

February  
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**BENSON G. MUGO**

Winner of the 2018 African Writers Award  
for Short Stories

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Naomi Dixon - Kenya  
Adodo Ruth Enoguehi - Nigeria  
Fomutar Stanislaus - Cameroon  
Tshepiso Keatimilwe - Botswana  
Kimberly Chirodzero - Zimbabwe

# EDITORIAL

Wow! Look at that. It's already February. The second month of the year, notoriously known as the month of love: Of chocolates, roses and red. Red, the colour of blood or is it love? What do folks say, painting the town red?

Well, we jumped right into the 'Love in Africa' themed wagon, bringing you variety from all corners of Africa... with love.

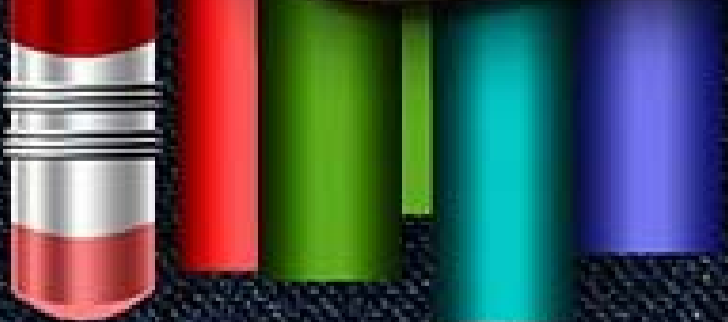
In this second issue of the year, we celebrate Benson Mugo from Kenya, the winner of short stories category in the 2018 African Writers Awards (AWA)

Speaking of Kenya, Africa will gather in Nairobi for the African Writers Conference and for the annual book fair. Flip the pages for more details.

Catch you there, in the city under the sun.

Keep it WSA!

Wakini Kuria,  
Chief Editor,  
Kenya



# ***IN THE NEWS...***

*- African Writers Conference unveils logo*



# African Writers Conference Unveils 2019 Logo

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It is with great delight that we announce the official unveiling of the 2019 African Writers Conference logo. With Kenya as our host this year, our conference is centered around the theme, “Cultural stereotypes in African Literature: Rewriting the narrative for the 21st Century Reader”.

The logo boasts a blend of the beautiful national colours of Kenya and symbols of the strength of African culture.

It represents our pride in the vibrant African culture often misrepresented in literature.

The logo is symbolic of the values we intend to share when we gather in Nairobi later in 2019 for the African Writers Conference. We hope these visuals will stimulate a new narrative on how African culture is portrayed in literary works of both Africans and non-Africans.

Join us as we celebrate this amazing piece of African art.

Anticipate and stay connected as we share more details on @AWCKenya(Twitter) and Africanwritersconference on Facebook and Instagram!



# FLASH FICTION





# Love is you Dead

Edith Knight Magak- Kenya



Love is you on your death bed; in your final hour, surrounded by flushed crying eyes of helpless loved ones. It's that moment when your breaths are measured- each one drawing you close to your end. You sift through your words, delicately picking the important ones, for a dying man has none to waste.

You want to tell your wife that at your death, another woman will emerge with a child and claim to be her co-wife. You almost start to, but it requires a lot of words, words you don't have, and how can you explain that it was out of love for her that you kept the mistress a secret?

You want to tell your son that the land he thought he would inherit was sold off by you secretly a few years ago. You are just about to, then you remember it's hard to speak. You're limited by the amount of air you can expend from your lungs, and you're not sure if you have enough time left for explanations, so you let it slide.

You want to tell your daughter that she actually qualified for the university and her acceptance letter came, but you hid it because you loved her. No man in the village would have married a university girl. You think you should, it's important she knows, but at most, you think you have only 5 words. And you have to save them.

Time is up, you can feel it. The breaths are more laboured and so you say words you have never said before, words you should have said more often. You look at them with emotional tear filled eyes, summon up all your energy and say "I love you all"

Love is you dead.

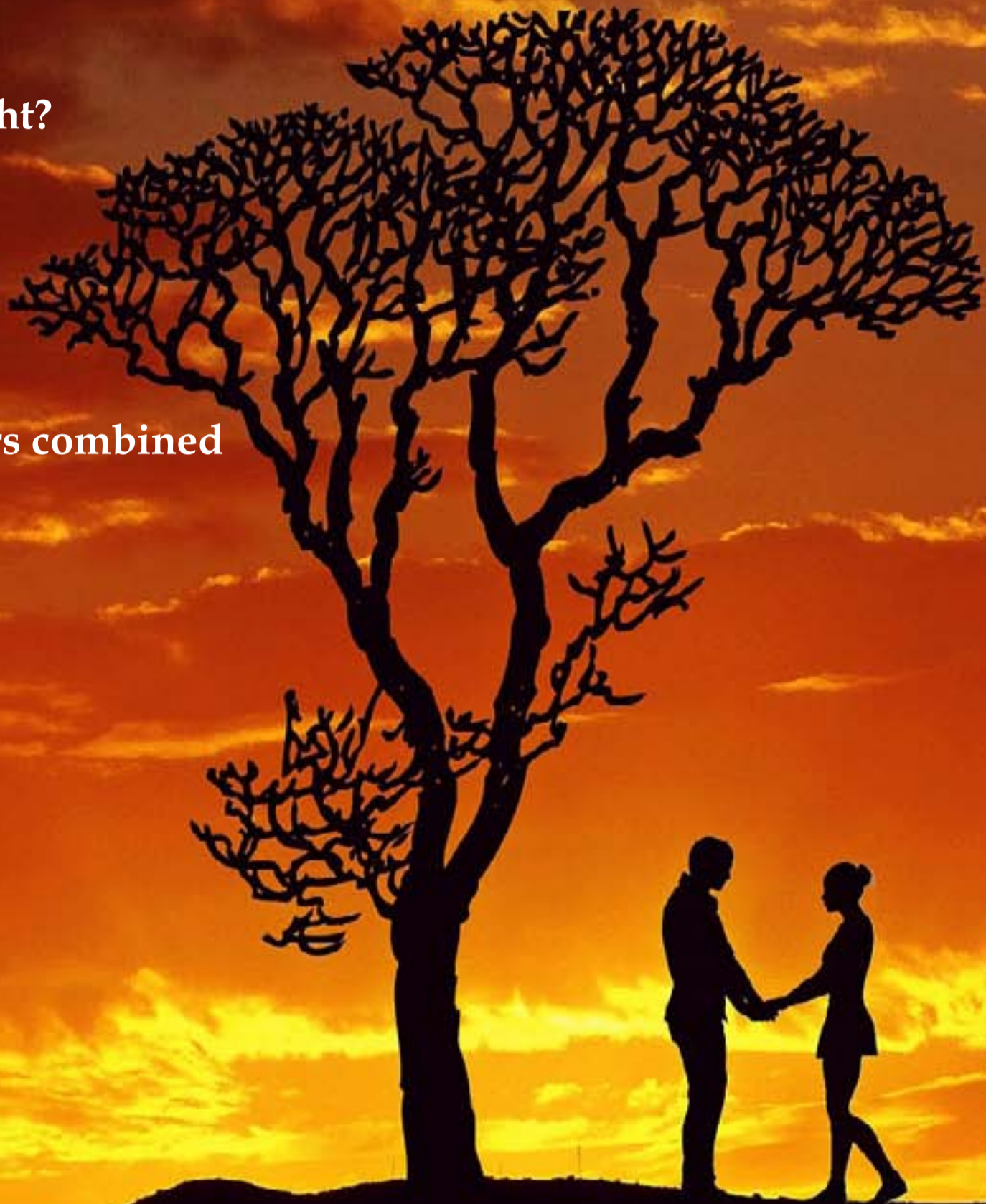


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# Infinite Shades

When is 'too early'  
To know that I'm in love?  
When is 'too early'  
To say the magic word?  
It's not 'love at first sight'  
But is there love at first night?  
What we have feels so real  
But I may not foresee  
For love is blind  
What I want with you,  
Is infinite shade of all colors combined

Seife Temam,  
Ethiopia



# MOONLIGHT IN MY VILLAGE

When her sexy smile outspreads the blanket blackness of the night  
Displaying her magical victory over darkness  
She feeds the playful appetites of my village friends  
Bestowing a paradise of joy upon our mother land

When she turns up a little brighter her stunning smile  
She gives birth to copious kids  
In my village maidens from far distance or shortest mile  
And paves the way for fascinating tales

Her light ignites and powers the old folks' jaws  
It releases engaging hoary stories  
To alleviate their weakened joy  
With deep expressions of their former glories

The flowing of her pampered face renders tender love in oneness  
Indulging deep feelings amid friends and family members  
She encircles all the Adams and Eves, to sit, to talk, to eat and play  
Together, while the gaffers laugh out fun with rum

Spreading her diamond smile to a wider laugh  
Spotlights instant love and empirical ties  
In the roguish minds of my village youngsters  
And in the happy eyes of my village elders

Drowning in the river of abundant joy and respect  
While singing with their choir-like voices  
All hands encircle weaving crazy instrumentals for sweet love songs  
Each taking centre stage, as a sign of moonshine

Yusuf Gazbee Kamara,  
Sierra Leone

# Young Love

I feel the heat of his hot gaze sweep through my body  
Leaving a trail of goose bumps in its wake  
My hair stands on ends  
and my palms turn clammy with sweat  
My first love, he stands so tall,  
shoulders high, muscles taut

The sound of his voice  
carries with the wind  
As he leads his sheep  
through green pastures to feed  
My eyes feast  
on the sight of him

He carries his staff with such ease,  
dark brown skin glistening from the heat  
His long black curly mane bunched by thread  
sways in the air  
His hazel eyes light up  
when he smiles up at me  
My heart skips a beat,  
time stops and freezes  
I've loved him from my window  
He's loved me from the street.

Maria Nicole. E. Gandaho  
Benin Republic

# Potent One

To love you is to be weary  
To ever contemplate your being  
Is to prepare for shattering  
of chains on stone  
To patiently gather the smithereens  
Before evening's children dash about  
To love you is to sit all night, gluing  
Piece on piece, this brokenness  
While others sigh away their  
Desperately peaceful selves!

Potent one,  
To love you is to create vastness itself  
The undulating scenes capture  
in one long moon-lit night  
That dissolves in both ritual  
and exotic paroxysms  
To love you is to listen to a cacophony  
Of a thousand tongues,  
which in their disagreed selves  
Is but one search of that single love,

Potent one,  
To love you is a miracle.

Samson Nyarima,  
Kenya



# HOME OF PLENTY

Look!  
How they embrace each other  
Under the early morning sun,  
How they swim  
In plenty of life  
How they enjoy  
Sweet well-earned drink  
In a pool of life  
With worries-  
No less than satisfaction

Look!  
The green in the background  
Inciting a deep pinch-  
Admiration.

Look!  
How brotherhood binds...

Come home brother!  
There can be a twist of fate  
Return to Africa  
Let's make her a pool of embrace,  
Harness the gifts of Mother Nature  
Smile  
Timeless love  
I LOVE YOU, AFRICA!

Zerida B Claire,  
Uganda



## Yearning for Love

Notice me,  
I pass here everyday  
Whistle,  
I'll smile in my heart  
Though my face will wear an angry look

Pause,  
Observe my steps  
Wink at me,  
As I throw my buttocks  
Left and right

Stop me,  
Use whatever excuse you have  
Scratch not your head  
Honestly, I wouldn't mind  
Deep inside

I may be, a tough one  
But I'm a woman inside  
Give essence to my nature  
If you turn down this invitation,  
A grumpy woman you'll be nursing

Notice me!  
Wave me down!  
Talk to me!  
I have a whim for these.

Nnane Ntube,  
Cameroon.



# Knowing

I understood lies before I knew what they were.  
In a judgmental society I was born  
outside the bounds of normal.  
Lies worsened and led to the eventual absence  
of he who brought me here.  
I thought that maybe  
I would be better off without him.  
Instead without him, I have known it all.  
Neglect, loneliness, violence,  
depression, I have known it all.

