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WWSA



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Nigeria

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Botswana

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Eme Ogbu

Winner of the 2019 African Writers Awards
(Children's Literature)

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EDITORIAL



I know what the future holds because I can see the future. Did you cringe or did I make your eyes pop?

As you will discover within these bold WSA pages, the future may be under a shedload of pressure; to deliver, to be successful, and to grant a whole lot more than three wishes.

Well, the future has many names and one of it is called “tomorrow”.

In the audacious words of Phill Ibsen, “What if tomorrow wanted to be left alone?”

I bet I’ll have a proper answer to that question - tomorrow!

Sandra Oma Etubiebi,
Chief Editor,
WSA

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FLASH FICTION





Tomorrow is Pregnant

Marycynthia Chinwe Okafor - Nigeria

My admission letter came in a slick white envelope, with my name engraved in gold, on a bright Monday morning. The courier man who delivered it smiled and said, “Have a nice day.”

I took it to my room and while Mama and Papa still slept, I read it and I cried. After dinner, I decided to tell them. As I descended the stairs, I heard my name.

My parents named me Odiyinaobi because I came out a girl when they had been expecting a boy. And also because I was a girl, they decided my tomorrow with the flip of a silver one kobo coin.

Papa said, “She’s no good to me going to higher institution. Head and she will learn market.”

“Tail and she will learn how to sew. It will bring more money,” Mama said. She had always believed that “echi di ime, tomorrow is pregnant” but she had never thought so when it came to me. She had once told me in a fit of rage that she had looked between my legs at birth and known I would bring her nothing but pity and shame in her husband’s house.

I sat in the shadows, to their oblivion, while they concluded in front of the television that I would learn how to sew. They wouldn’t send me to school. I knew, I had always known. My state primary and secondary school education had come easy. I tiptoed to my room making a firm decision as I flopped on the bed. Tomorrow I would go to Chief Ebeano, a man who had been more of a father to me than mine. He would send me to school even though the price was marrying his son whom I had never met.



POETRY

FAR BEYOND

Far beyond;
I see something
A diminishing trait
Very faint yet colourful
Surpassing the native
And giving hope to life.

Far beyond;
The mysteries are gone,
The old fraternity faded
Paving way for the present
Where humanity isn't magical
But rather an obsession.

Far beyond;
The clouds are blue and white,
The breeze is warm and cool,
The birds are flying
And the bees are buzzing.

Yesterday is long gone
A new dawn has come
Sparking a new life
A new life to a brighter future.

Grace Tendo Katana
Uganda

I PRAY

For I was wrong and stupid, I apologize
For I was weak and broken, I sympathize
For the past is a memory, I hallucinate
For It stole from me, I do regret
For I live now worried, a leash is on my throat
A scary life, stronger than smokes, I suffocate.

Days light up nights
Nights darken the moonlights
For my eyes lost sight,
For my sleep ain't too tight,
I am sick to my stomach.
I dwell in thick...
For my heart doesn't beat, I shrink
I bleed blue through ink, I think.

For the sun will rise again
To wipe off all tears and scars to my skin
For the future will be bright, I pray
I pray for God to clean my way
To glorify every word I say
For not to rewind
For the future to make sure
That my faith is pure....
And my body doesn't stumble like
An old furniture.

Muhizi Yves
Rwanda

WHOSE THE FUTURE IS

Listen. I talk again
Generations I call your name
Raise and shine your nation
The power of the future you hold
Is empowering all the expectations


Cars that fly isn't my target
Neither over boards that every one can get
But something strong, don't forget
Improvement in life and integrate
With everyone's understanding and enforcements

Sketch and expose your talent
Because without you the light may fade
The chance would hide
And the future would be lost
And there again other lost intentions

The future isn't for you
But imagine a little kid from you
Sitting in a history class talking about you
And they would clap saying all this is because of you.

