it is a possession of the Crown directly but an independent territory from the UK and even the European Union. They have a population of less than 100,000, their national language is called Manx and they use the Sterling pounds or Manx as currency. Apart from being a tax haven, there exists a Fairy Bridge in Mann and legend has it that you must greet the fairies when crossing because not doing so attracts bad luck. The end of the bridge joins a tarmac road that leads to Douglas, the capital city.

The major star of Mann is however the TT race held in May or June annually. What's fascinating about this race is

that during the two-week holiday, all public roads are closed. History has it that back then British motorcyclists had been sorely defeated in races on the continent and they wanted to establish a home racecourse to improve their performance. They finally settled on Mann because the English speed limit of 20 miles per hour (mph) did not apply to the island and back home, public roads could not be closed for such races. The first race was held in 1907 and since then, it's been nothing less than a spectacle that turns the sleepy rock of Mann to a rollicking festival ground for an entire fortnight.

The race track is called the Snaefell Mountain course, stretching 37.73 miles through stormy weather, gullies, narrow treacherous turns and over 200 capricious corners. The most dangerous corner has to be Ballagarey Corner that has claimed many lives among them that of my hero, Paul R. Dobbs also known as Dobsy in 2010, while also recording horrifying crashes like in the case of Guy Martin, my other hero, which took place just a day after the death of Dobsy. Martin's superbike make Honda CBR1000RR crashed at maximum speed into a stone wall before exploding into a fireball.

There are six race categories and their

difference is in the engine capacity. The Ultra Lightweight TT is for machines with engines not exceeding 125cc, Lightweight TT not exceeding 650cc, The Junior TT between 400cc to 750cc, Side-Car TT between 500cc to 600cc, Senior TT between 750cc to 1200cc 2012 or later models, Super Stock TT between 600cc to 1000cc 2012 model, Supersport TT between 600cc to 1200cc 2012 or later models, and the Zero TT for electronic motorcycles weighing between 100 to 300 kg and not exceeding 800 volts.

Since 1907 there have been 146 deaths that have occurred during the race. This begs questions like why would anyone risk his/her life for such a cause and wakanda cause is this where sacrifice is not in the service of a greater good? If you watch the YouTube videos, the race is akin to madness incarnate but as Richard 'Milky' Quayle, a former TT winner once said, "You cannot do this if you are mad. This takes too much focus and discipline."

The concept of mortality underpins the essence of the race giving it prestige and opening it to criticism. Speed is the echelon of the race that drives the riders to push all boundaries even if the Grim Reaper is staring into their eyes, and therein perhaps, lays the appeal of

the race to both the participants and the spectating crowd. Thus the line separating success and tragedy is blurred.

Most bikers come here in search of absolute freedom that only the race can give because of the absence of speed limits. A high speed for instance of 180mph gives that adrenaline rush that floods into your system like an intravenous drip, causing the biker to be in psychological state known as eustress or positive stress. It can be compared to sexual orgasm, but, and I say this unapologetically, it is three times better.

The same adrenaline rush is felt by spectators watching from the Grandstand area; when after they quietly wait and listen for an engine amid birdsongs and the murmuring of a nearby stream, suddenly a bike blasts by at concussive velocity you would think it's a missile. Unfortunately, there have been several incidents where some spectators died from being stabbed or hit by pieces of metal flying in the air from an exploding bike.

As a biker, you also have to trust that your octane fuelled coffin of a machine will land safely, make that bend and not skid on the steep slope. I believe the only thing that pushes a rider to sur-

vive is the thought of loved ones waiting back home for you, even though sometimes this is not enough. I cannot rationalize my love and aspiration for this race but the motivation to participate is not because of a death wish, but a yearning to experience and live through it. Personally, when I dream of participating in any of the TT races all I ever think about is how it would feel crossing the finish line. I bet it would be like that WWE moment when the glass breaks and Stone Cold Steve Austin makes an entrance.

Even though star bikers like the late Dobsy and Joey Dunlop paid with their own lives for something seemingly non-heroic as a race, they continue to shape our lives far from beyond the grave. So to answer my earlier question, yes I am willing to die at the TT race because death is not something that one should introspect about in the terms of life being stripped away, but rather challenging your personal limits even when faced with the possibility of your life ending in a cold caress.

Joyce Nawiri,  
Kenya



Image source: [www.thecheckeredflag.co.uk](http://www.thecheckeredflag.co.uk)

# WEEDS



Recently, I was weeding on my father's farm of corn and yams. While I worked, I got an insight or rather a revelation- that I want to share with you.

