

March  
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Issue 27

# WWSWA



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**CHIAMAKA ONU-OKPARA**

**Winner of the 2018 African Writers Award  
for Poetry**



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**Table Mountain at Sunset - South Africa**

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# Featured Writers



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Tydale Abigail - Nigeria

Wilson Waison Tinotenda - Zimbabwe

Meckson Kaboga - Tanzania

Godfrey Ikahu - Kenya

OmadangYowasi - Uganda

Wilfred Derosemi Cole - Sierra Leone

Muhammed Tamedou (Tha Hamlet kid) - The Gambia

Herieth Owen - Tanzania.

Joy Ng'ethe - Kenya

Markham Marcus Kafui - Ghana

Benny Wanjohi - Kenya

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Efe-Khaese Rinse Desmond - Nigeria

Robert Banda Jere - Zambia

Esther Musembi - Kenya

Kimberly Chirodzero - Zimbabwe

Victor Adakole - Nigeria

Tom Mwiraria - Kenya

# EDITORIAL

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*“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” — Mahatma Gandhi*

In this blessed month of March, we celebrate our pride. Africa is known for its beautiful and magnificent wild animals and safari. From the big five: Elephants, Lions, Leopards, Rhinos and Buffaloes.

Ever heard of the eighth wonder of the world? Where wildebeests in their thousands gather and wait for days to cross the Mara River. People from far and wide come to witness first-hand this great phenomenon. This spectacular view has been dubbed nature's greatest show on earth.

Unfortunately, man is destructive. This beautiful wildlife is being upset by a vice called poaching and game hunt. It's a pity how man has lost touch with nature.

Our forefathers hunted for food. Greed for money is robbing the continent off its beauty. We are dangerously becoming experts in environmental degradation, environmental pollution and game killing.

The Nobel laureate Prof. Wangari Maathai insists that mother nature is very unforgiving. If you destroy nature. Nature will destroy you.

Leave a place better than you found it. Plant a tree, practice water and wildlife conservancy.

Please do turn over the pages for more animal stories. Enjoy!

Keep it WSA!

Wakini Kuria,  
Chief Editor,  
Kenya



Cheetah



FLASH FICTION





# Imperfectly perfect

**Dennis Hannah Omokafe - Nigeria**

Under a tree sat a being lost in the pit of her insecurities, spelt boldly by the disappointment of critic's eyes. Far away from her mother's land, she thought she would thrive alone by her hard work but day after day, her fantasies have come true in opposite ways. With her color and hair being different from the person next door, inferiority crept in slowly till it bit and swallowed her completely beyond her control.

Back in mother land, she remembers how she walks in glory flaunting her color and thick hair with her eyes meeting every stare but now, she is the opposite of what she was. She cowers in a hole like the weakest of the creator's creation at just the smallest of whispers.

Still under the shield of the tree, she is hiding. Away from the stares and strange skin, she hides forgetting everything taught to her by Mother Africa. She forgets her natural strength and pride. She forgets her inner spirit whose glow has been continually dimmed by inferiority which she let in unconsciously. She forgets about the beauty of her dark skin and how it glows under the sun. She forgets about her beautifully constructed defined structure and how magnificent she is supposed to be.

Then a voice whispers loud from the deepest space in her heart swayed by the symphony played by the wind

"Awake! Awake!! Awake!!!

Daughter of Africa

Bask in strength and pride,

Roar till the end of the earth hears you"

So, she stood up and harkened to that voice. She roared until the end of the earth heard her. She roared out all the inferiority into oblivion and finally she feels again the strength of the lioness in her.

She remembers herself again, her real self.





**POETRY**





# THE PRETTIEST MAMMAL IN THE WILD

Mama told a story  
When I was a child.

She said,  
When you are a lady,  
Never go into the wild.  
There is only one prettiest mammal there;  
Small and gentle.

Lion kings spend hours running after her.  
Cheetahs and bears would never surrender  
their quest either.  
Even tigers do not rest their paws  
until she is taken.

But when I asked Mama;  
Is the prettiest mammal in the wild  
not a helpless prey?

No! She replied.

All the richest animals in the wild  
Admire the meekness of the gazelle.  
And with her innocent look and alluring horns,  
She seduces the most revered beasts in the jungle.

So, the gazelle never rests  
As the animals ask;  
"Will you marry me?"  
Because she is the prettiest mammal in the wild.

Tydale Abigail,  
Nigeria



# TOADS

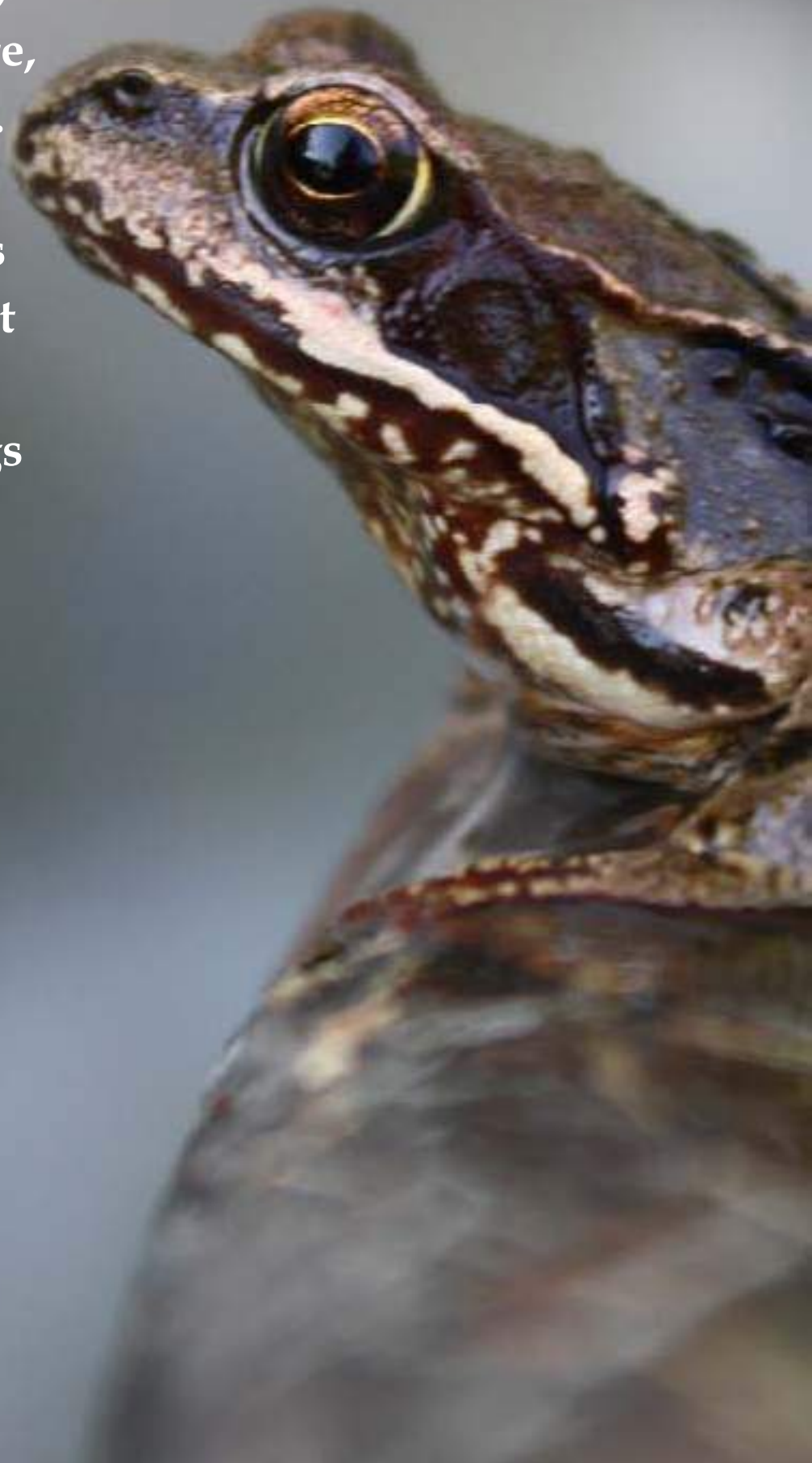
From the heat is derived our foe to deny us  
Our liberties and tranquil modus in a puddle  
Ma left us, swampy dumpy homes of origins.  
Radiation invaded and dried the coffers out,

Death came as a result of the unpleasant math  
To wipe out this cursed generation of tailed  
Toads in swamps, are we frogs? Tailed, tale  
Stout bodied is Ma with long limbs for leaping

Amphibians cursed at birth, adaptation turned  
Massacre by this indiscriminate ecological do,  
And questions point to this wiggling tail, mate,  
Whose maturity is devoured by a hunt for eat.

Poisonous brothers long live, colourful sisters  
Most feared, said to have venomous skins, but  
Why me? to be bred for all the traumatic pike  
Bayonets that seize the last breathe in us, frogs

Wilson Waison Tinotenda  
Zimbabwe





# THE AFRICAN SANCTUARY

African haven!

Where I feel worth and wholeness  
That dip me in aquatic minded-dales  
Of 'Who are you?'  
Oh! I don't need mythical thoughts  
But an opened eye to see the beauty.

Ostrich is the largest bird; running fast  
But cannot fly even two metres high  
To lacerate the sunrays of the sky,  
An eagle is the king's bird flying higher  
But can't swim even in shallow water.

African haven!

Honey badger is a small animal  
Preying on venomous snakes  
That can kill a big bitten elephant  
But can't avoid its natural death.

Armah's chichidodo is among chic birds  
But feeds on hatred faeces' maggots,  
And nowadays chichidodo is everywhere.  
"Understanding your purpose in this haven  
Is understanding 'Who you are'!"

Meckson Kaboga  
Tanzania



# TEARS FROM THE SAVANNAH

And we bow down to the new king,  
One on two, who rules us  
One who walks amidst three false gods  
One of those whose force is of open fire  
One- two- three - four - five  
He calls the big five  
Petty names.