R. Maëva Bazilia
Rwanda

CHANGE IS COMING



I know change is coming
I was born with insufficiency
It has been long days
Since my feet have been in dung
No chance of leaving
But I am not afraid to die
Still waiting for that change

Many times I have been dumped
Shunned and scorned
Many hopes and dreams have shattered
All these bruises in life
Just make me carry on and be strong
Long time coming, but I know
Change is at the door, knocking

Time keeps ticking on
Feet still rolling,
thunder still cracking
But I'm still waiting
Lions still roaring
Sorrow in the abyss
of a troubled heart
But I am still hanging on
My future success,
I know you are waiting
Casting your light, a ray of hope
Because I know
change is going to come

Foday Sillah
Sierra Leone

A STOLEN FUTURE



As the independence euphoria,
Ebbbed on our beautiful shores,
You and your political ilk,
Came up with masterly plans,
To propel us to a lovely future.
We were made to easily believe,
Our latent lands would be,
A paradise many would flock to,
How gullible we were to believe,
Your incessant tales of a future where,
Modern high speed electric trains,
Would snake through our hamlets,
Where a good network of roads,
Would ease our movements around,
Where our taps would never dry.
Here we are, many decades later,
Utterly desolate, and you are still,
Spewing tales of a gilded future.
Perhaps it's about time,
You took stock of your past.
Your manifesto was just a dream,
Unfortunately, it remained ever so!