Father did not plant weeds on his farm, but they found their way there. So, what exactly is a weed? A weed is any plant growing in cultivated ground to the injury of a crop or desired vegetation, or to the disfigurement of the place; an unsightly, useless, or injurious plant. Weeds are mostly peculiar to an environment (geography), or the type of crop planted on a particular field. A weed is simply an unwanted plant in an unwanted place. Weeding, therefore, is the act of removing unwanted vegetation from a cultivated area.

Our lives are like cultivated areas, where we plant different persons and things in a bid for us to have a desirable harvest of a

fulfilled life accompanied with good things.

As was the case on my father's farm, weeds also find their ways into our lives. This is mostly as a result of the environment in which we find ourselves. As such, there will be weeds in our lives as a result of our workplaces, our way of life, etc.

Over time, different persons and habits show up as weeds in our lives. They are weeds in that they cause injuries to us and to the good we desire to harvest, they threaten our continued survival and growth, they kill us little by little. In the same way that weeds on the farm, if left for a long time are capable of choking to death the planted crop, the weeds in our lives are capable of snuffing life out of us. For the crops on a field to yield bountifully, regular weeding must be done. Similarly, for us to live our lives to the maximum, we have to constantly carry out 'weeding'. We have to get rid

of habits and persons that are injurious to us and inimical to our growth from time to time. There are various types of weeds, but I will dwell on the three weeds I encountered on my father's farm and what each taught me.

*Imperata cylindrica*, commonly known as spear grass, is a deep underground spreading weed that must be uprooted fully or else it will sprout up the next day. This weed has a networked root which must be completely unearthed to destroy it. Some of the habits and even people in our lives are like this weed. They are buried so deep and therefore difficult to eradicate. Removing them requires a painstakingly diligent effort because if we leave even a tiny piece in the soil, they will grow back up into a full blown weed again.

*Commelina diffusa*, commonly known as spreading dayflower, is another weed I came across. It is a plant that is very easy to uproot but you must shake the soil off its root to kill it. If you don't, it starts growing again once rain falls on the field. Some habits and persons in our lives are like this, they seem easy to do away with but the moment an occurrence that facilitates their habitation occurs, they rouse their heads again. This group must be removed with care. After they are uprooted, the soil that ties them to us must be

shaken off completely and then we must throw them far and out of reach. That is the only way to get rid of these weeds.

The final type of weed I came across, and the trickiest to handle was the *Talinum triangulare*, also known as the water leaf. In between the ridges of yam, they stood erect, with their fleshy leaves and small pink flowers. You see despite being a weed, the water leaf is a valuable plant that can be eaten as a vegetable, made as a sauce and in some cases used medicinally. This goes to show that there are people or certain habits that are important and yet still weeds in our lives. In this case, like I was that day, you are faced with a dilemma; whether to remove them or to let them continue spreading. Well, I must tell you that I uprooted some but left others to grow; a population I was certain would not negate the growth of the yams.

We have to be wary of such weeds because even though they are 'wanted' plants, we shouldn't let them thrive in 'unwanted' places. It is only wise to leave them when one is certain they don't portend any significant harm.

Happy Weeding!

Williams Olaide Oladele,  
Nigeria





# THE GHOST IN OUR TOWN

Last Sunday, my mother informed me of her uncle's passing. I thought of the last time I saw him; a Sunday morning in May 2015. I tried to recall if there had been light in his eyes or life in his smile. Nothing, I could remember nothing.

There is a raw and numbing weight that presses on my chest whenever I think of death, and so the news of Babu's death made the heaviness spread throughout my body. He had been a simple, soft-spoken and restrained man. Worried of being a bother, he would visit our house with a loaf of bread and a kilo of sugar so we wouldn't have to feed him. He would sip his tea unobtrusively, without the clink of china; we would marvel at how sophisticated he was. He was considerate—would never send us to fetch him water or beer like other guests, he would always clean up after himself. At parties, he would shrink in the loud noise of music and life and never join the crowd.

On the Sunday I last saw him, he wore his signature look – a classic black blazer and khaki cadet pants. He was surprised that I had spotted him in the crowded

church and that I had made my way to greet him. Later, as we had brunch at the nuns' restaurant, he had urged me to study hard, to go away to America, get a master's degree, and see the world. He had also promised to come to my graduation, so that he too could see the world. As I sipped on my tea, I had told him there was nothing in the world but tall buildings.

The dusty May wind blew past as we walked from the restaurant in Jimboni to Mbinga Street with his son in tow. His face radiated when he talked about how bright his son was. You could tell he loved his family. Babu was a teacher. He taught business subjects at Mbinga day secondary school. He was also the books store keeper. There was a tone of disappointment when he talked about his job. "Teaching is a thankless job," he had said. After many years of teaching with no promotion to the next salary level, the little salary not even coming in some months, he had taken his case to the District Education Office, and every year they had told him to wait for the next budget period. He had seen students come and go, leaders come and go, yet nothing had changed for him.