I am a twenty first century woman.  
I do it all while glued to a screen all day,  
many call me brave  
and ask me for answers.  
When I am alone, sometimes  
I am happy other times  
The darkness attempts to draw me back in.  
To spite the darkness that tries  
and fails to consume my youth,  
I smile at the sounds of birds singing  
and the wind that makes the trees speak.  
The sounds teach me things;  
they teach me about the beauty  
Beauty that darkness refused to show me.

Through it all I found what many  
have termed a silver lining.  
He smiles, he cries, he laughs, he loves.  
He too has known it all.  
Pain, illness, death, depression,  
he has known it all.  
Together we run away from the shadows  
that bring the darkness.  
We find solace in things many do not see  
Because we have known it all.

Zangose Tembo,  
Zambia

# Breathless

Pulse...  
steady...

Upon my bed  
her rose in bloom  
And what do you do with a  
rose?

You...  
inhale...

Marvel at its  
many folds...  
Gently brush your lips against it

Teasingly...  
teasingly...

Pulse...  
racing ...

Upon my bed  
her fountain awaits  
And how do you drink from  
a fountain?

Lips placed gently inside  
to taste god's sweet nectar  
With quivering tongue

Slowly...  
slowly...

Pulse...  
frantic...

upon my bed  
her river overflows  
and how do you ride  
a river?

Enter ever so gently...  
stroke where the currents  
flow...

Deeper...  
deeper...

Pulse...  
explodes...

Mandela Matur (Ade), -  
South Sudan



# Love in Africa



Watching the lonely sky,  
When one is in love in Africa,  
A cliff becomes a meadow.

Delving into love history,  
Invading the truth and essence,  
Love is like misty rain that falls softly, but  
floods Africa greatly.

Like a lone star,  
Wanting to be watched,  
Love is a deposit of ups and downs.

As love enters gently,  
Africa falls back,  
Looking at life permanently.

Face to face,  
Like a day old baby watching her toys,

Love is unspoken.

Boiling amusement in life,  
Kissing those lovely tears away,  
Love in Africa is never astray.

Oh! Africa.  
As I stand in the middle of your thoughts,  
I love to caress your spacecraft like an as-  
tronaut.

Dancing to every emotions,  
Descending into the depths of every feel-  
ing,  
This love is emotional.

Edwin Olu Bestman, -  
Liberia

# Soil Daughter

There she goes touching my black heart  
with her unconditional love  
Turning my feelings upside down  
just like the free birds creating real  
music without drum and bass.  
Sweet melodies and trueversations  
We talked about personal revolution  
evolution of the minds  
Downtown Newton we chilled  
with the doves, rolled the holy grass and kissed  
Then she got me walking barefoot from  
Mandela Bridge to Braamfontein for a brunch  
I could feel the chemistry,  
the blues and the poetry in her eyes  
So cool as the breeze brewed  
from Johannesburg skies  
Full of adventure like a soul rebel with a cause  
she really put me on another level of love  
She is not afraid of any vultures,  
last one left to revive the culture  
So fine like matured wine  
without any boundaries to be mine.

Morwamphaka Sello Huma,  
South Africa

# The Loaf of Love

Sitting under the benevolent baobab, I tell a tale  
Of a soil mightier than the wind  
I see the oceanic wave that drives pain away at the table tons of South Africa  
And the Namibia Sossusvlei dunes that feed thousand of emptied souls a win.

Have you heard of the cloud that thunders “mosi o tun ya” in Zambia and Zimbabwe?  
Let us dance to the didactic steps of our grey hair,  
Let the chorused voices sing aloud the anthem of our continent.  
That our illusion filled leaders see the tiny flies in the air.

In the heart of the old city of Marrakech  
Lies the snake charmers, henna painters and date sellers.  
As night falls, kids sit on the laps of their mother on a stretch.  
In joy dangling up with the touch of the stars in their hearts.

The black beauty of Africans lures aliens to our great soil.  
Brotherhood colours our town, villages and country well  
And with this I sail across the border of the moon.  
Africa is a loaf of love.

Ayanfemi Ayobami,  
Nigeria



# CRASH

For you, I am as the sea,  
My love is my waves  
And you, are the sands on my shores  
Any time I see you, I come crashing  
At your feet

But the paradox of our metaphor  
Is that you, sweep me off  
My feet  
And my waves, go unnoticed.

Cyril Oswin Xedidor,  
Ghana

# Who am I without you?

Who am I without you?

I mean...who is 'I' without 'You'

They might say there's no 'I' in 'Y.O.U'

Then again, what do they know?

That's all they are.... They

Dreary, hateful, bigoted beings

But I know for sure that you can find 'You' in 'I'

Weird, right?

How can a single letter like 'I'

Clutch all the three letters of 'You'

All the three layers of 'You'

You being just.... You

Your obliviousness to my existence

And your undeserved attention from me and many souls

But what isn't?

What isn't weird and complicated?

Unorthodox, non-confirming

Heretical and life sucking

I learned what love is from you

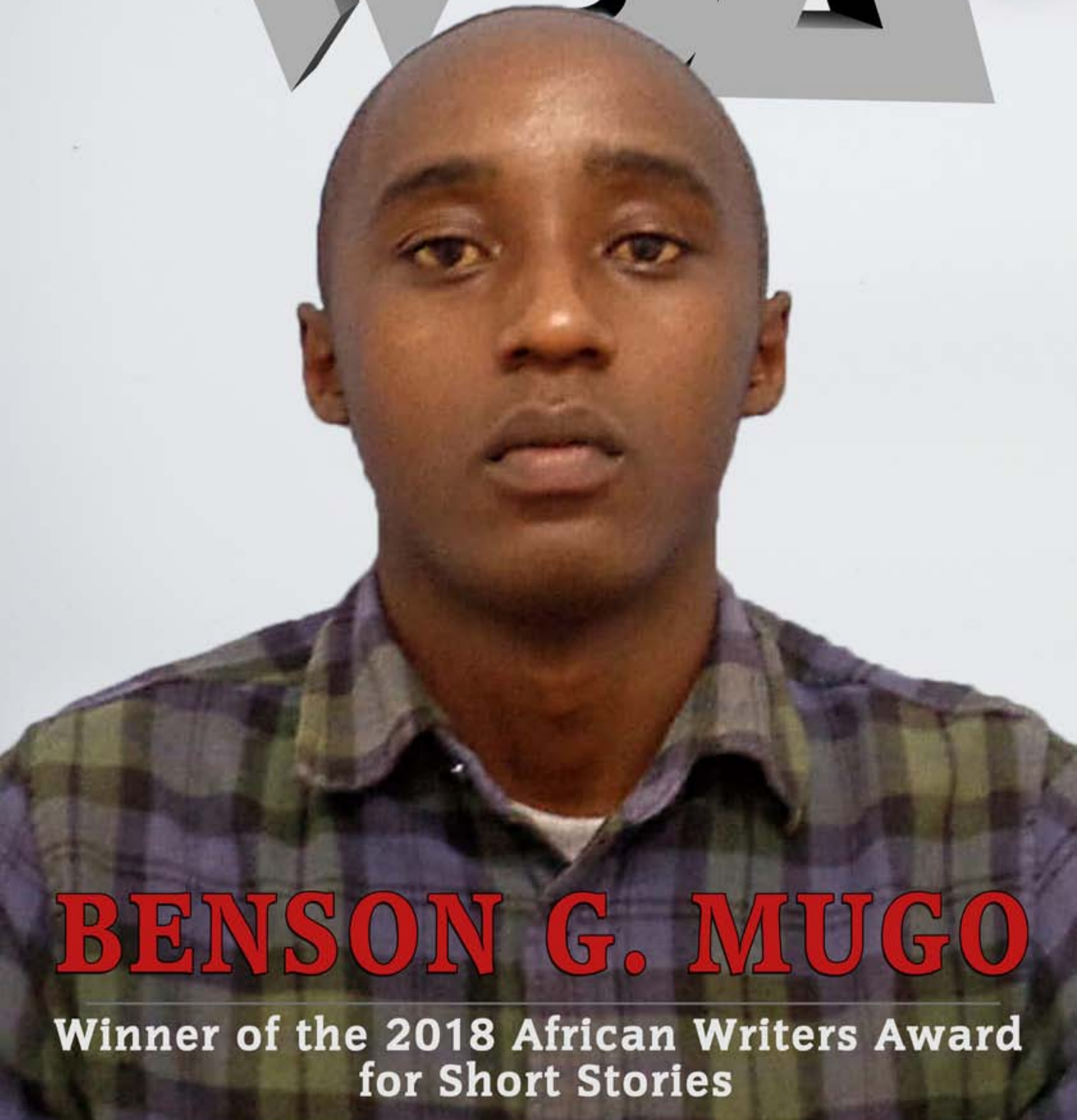
Even when you didn't love 'I' back

I am and is forever thankful and remorseful

Biniam Getaneh Kifle,

Ethiopia

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# **BENSON G. MUGO**

**Winner of the 2018 African Writers Award  
for Short Stories**



## ABOUT BENSON MUGO

Benson Gitau Mugo, who goes by the pen name Caymil, is a budding creative writer born in the green lush hills of Kericho, Kenya in 1995. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and Literature from Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya then worked as a paramedic. His experiences shapes most of his stories which he publishes on his blog at [Caymil.wordpress.com](http://Caymil.wordpress.com) .

During his university days, he was the editor of the campus magazine - *Campanile* and was part of the editorial for the *Career focus magazine*. He currently mentors highschool students on both creative writing and first aid. And in addition, Benson is currently writing his novel to be published later this year. He can be reached via his email [bensonmugo14@gmail.com](mailto:bensonmugo14@gmail.com)

Please enjoy his award winning story below.



# DAWN

by

## Benson Mugo

The flame danced lazily in a slow synchronized wave of an amber glow. A glow reflected on the dripping tears of the silhouetted figure staring deep into the flame. A silent figure. A figure so silent that mosquitoes gave up on and circle the moths on their quest on the lantern lamp. The lamp that is running on its last fumes of kerosene whose aromatic smell now fills the scantily furnished room. Its smell hangs heavily on the curtain that separates the lone

figure from her roommate, whose snores were in rhythm to her deep heaves. Tears drip on, now soaking through her skirt; one she has worn for the past two days. She still denies that depression has wound its tendrils up her system. The orange hue fades into the dark, absorbed by the curtains and the darkness takes over as the wick finally takes the final bow and sputters off, the kerosene finally giving up its last breath. Strangely she feels better in the dark. This was not always the case.

Nyambura is your not-so-normal neighbouring young adult. Bubbly with life, quick to anger, perpetual complainer with borderline narcissistic tendencies and a loner. Most of her life having been defined by mixed childhood and more mixed fortunes. Her clothes are decent, most being paramedic uniforms and church choir costumes inherited from her roommate's brother who suddenly found faith in another religion. Her speech is clear, defined by a clear soprano and mastery of facts. In essence, very few people have had the chance to be wowed by her speech as she decided a long time ago that normal mortals were not fit to share in her well of knowledge. Her side of the apartment as she likes to call it is a fort of books and novels, accrued cheaply in the streets and others dumped on her by her more sophisticated friends who prefer reading eBooks and podcasts. An avid reader and analyst, she doesn't belong to their generation.

Despite being born in a normal family setting, her mother, suffering from postpartum depression, left her to her father, who due to her schedule at work passed her on to her aunt or stepmother, she never knew, who then passed her on to her grandfather who ran a children's home for profit and funding from religious organizations and NGOs. If she ever decided to draw her family line, it would end at the start, with her. She only had the descriptions of her mother based on the angry rants of her grandfather when he lacked anything to blame for her poor bookkeeping skills. He swore heavily in mother tongue interspersed with English verbs at her and her mother. Apologies were never in her vocabulary until when her body was laid to rest and she had to apologize to the other children in the home for her grandfather's behaviours by virtue of being the eldest in the home and by extension a fawn of the family. This is when family lost meaning.

School was a maze to her, a maze she easily navigated by sheer will and skill. Her loner attitude made her an object of reverence by the junior form one children who were awed by the air of mystery around her. She herself was often surprised by the rumours about her floating in the dorms and shower cubicles. Her status of a demigod within the school made her unseen enemies in the school and she rarely cared, she could handle them by her street karate skills which she often offered free lessons to her combatants, freely breaking fingers and tearing tendons with well-aimed punches and tackles. Due to her stature and hatred for the human company, she rarely participated in games. She knew after school her future was doomed, a truth she tried not to think of, the punishing truth that hit her tender spots when she was in the laboratories and blamed the tears on the strong chemicals.