Kimutai Allan
Kenya

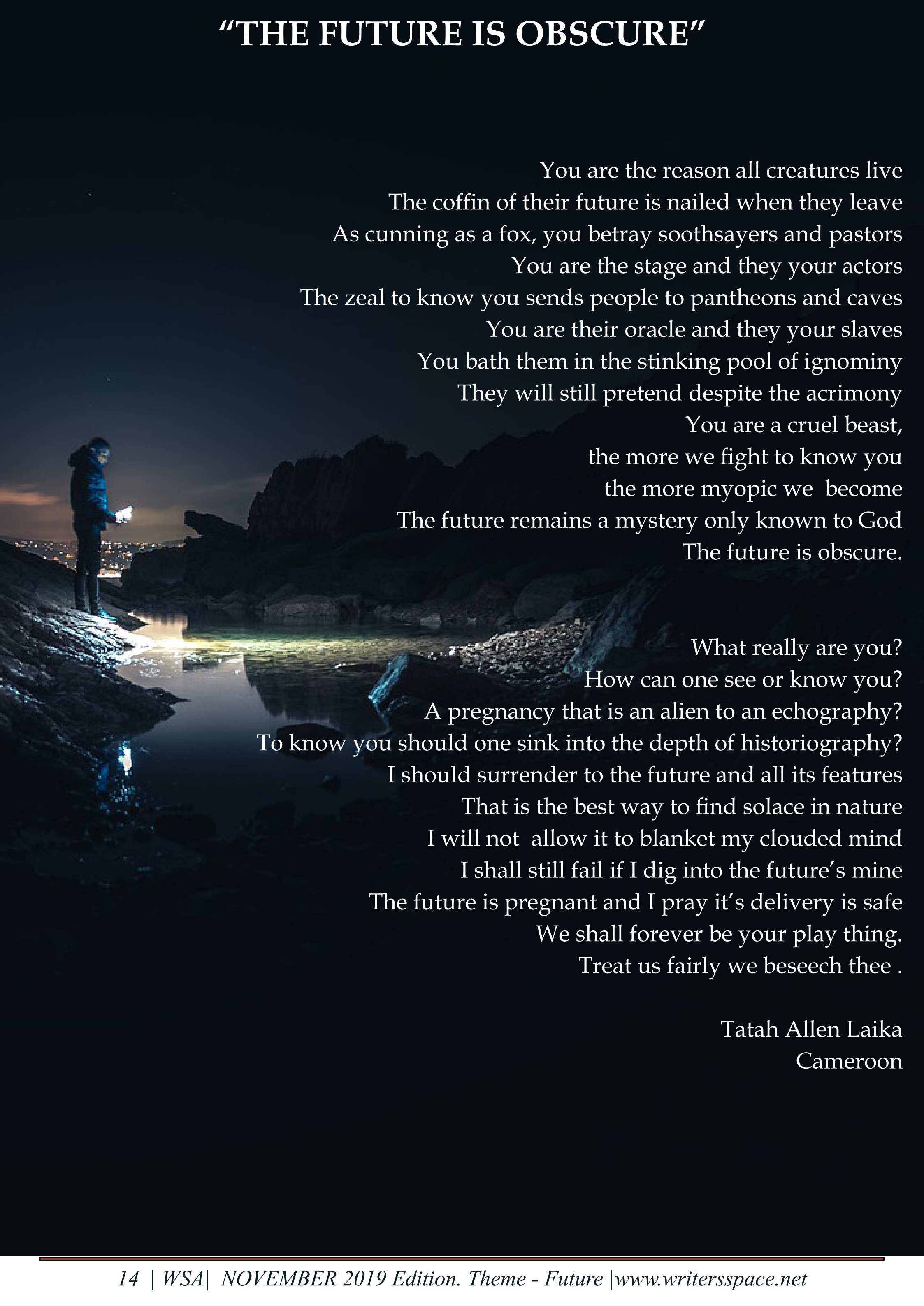
THE TIME IS NOW

Tomorrow! Oh tomorrow Will never come,
Today and only now you have time,
Make haste what you won't blame,
Stop and avoid lamentations,
Take only five minutes, and
Awake! Awake! It is now,
Only now is the time you have,
Let your yesterday successful,
And your today useful,
So that tomorrow may be remembered.
You have the key to open or close,
Only you can choose to keep or dispose,
You are born to be a winner,
Participate to win,
Fear and lose the chance.
Courage and steadfast are weapons,
To make yourself successful.

Arnold Furaha
Tanzania



"THE FUTURE IS OBSCURE"



You are the reason all creatures live
The coffin of their future is nailed when they leave
As cunning as a fox, you betray soothsayers and pastors
You are the stage and they your actors
The zeal to know you sends people to pantheons and caves
You are their oracle and they your slaves
You bath them in the stinking pool of ignominy
They will still pretend despite the acrimony
You are a cruel beast,
the more we fight to know you
the more myopic we become
The future remains a mystery only known to God
The future is obscure.

What really are you?
How can one see or know you?
A pregnancy that is an alien to an echography?
To know you should one sink into the depth of historiography?
I should surrender to the future and all its features
That is the best way to find solace in nature
I will not allow it to blanket my clouded mind
I shall still fail if I dig into the future's mine
The future is pregnant and I pray it's delivery is safe
We shall forever be your play thing.
Treat us fairly we beseech thee .

Tatah Allen Laika
Cameroon

LOVE IN FAITH

Like the stars of the sky
So is my love for you
Sparkling even in the dead of night
Shining through the darkness

I know you don't feel the same way
But I'm hopeful
What is man without faith?
What is love without hope?

Even when the sun shines no more
Or the birds stay silent in their nests
I'll still be here
Waiting for you

Susan Syondie
Kenya

FOR NEVER

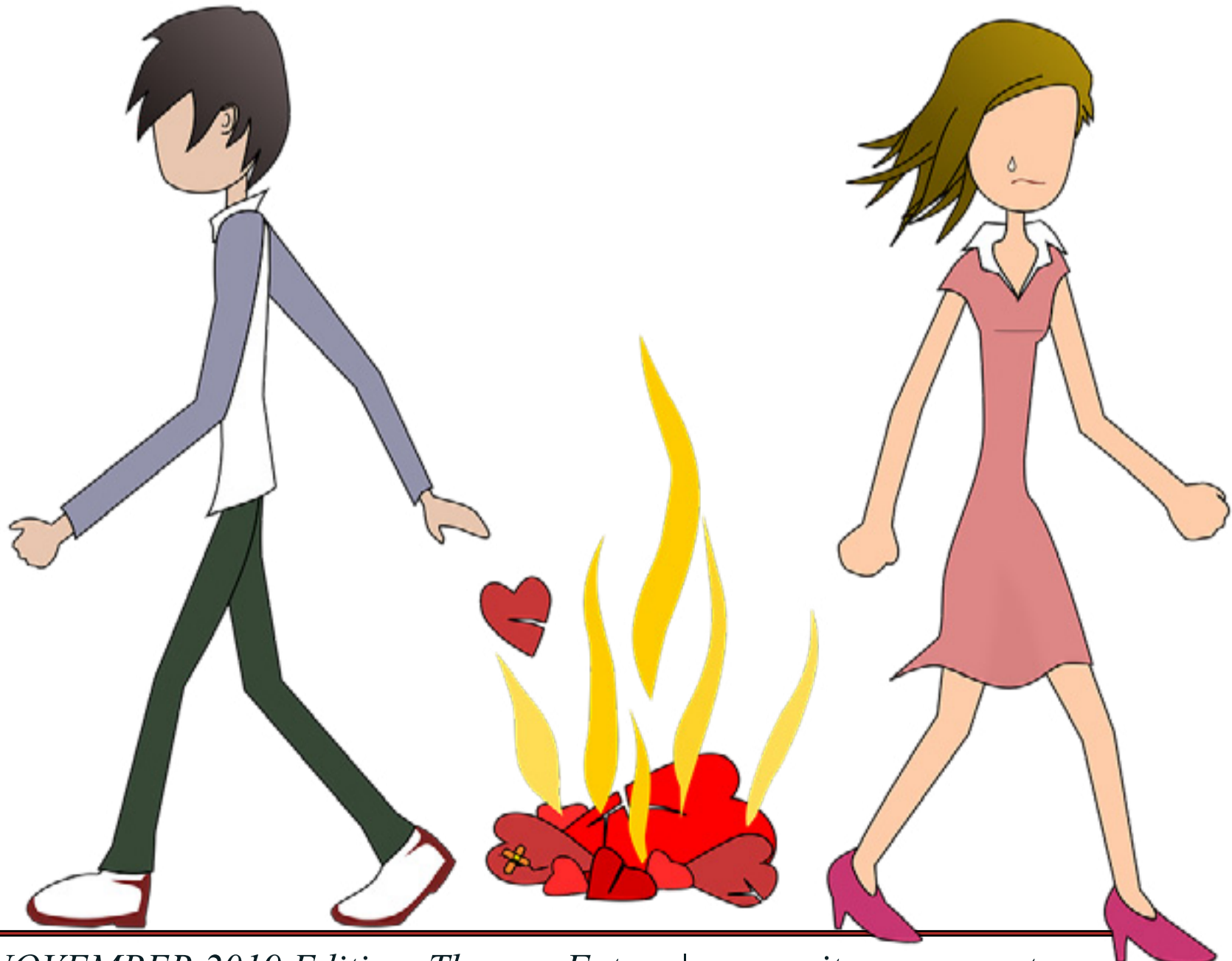
Eye to eye,
Dates and conversations,
We're better acquainted,
Tomorrow is sure.