We worship this same god,  
Not in blissful awe or wilful praise,  
Not in devotion but unsound cries,  
This god sees our bowed heads,  
Thin- king that we are one, of one faith,  
He splashes our trophies in wares  
Hangs us for more adoration on the walls of his temple.

Last week the news came,  
Through the local grapevine  
“Sudan is dead”  
In hordes of freshly pressed starched whites  
And feet of fours and twos and wings  
They saw to the end of the last white male rhino  
Telling the story of their own kind, through his name.

The eulogy read, “RIP last male white Rhino:  
“today we are witnessing the extinction of a species that had survived for millions of years  
BUT COULD NOT SURVIVE MANKIND

Godfrey Ikahu  
Kenya





# ANIMAL BLUES

Time to mate turns in sharply;  
As herds trek for pasture  
And safari masters track the trails.  
Beasts of the sea see no season;  
Boar to sow; Buck to doe;  
They go by the law of Noah's ark.  
This is to serve as a warning!  
Squirrels, burrow my land no more:  
Monkeys, my maize field I plead!  
Wolves! but do you hear me?  
My goats' pen was blown away!  
Crane-necked Giraffes; take care!  
The king's taking a nap nearby.  
Antelopes; come no nearer!  
In his sleep; flee from animal blues.  
Taciturn Oxen; pity upon you!  
Are you not part of his house hold?  
Don't you plough his fields till late?  
Your effort's in vain till sunset;  
For your reward's with the butcher.

OmadangYowasi,  
Uganda





# CATS

The cats burst up in twos  
Their looks and moves tell a lot  
They walk fast and furious  
Determined in their approach

They scatter in all dimensions  
Forming a square  
With premeditated steps  
Not wanting to fail

The two in front are a formidable force  
Brutish, nasty and short  
With black lines across their faces  
Full of Dutch courage

They are alert and muscle fit  
Ready to crouch  
Not wanting to leave anything undone  
Vigilant, vibrant and full of vigour

With their Meow! Meow! they chant  
To communicate among themselves  
Keeping their mind on the business plan  
Not wanting to be distracted

They rush in one accord from every side  
Surrounding the prey  
Face-to-face they grab the prey  
Along they go with the prey in joy...

Wilfred Derosemi Cole  
Sierra Leone



# MYSTERY

Under the whispering tree  
Atop of the mountain, I gazed at the burbling stream...

Sunlight set nature aglow  
I saw the infinite wonders  
In the animal kingdom,  
Meek and wildlife animals.

Creatures with infinite lessons to learn,  
Wolves joy in the wilderness,  
Tiger's quick and deceitful, frail,  
lion's bloody paw and merciless glint.

Panther's speed, strength and stamina,  
Giraffe's height, and elongated neck,  
Elephant's mightiness and calmness,  
Steps steadily pounded and pranced the ground

Lover bird's caress nest,  
Eagle's keen eyes,  
Penguin's gentle feet,  
Butterfly's magnificent colors,  
Light like a leaf in the wind but balanced:  
It's slight footprints on flowers curl.

Cat's glowing fur with watchful eyes ,  
Whale's giant swim and sharp intelligence,  
Starfish's steadiness;  
Creation is mysterious.

Muhammed Tamedou  
(Tha Hamlet kid),  
The Gambia



# TOUGH

If the size really mattered the elephant will be the king of the jungle  
The lion is but he doesn't sit in his den, he fights for his food regardless who he is.  
The wolf on the hill is never as hungry as the wolf climbing the hill  
The don't say to the pain why me  
They only howl try me.

When you are up against the lion  
Be as brave as honey badger  
The city is not a concrete jungle it is a human zoo  
You either fight or run forever  
Its not about being a survivor but a warrior.

In the jungle the only animal lion is afraid of is lioness  
They are not submissive  
They merely let you be king for as long as it pleases her  
The world is a jungle you either fight and dominate or hide and evaporate  
Better be lion for a day than a sheep  
All your life.

Herieth Owen,  
Tanzania.





# THE TRAP

Marauders of the night,  
Murderers without a conscience,  
Branded criminals jailed for life,  
No trial, no lawyers, no jury, no judge!

They torched our home,  
Stole our game and land,  
When we attacked,  
They claimed we were rogue.

The voices we had were silenced,  
Eternally damned on trophy walls,  
Condemned to death before the firing squad,  
No evidence, no investigations, no justice!

Defenseless we were assailed,  
Bundled up into prison cells,  
Watched as our kin were slaughtered,  
Stuffed and auctioned to them!  
Yet they called us wild,  
Showcased us in cages,  
All for their pride and honor,  
We were enslaved.

I long for my pride,  
The hunts and my mate,  
The runs and the deer,  
The jungle: bowing in fear.

Now I roar in the city,  
Fed by their will,  
Silently wishing for my own kill,  
Hoping the grasslands shall be home again.

Joy Ng'ethe  
Kenya





# The Serpent's Cry

I drive away your rodents but still goes unnoticed  
Stop the frog from interrupting your sleep but not rewarded  
But I come today in flesh just to play with the children  
Their joy brought me here- not that I lost my way  
But for whatnot persecution I am under, you sound the war drum  
With the machetes and bamboos, I quiver  
Run till I do no more- even then you are not satisfied  
When eventually confined, I become the corn just arriving in the coup  
Randomly, everybody gets a turn- even with that you are not satisfied  
You wait till my last tail twist- still not satisfied  
You put me in flames and smile at the emitting fragrance  
Even then, you are not satisfied until I arrive in your grave  
But even then, I know you don't get satisfied  
So I go to lie in wait for you by the river  
For those who think I do not know my length  
Unlike you, I'll tweak only those who disturb my thoughts  
And hide satisfied thereafter under the grasses but till then  
I wish you had me in your home.

Markham Marcus Kafui  
Ghana





# AFRICAN ELEPHANTS' TEARS

The matriarch elephant leads  
On green grass fields she feeds  
Behind, her herd is so very level  
Their red coats decorating Tsavo  
Little do they know of the danger  
Of the silent gun ready to trigger  
From the poachers in black masks  
Salivating for their white tusks  
Boom! Down goes the matriarch  
All the herd is in fear and havoc  
They run away to some distance  
To watch the vague circumstance  
Till when shall the bandits not relent?  
Till when shall the jumbos go absent?  
Till when shall the ivory markets tent?  
Till when shall the people be silent?  
The Savannah elephant has a right to live  
The Forest elephant has a right to survive  
Their protection should we always give  
As we say no to every poaching motive  
Time to stand up to save the elephant  
Call for action from the government  
Ask the community to curb the hunt  
Together shall we crush this predicament!

by Benny Wanjohi,  
Kenya

\*Tsavo is the largest Game Park in Kenya occupying about 4% of the country and a home to more than 12,000 elephants.





# TO SIMBA



Crowned their King  
Rig and ring will counter nought  
Nor change, what is deemed  
For king, must bring peace in his quiet  
This Simba you've done  
Your honour in all brutes!

Elegant as you are,  
Your quite is their peace. Trembling  
Seizes their wake, and  
Beauty'd hypnotize folks fretful.  
Then they'd pray to heal  
From your severe salutation!

Hesitant, careful, of mind,  
Souls be, as you be  
For novel visits, where is one.  
Sway owes your guard, to stay  
In surge and fill, and sing  
This your tongue counts done!

Shimbo Pastory,  
Tanzania





Will you be my woman?

Sorry, I can't date mice

Esther Imonmion, Nigeria



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**CHIAMAKA ONU-OKPARA**

**Winner of the 2018 African Writers Award  
for Poetry**



# About Chiamaka Onu-Okpara

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Chiamaka Onu-Okpara is a book editor who writes fiction and poetry from Lagos, Nigeria. She has been published in the Ake Review, Kalahari Review, and Strange Horizons magazine.

Although she is not active on social media, you can find her here on Facebook:

<https://facebook.com/onuokpara.chiamaka>

Please enjoy the winning poem below:

## A BATTLE CRY TO BE READ LOUDLY AND SOFTLY

By

Onu-Okpara Chiamaka, Nigeria

Let Venus' inhabitants arm themselves  
with hashtags  
forged from molten copper  
ready to burn gnarly fingers  
and  
mildewed tongues  
spewing misogyny  
from behind pixelated prisons  
that house bloodless souls  
dead to bloody sacrifices from  
mothers and aunties  
and  
that girl next door  
whose insides were bruised blue,  
black  
all colours of the rainbow  
as she protected her baby  
from the world

*but in the fight for their rights  
let them remember that  
hashtags should not be hooks  
dragging them into monochrome spaces where  
all Martians are evil aliens*