That was the first and the last day I truly conversed with him. I had listened to the dry sadness in his voice and forgotten it soon after we parted.

I wasn't able to attend Babu's funeral but I have imagined it many times. In my imagination, hundreds of people gather at the neighbourhood church to pay their last respects. The priest, dressed in a purple robe, lead the procession. Four altar boys in white robes and purple belts follow behind, bearing candles. His son, barely comprehending, drags his feet behind them, carrying a white cross that is later placed on his father's grave. Pallbearers march slowly behind him, balancing the pinewood coffin decorated with purple ribbons on their shoulders. They place the coffin on the altar as the choir sings Parapanda italia, the trumpet shall sound. His wife, red-eyed and weak, places a cheap wreath made of white and purple ribbons on it. There are no flowers.

The priest swings the thuribles around the coffin until the whole church smells of burning frankincense. Thin white smoke from the incense circles around Babu's portrait, placed on top of the casket- he is smiling in the photo. The priest opens his arms to lead the congregation in prayer. "Brothers and sisters, as we prepare to send our beloved to his eternal home, let us call to mind our sins." The church falls silent except for the oscillating fans overhead and occasional sniffs from family members exhausted from crying. Guilt hangs in the air. Babu was their sin. He is mine too.

The truth is, he had died years ago, and no one had noticed. He had walked on the dusty streets of our town, a ghost, and invisible to us all. How do you mourn this kind of death? Do you cry for him, or do you cry for yourself? It's hard to grieve without guilt – for we were guilty of missing the signs of darkness in his sunshine,

guilty of missing the details of his life. I can't even remember his laugh not that I ever saw his tears.

Sometimes I wonder how it might have been if our greetings were not just mere formalities – If I had meant it when I asked him how he was. And if he had sought help, would we have given it to him? I wonder if things would have been different if I had called him before I left, if I had told him I was going to America like he wanted me to, and that he could finally come to visit when I graduated. What If I had told him that besides tall buildings, there was so much hope and beauty in the world? What If I had seen the pain he harboured behind his smile? What if I had got to say a proper goodbye to Babu?

Babu had tried to kill himself before; Years ago, when I was younger. I never asked why. But everyone said it was because he had a soft heart – one that couldn't handle the harshness of life. Our society is not one to talk about emotions, or being soft, especially in our men. We are supposed to be those that face everything quietly and head on, even if it kills us. And kill him, it did.

They had found Babu's lifeless body hanging on a tree at the game park after he had been missing for two weeks. He had slipped away in the same quietness he lived through life. Perhaps there, away from us, far from this boisterous life, he had found his solace. He had fallen asleep among the trees, his feet swaying above the grass to the soothing whisper of the wind, and his god cooing him, hush now, It doesn't hurt anymore.

Rest in Peace Babu.

Neema Komba  
Tanzania

# Talking Love

By

• SAKA DBOSZ JUNIOR •

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# BLUNTNESS IS BRUTAL

Life is simple. Humans complicate it.



As I pen down the words of this column, I'm pouring out my heart. Life is simple. It is supposed to be, at least. But guess what? Humans- I'm talking about YOU- take away the ease of it, making it look like an inevitable bondage.

It's understandable that the makeup of every human- physical, psychological, physiological, geographical and otherwise- determines his or her reactions. So, no matter how objective we try to be about any concept, phenomenon or whatever, we end up being subjective because no two interpretations are the same. It's called PERCEPTION.

Imagine these situations:

Why can't a Prince declare his love for a non-royal individual without her being called a commoner, or better still, for a bi-racial lady without her 'coming under fire'? From Slaves to Royalty one European newspaper tweeted. Ridiculous!

Why can't women be who they are without being criticised by the male

folks? Every time I sit among men, I realise that one, at least, has a thing against womanhood. That's the world we live in. Meghan Markle wears an 'I woke up like this' makeup to her wedding ceremony and the male folks go 'that's true beauty unlike many other women'. Unbelievable. More seriously is the case of a woman being underpaid compared to her male counterpart in the same position, playing the same role with her. And someone in my random talk session attributed it to the Leave of Absence taken during pregnancy and for child care. Come on. Should you punish nature?

Why are children given little importance in several parts of the world? Why are they the last to be heard in every circumstance? Even the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) critiques pointed out that children were not adequately represented. The SDG's were criticised for not explicitly stating the rights of the child but embedding them in the generalisation of human rights, and making the children appear as objects of charity rather than holders of human rights (Child Rights International Network).

In many parts of Africa, the child almost has no say. Some cultures demand that a child remains standing while the elders sit, without the lad being punished. Many homes do not care consulting their kids before making any decision.