She still holds the record for clearing high school without being visited during any visiting day. She never expected any visitor and thus she rarely cared and spent days reading novels holed in the school bus garage with the bus driver who sometimes brought her teacher's food as a gift from the caterer whom he was seeing.

Do good grades make a career? A question Nyambura was yet to find out. The results came, hers on top. Universities had her on her dream career – bachelors of medicine and surgery, MBBS. But that remained on paper at the admissions offices. Nobody could afford the fees. Her grades glared back at her like the curse that they were. A victim of circumstances has no say. Having no adults in her life to advise her further and having reached the legal age, she had to vacate the children's home. Together with another spewed out adult, they rented out.

A new dawn will always arise with hope; Nyambura was ever optimistic and applied for the military cadet program with her glowing results. According to the military, they posted back their responses, but Nyambura had no postal address to the correspondence. And thus the wait began; the military with its efficiency gave up on her and resumed its activities. Survival by academic writing was not a reliable activity and she had a lot of free time which necessitated her runs to the city and sojourns in the suburbs in search for peers to impress with her newly acquired monies. It was in one of these that she met him.

Ever since she knew how to differentiate between colours, uniformed people always had an effect on her. She viewed them with reverence. To her, they were gods and deserved such profound respect. She was always in awe of them and the authority they had. A uniform was the epitome of excellence, a mark of authority and show of might. She always longed to be in one despite the military's rejection. Her fantasies involved her in her uniform, her fantasies and dreams were the best imaginations she ever had. Now she had a chance to be in one courtesy of him.

He stood out, his tie swinging wildly as he gave orders and jumped about trying to make his small stature visible in the crowd. His uniform a gleaming white in contrast to his skin and his small fingers in gloves. His small stout body bouncing about, being everywhere all the time. He appeared overwhelmed but did not show it. His resolve was evident as he directed first aiders at the scene of a car crash where a motorbike rider had ridden into the back of school bus despite its shouting yellow colour. As a loner, she had mastered the art of espionage, where she could gather as much information as possible while remaining in the shadows. Within minutes, she knew his name and had a couple of photos in her phone's gallery on a folder she had named- dreams.

Having basic knowledge in first aid through experience, as she was the unofficial medic at the children's home, her offer to help was initially met with some subtle resistance but her piercing gaze and speech melted that. The first aiders were convinced that she was a doctor. Her attempts to convince them otherwise were futile; her skills had them thinking she was just shy and trying to keep her identity decently camouflaged. She had to accompany the team with the ambulance to the hospital. That was how she secured a training spot with the crew. She was born a doctor, but circumstances forced her to be a paramedic. She never knew who paid for her studies but she was forever grateful.

Fate sometimes comes disguised as a blessing dripping with honey tasting like a freshly baked cake. Soon, everyone in her high school's WhatsApp group was aware that she was a medic and to them, that meant a doctor. In Kenya, everyone in a hospital setting clothed in a lab coat is a doctor, nurse, clinical officer, laboratory technician, orderlies and even a mortu-

cian. Her uniform, stethoscope and medal bag, the props for her facebook photos and work respectively gave her the alter ego and overconfidence inspired by her friends. She considered herself a doctor.

When a lady introduces herself as a doctor in front of a bunch of cute guys that she likes, she naturally expects them to be awed by her job profile and maybe one to fall for her charms and see a great future in her. The opposite actually happens; the guys will take her number alright, but for different purposes. Normally they will start by making small talk daily and when the guys are sure she is truly under their spell they will start asking for favours. Normally these ranges from free hospital medicines to treatment for basic ailments. The young doctor, trying to please them or him, will often comply and often bend over in the quest to fulfil these. After a while, they will start recommending their friends who are too embarrassed to seek treatment for STIs to her and then they themselves will come to her for the same. They then advance to seeking abortion services for their girlfriends. Thus a circle is born, all at the expense of the young female pseudo-doctor.

As a medic, life had its moments, from sadness after losing a casualty and anger while believing they could have done more to gratitude when they saved lives. Nyambura's life was changing, she became more interactive and even considered going back to do her degree in medicine after raking in the requisite school fees. She was a natural with patients and her crew grew to depend on her analytical skills and fast thinking capacity and actions. She felt like she had found a family in the uniformed strangers. Despite the erratic schedules and lack of rest sometimes, she enjoyed every time she was in uniform speeding through town blaring the sirens on the ambulance proving that she owned those nights saving lives. She had reached the epitome of self-efficacy during those adrenaline surges as she lifted the casualties to the hospitals.

What paramedic school had not prepared her for were the demons she would face as a first responder to gore and horrific scenes. The amount of blood and other gory bodily fluids she saw daily took a toll on her. As a paramedic, she saw things a normal human being was never supposed to see or even dream about. Pulling severed human body parts from mangled

wrecks and having to console their families all in a span of hours weighed Nyambura down. Trying to save a bleeding pregnant woman while being confronted by the tragedy of losing a hysterical after the accident was too much for her. Deciding who to care for first in a mass casualty event at the expense of another life, took more of her than she ever thought. She never signed up for the role of God, deciding who to live and who to let go. During her free time, she offered palliative care to cancer-ridden patients at their homes pro bono to try to cleanse her soul. Instead of helping, that added to her misery. How could she observe someone on their last steps and still try to give them hope knowing fully well that it was never enough?

The support structure around her slowly crumbled as she reverted to her cocoon of silence and self-hatred. Battling PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder- after shifts alone in her room proved a mountainous task. She soon got tired of weeping into her pillow, her diary full she opted for other ways to numb her senses. Offering more hours at the workplace did not help as she was mostly idle because accidents and calamities don't happen daily. The cackle of the ambulance radio made her jumpy. Her friends realized this and kept away from her angry outbursts and violent tendencies. Complaints streamed in, slowly at first then in torrents. Her hygiene was wanting for someone in her line of work. Usually, she thrived in loneliness but now she was scared of being alone. She was on the onset of depression; she knew it but was too proud to admit. Nyambura was slowly turning into the monster that her grandfather was. A comparison she derided.

The suspension letter came in a soft cushioned envelope with a recommendation letter to a psychiatrist. The blow hit her hard considering she was facing eviction due to government's roads expansion programs. The psychiatrist was expensive. She insisted that her problems stemmed from her childhood, a childhood she had no recollection over. The job would never accept her back if she did not approve of her state of mind. Nyambura played along to her mind games and went back to face her demons alone in the dark stuffy room she called home with her sniffles and tears for a lullaby. Here was a master of chaos, someone who held her grace under the horrors, now engulfed in chaos inside her which she could not handle. The chaos had finally mastered her.

After Noah drunk the first cup of wine, her grandchildren ensured that that cup never ran dry, Nyambura joined the bandwagon. At first, she was ashamed and embarrassed of going to the wines and spirit shop to get the bottle. In a hooded jumper and cap dropped low, she visited the place late into the evening in the twilight, her ears stuffed with earphones pushing out the sounds of destitute and filling her with slow music, souls and R and B, the sad man's music. The bartender knew her by her assured gait, a result of her job and her voice, which though clipped was enough of identification. Her house was soon a perfect advertisement for a brewing company with bottles meticulously arranged below the bed and on every available space, she was too embarrassed to throw them out, she still had a reputation to keep with her soon to be ex-neighbours. Drinking alone becomes a bore pretty easily and Nyambura needed an audience for her knowledge. By now her education fund was depleting faster than her dreams of one day having a hospital named after her- Dr Nyambura hospital.

She never had friends and thus she stood to lose nothing by nobody visiting her. As with such a life, paranoia sets in, she was sure everyone was out to kill her. She became more erratic and suspicious, a trait she grew up with but alcohol heightened it. The eviction passed her in a blur. All she remembers was picking up her uniforms and documents, selling a few household utensils to the caretaker and complaining vehemently in front of a television camera about how she had never seen the eviction notice before blacking out. She was woken up by dogs tugging at her matted hair and licking her face. The drizzle sobered her up and as she was waiting for showers to subside, she remembered the lady she had helped get rid of her pregnancies. That is how she found herself with a roommate twice her age, sharing the cold shanty listening to drunks urinate on the walls adjacent to the only window darkened with smears from countless fingers groping for their way in the dark alleys.

Word travels fast, she was the defacto slum doctor for the scum of the slums, and it paid for her lodgings and increased uptake of alcohol premium slum changaa the best Huruma slums could offer. Sometimes her patients paid in drink, sex or cash; nobody had the thought of substituting it with food. Somehow Nyambura thrived like the slum rat she had metamorphosed into. Police raids opted to ignore her existence; they were part of her clientele for STI treatment.

In the slums, you can thrive and become a slumlord, thrive and break free of the slums or be carried by the torrent and get absorbed by the slums. Nyambura was carried away. The reverence and pride of being called a doctor got into her head despite the high mortality rate from her clinic. All seemed to be at rest and she was convinced she had found purpose in life, to help those who could afford her services. Her life had run down from being an ambitious paramedic to a slum lord, a doctor.

Caymil, the male paramedic who introduced her to the field found her. In the slums, everyone is suspicious, anyone can be a policeman or an informant. Considering the illegal enterprises that thrive in there, such a person can spell doom for livelihoods for generations. Caymil knew that and knew that if he came in uniform bearing gifts of medications, doors would be opened and that's how he found himself looking at the emaciated body of Nyambura in a stupor leaning against her side of the room. Adjusting to the stench and darkness took a while and realizing that the coarse voice responding to his queries was what had remained of the sweet soprano that used to cajole and tease him when not singing sweet nothings to him. How times change. Her peeling lips smattered as she recognized him. Deep down she wanted to apologize for her sorry state, but her ego turned that into blaming him for her misfortunes.

The three-hour conversation cut deep into her, despite the factual information, she still blamed him and hated that he was wasting her time to make money. Her liver was begging for a drink and her drooling eyes showed it all. He was persistent. Care and love lined his words, a few times she heard his sobs and she was sure she saw some tears. He claimed it was from the stench therein. Nyambura knew that he cared for her. She was impossible to love having never received love, and she had tried the art with mixed results and being left by a one-time boyfriend sealed her fate on love. She understood care but never comprehended love. She felt emasculated by his presence, she felt cheated and embarrassed. To her, his presence was the final nail as far as ridicule goes. She tried raising her voice but the peeling lips bled painfully. In Caymil she saw her shattered dreams. She still knew a new better day would come, her dawn.



The withdrawal effects of drugs hit harder than anticipated. The body used to alcohol fought to have it. Her brain refused to coordinate with her fingers. Her vision became hazy and eyes so puffed that they refused to open. The shaking left her too weak to even go out for normal bodily functions. Her room became an abolition block reeking to the heavens of puke and other body fluids. Her roommate was ever drunk to even notice. The images of Caymil kept running in her head calling unto him. She spoke to herself on days unending, time ceased to exist, hunger pitched tent in her guts. Shivers made it impossible to talk or communicate, the scraps of food she swallowed all came out. In the delirious state, she started fathoming the notion of a better life after death. She was convinced her dawn lay on the other side, the other dimension held her future.

Her last act of defiance to her ego was calling Caymil and outlining how she was going to redeem her soul in the other dimension. Now as she stared at the gloom, she saw her life ebb away like the dancing flame in the lantern. The amber glow fading into the darkness and stars forming inside her eyelids as the floor soaked her blood. Her wrists felt soft, bubblegum-like as blood flowed out slowly numbing her, drawing her closer to the other dimension. As she drifted out of consciousness all she could shear was the closing in on the ambulance siren and her mantra playing on a loop in her head *I'l n'est rein de re'el que le reve*.

Laying on the cold bloodied stretcher, drifting in and out of consciousness, listening to the sirens of the ambulance fade in and blare, seeing the lights fading and brighten in a cacophony of red and blue colours, was the most beautiful thing she saw. Caymil was standing over her trying to fix a needle from the IV fluid into her now collapsed veins, she felt loved, but her new dawn was on the other side. She felt so comfortable and relaxed as they all faded into oblivion slowly. The doctor's voices blended into a soft murmur before fading off into infinity, the lights creating an aurora. She dived deeper into the peaceful ambience where silence and peace took over. Finally, she felt at peace, with herself, and the world. Her dawn had come. Silence...