*sometimes, other aliens understand us*

*give them a weapon and watch them roar*



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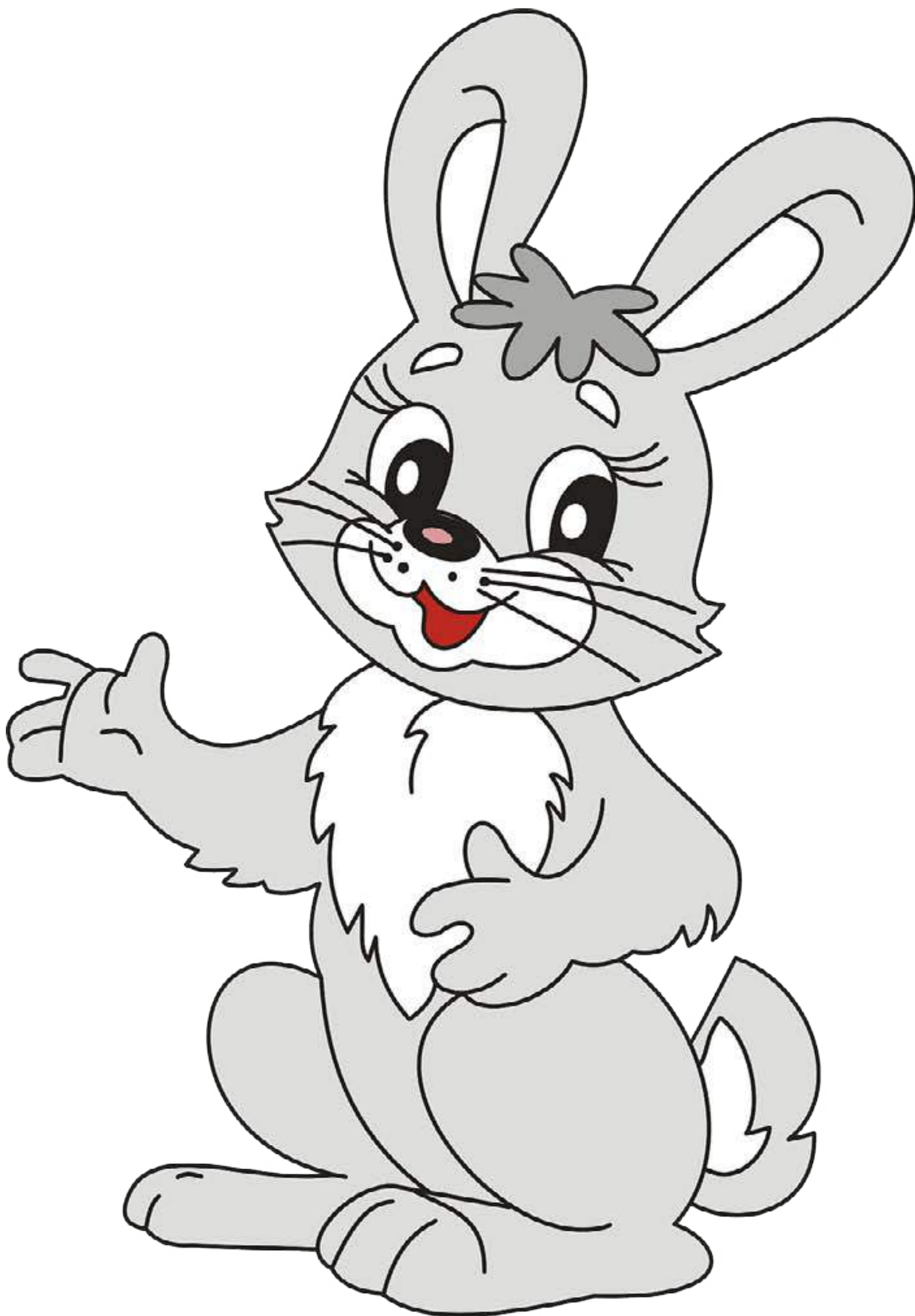
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# Children's Literature







# MAKING FRIENDS IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

by

Adeyemi Okediran – Nigeria

Once within the kingdom, there lived a timid elephant who felt lonely and had nobody to play with.

“I need to come up with one thing to prevent this loneliness,” the elephant said to himself. He wandered into the thick forest in search of friends.

He saw a horse beside a watercourse.

“Will you be my friend?” asked the elephant.

“You are too huge. You cannot run as quick as I can,” replied the horse,

Next, the elephant met a crocodilian reptile.



He asked him to be his friends.

But the crocodilian reptile said, "You are too huge and cannot play in water!"

The elephant was upset. He met with a bird of prey next.

"Will you be my friend?" he asked the bird of prey.

The bird of prey said, "Sorry, sir, you're too huge, you cannot fly."

The elephant was stunned, "how could all of them reject me due to my size", he said and felt depressed.

The next day, the forest was busy with animals running helter and shelter for their lives.

The elephant asked them what the matter was.

The emmet replied, "There is a lion within the forest. He's making an attempt to gobble us all up!"

The animals all ran away for cover. The elephant thought about what he could do to shield everybody.

Meanwhile, the lion kept devouring on whoever he came across.

The elephant walked up to the lion and said, "Please, Mr. Lion don't kill these poor animals".

The lion roared, "Mind your own business!"

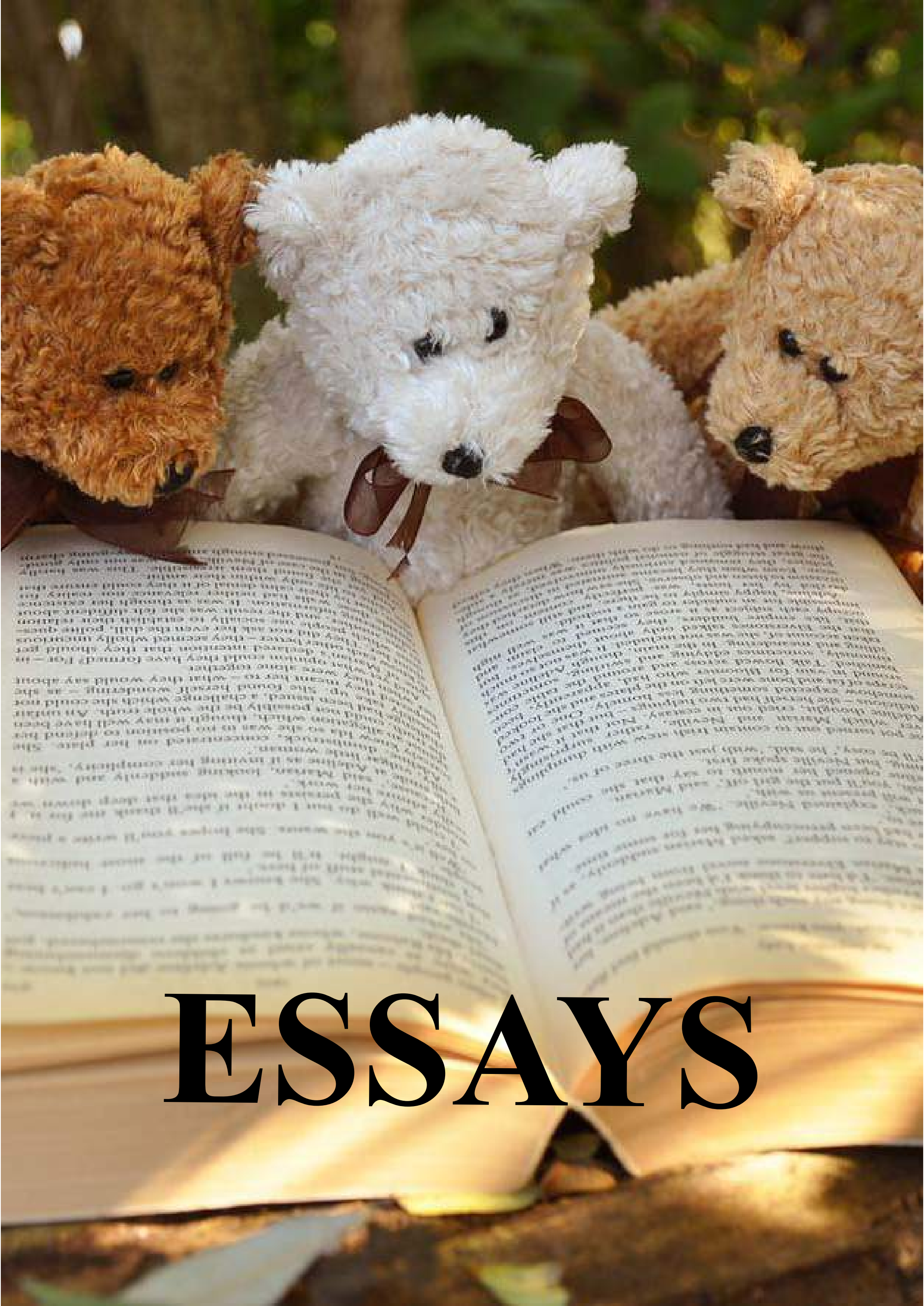
The elephant decided to face the lion. Using his trunk, he made the lion run for his life.

Relaxed, the elephant walked back slowly to the forest to announce the great news.

All the animals thanked the elephant.

They said, "You are simply the proper size to be our friend".





# ESSAYS





# **ANIMAL ABUSE: THE SHADOWS OF PAIN BENEATH OUR PLEASURES**

**by**

**Efe-Khaese Rinse Desmond- Nigeria**

**After seven days, the creator looked at His creation and called it beautiful. As the spirit of the Lord was walking through the garden, an instruction fell from heaven into the heart of man; name these animals**

**Filled with the spirit of self, man set about this task. For the birds of the earth, with feathers glued to their flesh, he named for his pillows and Christmas. For the soft cattle of the meadows, adorned with moulds of elastic skin, he named for his shoes and Eid. For the bleating herbivore imbued with the element of stubbornness, he relegated to his soup pot. For the wildlife, bearing furry hide and woolly coating, he named for his clothing and the brave and fiery, he named for sport. Other animals, which could not play this game of naming, served lesser**



gods as effigies and annual sacrifices.

Every day, since this baptism, the animal kingdom has continually offered its constituents for the preservation of humankind. In reality, this trend has been coated in various dressings. While some view it with the lightings of a circus, a diverse divide call it after the poaching of animals. At the same time, some see it behind the lens of lab-filled rats and monkeys; others regard it through the fox-made frocks of winter. Even so, no matter the colour animal cruelty wears, a clear outcome is the suffering and inhumaneness it brings. Nevertheless, one question that is left unanswered is whether the use of animals for our entertainment, is worth the bloodletting.

According to the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), approximately 10,000 bulls die annually in the Spanish Tlacotalpan Bull Festival, right after being induced with alcohol, beaten and stabbed repeatedly. In South Africa, young men, barely 13, beautify themselves with the blood of a bull, right after tormenting it by uprooting its tongue, filling its mouth with dirt to obstruct breathing, taking out its eyes, and mutilating its genitals. Interestingly, families comprising of minors, witness this public display of cruelty, which has been psychologically linked to the perpetrators of domestic violence and mass murder by a 2017 study by the Animal Legal Defence Fund (ALDF). It is said that culture is life, but on an intellectual scale of preference, we do not place a culture that has proven detrimental, above the psychological make-up of the future generation.