They call it a free world, yet, religionists get the biggest of criticisms. While it's not okay to be an extremist, it's totally okay to choose what you want to believe in. I'm Christian; I've chosen the path of Christ. Anyone else is free to choose. So, why the fuss against religion and religionists. If you want to be a free-thinker, that's okay too.

Plants are not left out. Why can't I eat what pleases me without being told the side effects of the food? Almost everything edible has a side effect as painted by nutritionists. Research posited a few years ago that the potassium substance Africans (Nigerians in particular) used for ages as soup thickener, akanwu, was suddenly discovered to be among those responsible for cancer and kidney failure (Nutrifactsblog.com). Banana, too, should not be eaten at night. And

many more findings. One study said eat an egg a day and another said more than one egg a week blocks the arteries. I tire!

My point is 'we don't have to be bizarre or extreme in our perceptions and opinions.' Everybody deserves a chance, be it a mistake. The cliché, goes "variety is the spice of life" so why not enjoy these varieties? It is paramount that we operate with the mentality that choices and preferences are different. Conditioning and judging everything according to your mindset alone is what brings about conflicts and controversies. Relieve yourself of subjectivity to a large extent (somehow, we all remain subjective even in our open-mindedness but it can be controlled), broaden your perception even when it doesn't appeal to you, be open to more knowledge in order to enhance your relationship with living and non-living elements as well as abstract. Don't think of yourself highly than the other and you'll find out that the world is way simpler than you think. No complications really.

Here's an anonymous quote before I wrap up. It's somewhat related to this: No one in this world is pure and perfect. If you avoid people for their mistakes, you would be alone in this world. Judge less and love more.

### **About the columnist:**

Gabrielina Gabriel-Abhie is a writer, editor, and broadcast journalist; a columnist with Writers Space Africa online magazine. She's a preacher of her propaganda and a believer in equality and truth. Her essay contents span various topics from child abuse, politics, to gender equality, racism, tribalism, and as many issues as can be touched. She is a general interest blogger too. In her opinion, her blog should not be mistaken for a rant but one that focuses on heart splitting issues. She can be reached via the email addresses: [theroaringwriter@gmail.com](mailto:theroaringwriter@gmail.com) or [gabrielina.gabriel@gmail.com](mailto:gabrielina.gabriel@gmail.com)

# Literary News

with  
Nyashadzashe Chikumbu

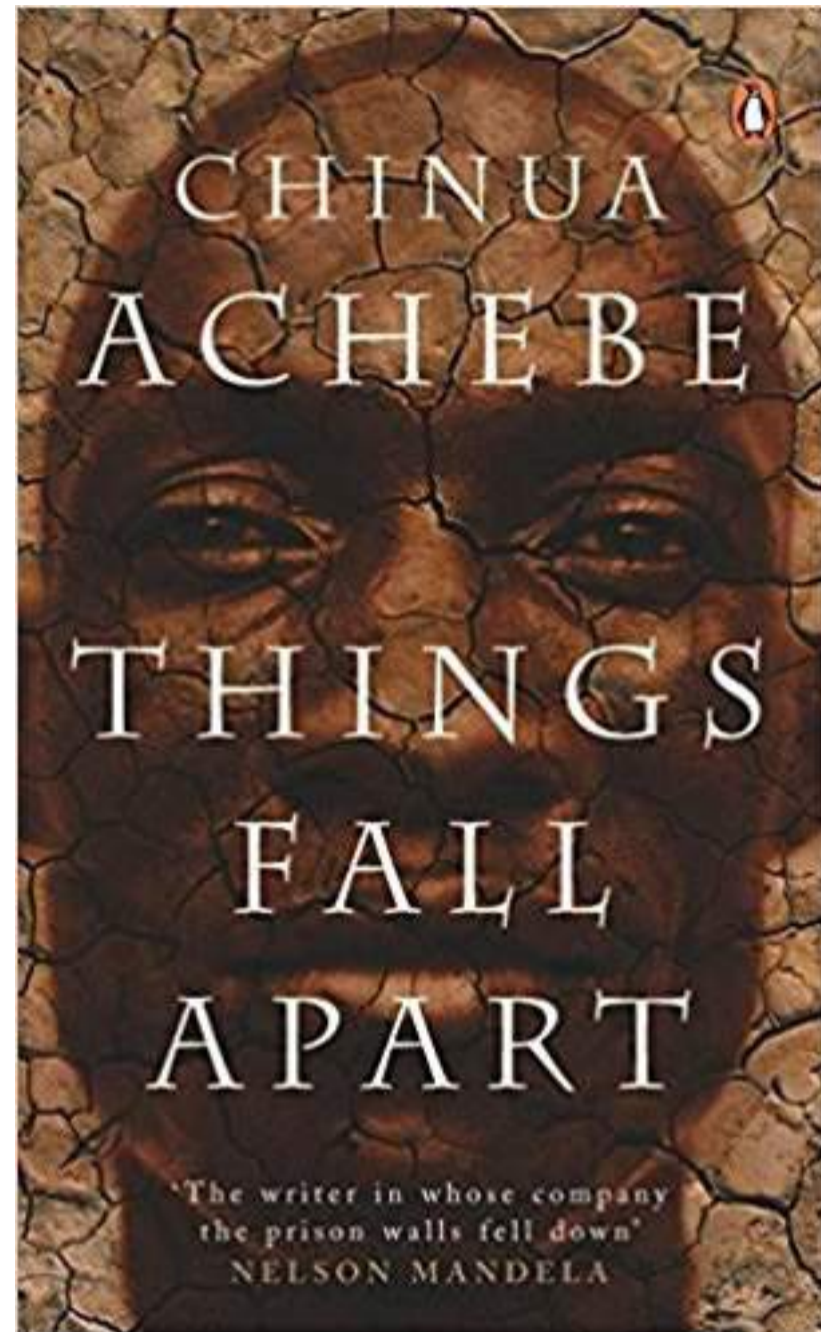
## ‘THINGS FALL APART’ NAMED ONE OF TWELVE NOVELS, CONSIDERED THE GREATEST BOOKS EVER WRITTEN.