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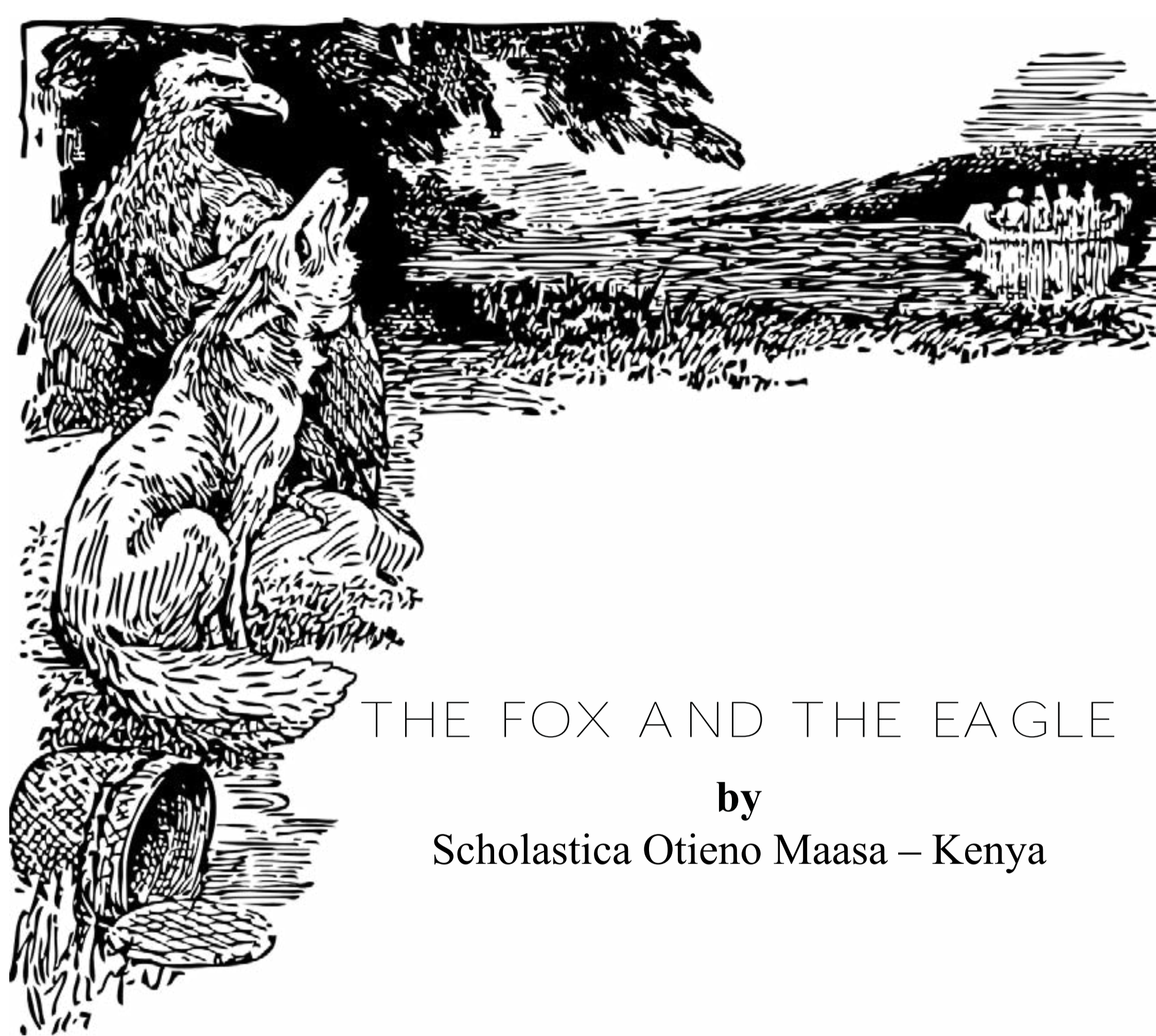
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# Children's Literature





## THE FOX AND THE EAGLE

by

Scholastica Otieno Maasa – Kenya

Once upon a time, when animals talked to each other, Fox was as wise as king Solomon ! Every animal in the forest respected him including Lion, the king of the jungle.

Lion, the king, sought fox's counsel during complex crisis. All the animals believed fox was clever and none disputed that. Despite all that fox had, he was jealous of the eagle.

'What is special about the eagle?' He asked himself many times.

One day he went to meet the eagle. He began yapping his dislike for the bird.

"Can't you greet me first?" Asked the eagle while shaking its head.

"That is not important."

"What brings you to my place then?"

**“I want to know, Eagle, why are you so famous around the jungle and among the humans?”**

**“Just that, my friend fox? The answer is that .they like me.”**

**“But they say much about you. They praise your bravery instead of my wits. Don’t you think being clever is far much better than being brave?”**

**To his surprise, the eagle laughed uncontrollably, “hahaaaaaaaahaaaaaaa”.**

**“If you think you are cleverer, you should have the answer already. You know that I fly to greater heights than most birds? Sometimes I have to hurt myself by plucking my feathers. I then look ugly just to have another forty years after living first forty years. Also, I identify places where other animals can rarely survive.”**

**“Just that?”**

**“No. I have sharp vision to identify my prey and strictly adhere to hunt them down tirelessly, replied the eagle.**

**The eagle went on to describe how his view is always beautiful from above.**

**The eagle went on to explain to the fox how in his flying he assumes that sky is not the limit and thus keeps on going to greater heights.**

**“And let me brag about this, I’m mentioned in God’s book, the bible “that those who trust upon the lord will fly out higher like the eagle, when God can relate to me, I feel humbled.”**

**Fox nodded his head and replied “ Oh ! I see! The world doesn’t only need clever and wise people but action in dealing with tough situations, climbing greater heights limitless, exploiting ones potentials and talents and staying close with loved ones.”**

**Thank you for making me know about you. I had wrong judgment about you and I am sorry. I have a lot to learn from you, please forgive me, I want us to be friends. Shall we?”**

**“Yes.”**

**The two greeted each other with smiles on their faces. Since that day the fox and eagle became best of friends. Sometimes the fox looked up to see his friend the eagle. Also, the eagle looked through the woods for the fox. The two used their unique abilities to help the kingdom grow.**

**The End**



# MY NEW LOOK

by

Immaculate Ajiambo – Kenya

I sat at the reading table trying to finish my homework. But it was pointless. I was thinking of my tooth. I turned to my big brother.

“Dan is there another way of removing this tooth? It is already loose.”

“No, the pair of pliers is the only way.” Dan replied.

I did not find satisfaction in Dan’s answer. The pair of pliers was huge. It had a black handle with a long pointed tip. That would be painful. I was afraid that I would bleed a lot.

“What did you do when you had to remove yours, Dan?”

“Oh! For me I was strong. I just kept pushing the tooth with my finger until it came out.”

“Ouch!”

**“You see I was a strong boy that is why I did not cry.” Dan teased me.**

**“I will let it stay there until it comes out on its own.”**

**Mother looked at me in a caring way and smiled.**

**“I will help you remove it!” Mother said as she went to her bedroom.**

**My mother was back in a minute, carrying something- a spool of black thread!**

**“If you leave it there you will swallow it and die,” my mother said. She encouraged me to be courageous for that moment.**

**“So I’ll tie a small piece around the loose tooth, twist, and the tooth will fall out. It is not painful.”**

**“It won’t hurt? I thought it would hurt. I thought I would feel pain.”**

**I told mum to give me some minutes to compose my courage. I was shaking thinking of the gap it would leave in my mouth. My classmates would make fun of me like they do to Njeri. They sing ‘Njeri mapengooo alilamba sukariiii akasema ni wageniii na ni Njeri mapengo’ until she cries. No one plays with her because she has a toothless gap. I pity her. I don’t want to be like her.**

**“Are you ready son?”**

**“No wait, will you cover the gap for me?”**

**“Another tooth will grow there. It will take some months. You will be a mapengo.”**

**“Mum, will I be your son after removing my tooth?”**

**“Yes! Yes!” she assured me.” I will still love you. We love you Jimmy.”**

**Mum told me that those who love you make you happy. They don’t make you feel bad about how you look, how you talk and how you walk. I felt relieved knowing that my family loves me.**

**I shut my eyes and opened my mouth. I could feel mum inserting the thread in my mouth. A thought struck me, what next? I opened my eyes immediately.**

**“We are half way dear. I will now tie the thread to the door knob. Then pull the door and it will bring out the tooth.” She explained to me.**

**The kitchen door was ten times bigger than me. I felt nervous. It was a lot**



stronger than I was. I felt I would lose my head too from the pulling. Dan was laughing at me at this point. Mum comforted me that that was the best method from the old days. I was so scared that I started crying and asked mum to remove the thread.

In a blink of a second, she had pulled out the tooth. I let out a loud scream as if I had been pierced by a sharp needle. She cleaned the blood. It was not even much blood.

That night, I refused to talk to anyone fearing that the gap would attract germs from the air. I refused to eat because I thought the food would stick in the gap. When my father came home I did not laugh with him at his jokes. I thought he would laugh at my gap. He was told about my tooth and he told me that I was growing up and the teeth will fall out for others to grow





# ESSAYS



## **LOVE IN AFRICA**

**by**

**Rebekah Lamai Gambo – Nigeria**

**Love in Africa is as old as the continent.**

**Here, I will not talk about the noun or the intrinsic qualities of love in itself; but rather how love happens in Africa and how we experience it.**

**By saying ‘Love’ we cannot limit ourselves to romance, though we can’t entirely succeed in talking about this lofty and eternal quality called love without bringing romance up.**

**Romance, permit me to say, is not entirely foreign to Africa as we would have observed in more recent times. Now when I say romance, I refer to what we find in Western romance novels: the affectionate advances, the giving of flowers and perfumes, the gentle kisses and soft caresses, the quiet walks under the moonlight and endless gazing into each other’s eyes talking about sweet nothings. My**

grandfather would have laughed at this notion of romance and exclaimed “Banza kawai!” which means ‘nonsense’ in English. But not to eliminate the likelihood of romance from his generation, a certain form of romance did exist in his time, as gathered from the stories told by my grandmother, though definitely not of the nature described earlier.

Before westernization that caused romance in Africa to evolve into a hybrid of local and foreign cultures, there was no real freedom to marry by choice particularly for women. It was a case of, ‘love if you will, but Daddy (and maybe relatives too) will decide who you marry’. In more severe cases, underage girls would be married off (and are still being married off) to men older than their fathers, to join a harem of women as old as their mothers. Love sometimes happened after an arranged marriage but love never seemed to be the foundation or origin; marriage was built on a strong commitment to one’s traditions and a commitment to upholding the family name.

For the last few decades, Africans have been free, to a large extent, to fall in love: to feel passionately, desire sexually and express deep affection for a member of the opposite sex (because yes, in Africa this kind of love is almost always between a man and a woman and homosexuality is still considered taboo). These two individuals then begin to ‘see’ each other (as the language goes) and thus probably establish the beginning of a beautiful love story.

But then you see, love in Africa is built on sweat, money and blood.

Let me explain- The couple typified in the last paragraph is yet to cross the first hurdle which I would name the familial factor. Here, their family members begin to interrogate them and decide for them if the partner they have chosen is a suitable mate. After this, other factors like the social, economic, religious and even political factors begin to arise and get intertwined in the matter.

In Africa we like to say “money makes love strong”. We say, “Without it, you will just suffer”. Your ethnic group, political views and religion (even denomination/sect) determine who you can and cannot love and subsequently marry. However there exist certain thoroughly modernized and open minded Africans

who have been able to look beyond most of these issues.

In spite of all of this, love is everywhere in Africa.

We may be divided across political, socioeconomic and religious lines but in several places and at certain times these lines fade away and essentially become nonexistent. As the languages we speak and the way we live are diverse in Africa, so also is the experience of love.