Furthermore, over the past years, PETA has shown that the behaviour of animals at circus shows is a far cry from their natural composition. Hence, connoting that tigers do not hop through rings of fire and then lay down in a straight line, kangaroos do not juggle tennis balls, and female elephants do not mount each other. These 'tricks' have been made possible only by extreme torture with the aim of training animals for the circus, an act that translates into animal enslavement. This act has made some elephants, which are confined for constant travels, to suffer from lameness, arthritis, and osteoporosis - a disease of the joints that is caused when natural roaming animals do not have wide spaces to move about. Despite the labours against animal cruelty, circuses still stand today and animals are still exploited.

In addition, the fashion market has been flooded by the influx of fur materi-



als, with its demand plummeting during the winter season. The beauty of this clothing leaves nothing to the imagination of how fur is obtained; neither does it imprint the pains of the animals on its surface. However, the Citizens to End Animal Sufferings and Exploitation (CEASE) paints a vivid picture in a 2015 article, where it narrated that 100 chinchillas are skinned, sometimes partly alive, in order to make one full-length fur coat. All this indicates that for five individuals to be adorned in fur, 500 chinchilla skins have to be peeled off. Thrilling is the fact that in spite of the towering cost to obtain fur coats, the demand still rises and this has resulted in a staggering decline in the population of chinchillas in the jungle.

Moreover, animal abuse has been masked by the danger posed by wild animals that stray into residential areas and cause bodily harm. The New England Cable News (NECN) in a report dated July 31, 2018, gave an account of four people, including a five-year-old child, who were treated for rabies after being attacked by a fox in Brunswick, Maine. As unfortunate as this tale might seem, more compelling is how foxes began making their way into living quarters. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) reports, that the Earth loses 18.7 million acres of forests per year, which is estimated to be the loss of 27 soccer fields per minute. The debris of this demolition was once the home of wildlife, and when a man is deprived of his home, his next step is to live on the streets, and for the animals, the 'streets' are our homes. Therefore, we should not blame them for visiting our homes, when we have deprived them of theirs.

Finally, human needs have always been the drive for survival. These needs have been itemised and are sometimes challenged by other humans. It might be a defense for cruelty, when animals are utilised for the survival of man; yet, when they are used for our entertainment it becomes loathsome. Amongst many arguments for animal abuse, one has always been that animals do not have feelings. Maybe they do not, but so does a 3-month-old foetus, yet it is an abomination to kill it in the Morality code. Thus, it goes without saying that we should not be cryptic about our views on animals but attempt to love them by not watching through cages as they are abused for entertainment. Suffice it to say, that may a day not come when animals learn to read, for George Orwell's "Animal Farm" is a guide for an animal revolt against the pains of many, endured for the pleasures of one.





## **Cries of Our Silent Cousins**

**by**

**Robert Banda Jere - Zambia**

**Almost every human being is born with an intuition about right and wrong. This intuition is so baked in that we often do not understand why we get repulsed by stories (fiction or not) that depict people who find pleasure in doing things that we would consider to be 'obviously' wrong. Think of a psychopath who finds pleasure in torturing people. Such a human being would be so unacceptable to most people that they would readily declare him/her to be insane. To be sure, there are a lot of issues on which our ideas of right and wrong differ from those held by other people. Nevertheless, there are some core values where we do not expect any sane person to disagree with the orthodox view. While one does not have to be insane to disagree about the Sabbath, or whether certain drugs should**



be illegal for recreational use; we do recognize that there is something wrong with rape, slavery and genocide.

In my society, we interact with domesticated animals in distinct ways. I will highlight three main interactions which are relevant to this discussion. The first is the relationship between human beings and their pets on a household level (this includes security dogs). The second interaction is on farms, both commercial and subsistence, where animals are kept as a commodity or a source of commodities such as leather and eggs. The final interaction is when we use animals (mostly cattle) to do farm work and as a means of transportation (ox-drawn carts). This list is not exhaustive, but it covers the areas where the animal welfare issues are most pronounced.

A common objection to the issue of how animals are treated is that they are different from us. To be clear, this is not something that I disagree with. Some differences include the ability to talk and the skin that most of these animals have. However, it would be a strange idea that how we treat animals does not matter because they cannot talk. A large number of people are not capable of speech (including infants). And yet, we do not see this as morally relevant when it comes to the question of how we treat them. There is also an issue of intelligence and social life. The claim is that animals are not significantly intelligent or social for their treatment to be of major concern.

The first response is that whatever is meant by 'intelligence', animals like pigs and dogs clearly have some. The point about social life is empirically not true. Farm animals take care of their young and move around in groups. This is if they are allowed to. Further, all of these qualities are not universal within the human population. Adult pigs are more intelligent than human babies and hens are more concerned about their young than some human beings. This does not mean that a baby has no right to life or to good treatment. All these mental attributes are irrelevant to our moral sense. To quote the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, "The question is not, 'Can they reason?' nor, 'Can they talk?' but rather, 'Can they suffer?'"

On some level, this question is unanswerable. The same way we cannot be



sure whether our loved one is really happy or even a real person with experiences. The best that we can do is to point out that the people around us are remarkably similar to us. If we can feel pain, happiness and other emotions; it is only reasonable to conclude that other people do too. I bring this up because there are people who make the claim that animals do not feel pain, that they are incapable of suffering. Personally, I think that it is not possible to believe this view; nevertheless, it is only fair that we say something about it. The reason that we believe that animals (the ones that are domesticated) can suffer and experience pain is that they behave as if they do. Their reaction to certain kinds of stimuli is consistent with discomfort and concern for their wellbeing.

Furthermore, they have the biology that supports this view this includes having a brain and a peripheral nervous system. Therefore, it is reasonable (the only reasonable position) to act towards them as if they can suffer.

The last point is one of scale; even if a chicken or a pig can suffer, is their suffering the same as ours? This argument is based on the assumption that there is an objective scale on which we can measure the emotions of separate sentient beings. There is no good reason to believe this. Let us be clear on what I am not claiming. There is no problem with distinguishing between a pin prick and a severed limb. We can even say that the person who has lost a limb has lost more than another whose thumb has been pricked.

However, it does not follow that one is suffering more than the other, at least not from the information that we have here. It might as well be useful to say that in a court of law, the person who has lost a limb should get more damages for suffering, but let us not confuse pragmatic solutions for moral principles. It is not the perceived intensity, but the reality of suffering that imposes a moral duty on us to respect the dignity of the lives of those around us.

How happy are the animals in our society? The animals that we keep as pets have the best lives among the domesticated animals, although the standard is very low. It is not uncommon to read reports about dogs getting killed by local authorities because of vaccination issues or simply for not having an identifiable master.



**Animals that are used for labor face a lot of toil and unjustified violence. The preferred method of motivation is the whip. When one visits a rural area, it is a common sight to see cattle pulling overloaded ox-carts. Lashes are used to control these animals. Broilers have the worst lot. The urbanization of our society has increased their demand. This has incentivized practices that result in lives of perpetual torture for these birds. As someone once pointed out, 'factory farming is a horror show'.**

**All that said, we should admit that a lot of people's livelihoods depend on these human animal relationships. The goal shouldn't be a revolution, but a steady and compassionate change in our culture towards our silent co-travelers on this journey through life.**







# **A LITTLE LOVE TO THEM**

**by**

**Esther Musembi - Kenya**

**I think I was ten at the time. One of my teachers was trying to explain the concept of poaching to our already young and uncomprehending brains without overwhelming and even boring us. It was quite the task but he managed to explain through a short tale.**

**As in most African countries, a young herdsman was braving the hot sweltering sun to make sure his owner's herd of cattle grazed to their fill. He tried to fill in the long, sweaty hours by playing a few unpolished notes on his equally crude home-made flute; an attempt to make his stomach forget that he had only had a bowl of uji early that morning. But his stomach couldn't just stop growling. And like all miracles, a rare bird in those areas just happens to perch on the tree where he was lying under. He needn't have to be told twice. He removed one ar-**



row as swift and as silently as he could so as not to spook his would-be next meal. The arrow struck once and the once beautiful, trilling bird dropped dead on his feet.

He was just gathering a few sticks to roast the bird when heavy footsteps sounded too close to where the bird lay. If only he could lay just a bit low in the bushes maybe they would go away but one of them was already herding the cattle away from him. He couldn't let them take his employer's cattle away; there would be a heavy price to pay. The game rangers were affable, even easy on the eyes as they asked him in the politest of voices why he had just killed a bird. They are on my side, he thought, and so he told them. Those kind faces seemed to close in an instant and angry masks seemed to take their place. They calmly, in very low tones, explained that all animals and even plants in that particular environment were protected and he had just committed a very huge offence. Since they couldn't do anything about the dead bird, and he was hungry anyway, why not just eat it, raw. Not even a hiss of smoke to tenderize the meat. Finally we learnt the meaning of poaching and a perfect example to accompany it.

Poaching as we know it has existed for centuries. It's only that important species dwindling in numbers has made it become noticeable. No longer is the wild teeming with wildlife as it used to. People have become uncontrolled, almost maniacal, in everyday massacres of the wild. In turn, some of our great animals such as elephants are disappearing more than they are being born. Not so long ago, a Maasai young boy was initiated into Moran hood by killing a lion and presenting the head as a trophy. This earned him great respect as a man and a warrior, protector of the community. As much as we try to hold on to our beautiful traditions, some things are bound to change.

The government has tried to put a stop to such traditions for the sake of future generations and so far the said community is complying. Elephants are the most widely poached species especially in Africa. In an inventory conducted by Kenyan authorities and external groups concluded on 27 August, 2015 Kenyan authorities reported that government-held stockpiles were in possession



of 25,052 pieces of ivory weighing 137,679 kg. The various stockpiles include raw elephant ivory collected by KWS from elephants that had died of natural and unnatural causes as well as ivory recovered by other agencies from poachers and traffickers.