The book was named on the list compiled by Encyclopaedia Britannica, and Achebe’s master piece is named amidst the greatest literary works. Things fall apart is Chinua Achebe’s first novel. The story chronicles the pre-colonial life in Nigeria and the arrival of the Europeans during the 19th century.

The story interrogates the class of cultures, traditional values and belief systems.

The novel is the first of its kind to show a sudden break from the British novelists’ style of writing. As it draws its pictorial images and its rich idiom from the African culture and tradition.

Even though it has been five years since Chinua passed away, his master piece continues to give African literature a new face. Things fall apart being the greatest and remains the most quoted book in African and world literature. With quotes like ‘whenever you see a toad jumping in broad day light then know, that something is after its life.’



## SEXUAL SCANDALS LEAD TO YET ANOTHER YEAR WITH NO NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE.

Following a series of sexual scandals and misconduct, which has seen to the resignation of many of the chairs of the Swedish academy board responsible for selecting Nobel literature winners. The Swedish academy early this month announced that ‘no Nobel prize for literature will be awarded this year.’ This was confirmed through a tweet they posted ‘the Nobel prize for literature has been postponed , the Nobel foundation supports the Swedish academy’s decision .’

The intention was to award the 2018 prize next year along with the 2019 prize. The foundation said in a statement – according to a report by the Associated Press ‘the decision was made at a weekly meeting in Stockholm a day earlier , on the grounds that the academy is in no shape to pick a winner after a string of sex abuse and allegations of financial scandals’

A decision which has left the literary world shocked to bits, especially the world of African literature which has only one Nobel laureate to account for. France leading with 16, the United States and the United Kingdom coming at second with 11 each. African writers can only hope for the best.

# SHORT STORIES

UPON THE  
K  
E





# Eki: The Prince's Bride

Patience Saduwa, Nigeria

(Igodi Community, circa 1809)

Along the river road the three young girls walked in single file to their village Igodi. They were returning from the river, where they had gone to fetch water for their mothers. Placed on their heads were clay pots of different sizes, with Edafe at the rear of the small group having the smallest pot. Edafe was as vain as a peacock about her looks, she hated carrying heavy objects on her elegant neck which she considered one of her best features. She believed that objects on the head would 'deform' her neck and diminish her beauty, thus reducing her chances of mar-

rying Emojevwe, one of the sons of Etaghene, the rich merchant whom she was in love with. She walked with slow steps so as not to spill the water, trailing behind Eki, who was in front and Johwo in the middle.

The girls chatted and laughed gaily as they walked, their chatter startling the birds, squirrels and other small animals in the dense foliage that bordered the path. They had passed a major junction and the path that led to Okue-tchi, a neighbouring village. And were heading towards a bend on the path when a group of men suddenly appeared on the path. The girls were so engrossed in their chatter that

they did not see the men in time. The men walked straight into Eki, who was in front and she fell by the pathway with a cry. Her friends quickly placed their water pots on the ground and gathered round her.

“Ah Eki! Are you ok? Can you get up?” they asked with concern. The men, four in number, stood watching the girls at first. Then one of them, who wore a strip of gold-coloured woven clothe round his neck and a string of coral beads on his right wrist, drew close. “Are you alright?” he asked in an anxious tone, bending down. Eki tried getting up but a sharp pain shot up her leg making her stagger. His arm shot out to support her back, breaking her fall. She gazed up at him, her curious eyes noting the clean lines of his face and his clear eyes that seemed to look deep into her soul. She blinked and straightened up, putting her weight more on the uninjured left leg. “I’m fine,” she said shortly. “Why don’t you men look where you’re going? Barging around like wild pigs in the forest!” she said scornfully, glaring up at the man who had helped her to her feet. He seemed to be the leader of the group. “Watch your mouth! How dare you...” said one of the men who took a menacing step towards Eki. Their leader held up his hand. “It’s ok.” Then he turned to Eki who was now flanked by her friends as if to protect her against any attack from the men.