We see the mother of six who gathers her children around a big circular tray to feed them rice and stew still having the generosity to invite the little children who peep from behind the fence made of straw to come and eat. We see a struggling couple get married in t-shirts and jeans and cut a cake of bread because they can't afford a proper wedding but they can't imagine life without each other. We witness the coming together of people from several villages, of different socioeconomic classes and faiths to celebrate a festival or Christmas or Eid. Sitting under the neem tree for forty days we find those who have come from far and near to sympathize with the family who lost a son, mourning as it were, the death of their very own. Not speaking but comforting with their immovable presence, you see the love wrapped around them, an invisible cloak.

Love in Africa may be complicated by ideologies, traditions and economy, but love in Africa is sweet. Why do I say this?

Because it is the love that is tested and tried that stands true. And because it is in Africa we feel at home. It is in Africa we sit and laugh with our grandparents and aunties and cousins under the Baobab while eating anything ranging from boiled corn to groundnuts to roasted rabbit. We fall asleep watching the glorious sunset knowing that in the morning there will be someone to talk to. We talk as cars drive by, as we walk beside the dusty road to visit our friends unannounced albeit assured of a warm reception. And we hold hands as we take our Beloved to see our mother and receive the blessing she has for us in her hugs and warm smile.



# Love and the “MUMU BUTTON”

by

Namse Udosen, Nigeria

I must begin by defining what or who a “mumu” is. A “Mumu” in Nigerian parlance, is a silly or foolish person. To expand further, a “mumu” is a person who performs acts that defy logic and common sense. It also refers to a person who is naive in social engagements.

“Mumus” are manifest in all spheres of the society. We are quick to call people who get swindled in business dealings, cheated by employees or a generally soft people “mumu”. The most remarkable form of “mumuism” occurs when it is induced by a member of the opposite sex.

Generally, people do not accept the “mumu” tag. No one agrees that he or she is a “mumu”. All “Naija” people are sharp guys and babes, so “nobody wan gree-say he be mumu”<sup>1</sup>, but this changes when you meet that person.

A school thought posits that everybody has a “mumu button” which can be activated by that special person. It is also said that when you “fall in love” your

**“mumu button” is activated. The funny thing about it is that a person under the mumu spell never admits that he/she has been mumified!**

**I have met some chicks who have earned the reputation of being tough and mean with men in their social circle; their brothers, colleagues or friends. One guy comes along and she just loses it. A girl that doesn't cook on a regular would become a super chef in that guy's house. I have seen babes spending crazy money on a guy that hardly even notices them or travel ridiculous distances just to be with him. On the flip side, a guy's mumu button once activated could be disastrous. Many people in Nigeria feel that if a guy spends obscene amounts of money on a girl, he is a mumu; but I believe that is not true in all cases. There are guys who are really loaded and spending such money is nothing to them. The disaster is when a “hard man” or “big boy” starts marking laundry attendance at a chic's place on a regular like say “them dey pay am”<sup>2</sup>. I know guys weydey wash undies and jeans for bae!<sup>3</sup> It is not easy o! Some of them are married men o! Like I mentioned earlier when your “mumu button” has been activated you won't even know, it is your close friends that will point it out to you. To help out, I now give 5 symptoms to know when your “mumu button” has been activated.**

- 1. When you start thinking and actually believing that one girl/guy is an angel that can do no wrong.**
- 2. When you think that your life will end if he/she leaves you.**
- 3. When you find yourself spending time away from productive activities, hallucinating about that person.**
- 4. When you go against your principles and values without much stress.**
- 5. When your productivity starts to slowly decline with no natural cause**

**Love, they say is the key to unlocking the mumu button. Love is what makes grown men and women do things that they never thought they would do. What the heck is love anyway?**

**Love has over the millennia been a subject and theme for musicians, artists, movie writers, storytellers, and everyday men, women, boys, and girls. Love has, through music and art invaded popular culture and has been artistically**

been described in a variety of ways; “love is strange”, “love is beautiful”, “love is wicked” it even has animalistic tendencies like “love floats like a butterfly”. In Nigeria, someone sang: your love dey turn me to mumu”. Some have given it a colorful notation as seen in “the colour of love is red”, love is like a rainbow, “I am blue cos I love you”. Parents tell their Children; “I love you”. The same do spouses whisper to each other. When a boy and a girl are often seen together, probably holding hands and showing some form of intimacy, society screams “they are lovers!” sometimes it can be assumed that they whisper; I love you to each other when they share stolen kisses in secret! In the modern world, love is always in the air!

So many love stories are found in all media, and there are those who say that love does not exist! Love seems to have taken the position of a hypothetical construct which no one can really understand or explain, but what exactly is love?

The word love stems from the old English word “lufu” meaning affection or friendliness, this, in turn, comes from the pre-Germanic “lubo”, Old Frisian “liaf” and gothic “liufs” meaning dear or beloved. Its meaning has also changed over the ages.

When a young 15th-century Bavarian boy told a lady, “I Lufu you”, its meaning is very different from when a 21st-century Naija boy or girl says “I love you”! It has progressed from a gentle “lufu” to a more amorous and erotic “love”!

That’s why falling in love in Nigeria these days is equivalent to letting go of your “mumu button”!

In Greek socio-philosophy there are 3 major expressions of “love”; agape, phillia and Eros. Agape is a holy and divine aspect of love that men show to the Supreme Being. It is unconditional and the type preached by most religions. Philia entails a fondness and loyalty to friends, family and to the community. Eros is the aspect of love that has to do with sensual desires; it is the root for the modern expression erotic. There is often a misconception in current thought that these three aspects of love are distinct and unrelated. This mentality stems from a vain Romance culture present in arts and literature. Even the nature of erotic love is generally misunderstood.

However the philosophers in the symposium posit that love is an intrinsically higher value than appetitive or physical desire. Physical desire, Plato notes, is held in common with the animal kingdom. In Plato's opinion Eros is held to be a common desire that seeks transcendental beauty- the particular beauty of an individual reminds us of the true beauty that exists in creation. From this we can deduce that Eros within the enlightened Greek culture was not merely physical or sensual as we reduce it today. Aristotle in Nicomachean ethics writes that "things that cause friendship are doing kindness; doing them unmasked and not proclaiming the fact when they are done". He goes on to add that Love cannot emanate from people who are quarrelsome, gossips, aggressive in manner and personality and those who are unjust. The best characters, it follows, can produce the best kind of friendship and hence love. The most rational person therefore is the most capable of love. Hence the "mumu" syndrome or button cannot be equated with the essence of love.

## References

1. Nobody agrees he or she is a foolish person
2. He was paid to do the job
3. I know men who wash underwear and jeans for their girlfriends







# **GOD’S LOVE THE ONLY SOLUTION**

**by**

**Reuben Mwabili – Kenya**

**Based on well profound research, I tell with much confidence that there’s more to love than meets the eye. After you read this brief definition of love, you have choice to either take or leave what I’m going to share. It’s up to you to decide. First we have to understand that God is love. What does that statement mean? You can’t love without God and for you to love you have to first have God and carry the burden. Love comes from the Hebrew word “Ahava” Why Hebrew and not Latin? Because Hebrew was the first language the bible was written in. Ahava comes from the root word “Ahav” which means “to give”- to give yourself up to God. The moment you give yourself is the moment you start the journey of finding your real self. Submit to death, the death of everything you possess, your desires, dreams and ambition, your emotions and feelings because nothing that has not died can be raised to life. God is patiently waiting for you to give yourself and submit to his way of love. Submission is the key. It is the volun-**

tary attitude of giving in, co-operating, assuming responsibility and carrying a burden. Carry the burden of love and its nature.

It's a sad thing to see the vices, the wickedness and immorality going on in our great land of Africa and the people ignoring the fact that the key that holds the power to free us from all wickedness is given to us free of charge. The key is love and all we need to do is open our hearts and allow it to take charge and let it rule over our lives. If there was love in this precious land, then there would not be corrupt and greedy leaders and people who only seek to satisfy themselves. No theft, robbery, people who take pride in vengeance, oppression and shedding of innocent blood, the adulterers, husband and wife snatchers, the young boys and girls sleeping with their mothers and fathers, killers of progress like the wizards and witches, the gossipers and back biters always proclaiming ill and never speaking good things of substance.

This is a very terrible disease, a killer disease, immorality is slowly by slowly killing us and for me the beginning of the ending of this disease is preaching love. Love is the only solution and the only thing that can deliver us and grant us the freedom we ought to have.

This is the nature of love. It is long suffering and kind, it does not envy, it does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things. Endures all things and love never fails.

The greatest love is to lay down your life for the sake of your friend. As I conclude, I would like you to ask yourself one simple question, how many people in your life, that are not your family members, relatives, boyfriends or girlfriends, fiancé or fiancée, best friends- people who are just simply friends- would you lay your life down for their sake and vice versa? I tell you this without the shadow of a doubt, that Jesus did it for you because of God's Love. God Bless this Great and Precious Land of Africa.



COMING SOON IN 2019



...the best-known product, and one of France's most important agricultural exports, is wine. Wine has been produced in France since Roman times and perhaps earlier. There is hardly a region of France that does not have its vineyards. Ranging in color from pale rose to deep ruby, from golden amber to almost clear white, the wines of France are considered by many to be the finest in the world. There are the whites of Provence and Anjou, the reds of the Rhone, and the whites of the Loire and Alsace. The sparkling wines of the Champagne region are the only ones in the world legally entitled to use the name. Some of the great red wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy are justly renowned around the world though often they may come from holdings only a few acres in size.

Besides the important well-known vineyards, such as Rothschild and Romanée-Conti, there are local wines and everyday wines (vins ordinaires), which are rarely exported. Many small farms have their own prized vines, producing just enough for family and friends. In some parts of France, after picking time, farmers still frudge up the slopes to prune their weathered, gnarled vines with old-fashioned long-handled knives, as they did in the time of Saint Vincent, long ago. According to an old Burgundian legend it was this saint who first taught that severely pruned vines yield more grapes. It takes year-round, unrelenting toil to grow the grapes that keep France in the forefront of the world's wine producers.

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mined in the 19th century.

# Short Stories



## **It Started in a Bus Rank**

**By**

**Fiske Serah Nyirongo - Zambia**

Kulima Tower bus station is in its usual hustle and bustle of a weekday at 6 p.m., buses offload and load at lightning speed. Another workday is over for Lukundo in Lusaka. She stands on swollen tired feet but her mind is still in customer service mode as people brush past her in a hurry, she gives way and politely smiles at one or two strangers. Her good mood is cut short when a man walking towards her, head bent towards his phone roughly bumps into her and sends the milkshake in his hands all over her.

“I’m so sorry Miss. I wasn’t watching where I was going. I’m so sorry. Here use this,” the man says to her, offering her a cloth he pulls out from his pocket when he sees her struggling to wipe off the sticky liquid with a flimsy piece of tissue.

“Of course you weren’t. you should be more careful. This isn’t your house,” she replies, almost screaming. She eyes the cloth that he is offering and reluctantly gets it from him, she immediately dabs at the wet spot on her chest.

“I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to. I’m Emmanuel by the way,” Lukundo notices for the first time that her milkshake thrower has a beautiful face and while the look in his eyes is full of contrition, there is also a flirty intense look in them.

“No I’m not giving you my number and you owe me for dry cleaning,” she says to Em-

manuel while removing a big chunk of some fruit from her jacket. Working in the Telecommunications industry for the past seven years had taught her how to put her foot down when it came to men. She might see herself dating a man like Emmanuel but she was not in the right space in her life to consider serious dating or anything more.

“I wanted to tell that you that you have a splash of milkshake in your hair,” he replies, gesturing to the centre of her parted hair. Emmanuel goes ahead and wipes away the splash with the unspoilt part of the tissue around his half-empty milkshake.

Emmanuel is a recent medical school graduate who has just had his first salary deposited into his account. He has been moving around Lusaka’s central business district on his off day trying to get his older sister a gift. Wanting to thank her for paying for his medical schooling from start to finish. He finally found the perfect gift in an industrial oven for his sister’s thriving bakery. He has been walking on a cloud ever since and much to the chagrin of the woman standing before him.

“I’m Lukundo. It’s fine, you look like you had a good day,” Lukundo says to him. He notices the striking features on her face and the wistful smile she has as she says the words.

“And it looks like you had quite the day?” he says. The fatigue on her face is a dead giveaway to the question and the logo on her shirt has him nodding in understanding.