In a 2013 annual report, the Kenya Wildlife Service announced that 302 elephants were lost to poaching that year. This is not comforting at all. There's need to protect our wild species if we are to preserve our national history and heritage at all. Human and animal conflicts occur all the time, and in some exceptions the animal has to be put down to avoid loss of human life if the animal is a threat. However, it's not right when the same people, fuelled by selfish gains, go into the wild to hunt down elephants and rhinos just so they can benefit from their tusks and horns. Maybe it would have been even more humane if these poachers used 'kinder' ways of putting down these precious beasts but that is not the case. Poachers have been known to use poisoned arrows on elephants and rhinos especially. Sometimes the animal manages to get away but with wounds festering from the poison, the animal is subjected to a slow painful death.

Some time ago, I happened to be posted in a remote place with rampant wildlife. It happened that one morning I woke up to a grazing sound on my wooden window. I was scared but gathered what little courage I had to open the door and look outside. It's only that I was still holding onto the door otherwise I'd have fainted right there and then. Standing outside was the largest bull elephant I had ever seen. He was in distress, one of his tusks was missing and he was just standing there, eyes clouded in pain, maybe waiting for the blood to dry up so he could continue with his journey. It was an image I could never forget even if I wanted to, sad, shocking and downright cruel. I'll never know if he ever made it to his watering hole. Later, these poachers, will come to collect their 'prize' when the animal tires of fighting and its rotting carcass is home to a multitude of maggots and food for vultures. Some poachers even take it a notch higher by poisoning waterholes, this way; they can kill a whole herd. Imagine a whole herd of elephants, maybe ten of them, a family, dropping dead on the same day.



Satao, one of East Africa's great tuskers succumbed to poachers' wild, insatiable greed. His death caused a major outcry especially in Tsavo East where he called home. He was one of the few bull elephants whose tusks trailed down to the ground and arguably a poacher's greatest dream. It was revealed that Satao used to hide, yes, imagine that. This, magnificent beast trying to hide in lowly bushes because he knew he was being hunted. Then one day he couldn't hide any longer. Maybe he needed water, maybe he was simply saying hi to another herd. This time, the poacher did not hesitate. A poisoned arrow straight to his ample flank and Satao's existence ended horribly in just a split second. It did not have to reach that point but it has. Poachers do not do this alone. Even as they are slapped with long jail-terms the elite who fund these operations should join them too to serve as an example. Governments, in this case, African governments should take wildlife conservation more seriously if we are to protect what little we have left at least for the sake of future generations. Most of these causes are taken up by individuals who are passionate about wildlife but still need a helping hand from the national government. For example, the Hirola conservancy in northern Kenya was founded by the local communities to protect endangered species as part of their natural and cultural heritage, the government, after some time, stepped in and its now one of the most vibrant conservancies.

Just a thought, imagine someone pulling out your tooth when it's not loose or without anesthesia, painful, yes? This is what our elephants and rhinos go through. It only calls for the humane nature in us. As God put us on this earth with animals, let's do better and learn to coexist with our wildlife. It will be awkward in future trying to explain to our sons and daughters that we actually had elephants and rhinos roaming our forests and plains.

\*Uji - porridge

\*KWS - Kenya Wildlife Service



# Short Stories





# AN ELEPHANT'S FEAR

By

Kimberly Chirodzero- Zimbabwe



My name is Tuli. I am the youngest female elephant in my family and the eldest calf of my generation in our herd. This means that one day I will lead the herd. Ama, our old matriarch started training me as soon as I got my sight. Today she is taking me on one of her favourite little excursions. She wants me to memorize the location of every watering hole that we use. I already know them all, including the new ones that she just made the whole herd dig, but I follow her anyway. I have a suspicion that Ama just likes me because I am as curious and adventurous as she is.

I am following behind Ama, leisurely pulling at grass and plants so I don't immediately see what she sees. The thing that alerts me to danger is the heartbroken bellow that comes from Ama's trunk. I move hurriedly from behind Ama's bulk and the sight that greets my eyes makes me lift my own trunk for a heartbroken bellow. Around one



of our oldest waterholes, five bodies lie slumped in a way that speaks only of death. Ama seems to be frozen in place, bellowing loudly so I edge forward slowly because one of those hulking masses looks hauntingly familiar. I cannot be sure because I don't see his gleaming ivory tusks and I quickly realise why when I am close enough to the fallen five. None of them has any tusks left.

There is a scream lodged in my trunk but then I recognize the body closest to me. It is Bayo, my brother. I start to turn away because I am suddenly insubstantial, the harsh winds of heartbreak and grief threatening to blow me away. I almost step on the other fallen elephant slightly behind me. That is how I recognize her. Sari was pregnant with Bayo's calf. She was a part of our herd with the other females but ever since she got pregnant, Sari liked to walk with Bayo every once in a while. My brother never seemed to mind though he had left the herd like most males. The scream in my trunk builds to a crescendo and spills out.

When I was born Bayo was almost an adult but we still had some time together. We loved to spend hours upon hours swimming. Mother told me it was good for resting my legs but I just loved spending time with Bayo. Even after he became an adult and left the herd, Bayo still walked with me and occasionally swam close to me though he pretended it was always a coincidence. I knew better. I am going to miss him and all his small kindnesses. My mind is having trouble accepting that I will never see Bayo again whom I have known my whole life. I don't understand why he had to die. A harsh sound breaks into my misery and I realise that I am still standing over Bayo bellowing.

Ama gently nudges me from my fallen brethren with her trunk. "Why?" I ask, seeing the empty hollow places Bayo had his tusks. Ama pats me gently. "That is the way of humans, little one," Ama voice holds infinite sadness. "We are dying out because of their greed and soon we shall no more be found on the earth." A memory flickers in my mind. The monster Bayo had once warned me of. "You must never travel at night or alone, Tuli. There are monsters that come by night with weapons that roar to kill us and take our tusks, leaving us to die in the night," Bayo's long ago words ring in my head.

I cannot understand the greed of man. To take away another's family seems unneces-



sarily cruel. Although Bayo left the herd when he became a grown male, he never forgot our family or truly left us. Sometimes he even got me the sweet marula fruit that I cannot yet reach with my small trunk but that he knew I love. Bayo was kind to all, especially the young ones. Grief is a terrible thing with claws inside me, threatening to rip its way out. “I don’t understand,” I confess to Ama. “The men who sneak around at night used to bring loud weapons but that only alerted our humans,” Ama tells me. Our humans are the ones who protect us and take care of the land. They all look the same to us because they wear the same funny coverings. “But we heard no loud noises last night,” I protest, baffled.

“The men have become cunning. You remember I asked the herd to dig new waterholes?” Ama replies in her calm voice. She doesn’t really want an answer. We have been digging many days so of course, she knows I remember. “It’s because I smelled something wrong in the water in several waterholes. I have a group covering the waterholes with the wrong smell but I suppose they hadn’t gotten to this one yet.” I know Ama is trying to tell me something important but my mind has reached its horror threshold for the day. “What are you saying, Ama?” I ask bluntly. “The waterholes were poisoned, Tuli. There was no way to be sure but...” her trunk points towards the five dead bodies in explanation.

I think of Sari with her contagious joy at carrying a young and of Bayo’s kindness and sorrow fills me. The rest of the herd is arriving, called by Ama’s heartbroken bellows. Our humans arrive shortly after. The human female is inconsolable and the three human males with her are angry. The air is tense with it. Other members of our herd nudge the three bodies of the other dead male elephants. Family members perhaps, grieving their dead. My mother stands close to Bayo’s fallen body. Every once in a while she lets out a loud bellow of keening pain. The horror of the mutilated bodies has the whole herd in the grip of heartbreak and unspeakable grief.

Over the next hours, more of the humans come and go. Two kneel at the water for a long time and carry off some of the water. Several others are hovering over our dead with equipment of some sort. The humans are trying to get us to move away but we must mourn our dead. Perhaps mourning loved ones is a foreign concept to humans. Maybe that is why they kill us so callously. Ama is patting me with her trunk in an absent-minded way. “Do you think humans don’t understand family and grief?” I ask her. She is silent for a long time, but I have learned to be patient with Ama. She



is old and her memory long so sometimes it takes time for her to answer. I imagine even now she is sorting through everything she knows of human nature in her mind.

“I think perhaps they do but maybe only amongst themselves,” Ama finally replies. “So they are selfish then,” it is not a question. “Perhaps, they are. Some of them are just small minded and think of the earth as only theirs,” Ama answers me anyway. “That is silly. I thought you said they were intelligent,” I say. Ama has always indulged my curiosity and because I will one day lead she has always spoken frankly to me. “Some of them are kind and intelligent,” she indicates our humans with her trunk. I want to hate them all but I cannot deny the truth in Ama’s words. “I tell you the truth, Tuli because one day this burden will be yours. You must know of the deceit and selfishness of man but you cannot let it taint your heart. Tomorrow I shall teach you to smell the wrongness in the water for it seems man will keep on inventing new ways of destruction,” Ama’s voice is heavy with the weight of the dead.

Fear slams into me, making me shift restlessly on my feet. How can I lead the herd when there are such cruel and harsh methods used by man against us? A new fear blooms inside me. “Will there even be a herd left for me to lead in the future?” Ama did say we are dying out, after all, and we just lost five in one night. Six, if you count Sari’s unborn calf. “I don’t have the answer to that, little one,” Ama says and I realise I must have spoken my fear out loud. I know I must be brave and try to have faith in the good humans like Ama does. From now on I will take Ama’s teachings more seriously. I will diligently learn all of Ama’s lessons but I am still afraid that there is no way to fight an enemy whose greatest weapon is a cruel and selfish heart.





# THE COUNCIL MEETING

By Victor Adakole - Nigeria



It was a clear sunny day and all the attendees were in full voice, protesting. As it turned out, everyone was talking, trying to make their point louder than the other, but no one was listening.

“SILENCE!” Blared the convener of the meeting. As everyone turned to face him, he took his seat at the topmost elevation while the rest scrambled for whatever spot they could find.

“We are gathered here to bare our minds and proffer solutions to the common challenge facing us.” At this point, they were all silent and the meeting looked set to begin. “We the animals, are facing stiff and heartless treatment from our fellow earth dwellers -- humans.” Several nods of agreement were shared amongst the group.