“Where’s your village?”

“Why do you ask?” Edafe retorted, a wary look in her eyes. She could tell the men were not from Igodi, neither did they look as if they were from any of the neighbouring villages. They looked like strangers from a faraway place so one had to be careful. Who knew, they could even be slave hunters! Neither Edafe nor any of her friends had seen one before but there were stories in the village about people being captured from their farms, in the bush and even homes in communities near the coast and hinterland and taken away by sea in big okor (ships) by strange looking white people, who spoke in a funny way through their noses.

“So we can escort you home because of your injury,” the man explained.

“No need for that... I’m alright,” Eki said. He did not look convinced.

“The broken pot. It needs replacing.” He made a sign to one of his men who brought out a small pouch from the raffia bag hanging on his shoulder. He stretched his hand towards Eki who glanced at the pouch, then up at the man.

“What’s this?” she asked curiously.

“Payment for the pot,” said their leader. Eki turned towards him.

“It’s not necessary. I...” Before she could finish, Edafe snatched the pouch of cowries

from the man. “Thank you! We’ll get another pot on the next market day,” she said, ignoring the glowering look from Eki. “You know what your mother will do to you if you return home with a broken pot. The money will be useful,” she whispered into Eki’s ear. The men made to leave. “I wish you a safe walk home. Good bye!” said the leader. His eyes lingered for a moment on Eki, then with a slight wave of the hand, he turned away. The men walked quickly away, soon disappearing round a bend on the narrow path enveloped by thick bushes, trees and shrubs.

Back home, Eki’s father, angry that she had left the house against his orders, treated the injury that evening with some herbs and hot ointment as he did not trust Equono or any of his other wives to treat it properly. Esiso did not want any blemish on his lovely daughter’s smooth skin. “I’m sorry, Father. I was bored staying at home, that’s why I went to the river with my friends.” “We are leaving for the capital after the next edewor (market day). You must rest at home so the leg can heal well. No more gallivanting all over the place. Is that clear?” he said sternly as he rubbed her leg with the concoction. “Yes, Father.” Once again she wondered why she had to accompany him to the capital, since that was usually something done by the sons of the family.

At the capital The Uyere ceremony or paying homage to the King was the annual gathering of all the chiefs and village heads in Otumara Kingdom. It was held just before the big ‘ore’ or festival that took place after the harvest. It was a busy time in the capital, Okor with the influx of the chiefs from near and far-flung places in the kingdom. Esiso, Eki and Brume one of his many sons and their large entourage took up residence in the home of a relative of his, Ukrakpor who lived in the capital. The following morning, before Esiso left for the palace to attend the meeting of the chiefs, he inspected Eki’s appearance. The months of pampering and special diet had paid off. Her brown skin glowed with health and youth and her clear luminous eyes sparkled like the sea on a sunny day. He had given her a new set of coral waist beads which now hung enticingly on her round hips around which was tied a brightly coloured wrapper. He nodded with satisfaction. She was ready. “Let’s go,” he said, leading the way as the group, carrying different packages, made its slow way to the palace.

“How long has it been now, Esiso? You should come to the capital more often! You know I always enjoy your company,” Ovie Agbogidi II, the King of Otumara Kingdom said as Esiso stepped forward to pay homage to him in the large Audience Hall.

“Your Highness. Please forgive me. The harvest and other concerns of mine kept me too busy this period,” said Esiso. After the greetings and the presentation of gifts and tributes to the King, Esiso stayed a while to chat with the King. They were old friends who had known each other long before the king had ascended the throne, when he was the crown Prince. As they spoke, the King’s glance fell on Eki who stood quietly behind her father with the others in their group.

“And who’s this beautiful damsel? Come forward my dear,” he beckoned on her. Eki genuflected, then stood before the monarch, her head bowed demurely, her eyes not meeting his as it was forbidden for women to look directly at the king’s face. Esiso did the introductions. “This is my daughter, Eki.”

“Hmm. Lovely,” said the monarch, his eyes inspecting her from head to toe like one would look at a very interesting object. “Is she betrothed yet?” he asked Esiso.

“No, your majesty. I’m working on it, though,” Esiso, said, uncomfortable at the direction the conversation was going. He did not like the look in the old monarch’s eyes as he stared fixedly at his daughter. It was a look of desire and lust.