“I’ve always wondered what Mandy operators look like and I got my answer today,” he says to Lukundo. Lukundo fights a smile at his words but loses when he gazes at her with clear appreciation.

“So you are one of those men callers who keep calling for the same issue claiming that it wasn’t resolved?” Lukundo asks him with a smirk. Her words have an effect on him as he shifts his eyes away from her. ‘Too bad you can’t date him’ a voice in her head says to her.

“Won’t your bus leave you?” Lukundo asks him when he doesn’t move.

“Oh no, I’m waiting for the Avondale bus. That’s where you are heading to too?” he asks her with a knowing smile.

“Yes born, raised and living in Avondale,” she says with pride.

“You must show me around then. I’m working at the new hospital. Most of Lusaka is not new to me but Avondale is a whole other world. I’m originally from Chipata,” he replies. He notes the conflict in her eyes and in that moment he is more than sure that she finds him attractive too but something is holding her back.

“I mean if you want to or anything like that,” he nervously adds on.

A Rosa bus coming to a stop in front of them gives them both respite from the slightly tense moment. They board on to the bus and Emmanuel follows her to a two-seater seat even as they feel awkward sitting next to each other.

A few minutes into the bus ride, the tension between them is thawed by a funny conductor and passengers banter and they spend the next forty minutes talking like old friends. Lukundo notices her stop coming up and she makes a decision that she hopes will not be one she regrets. 'You deserve to move on too. It's been a year' that same voice says to her again.

"Here you go," she says to him as she opens up her keypad on her phone and hands the phone to him. The surprise on Emmanuel's face is almost comical but he enters the digits of his phone number and hands back the phone.

"I'll text you when I'm home. It was nice to meet you, Emmanuel, even if you made me smell like a fruit shop," she says to him as she rises from her seat. She brushes one of her hands across one of his as she exits the bus and that snaps him back into reality.

"Thank you. It was nice to meet you too," he replies too late as the bus is already driving away from the stop. A few peals of laughter can be heard throughout the bus and Emmanuel puts his head in his hands, embarrassed at being caught off guard.

"At least she got your number," the young faced conductor tells him between laughs. He doesn't notice much as the bus reaches its last stop which happens to be his stop. His mind seems to be stuck on the beautiful Lukundo. He almost falls when his phone vibrates in his pocket and he fishes it out as quickly as possible.

'She's six months old and my life revolves around her at the moment. If this is a deal breaker for you, please delete this number and I will understand' a message reads. He stops walking and views the photo attached to the text. A fresh-faced Lukundo is feeding a baby seated in a high chair, with both of them wearing matching expressions of joy on their faces

'When does our tour start?' he texts back. He knows that there's much to uncover about each other if they ever want to go further with this but for now he still wants to be around Lukundo. The warmth he feels when he remembers her face and voice has not been dampened by that picture.

'I'm off tomorrow' a text from Lukundo says in reply. A grin appears on Emmanuel's face as he continues to walk to his house. Avondale would not be so boring anymore for the young doctor.

# Burning Secret

By Naomi Dixon - Kenya



My sister Pearl and Quinton's relationship did not involve endless confessions of romantic utterances. It did not involve inseparable holding of hands nor prolonged desirous gazes at each other. They often met to talk about the latest models of cars or technology. Yet other times they would have heated debates about whether it would rain or not or this politician would win the next election over the other. They would part angrily at each other until the next day. One would expect passionate pleas of apologies towards each other but no, they would start a new topic, avoiding what had irked them earlier.

I would accompany Pearl to her rendezvous so that mother never suspected my sister's clandestine activities. It was probably why she let me have my way almost all the time. Father was proud of her for taking care of me. He reckoned it was our age gap that made us live in such harmony. Pearl was eighteen and I was thirteen. Recently, something else made us even closer. A secret that ate into us like cancer,



soon we felt we would be just a shell. I tried to summon the energy to chide father for blocking us from revealing, but every time I almost did, my knees would give away. Pearl was a lion, a cub rather because she would find the courage but she would challenge him meekly,

“Father, what if...just what if...people found out?” She would ask.

“You know how this society is, very judgmental, very evil. We could even lose a family member if we let the secret out. If you dare betray us, whatever happens, will be upon you.” He would warn us.

“Yes father, we understand,” Pearl said.

“Good,” Father said in finality, “Now, allow the town doctor to catch some sleep, he has had a long day,” he said as he woke from his couch and left.

“Mum, why do we allow him to do this to one of us?” Pearl whispered.

“Shhh...Do not shout! Do we have a choice? Do you not see his point, what if he is right and death befell one of us? Haven’t you heard such stories?”

“But mum, is it really care or shame that drives him to do this? Mum, do you allow him because you share the chagrin?” Pearl’s eyes were teary by now.

Mother’s eyes sparkled in anger. She woke from her sofa and left hurriedly.

“Pearl, you should not have annoyed mum that much,” I cautioned her.

“No Ruby, she needs to be told the truth. Are we going to do this forever? Tell me, Ruby, are you also happy at what they do?” she asked me.

“No...but....!”

“You see, you also disagree!” she almost yelled.

There was a click on the door and father emerged.

“Do you have something to say, Pearl?” he asked. There was pin-drop silence.

“No, I was just going to bed,” Pearl answered as she walked to our bedroom. I followed sheepishly. We left father at the doorway, fiddling with the ropes of his robe. Remembering the previous day’s events, the following morning got us waiting in our beds for father to leave for work. As for mother, she never stayed angry for too long.

“Good morning my daughters,” she said beaming, obviously wishing the previous day’s events could be forgotten. However, it was not the case for Pearl.

“Your father left some money for you to download the university forms you were telling me about yesterday.” She said, handing the money to Pearl who took it unceremoniously. She gestured me to follow her, I gulped my last sip of tea and fol-

lowed.

“Bye mum!” I said, running after Pearl, who was already a few meters ahead, her mobile phone on her ears. It was Quinton, and they were planning to meet at the Cyber Café.

“Ok, meet you there in a few. Bye.” She said and hang up. The journey was packed with small talk until we arrived at the Cyber. Quinton was already there. Pearl joined him and I took some free space away from them.

“Excuse me, I need some help with this computer, I think it’s faulty,” Pearl called out to the Cyber attendant. He was new, an albino, not the lady we were used to. He seemed so engrossed in his computer that he did not hear.

“Hey, you mzungumwitu (fake white man)!” Quinton shouted. Pearl glanced at me, then glared at Quinton. I knew only too well what she felt, I felt it too. Anger churned hot, deep in my system begging to erupt on this egoistic side of Quinton we had never known. The Cyber attendant was already up, angry too at the insult. The rest of the clients also smelled the tension in the air.

“Hey, what’s with the anxiety, I just asked the mzungumwituto come!” Quinton laughed.

“He has a name tag, read it and call him by his name...” It was the most dangerous tone I had ever heard Pearl use.

“Hey...calm down...the albino can defend himself I am sure,” he said proudly. I could not handle it anymore. I ran to him aiming for a header but a client held me midway, and I helplessly struggled to accomplish my mission. Quinton was bewildered, the Cyber attendant was humbly baffled and a crowd had already gathered to witness the scuffle.

“Ok...Ok...Pearl darl, what is...?” Quinton asked.

“Do not call me darl! In fact, never call me darl. If this is how you treat people,” pointing at the attendant, “Never call me darl. If people like this have to stay insulted all their lives because of their skin color,” She continued “They do not choose to be how they are!”

“Ok...thank you so much but I think I can speak for myse...” the attendant said.

“It is not about you!” I interrupted, sharing my sister’s emotions.

“Then who is it about?” A nosy person from the crowd asked. Then it dawned on us that we were about to let the family secret out. We could not find the strength to speak.

“Ok...clearly these two have a problem...” It was Quinton.

“Shut up!” Pearl and I shouted in unison.

“Ruby,” I looked at her questioningly. “You know, I think it’s time.” A part of me wanted to stop her but another urged me to let her tell the world, the latter part won. “To you all who have gathered here, I am not ashamed to say that I have a one-year-old brother who cannot get out of our compound because of people like Quinton. Yes, Dr. Matthias has an albino son and he is so scared of being mocked, so afraid that people will come and kill his son out of outrageous superstitions.” She paused, the crowd took a deep breath as if in unison. It was shocking news.

“But we thought your mother lost her last pregnancy,” someone asked.

“That’s what we wanted you to think. The truth is, the baby’s birth was very smooth, no complications...he brings so much joy to our lives...he took his first step only last month...” She was in tears.

“Come on, let us leave,” I urged her.

We left the crowd to digest the perplexing news. We silently walked home. One look at us and mother knew the cat was out of the bag.

“Hell will break loose when your father comes,” she said visibly terrified. We sat at the living room and waited for father. We watched as Isaac played with his toys oblivious of the apprehension in the room.

Father’s car roared in. Pearl’s clammy hand held my already soaked one. Mother bent her head and said a short prayer. Father walked in. His face was expressionless. He sat down with a thud. An eternity of murderous quietude swept the room until he finally spoke.

“I have heard about the Cyber ruckus. What I feared most has come to pass, people know. Yet, against my expectations, I have received immense support. I think I judged the society wrongly. I admit there are a few dimwits and those are the ones we will protect Isaac from.” He paused from his emotional speech and looked at us, “Things have changed, let us see how tomorrow unfolds. Before it gets too dark, I need to take my son for a walk, I should have done this a long time ago. Mama Isaac, accompany us lest he feels hungry on the way,” he said smiling at mother. Mother could not contain it, she jumped and embraced him and sobbed uncontrollably. Needless to say, my sister and I too, had tears filled in our eyes. Tears of joy.

# HONEY-BLOOD

By Adodo Ruth Enoguehi – Nigeria



Ayo was looking at me that day with warm doe-eyes. I was in front of him at church that Sunday and a shiver licked my spine just knowing he was, but I wanted nothing to do with such scum; a nobody; some son of a carpenter father and seamstress mother to match. What I deserved was the honey-blood type of romance, the velvety passion that came with the real velvet and Louis Vuitton to match.

At the close of church, he had the nerve to upset my stomach with uninteresting introductions and prat talk about his literary passions but the unnerving bit was staring at his brown eyes and pathetic but ravaging smile through it all. Our parting note was hurried, seeing I wanted to scam from the onset. There was a bleeping 'danger' sign looming over his head and his aura exuded raw trouble. I didn't believe in this sort of emotional stupidity. I was a realist, and love and comfort were sisters, never to be separated, else such a one-legged choice would be the genesis of incalculable regret. I believed I could have both. I just had to.

The irksome part is that, all through that week, I kept bumping into Ayo and there magically happened to be the unavoidable opportunity for a conversation to drag on and on! And I began to take a disturbing liking to this scum by a pinch of madness, certainly, coming alive in my mind! In the first week, it was the way he hung his head askance toward his shoulder each time he laughed that erupted the butterflies. The second week, it was the calculated laugh itself. The third week, it was his gentle, honest communication and unfeigned affection. And in the fourth week, I had it! I was kicking this imposter out of my life one way or every way and I sure did; then I brushed those useless fancies off my mind like time-summoned dust; because they were just as pointless. He was just as pointless. Fancies do not pay the bills.

Fast forward, seven months to December. I was in front of Ayo again at church and thinking grossly, what a sly coincidence it was; the present date matched the date we first spoke; but this time, my honey-blood, Charles was beside me, clasping my arms tightly, pressing his sturdy frame closer to mine. The devastating thing was, Ayo was still gawking at me, and a shiver still chilled my spine, just knowing this. I kicked myself back to reality, but honey-blood's eyes were hard, serious and icy cold. Why couldn't they be warm like Ayo's? Why were Ayo's ever so warm and intense with a strange enlivening intensity? Still, he wasn't supposed to matter, and he didn't, but somehow, I was concerned with a strange, reckless concern.

The next year, honey-blood put a stone on my finger and roses in my hair. He was heir to half the estate of the Braithwaite dynasty, and I was happy to oblige naysayers of the credibility of our engagement; still, I was finding it hard to oblige myself this truth, or half-truth. I was scared. Honey-blood was kind and sweet and filthy rich, so I couldn't wrap my little finger around thisitching doubt. It was probably just cold-feet; he was my better-half and everything I needed to be happy, and I loved him dearly; with the velvety passion and Louis Vuitton to match, guaranteed; it would be sheer absurdity to even think that I didn't love honey-blood!