While the convener was talking, the secretary - a monkey, was making rounds with a basket and collecting something that looks like a rock, bearing some form of inscriptions. When it was confirmed that each group had dropped theirs, the basket was taken to the convener for the draw.



All the rocks collected indicated individual groups, and when a rock is picked, it meant that that group would be first to speak. This was the system adopted so that no group would accuse the convener of favouritism or marginalisation. The first to be picked was the rock showing the inscription of the snake family. The leader was dressed in a shiny crystalline gown that flowed from his head to the floor. And he ensured that everyone paid attention using calculated, slow and easy words while emphasising his baritone voice whenever possible -- and he was proud of his gift.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I greet you in the tongues of the Snake Kingdom. As you well know, we hold the undisputed record that we are the first to make contact with the humans and also the first to have a long and meaningful conversation with them.” “However, today, we have a grudge and we want to table it before this council of great minds. The humans have made it a point to ascribe their own foolish and wicked failings to us. The other day, one of my subjects was taking a leisurely walk through the garden and overheard a human calling his fellow a ‘green snake’. Upon investigations, it turned out to mean an individual who is intent on backstabbing while pretending to be a friend. We vehemently oppose this attribute and we want to make our position clear, that we are friendly, truthful and the most sincere when it comes to our relationship with different kinds of living beings.”

He received applause for his contribution and succeeded in opening a can of worms because every other animal had grievances along this line.

The Pigs claimed that ‘dirty pig’ is now a term used by humans on dirty people -- which is really unfair! The Foxes protested that ‘sly fox’ is used to describe a cheat. The Vultures claimed that people used them to describe fellow humans who are only intent on taking from others without any plans of giving back.

The protests continued and it seemed that nearly every animal had a pain to let out. From the Monkeys to the Giraffes (who claimed that their name describes someone who cheats during a test by spying on other people’s work), even to the tiniest of insects.

While they were talking, the leader of the eagle clan decided to make an appearance, and it was a grand entrance -- wings spread in all its glory, chest filled with an air of pride. And when it landed, there was a lightness of grace. Everyone turned to the big bird who had a mocking grin on its chin. “What do you have to say?” The convener asked. The Eagle said, “it is because you animals have



reduced yourselves to pets, that is why humans have taken a wrong impression of us all and giving you all sorts of names. You see me, I stay far away, with less contact with them, and I am said to be the symbol of strength, speed, excellence, and visionary living. Not like you clan of Dogs who have reduced yourselves to become disrespected. Imagine, with all your being a man's best friend, they still use your name to describe men who are not faithful to their mates. I cannot even look at you!" Then turning around and with a new sense of authority, the eagle continued, "We all have to think of a way forward for ourselves. I have discovered that when these humans cannot tame us, they call us the wild ones. And I put it to you all, that it is better to be wild and respected than to be domesticated and without regard."

Cheers rang out from every corner of the square. The animals adopted the suggestions of the eagle and began dancing to the music of the birds. They could not hear the shrieking of the raven scout, warning that the human hunters are within reach of them.





# THE HOSTAGE

By Tom Mwiraria – Kenya



Gen. Lwanda Magere cleared his throat and addressed Captain Koitalel, Kinjeketile, Mekatilili and three other brave warriors of 5th Calvary Mikey squad who had just finished a military drill.

“The task at hand is precarious. There is no sign that the enemy will release the teenage mouse Panya. As you know, the poor boy was kidnapped while returning home to the cupboard. This is infamy, a grave assault, and insult to our sovereignty in Syokimau’s house. Now you will be exceedingly vigilant as you carry the operation, ‘Save Panya’. Cats are trained assassins and they have mastered the art of surprise. They know the best hiding spots in the house. Their battle techniques are evolving; so is their technology as you have spied them putting their paws on Syokimau’s laptop, disconnecting sockets. Everything is afraid of them. The enemy is craftier and smarter than he appears. They are strategists, escape artists and masters of disguise. Be subtly careful, the cat’s camouflage is unparalleled.



Once you rescue Panya, you must be swift. The cat is faster than the average Ninja. Teamwork is key when you reach the burrows. Cats know how to work in teams, and so you must aptly play a team role. Warriors, be mindful of the fact that the future of the mice race depends on your bravery. The enemy is hunting us one by one. Today it was the adolescent Panya, tomorrow it could be your teething son. Warriors, the cats have enslaved the humans and the dogs. Their secret service has infiltrated human bedrooms, bathrooms and has assumed a Kingly status in the sitting room.

Dogs will agree that we have to eliminate this menace but first, we must rescue Panya before we come to the drawing board. Lastly, let me remind you that cats are not affected by gravity and are bafflingly elusive. Our allies, the dogs, have confessed to not seeing the enemy coming and escape like lightning bolt after causing terror. The choice we have made is full of hazards, as all roads are; but courage is the foundation of Mice dominion, consistent with our character and courage and our commitments around Syokimau's house. The stake of freedom is always high, but mice have always paid it. And one path we shall never take is the path of fear and servitude. Our goal is not the triumph of our military, but the assertion of our inalienable right to exist, here in Syokimau's house, and around the neighbourhood. Heavens willing, that goal will be achieved. I am praying for you to return with the hostage, and we shall welcome you with dance and reward you generously for your audacity. Captain Koitalel, you lead the mission."

On a surreal dark dawn the next day the 5th Calvary Mickey squad, armed to the teeth subtly marched to the Northern burrows under Syokimau's timber house. Thirsting for Panya's rescue, putting their lives on the line for freedom and justice, fuelled by the unyielding spirit of mice martyrs, ancestors tortured and eaten for supper by cats, for the agitation of democracy in Syokimau's house. Fired by the spirit of murdered fathers and butchered mothers, executed brothers and slain children like Panya, whose life was now in danger? The captain laid out the basic plan of operation - to march on and to keep on advancing irrespective of whether they have to go over, under, or through the foe.

At 4 am the raid started. The three of them landed on the cat's torture burrow,



and slew the guards on watch before they could raise the alarm. While this was going on, Koitalel, Kinjeketili, Mekatillili had sneaked into the big crevice, just outside by climbing in through the burrows. They effortlessly passed through the burrows due to their small biscuit tin lid size and then climbed up the chains and ropes of the house. Once they sneaked in, they came upon a lone cat that had placed a weak mouse on his paws. The mouse whom they immediately recognized as Panya looked extremely weak, and emaciated and tortured with visible wounds on his belly.

An intense fight ensued, all the three scratching, biting and pulling the burly cat's tail. The enemy, seeing his imminent enemy grabbed the poor Panya by his teeth, escaped through the middle burrow in hot pursuit of the three. Masinde Muliro was badly injured on his left but he managed to limp out. Outside, the other members of the mice press had heard the cat purrs and groans and waylay, expecting the cat to use the middle burrow as the escape route. Upon emerging from the opening, the cat was startled to see a battery of journalists, who immediately clicked their cameras and fired random questions.

He momentarily stopped and growled while still holding Panya by his teeth. He was possibly considering surrender, and terms of exchange for a hostage's life. In no time, however, Lwanda Magere, Kinjeketile, Koitalel and Mekatillili emerged; breathing fire. The cat took off, all the battalion is in hot pursuit. At the far Eastern corner of the house, the cat dropped the poor little child and he fell with a whimpering thud. Panya was finally carried home to the Southern Burrows of Syokimau's house. The brave squad was given a heroes' reception. Panya's parents, friends, and the Mice health wing fought for his life, and although he recovered from his injuries, he remained with a permanent disability on his rear limbs.

His imminence president Mugwe, saluting the 5th Mikey Calvary Squad, reminded the Nation that there must be no room in citizenry for whimperers and cowards, for panic-mongers and poltroons. The mice hood must know no fear in battle and must selflessly join the patriotic war of emancipation; "our war against the cat."



# AT A COST

What happens when tradition decides the fate of Zarah? A pretty damsel living somewhere in northern Nigeria, Zarah loses her place as princess of her father's heart to traditional principles, sojourning and scavenging until she finds her identity, but at a cost....

by  
AMAMI YUSUF





# EPISODE ONE

Her father's voice rang in her head again, as it frequently did. Childhood memories came with the voice - it was so clear. It felt like she was reliving her childhood over again in minutes. She couldn't tell which event brought back memories and tears to her eyes. Was it the documentary or the realisation that she was minutes from sharing her story with the world? Last night, while sleep eluded her, she had taken out her MAC laptop and watched a documentary on the life and bravery of Queen Amina of Zazzau. It was a story she held dear, and very much related to. She was almost certain that the narrator's voice was her father's. The words sounded familiar:

There once was a time in Nigeria, the pre-colonial era it was called, when men never felt threatened, but rather appreciated that women could be in power. Political power was not restricted to men only, nor to kinsmen, nor to a particular age, but to whosoever deserved to be and deemed capable. That was the era queen Amina of the ancient city of Zazzau found herself.

"Queen Amina of Zazzau, according to history, was the first woman to become the queen in a male-dominated society," her father's calm baritone once said. She remembered the 'male-dominated society' she too had lived. She fought back the tears. Although the makeup artist assured that her makeup was set and waterproof, she was not taking any chances. She would be live on TV in two minutes. Zarah looked into the mirror. The face staring back at her appeared calm and composed, but she felt different. Nervous. Tensed. Scared. Her breathing quickened. She closed her eyes - to fill her lungs. To still her heart. To clear her mind.

Juwon, the programme manager, could tell Zarah was nervous. He noticed when he came in backstage to tell her "We're ready for you Ma'am." She gave a quick nod and smiled weakly. He lowered the paperboard in his hand, and looked at her with a warm smile.

"You can do this." He assured and walked out briskly, like he was forbidden to stay longer.