“You should. She’s at the right age. Just ripe enough for plucking,” the king said, with a smile that revealed his tobacco-stained teeth.

“I do not see the Crown Prince in the Hall. I hope he is doing well,” said Esiso, trying to steer the conversation away from his daughter who had returned to her former position. The King, whose eyes had been fixed on Eki as she walked away, turned to her father.

“He has been away to Ijere village to mediate in the land dispute between it and the neighbouring community. He returned early this morning. He will be present during tomorrow’s ceremony,” he said.

“That will be nice. I have a special gift I want to present to him.”

The ‘Uyere’ ended and the King together with the visiting Chiefs, and the King’s ministers, settled down to hold a council meeting. It was held at this time of the year to deliberate on matters pertaining to the Kingdom’s affairs and general wellbeing. Eki and her older brother Brume, a strapping youth of nineteen left the audience hall to wait for their father in the large courtyard in the palace. Brume, who had just spied a friend of his from their village said, “Eki, wait for me here. Don’t go wander-

ing about or Father will be cross with you!” And he walked away. Sometime later, bored with waiting, Eki decided to take a walk around the palace grounds. Near a large mango tree, its branches heavy with fruit were some statues and sculptures of different figures and sizes. She stood in front of one of them, a bronze statue of a young girl carrying a clay pot on her head, her slim elegant waist bedecked with large coral beads. It was so life-like, Eki felt water would splash from the pot onto the beautiful girl’s shoulders any minute.

“Looks familiar, doesn’t it?” said a deep voice. Her expressive eyes widened in surprise when she saw him. It was the man she had encountered on the river road over a week before when her water pot had broken.

“You!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here?” Behind him stood three young men that looked like palace guards. He smiled and drew closer.

“I should be asking you what you’re doing here in my...” He paused. “Nice meeting you again.” He glanced down at her leg. “So, how’s your leg? Better I hope?” She nodded, swinging her right foot a little.

“Yes, that’s good.” He paused briefly. “Anyway, do you like the statue? You were so engrossed in it,” the man said.

Eki, her gaze fixed on the statue, said: “It is so real. It looks as if she would start walking any minute.”

“You’re right. That’s the work of Igbinosa, the master bronze caster of Bini Kingdom. There are more of his works inside the Palace. Would you like to see them?” he asked.

“Is it allowed? I mean, there are some exclusive areas in this palace outsiders cannot enter...”

“You can go anywhere here as long as you’re with me,” he assured her.

She looked at him, a bit sceptical, then at the encouraging smile from him Eki shrugged and followed him. They left the large courtyard and walked through a second gate on both sides of which were guards. These bowed to the man respectfully as they passed through. Eki looked at him curiously. “Do you work in the palace? Are you a body-guard?” she asked. He gave her an enigmatic smile. “Something like that.” (Excerpts from an unpublished manuscript)

# YOU ARE STILL THE LAST PERSON I KISSED

Kimberly Chirodzero, Zimbabwe



In the three years since Taku and I have been apart, I've been to every one of our old haunts in a bid to exorcise the ghost of our love. Every haunt besides the one I now stand in. Ambrosia restaurant hasn't changed in three years and this makes me nervous. This is where we had our first date and our first kiss. One year and six months ago I almost made the biggest mistake of my life; marrying Roland. It wasn't entirely Roland's fault, seeing as I knew right from the start of that relationship that something was wrong. I think if I am recalling correctly Roland himself tried to warn me, but I'm a stubborn girl. I believed too highly in the magic of my love. I did learn a lot from that hell bound disaster of a relationship though and I began the journey of self-healing. Breaking up with Roland brought me back to life in a way only a previously oppressed

person could appreciate.

Now I stand in the restaurant Taku and I loved and force myself to walk, chin up to the table we frequented. Luckily, it's unoccupied so I slip into a chair and let out a breath I didn't know I had been holding. Part of my healing has been dealing with the things in my past I'd rather avoid and even though I started this journey because of my destructive relationship with Roland, it has led me back to Taku. Everything leads me back to Taku. A plump waitress comes over to my table. "Hello, would you like to order now?" she smiles pleasantly. I stare at the menu that I didn't even open and wonder what to say. "Give us a minute," a voice says from behind the waitress. I would know that voice anywhere. The waitress smiles once more and takes off; leaving me face to face with the ghost that haunts my dreams.

Taku pulls up a chair as if this encounter is perfectly normal. "What are you doing here?" I blurt out my first words to him in three years. I look him over expecting some tell-tale signs of the years but he just looks more handsome if anything.

"I could ask you the same thing," he says with an easy smile but I can tell from his eyes that he is just as shocked as I am. My heart is pounding as if it's been transformed by some magic trick into a herd of stamping cattle. This man does things to me no one should be able to do to another human being. I'm slightly shocked that this is all it took for him to shatter me. I feel as insubstantial as stardust, as though I could be blown away in a single gust of emotion.