Fast forward, three months. Ayo's wedding is today, and I'm sitting front row, dazed, partially confused, partially depressed, completely astounded, fairly regretful, and approaching a tear-drop. I can't believe I'm getting emotional about this scum! I'm way beyond his league now more than ever. I would never have guessed by all that stands with reason, that he'd find another girl so suddenly,

least of all be married before Christmas comes around again, or even married before me.

He's not looking at me; his eyes are soft, and they're fixed on that walking sack of beans; she's so fat and isn't even half as beautiful as I am! Yet, a shiver runs down my spine. I wonder what he sees in her. In my head, I visualize, with every bitter nerve in my body that this Atinuke, would just fall flat and die! He's honestly too good for her; but these thoughts are most improper, considering, honey-blood, Charles, is her second cousin. This time, it must just be a curse hanging over my head, else, what could explain such coincidences; of all the over-weight Atinukes in the whole wide world, Ayo had to dig up this one.

The ceremony is terribly bland and everything is so drab and ugly it's making me want to throw-up. Honey-blood squeezes my hand; they're saying their vows. "I don't like the idea of size being a barrier to love," he leans closer and whispers in my ear. "I don't think it should matter. The gentleman has my high regards; just look at the way he's staring at Ati; His eyes just light up. She's very lucky," Charles chuckles tenderly "They look adorable together, what do you think, Paula?" he asks me and returns his gaze to the couple. They're inserting rings now. I feel like running out of the church.

"Yes, love" My throat constricts and my heart begins to pound "They do. They look fantastic together."

"True," he said and looked at me again, with his eyes smiling, then his face put on curiosity, "Are you feeling okay, love? You're sweating on your forehead and you appear pale. Are you dehydrated... dizzy... suffocating or anything like that? Do you need some water?"

"No," I laughed a ridiculous laugh "Of course not. I'm fine." I was not fine! And it was scarier that I had no idea why.

"Alright. But you know, if you need anything, all you have to do is ask," he touched my shoulder and looked at me.

"Yeah, I know. Thanks." I swallowed my uneasiness and decided to fake joy till the end, but finding authentic joy was the herculean problem.

At the reception, I focused on honey-blood, the cuisine, the music, and over-zealous fashion statements. I was determined to do this until I could evaporate from that place, till, I caught Ayo looking at me, just after the cake-sharing disaster. Pig-sized snow-white kept tripping and crashing on her groom, bathing him in green icing and cake. There was a lingering sadness in his eyes that only

I could see. It was no more the shiver that licked my spine; I was feeling sorry for him, and wrathful at myself. Did I do this to him? Did I push him to settle for that catastrophe in a white dress? I drove the thoughts away and leaned closer to honey-blood, smiled and dropped a kiss on his cheek. I needed to remind myself of who I was and what I now had and couldn't trade for anything or anyone. Charles. He giggled and joined his brows together.

"Well, Mrs. Braithwaite, what was that for?" he asked, jocularly.

"For being Mrs. Braithwaite's Mr. Braithwaite." I laughed and kissed him on his cheek again.

"Well, if anyone is lucky as hell here, it's me, Mrs. Braithwaite," he remarked and I blushed, but when he looked away, my eyes searched for Ayo. He was dancing with his bride, looking fairly happy. Probably, I was just seeing things. What happened between us was long ago. It shouldn't matter or settle in our memories. It was a weak flame that I made sure to kill; a dead flame. There was a hurra! screaming on my inside when I went into honey-blood's car and we sped off. Hopefully, I wouldn't be seeing Ayo again. Hopefully.

Fast forward, two years down the line. I now dwell in a castle with, yours truly, Charles Braithwaite and I'm pregnant with a double portion. It would be an understatement to say I'm fulfilled with my decisions thus far and glad I bade adios to that bound-to-hades connection that could have cost me dearly. How is Ayo, by the way? Does he still write and make uninteresting introductions and hiccups whenever he says his name? I laugh at the memories of him. I have nothing to do all day, but to conjure memories like these, relevant and irrelevant alike.

Fast forward, five months.

Ayo darkens my door, with honey-blood, as our new Accountant and his visits would also apparently, be more frequent on this account. But Ayo's stare still gives me a shiver down my spine, except, those eyes are frosty now. Cold as lard.

I see now, what I have done.

I cannot see Ayo in there anymore. It feels like a dagger is buried in my chest; so, with the acid of irreparable loss and guilt burning in my veins I walk them both to Charles' study room.

# LOVE AND DESPERATION

By Fomutar Stanislaus – Cameroon



“We are two different people. Look for someone else.”

Those words of tremor tormented me every step of my life. The prize of my love and vulnerability to her was a broken heart, and a face soaked white in tears. She strangled my heart to impotence, yet, her image hung on my soul like an eternal scar. She was a ghost in my dreams, and there she was kind and loyal, but it was only a dream buried in my bones, and I was bound to die with it. Whenever I took up my pen to word my feelings, her picture filled my mind, and I lost grip of anything worth saying.

My love story was the painful tale of a bare-feet man walking on sharp pointed pieces of broken bottles. The sole of my heart bled in agony and anxiety. The smile on my face was deceptive. The silent battles at the bosom of my adulthood ravaged my bones like burning flames. I cried to God to make more days, and fewer nights, to rescue me from the claws of lonely nights and to kill my pain with days of light.



I could pretend in the day with deceptive smiles as I greeted every passer-by. But in the inferno of my lonely nights, where I led myself astray in wondering thoughts and regret, I had no possibility of narrow escape from the traps of my blunders and ill-fated strides.

I confronted the sky, I sailed to the depth of oceans to learn the art of conquest, but the calmness of nature was deafening. I enquired from the wind, the source of my curse, but it blew sand in my ears and I got lost the more. Like a lonely tree planted by fate on the hillside, I quivered and wavered in the wild wind of time, embracing my loneliness for warmth. She had become the sole controller of my destiny. She dragged me as with a tether of iron, hurting my emotions and strangling my heart without care. I wept and groaned in the pit of my soul, but the world was quiet. It was fooled by my empty smiles with every passer-by. No one knew about the hidden bitterness that rained like dew on the dilapidating walls of my soul. I prayed for a flood to come and wash my agony away, but only dew dripped from the sky to make my soul muddier instead.

“Don’t quit yet.” A voice persisted from within me. “You have to try harder. Remember the sparks of gold in fire.” It reiterated and triggered the impulses of determination and perseverance out of a collapsing heart.

“Don’t you think she needs time to make up her mind?” That silent voice insisted and it became clearer to me, that I was the one speaking to myself in the depth of my heart. If it wasn’t me, then it was God, and in either case, I needed to make another stride. I rushed out of the house, and hurried to the nearby stream and waited there. I was determined to remain there till Tirla came around to fetch water. How else could I get to her? We needed space to discuss, and if she insulted me again, we would be alone, and no one would eavesdrop.

I wondered in the bushes around the stream whistling weird rhythms of songs inexistent. And behold, I saw her coming. As she came closer, the pain of losing her pierced through my heart with the sharpness of an arrow of steel, and I felt like a peripatetic, searching for a conducive shade for my feelings. Her sublime beauty struck me with both majesty and horror, and I wished she never allowed tears to drench that beautiful face at my grave if I died of the love of her. Beholding her was like beholding the site of a volcanic eruption: good to admire from outside, but terrifying to feel its heat and depth of betrayal. It was an awe-struck

feeling.

“You have her.” That voice whispered as she stopped by the stream, but I was lost contemplating her beauty. She had coils of gold hair on her head and silver nails, and I wondered if her honey lips were going to give me a diamond kiss. Her white teeth flashed with a smile on her face as she observed the natural environment around, and as she blinked her eyes, my world blinked too. She blazed like a sword of gold. She was the supreme ideal of womanhood, the enigma of romantic adventure, and the ultimate revelation of the beatific vision. I swore by my life to behold that piece of beauty, and suckle from the juice of that pleasing melon. No word could convey my fantasy of her beauty: she was simply the mystery of love and attraction. But I lamented profusely that such magnetic magnificence was going to fade away and die one day. Still, the same ephemeral beauty got me drunk and intoxicated. Her fragrance put my breath at a halt. She now constituted fresh oxygen that I needed to survive henceforth. She sparkled in the fading evening sun like a piece of jewelry, and her charm and gracefulness tore my passion into insanity. She was simply ravishing. I inhaled her resplendence from a distance.

“Tir,” I called to her from the bush.

“HeeeyLifoter. What are you doing here?” she whispered.

“I have come to see you.” I murmured.

“Me? What for?” She bemoaned.

“This is for you.” I stepped closer to hand over the parcel I brought for her. Originally I had planned to embrace her, but something kept telling me “next time,” and I allowed it. But that fantasy never left me. Her voice, as melodious as the rhythm of an enchanting lullaby carried me into another world. There, I saw myself hug her firmly, with her soft pumpkins fastened to my lonely chest. I felt her tender lips run over mine with the charm every man desired in a woman. It felt like a drop of water on thirsty earth. I stayed glued to her as the soft pinches of her nipples swept across my chest, stimulating my activism like shocks of electric current. Oh, my missing rib! She was the nightingale of my chaste nights, the beauty of my vernal bloom. I felt the sensation of ruttish feelings coil at the bottom of my abdomen in a swift as a flash of lightning.

“What is it Lifoter?” she asked again, but I could not find myself anymore. In my dream world, the warmth of her embrace reverberated and the sleeping eros at the edge of my being rose with the potency of a warm vapour rising in response to an outpour of water on a warm surface. She had the aura of a goddess. Her face shone as bright as palm oil on the surface of a clay pot, her calves as soft and jelly as the bud of a rose at spring. Oh God, was she created on the day of ancestral veneration? Was she the successor of Ngonso?

“Lifoter, are you dumb?” she shouted.

“Are you still going to leave me? I need you.” I implored.

“Listen to me.” She said, feigning calm. “You have to accept that certain things will never come to be no matter how hard you try...”

“But....” I tried saying something but my power of speech had gone in the wind.

“But what?” she shouted infuriated. “Leave me alone. Is it groundnut paste that you want to exchange for my love?” she pushed my gift away and left my presence inflated.

I needed her as a chick needed the safe wings of mother hen, but she detested me as night detests day. Was I under a bane? Why couldn't that feeling go away? Her constant rejection was the malaise of my youth. She seized my thoughts, dreams, and feelings, but my reality was an empty conquest. Why did I have to love her that much? I wished someone could rub balm on my wounds. Was I going to bow my head all the time in shame? The first time she turned me down, I resolved to dig a five feet grave and bury my battered heart inside. “Enough of the pain!!” I had sworn, but it could not sleep there in calm. Its resurrection was a volcanic explosion more agile, with the force worth more than the breaking point of mortal strength could contend. How was I going to get rid of that feeling?

I returned home wounded, feeling defeated and fragmented. I was disappointed with myself. I had missed another opportunity to utter any significant word to the love of my life. There was surely an evil spirit at the stream that formatted my memory and muted my tongue.

“Why was a man crying?” passers-by asked. But no one knew I had lost a world, a whole world!!

# “She will be loved”

By Tshepiso Keatimilwe – Botswana



She grew up in a stable home in a village where children played outside until dark without fear, unlike these days. Her mother was a nurse and her father a teacher. She always thought that her parents had an odd relationship as she had never seen them being affectionate with each other. But then again people from that generation did not believe in public displays of affection. But it was more than that, she always sensed that her mother silently resented her father. Even when he died from cancer, she did not see her mother cry once. Could this be the reason why she herself was so affectionate?

Of all her siblings, she was the only one who went to private schools. As a result of this, she carried around a sense of guilt even though she obviously did not make the financial decisions in the family. In fact, she had a feeling that her oldest sister resented her for this. It was more than a feeling, she could see it in the little things. Sometimes her sister would not dish meat in her plate when the parents were not around, or her food would have been overloaded on her plate and she would be expected to finish it all. Or maybe it was all imagined by a five-year-old girl. Anyway, this half-sister passed away and the “harassment” stopped.