Elegant in her burgundy coloured, close fitting abaya, with a black turban on her head, Zarah crossed her leg one over the other and placed her hands in her lap. Her charming smile showed off her gapped tooth as the cameraman zoomed in on her. She sat on stage before an audience. As Lola's voice filled the room, Zarah's heart raced faster. Lola was her host tonight on the 'Yes Woman' show, which aired from Arise Television in Lagos to the entire African Continent. Yes Woman invites successful women, young and old, to share their stories with an international audience.



She missed what Lola had said. Zarah had drifted into the thoughts playing in her head. The loud sound from a hundred paired hands jolted her back. Judging from the eager, attentive eyes glaring at her, she knew it was time.

“I like to think of myself as the Queen Amina of my time...” She paused, scanning the large audience and willing the courage to come. She involuntarily let her tongue glide between her lips, and then she pressed them together. It was a habit that stuck, playing out every time she was tensed.

“My courage to take on life, fighting and conquering battles along the way has brought and led me here.”

She scanned the faces of the audience again, and this time, noticed a little girl sitting on her mother’s lap. The girl was obviously Fulani, judging from her facial appearance. She was suckling carefree on her thumb while trying to get her mother’s attention. Zarah let a little smile split her lips. The child reminded her of herself, when she still had her innocence and was in dire need of a mother’s attention. At that moment, Zarah let the memories of her life play out; translating it into words for her curious, yet attentive audience.

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The air that evening was chilly. It was mid November 1993 and the harmattan was settling in gradually. Dutsin-ma’s air, like no other local government in Katsina, blew violently. She wrapped her arms around her body as the ‘swoosh swoosh’ from the trees beat against her hijab and unto her skin. The pink top she wore beneath her hijab was short sleeved making her cold despite trying to shield herself from its aggressive whips. She rubbed her palms up her arms, against the goose bumps that were already forming. Her teeth, seeming to have a mind of their own, quaked. She was almost running as she walked. One, in a fruitless attempt to keep warm. Two, to match Kamal’s pace. Kamal- the tall, dark, and slender, Fulani-handsome thirteen year old who was her brother. In her haste, her long hijab tangled her legs and made her to topple over.

“Ka jira ni.” She called out to him to wait for her in Hausa. Rather than stop, he walked even faster. And before long, he was running, laughing all the way. Zarah cried, screaming out his name as she ran after him. He finally stopped but she didn’t till she caught up with him.

“I’m going to report you to Baba,” she said in a little exasperated voice, sliding her



palm against her cheeks, frowning and giving him the you're-going-to-be-in-trouble look. Kamal apologized. "Wudu muyal," he pleaded in Fulfulde. They occasionally interchanged between Hausa, Fulani, and Fulfude, though they spoke Hausa more often.

The sun was about to set that evening, and both of them, as if on instinct, began running towards the hills. Zarah - despite her sleek and delicate feminine features, was considered one of the boys. She was always carefree; playing, rolling, or coming home with one new injury after another. She and Kamal loved to watch the sunset from the vantage of the hills of Dutsinma. It was what made them love Katsina, though they had never been to any other state within northern Nigeria or beyond the north. They had a particular hill they stood on. It was easy to climb, not too high, nor too low, and had a perfectly clear view ahead. They got on the hill just in time to watch the sun before it finally faded away.

"I wish the sunset always stayed longer." Zarah said mesmerized at the sight. Kamal said nothing but turned to leave, gradually letting go of her hand which had unconsciously intertwined with his. Just as they returned to the path which led straight to their house, they met Zainab, Kamal's classmate and friend. Zainab was the chubby, yet pretty brain box in his class. She was nice and always very cheerful, and always smelled nice too. Everyone said Zainab's father was wasting his money on her. After all, her destiny as a girl is to be an obedient wife and nothing more, they would argue. Alhaji Imran was the only one who did not agree with them. He rather urged his Kamal and Zarah, his children, to be like Zainab.

Zainab earned most of the boys' admiration because of her beauty. She was also the girl other mothers warned their girls about. That girl wears too much makeup. Or that girl is always walking with one boy or the other. Or, that girl can go out without a hijab or without covering her hair... And yet, she was still the same girl whom the other girls secretly admired- her freedom, her always-nicely-done hairstyles and so much more. Zainab, who had lived the first twelve years of her life in Port Harcourt, seemed to attract the whole of Dutse-ma's attention -young and old, male and female. That evening, she had been walking with a little group of 3 girls. The girls chorused his name as if the unison had been rehearsed. Kamal was always nervous around girls, and he was just so now. He waved his hand in the air and smiled in their direction, but made eye contact with none. They stood for about half a minute, without anyone saying a word. The silence was awkward, none of them knowing whether a conversation should be developed or walk away. And, who should initi-



ate the first move? Zainab walked towards him, hugged him, and said “goodbye” as she did. Zarah’s gasp came involuntarily, and was loud enough to be heard by Zainab and Kamal. Zainab turned towards Zarah, smiling as she did, and then bent down to hug her as well.

“Kamal...” Zarah began, finally breaking off the silence. They had walked on in silence since after Zainab and crew departed. She seemed unsure and reluctant to relay all that was on her mind.

“Kamal?” she tried again. This time it sounded like a question.

“What is it, Zarah?” He asked a bit distracted. Zarah cleared her throat, more to gain confidence than because it needed to be cleared.

“How long do you think... I mean... Is Zai...?” Whatever she was about to say seemed too heavy for her small pink tongue. “Do you think Zainab is already pregnant?”

The look he gave her stripped her of all the confidence she had gathered. “Which Zainab?” he had asked, still looking at her. He only looked back at the road before him after he hit his toe against an average sized stone. He yelped, then remained silent to allow Zarah to finish the conversation she had just started. She said nothing more for a few minutes. Zarah thought of how best to relay to Kamal that definitely, surely, she and Zainab were in the same situation. She inhaled deeply, and nervously. She knew she had to tell him, and she did. “Kamal, I’m afraid I’m pregnant.”

This time Kamal stopped. He placed his arms on her shoulders and turned her around to stand face-to-face with him. Had he just heard her right? What did his ten year old little sister mean or even know by what she had just said. “I think I am pregnant.” That was what she had said, but he doubted that he had heard right. Zarah avoided his eyes now, but rather looked down at her tiny feet which had gotten dusty from walking and running. Kamal knew it would do no good to try to force the words out of her. Yelling would only make her more withdrawn, and less confident. But he needed answers. He needed to know what she meant by those words. She had said the words and refused saying anymore. They were already in front of the house when she made that utterance, and dashed off without looking back. She was scared, and frightened, and confused. An innocent ten year old.

The air that Saturday morning felt stale. The sun took longer in rising that morning, or so Kamal thought. He had tossed and turned all through the night. The sound of Zarah’s voice not leaving his mind. Maybe she was just trying to prank him. He had played a prank on her and she swore to payback. But why would she joke with a thing as serious as that? Plus, she looked genuine. These were the thoughts that



filled his mind through the night. He could not finish his conversation with her because he had to hurry back to where he served as an apprentice under Asuratu. That was what he did after school hours in the afternoon.

I swear I'd kill that girl if she was only joking.

But what if she was telling the truth?

The two voices in his head argued. The only thing they agreed upon was that no one could or should know about her claims till he had confirmed from her. He at least owed her that much. Just as he came to that conclusion, the hens in his father's compound crowed.

The hens in Alhaji Imran's compound were most times early risers, unlike Zarah who usually slept in till the loud 'bang bang bang' from her step-mother's fist against her door awakened her. The loud sounds usually made her wake with a start, and sometimes, anger. But she dared not show such emotion before Aunty Halima. Halima had forbidden her from calling her 'mother'.

"I'm not your mother nor are you my child," she had said to Zarah once. "You are simply the unfortunate child of a dead woman." Halima had lashed out at Zarah. That was the last time Zarah attempted calling her 'mother'. Both of them seemed to reach an agreeable compromise on 'aunty'. Halima had borne seven sons to Imran, whilst Samira, Zarah's mother died during labour just a year after she had gotten married to Imran.

"Ina kwana," Zarah greeted getting low enough for her knees to touch the ground, but leaving enough room for them not to. She stood and yawned, as two little tears escaped the sides of her shut eyes. And then adjusted her wrapper properly over her pajamas and across her chest, and tied her hair with a scarf. Halima dished out instructions to Zarah as always, without responding to her greetings. It was weekend with much work to do.

Every Saturday and Sunday, Zarah followed her father out to the construction site where he worked and today was no exception. He was an extremely tall man, with a long pointed nose. His nostrils were so narrow that sometimes, Zarah wondered if his smallest fingers could go in or at least, without a struggle. He had begun aging slowly, but no doubt he had attracted a lot of female attention in his youth. He had a long, one-sided dimple on the left side of his cheek close to his jaw which deepened anytime he spoke or smiled. His perfectly black and curly hair complimented his grey skin, and so did the brown caftan and cap he wore. He was often referred to by the maidens in the community as the standard for good looks when they fantasized about suitors.



“Baba, can you guess what I and Aunty Halima packaged for us as lunch today?”  
“Mmmmm...is it indomie?” He teased feigning ignorance of the aroma of nyiiri and haako which had filled the kitchen as well as the entire house that morning. The meal of smooth, well wrapped balls of ground maize with fresh local vegetable soup was his all-time favorite. Zarah threw her free hand over her mouth and giggled. The thought of her father having noodles for lunch at work in front of the other men was amusing. The wind, as Imran rode his four year old motorcycle, was quite intense. Zarah tried to hold down the edge of her scarf as she shut her eyes. The force from the wind always made her eyes water, though Imran never seemed affected by it. Zarah and Imran usually avoided having conversations whilst he rode due to the loud sizzling of the wind which made it difficult to hear. She buried her face in his back to avoid the splash of wind hitting against her face.

The site was a very large space. Imran alongside other men worked there. There were sections of those who manually broke rocks with axes. There were those who carried those rocks; those who carried sand in iron basins; there were also those who were expert at the mill. There were so many other segments. Imran worked on the mills and the machines always fascinated Zarah. He parked his bike in the lot and helped Zarah get down as well. They walked towards the mill in some father-daughter-bonding conversation. She loved her father and always enjoyed spending time with him. She enjoyed the idea of following him to work, rather than actually being on the site. Some of the men frightened her.