"It was bound to happen, Jules. Ambrosia was always our place," Taku continues to speak in that calm, velvety tone.

"I thought you were in Algeria getting your masters and PhD," I say trying to keep the bitterness out of my voice.

"I graduated in October. I just came for the Christmas holiday," he says, watching me carefully.

He would mention Christmas wouldn't he, the bastard. December was as much our month as Ambrosia was our "place". We started dating in December, and for the time we were together that month carried a special kind of magic for us. We spent Christmas together and it was always spectacular. My favourite Christmases were the ones I spent with him and he knew

it. I can see in his warm brown eyes he is waiting for me to react. I feel like I'm falling into him all over again. Abruptly, I stand up and sling my bag over my shoulder. "I should go," I say. Taku stands too and grabs my hand. "Jules, I've been coming here the whole week hoping we'd meet like this. Please sit down," his hand caresses mine and I'm sure my skin is blistering from the fire his fingers ignite there. I sit because I hate making a scene in front of people. Or so I tell myself.

Taku orders us food and we are both silent until the waitress serving us leaves. "Let's just start slow, shall we? We were friends once," His voice is low, coaxing. I narrow my eyes at him. Friends? We were best friends. Being apart the first year physically hurt. I snort and Taku laughs. Everything in me lights up in spite of myself. I had forgotten Taku's laughter. It's a rhapsodic music specifically designed for me and he is a virtuoso. Once upon a time I used to make up jokes just to hear him laugh. I used to kiss the sides of his neck... I mentally grab hold of my wayward thoughts and shove them under the table.

"I guess there is no harm in being friends," I say in mock defeat. I'm rewarded with a smile that melts my uncertainty.

"I've missed you every single day," he says simply.

"Isn't there someone in your life now?" Now I want to hide under the table. I didn't mean to make that my very first question. Taku looks down at his food but doesn't eat.

"Jules, you're still the last person I kissed." I choke on my cranberry juice.

"What?" I croak.

"I haven't dated in three years. It just always felt like I'd be betraying you," he holds up his hand to cut me off. "I know we broke up and you moved on. I just...well, for me it has just always been you." I want to disappear. Instead I begin to eat in earnest, as if this food is my salvation.

"Jules," Taku starts tentatively. "I know you are with someone now. I'm not trying to start anything but I do mean it when I say I miss my best friend." I almost choke again.

"With someone?" I manage to whisper.

"That Roland guy," he doesn't look at me when he spits the name out. "I heard you guys



are engaged.” I sigh loudly because I really don’t want to talk about Roland anymore but this is Taku, my once best friend and everything else.

“I broke up with Roland one year and six months ago.” Taku’s face lights up before I even finish speaking. He is beaming and he’s not even trying to hide it. I should be angry. I should leave but when Taku smiles at me my every coherent thought gets lost before it reaches execution. We finish our food in silence.

“Go out with me tomorrow night,” Taku says as we step out from Ambrosia’s double doors. I open my mouth for some excuse but he cuts me off. “I know you are a great believer in healing and healthy relationships. My last relationship was three years ago, yours a year and six months so we’ve both healed. Say yes, Julietta.” He is coaxing me with that velvety, spun honey voice of his. He takes my hands and looks me in the eye. The tether between our souls is still there, I can feel it rejoicing at spending a few hours with him.

“It’s been three years, Taku. What if we no longer fit?” I voice my fears. Without warning he steps into my space and I am suddenly in his arms. His hand is at the nape of my neck and then Taku is kissing me. I’ve been kissed by Taku before and each time I always thought one day the crazy rush of magic he incites in my veins would surely fade. It hasn’t. At first I am so shaken I just hold on for dear life but when I finally yield, we explode. I instantly understand why Taku waited three years for me. I understand why Roland and I never stood a chance. What Taku and I have encompasses every level; soul, spirit and body. When Taku releases me, I blink at him stupidly. One kiss from this man and I am sure whose rib I am. My problem three years ago was I had too much pride and I was afraid of the pain that comes when your love is so raw. I hated belonging to someone on a soul level. I felt caged. I was wrong. Having a soul mate is such a beautiful and freeing thing. There is no need for pretence between us. “I love you,” I say. Taku doesn’t miss a beat. “Took you all of three years to figure that out,” Taku snorts but he’s smiling at me, “I never stopped loving you.” Roland almost killed me with physical and verbal abuse but no matter his antics to control me, remould me, we never fit. I had always been meant for this man whose laughter soothes my soul and whose kiss brings clarity to my universe. I might be a stubborn girl but I learn my lessons. Love doesn’t cage us, it frees us.



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