After the private schools and university, she got a good job in the city. There is something about growing up in a village which makes people expect the least from you. So

yes, being able to graduate from university and getting a good job was a big deal. She was always reminded of how lucky and blessed she was for being given an opportunity to attend a private school where the teacher-student ratio was much less than in public schools. It was always made to sound like she got far only because of that. No one paid attention to the fact that she studied every day for four hours after school or that she read a new novel every week to improve her English and grammar.

After the new job, new car and a new home, as people tend to do, they started asking her about marriage. "Girl when are you getting married? It's because you intimidate men with all your accomplishments that no man wants to marry you! You also need to put some meat on those bones so that you can attract men, men like to have something to hold onto."

She did look for love with the same gusto she pursued her qualifications and material assets with. And when she loved, she gave every bit of herself. She just assumed that's how life worked - you see something you like and go after it. This strategy only yielded temporary men. The Bible said she should be like a Ruth and pray and wait for her Boaz. Romantic comedies on television told her she should be more outgoing, approachable and look like a Barbie doll. Self-help books told her to keep her legs closed for ninety days and she would find a man who deserves her. Her mother told her she should stop sleeping in on weekends and wear more dresses and fewer trousers otherwise men would not be impressed.

She was now thirty years old and by African standards, this is ancient for an unmarried woman. After reading spiritual books, she decided that instead of searching for love, she would start searching for her purpose. She thought that if people saw her accomplishing something greater than herself, they would forget that she was husbandless or childless. She thought that if she found her purpose, she would no longer have that barren emptiness which she was reminded of each time she wiped away her own tears after a tough day.

The dictionary says purpose is the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists, a person's sense of resolve or determination. She always thought that her job was her purpose. But no, her job was merely a means to an end and something to prove that she was part of society. She asked herself what she was passionate about with the hope that it would lead to her purpose. And each time she asked herself that question, she was taken back to square one because her passion was to love someone.

She walked around in her well-tailored clothes and fancy things which attracted admiration. Meanwhile, she was a woman with a passion to love but no one to love. Her name was Naledi.

# IMMORTAL LOVE

By Kimberly Chirozero - Zimbabwe



Malia Zulu shouldered her way past the patrons going in and out of Berlin's Neues Museum. This was her last stop in trying to figure out what it was that was drawing her to museums, to the Egyptian exhibits in particular. Her mother was waiting for her in Nigeria at her grandparent's place. Her father who had been raised solely in Zimbabwe blamed her world tour of museums on the fact that she had lived half her life in Europe. She could never tell her beloved parents the truth, which was that she was chasing some half-formed vision of a man's soul-deep kiss as the waters of the Nile nipped at their toes. As far as she knew there was no link to Egypt in her ancestry line. The visions, however, would not let her go, not since she had turned eighteen five years ago.

Malia had felt lost all her life: a half Zimbabwean, half Nigerian girl living in Britain. The visions were her first real lead to a clue or so she thought. In the Egyptian exhibits section, Malia found herself drawn to the bust of Nefertiti and it wasn't because of the queen's beautiful features. The artifact sang to her on a soul level. She wanted against all odds to cradle it and weep. She wasn't an overly weepy girl so the urge only frustrated her further. Reaching out her hand as though to touch the glass casing housing the bust, Malia noticed too late that the man beside her was doing the same. As their hands collided, Malia felt the world tilt on its

axis, shatter, and then reform to the way it should always have been. Her head reeling, she tried to step away and stumbled. The man moved fluidly, his body like a dancer's. He held her to his chest before she could fall.

"Got you, my love," his voice had a song like quality that brought to mind swaying tides. Looking up from his chest, Malia stared into deep-set mahogany eyes touched by flickers of gold. Suddenly she was being drawn into them and the museum around them was disappearing. Coming to herself Malia first noticed the gold brushed into her smooth brown skin. She was in a sitting position and lying before her was her beloved. She knew this because of the way his mahogany eyes looked into hers. "Queen of Heaven, fear not for this I promise you: we will be reunited. No matter what passes, I will find you again in the next life," he whispered out of papery lips, swallowing slowly.

"I will wait for you a thousand lifetimes, Akhenaten, son of the Sun God," Malia heard her own voice say as she lowered her lips to his forehead. As her lips brushed his skin, the floodgates of memory opened and she saw the truth. She was another woman and yet herself. She was the queen of Egypt, lady of grace, her Pharaoh's beloved. She remembered what it had felt like to meet him as a young girl, hurled away from her home in Mitanni to be married to a prince of Egypt. She had been nothing more than a political pawn for kings to move about as they willed. Barely a teenager, she had been intelligent enough to be bitter. Akhenaten was a revelation in joy and serendipity for the young Nefertiti.

It had been as if her soul had waited for his. There was no getting to know one another. It was as if they had been separated and now were reunited. The connection was easy, maybe because they were children united against sovereign rulers who dictated their lives. That friendship grew into the most intimate and beautiful of loves. They were a symphony, perfectly in tune with one another in body, soul, and spirit. It was unheard of in their time but Akhenaten was bold in his love for her, commissioning artwork of the two of them in almost every setting. Occasionally he disregarded ancient customs that demanded a queen be depicted as physically smaller than her Pharaoh. It made him impossibly happy to tell his land of the happiness his queen brought him.

When tears filled Malia's eyes, they were tears of joy, not sadness. As the tears fell, her vision cleared and Malia realized she was still cloistered in a stranger's warm arms in the Neues Museum. As her gaze met him she realized he was no stranger. "It can't be... Is it really you Akhenaten?" she asked the stranger who looked nothing like her Pharaoh. It was his eyes though; she would know those eyes anywhere. Only one man, one soul would ever look at her like that. There was utter shock in his eyes but Malia saw relief and pure undiluted love too. "Yes, my love though in this life I am named Zane. I

have searched for you for seven years, my beloved queen," he said, in a voice that was as familiar as her own heartbeat.

Curious onlookers tried to be polite in their staring of the couple embracing in front of the bust of Nefertiti but failed spectacularly as the young couple started laughing and running hands all over each other. Malia was aware that her mind should have rejected this impossibility yet for the first time in twenty-three years it was truly settled. "Come with me, there is a small café close by," Zane said, noticing they were attracting an audience. Malia laughed and followed as Zane led her out. She held on to his hand as if she would never let go. Now that she knew what had been missing, the other life she had lived as another brave woman, she wasn't about to let go of the man she had waited for, lifetime after lifetime.

In the café, Zane sat next to her not across. "Nefertiti..." he murmured twisting one of her braids around his finger. "Malia. My name is Malia," she told him, gazing into his eyes. "A name fit for a queen," he laughed. They sat in that café as she told him her life story. He told her he had been born in Egypt but always felt lost. As soon as he turned eighteen he left home as an apprentice to a curator and that was how his awakening came about. He had found an ankh belonging to Akhenaten and upon contact, his soul was awakened. Since then he had scoured Africa looking for his reborn queen.

They cried over their losses, their tragedies and all the people they could not get back but their joy rose above the grief. "Do you still love me even though I am no longer a Pharaoh?" Zane teased her. Malia tilted her head as though thinking it through. She was fully Malia, the girl who loved traveling the globe and was as headstrong as her father. She was also Nefertiti; wife, mother and the queen who had ruled with her Pharaoh. However, Nefertiti's time was done. She had lived a full life, in an Africa that was different from Malia's. She could no more repeat that queen's lifestyle or bear the burdens she had, but her choices were different now. Still as her eyes met Zane's she knew: her soul was the same and it was, as it always had been, his. He was a part of her soul, even if she had not been reborn, she was sure she would have loved him anyway.

"Yes, I love you still. We have lost a lot, but look at what we have gained. We have choices we never had before. The world has changed but we can use it to our advantage," she kissed the inside of his hand. Zane smiled and Malia noticed that although his aura was definitely the same of that long gone beautiful human, his crooked smile was new. "What fun we shall have in this time, Malia my love," he said as if reading her mind. "I never thought I'd find you in Berlin though. I usually come to look at that bust. I almost didn't come." His eyes shone when he spoke, the gold in his eyes coming to life and dancing. "I almost didn't come either. I have to be on a plane to Africa tomorrow," she







told him, drinking him in.

She wondered if he would come with her. “Then to Africa, we go,” he told her as if there was no question about it. He saw the shock in her eyes and lifted her hand to his lips. “I have been a wanderer without you, Malia, so believe me; I will follow you anywhere but especially home. I promised you love beyond eternity and my heart belongs to you still, Queen of Heaven.” Malia laughed, got in his lap and kissed him. They had never been fazed by public displays of affection anyway, as the various paintings of them attested and Malia wasn’t about to start now.

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: @africanwritersconference : African writers conference : @awkenya : <http://writersspace.net/>



The poster features a teal background with a large, dark teal diamond shape in the center. Inside the diamond, the text 'AWC' is written in large, bold, white letters, followed by 'African Writers Conference' in a smaller, bold, white font. Below this, a white rounded rectangle contains the text 'KENYA 2019' in bold black letters. To the right of the diamond, a teal arrow-shaped box points downwards and contains the hashtag '#Anticipate' in white. The background is decorated with stylized white and black pen nibs and a small graphic of a red and white flower in the bottom right corner.

# AWC

## African Writers Conference

**KENYA 2019**

#Anticipate



**COLUMN**

# BLUNTNESS IS BRUTAL

## ARE WE REALLY FREE?

Nothing is absolute. Not even FREEDOM. Show me a free person walking on the Earth's surface and I'll show you a person under manipulation. We are all products of someone or something's control- God, human, or whatsoever. Whatever we do, think, or say is a result of a shaped perspective acquired somewhere or from someone; it was instilled onto us. And even if you choose to deconstruct it and reconstruct your own perspective or view of things, you are only doing so as a result of influence from somewhere else, something else, or someone else. In other words, we are still being controlled.

But then, let's delve a little- let's get 'philosophically blunt'. There's a concept called choice- the right to choose what you want to do, think, believe or be. This right is a freedom; freedom is a right. Meaning that you and I are free to choose our freedom. Although we are controlled indirectly, we are free to choose what controls us, what we want to be controlled by. I'm free to speak, free to express myself, and free to mould my beliefs and perceptions according to whatever controls me. So are you.

We, however, live in a world where the protest for freedom crumples someone else's. And to utter dismay, people display oblivion of this fact. Europe and America today, are often on the battle lane for one sort of freedom or the other which might not

be a problem. But then, it becomes a problem when someone else has to sacrifice his or hers for another's. Simply put, Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression should not violate my right to my beliefs and practices. It's okay if it sets us all loose from an ideology that once crippled us as humans and as a society but it's not okay if it punishes another group of people.

For instance, it's not FREEDOM if a Christian can't openly declare that he or she believes in Jesus; same with a Muslim and other religions. It's not FREEDOM if a culture is imposed. It's not FREEDOM if a government is intimidated into signing a treaty that's against the morals and culture of his or her country in order to earn a collaboration or benefit. The world keeps talking about FREEDOM where as their understanding of FREEDOM is SUBJUGATION.

Freedom should be Freedom in every sense. Admittedly, there's need for the regulation of certain freedom (which is necessary to prevent mishaps such as wars, conflicts, etc) but other than this, no one has to sacrifice his freedom for another's. As much as we are controlled, we should be allowed to give in to whatever control we prefer. If I lose my right to speak of something, or someone I believe in because of someone else, then, no one is really free. Let he/she that reads this ponder.

## **About the Columnist**

Gabrielina Gabriel-Abhie is a writer and journalist; a columnist with Writers Space Africa online magazine.

She was shortlisted among the finalists for Homevida 2017 scriptwriting competition, as well as the winner of Writers Space Africa season two flashfiction contest.

She uses her writing, often times, to address nature or preach her propaganda. She believes that writers can and have the responsibility to effect change in their world through writing.

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WRITERS SPACE AFRICA

PRESENTS

# Animals

A CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We are calling for submissions for the March edition of WSA under the theme 'Animals'. We accept submissions in the following categories:

Articles | Essays | Flash Fiction | Poetry | Children's Literature | Short Stories | Jokes | Artworks | Personalised quotation.

Deadline - February 12, 2019

Visit - [www.writerspace.net/submissions](http://www.writerspace.net/submissions)