“Sannu da zuwa, Imran” or “ina kwana, Imran,” most of the men welcomed and greeted as he walked past. He responded warmly stopping to shake hands with some. The men bent their heads slightly forward while they greeted either shaking the other man’s hands with both hands or using one hand, whilst the other hand slightly touched their chests. Some of the men noticed when Zarah greeted in a low little voice, and some didn’t. They got carried away in their little chatters and exchange of pleasantries. A number of them though, noticed beyond her presence and little greetings- their eyes appreciating her delicate flawless beauty, and their minds acknowledging her feminine features- the hips which were beginning to take a nice arched shape; the tits which were already forming and taking on a more rounded shape, penetrating through her hijab. Some of such men, like Mohammed, voiced the thoughts of their wandering eyes. He constantly made jokes about how fast she was ‘maturing’. Of her stunning beauty which was killing him. Of how she could become a full woman even before reaching the age. Of how Imran had better keep a jealous eye on her because it wouldn’t be long before men would start trooping into his home in want of her. Imran never for once took offense in Mohammed’s talks.



He heard the jokes. He understood that the man, his friend, was making deliberate comments about his daughter's body, yet he only dismissed it as the careless jokes of a man. He came to the conclusion that he wouldn't mind giving her out in marriage when she reached at least 14.

Zarah went to sit by one of the rocks, like she often did. She loved to read, as well as draw, designing dresses especially. Sometimes she created her own designs, other times she drew designs she had seen on others. She was busy designing that she hadn't heard her father's voice from the distance. Mohammed was on his way to the latrine which was a long distance away, and in which the workers used to relieve themselves.

"Tell Zarah to bring the lunch," Imran had instructed Mohammed while he passed. As he walked, Mohammed lit a cigarette and inhaled, letting the smoke escape in small puffs.

"Baban ki ya ce ki kai abincin," he said bending over her while relaying her father's instructions. He was so close that the strong smell of smoke choked her. She nodded and started gathering her books. She looked up to see him still lingering above her with a crooked smile across his lips.

"You know you are very beautiful ko, Zarahu?" He liked to add the 'u' at the end as a form of endearment and fondness.

"I'd like to marry you o..." he said again, though she made no reply to his initial comment. He looked round briefly, and after ensuring that no one was watching, he pinched hard at her nipple and then let go. She was too scared and frightened for words. She wanted to scream, she wanted to cry, but alas did none. He walked away laughing but not after assuring her that next time, it wouldn't be just her nipple which would be pinched.

#### AUTHOR'S BIO:

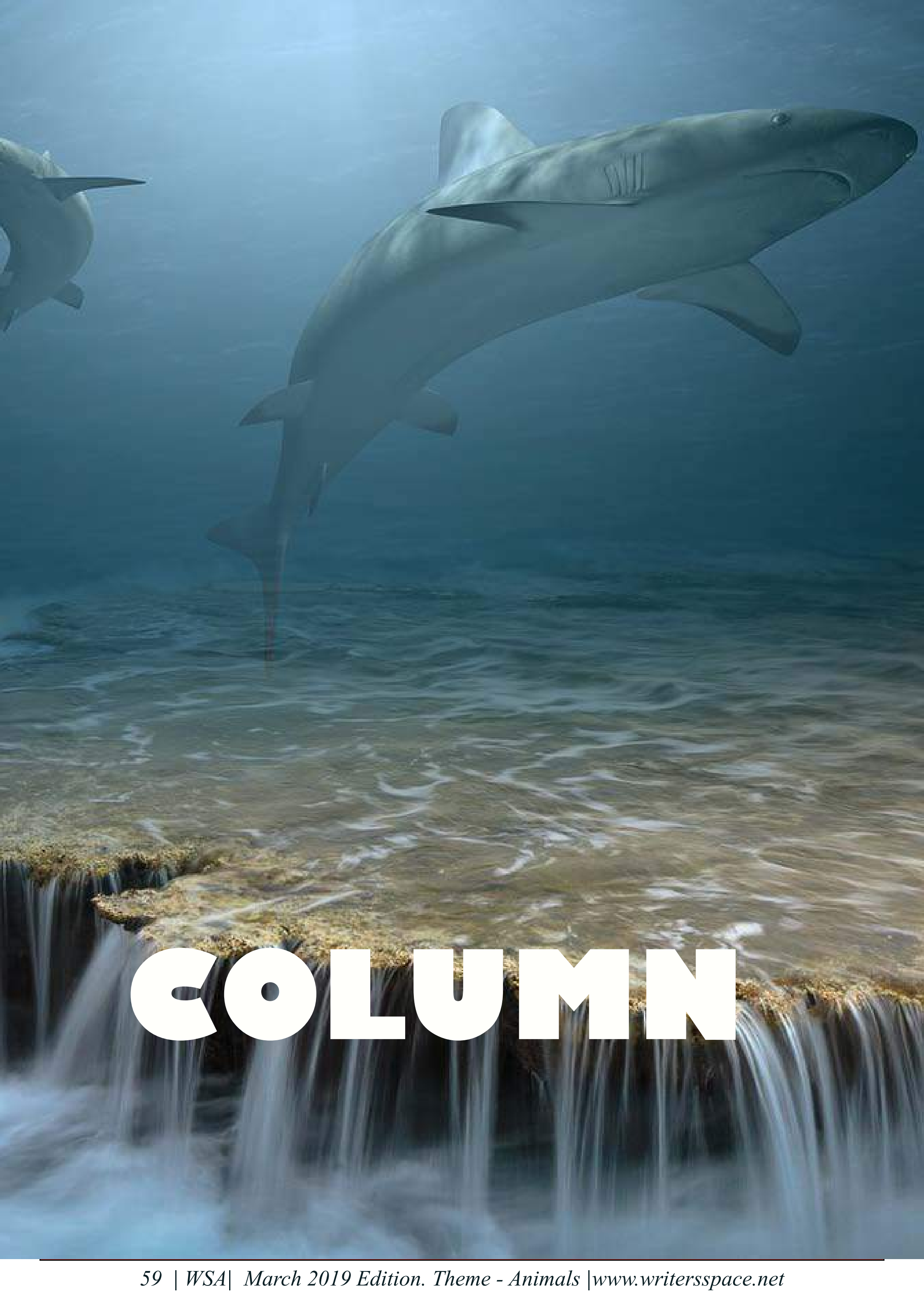
In the beautiful city of Zaria, Kaduna State, Amami Yusuf, a writer, student, hairdresser and makeup artist, writes prose-fiction and poetry when she's not busy with school work or attending to clients' hair and faces.

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# COLUMN



# COLOURISM IN AFRICA

By Leo Muzivoreva, Zimbabwe



USUALLY, when Africans comment on the beauty of a light skinned person, there is no comment about their skin tone. This is in contrast to the narrative when complimenting a dark skinned person; where the person is qualified as a 'dark beauty'. In this, the default cultural conception of beauty is light skinned—although darker tones can be beautiful, they require more justification. In Africa, anything which can make one look fair or feel fair is desired and wanted, while that which does not is shunned. Thus, people are trying to make themselves look fairer than everyone else.

When a baby is born in Zimbabwe, where I am from, people always start by checking for signs which suggest the skin tone of the baby. All new born babies are always fair to light skinned because of the optimum conditions in the womb but Zimbabweans check the baby's ears and such sentiments like "mutema kutodza baba" (he's dark skinned just like his father) are the order of the day... The reasons behind such sentiments is basically the colonial indoctrination that white is always better; so as Zimbabweans we grow up with the perception that beauty means being light skinned.

As a kindergartener in the 90s, I recall singing songs which suggested that having a light skinned woman was the ultimate achievement in as far as getting a beautiful wife was concerned- I'm not sure if the children these days sing such songs. On an-



other note, my mum is a little on the dark side and my dad was a bit light skinned. Of my three siblings, only one is a bit on the light skinned side. Basic biology genetic variation, but the general comments from people in the community will be like, ohhh he's such a looker, takes after his aunties. And that I am also handsome like my father just a "darker version".

This is a common interaction amongst Africans in general. People mention color in a way which is not common in the West – 'darkness' and 'lightness' are relative terms, marking differences of color between people, even amongst family members. Even though people here in Zimbabwe are aware of the racism that occurs in Western countries, and Zimbabweans who live in the West realize that they inhabit a system of race where to be African generally is to be categorized as being non-white or brown, they believe that no problem with 'race' exists in our society. Access to fairness in third world countries such as Zimbabwe is a limited good, and the poverty which is associated with being dark is "the absence" of that good. Whenever someone is doing better in life, a good job, living in the upmarket suburbs and driving a nice car, people suddenly notice change "atotsvukira wena, nenguva diki diki iyoyi" (he's actually getting lighter hey in this short space of time.) Light skin tone is associated with success while dark skin means poverty.

A while back, a picture of two babies went viral on social media, one light skinned and the other dark skinned. The caption on the picture suggested that the light skinned baby be referred to in English but the darker one to be referred to as "mwana" the vernacular term. Funny how people still have that colonial mindset that white is always better...and to make matters worse, even babies are subject to mockery.

African ladies flock to get lightening creams as the need to look fairer comes naturally. South African and Nigerian ladies lead the pack in this regard and it is the former where the term "yellow bone" was coined.

As with all colonized countries, the legacy and impact of colonialism puts color into discourse in delicate and clever ways. In countries such as United States and Britain the concept of race is clear-cut and definable. It is enshrined in the law books, and in the United States it is embedded in their constitution. In Zimbabwe, race has no appearance in the structure of society, but is played out against tonal differences,



which depend on the context.

The history of conquest helped to create this system of signs that demarcate dark-skin as being subordinate to light-skin. It was white-skinned people who twice colonized and enslaved Africa, cementing the ideological system that makes Zimbabwean dark skinned women use lightening creams and also led my mother to qualify that I was handsome like my dad, only a 'darker version' ...

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