Hand in hand,
Trudging through life,
You're my rock,
The future I crave.

Chest to chest,
Entangled in matrimony,
Promising forever,
The journey begins.

Toe to toe,
Arguments and fights,
Fagged out, disappointed,
We're done.

Peter Blessing Pever (PPBlessing)
Nigeria



MORROW

Dosing with a permanent smile,
Yesterday was colourful
Now, stuck with the medieval style
Confused! no longer peaceful.
Scared to plop head on this pillow,
Like salt in water, I dissolve with the night blanket
No hope to be a hero.
What's in tomorrow's basket?
No telescope to project.
Like a siamese twin, clueless about my fate.
Fate that I'm in no state to predict.
Oh! how will I hate...
To affiliate to sorrow,
Oh! What's in store for my morrow?

Lebogang Samson,
Botswana



**BE LOYAL TO THE UNKNOWN,
BE COMMITTED TO THE FUTURE,
YOU MAY BE PRIVILEGED TO MEET HER SOMETIME.**

CELESTINA OMOR ORHUE,
NIGERIA

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WRITERS SPACE AFRICA



EME OGBU

Winner of the
2019 African Writers Awards
(Children's Literature)

BIO: OGBU EME

Many years ago, during the few final weeks leading to the graduation of the mass communication class of 2011 of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ogbu Eme wrote in the class photo book, “to become one of the top 100 writers in the world”. Today, he is pursuing this lofty dream as a children’s writer.

Of course, this is no mean feat, and oftentimes, when he thinks about what it will take to get there, he feels he has barely scratched the surface. But those who have met him know he is determined to push hard until his dreams come true.

Born in 1987 in Alayi, a village in southeastern Nigeria, Ogbu was the fourth child of Mr and Mrs Eme. He attended primary school in the village, up to primary three before moving to Cotonou, the economic capital of the Republic of Benin in 1996. There he was enrolled into Nigerian International Schools, Cotonou. As a village boy, he didn’t understand English, so school was hard. The memories of not being able to have a go on the swing because he couldn’t speak English and the ridiculous description of himself as “a goat to a new school” during a composition writing class now evoke laughter. However, determined to show the other kids he wasn’t dumb, he studied hard. He soon learned the English language as well as other subjects so that he became one of the best students in school. Interestingly, he fell in love with reading, and with reading came the passion for writing. He would write the folktales his grandmother used to tell him.

After leaving primary school in 2000, he went to Lagos State Model College Kankon and then to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2007. Fast forward to 2014 when he got an offer from The Sycamore School Port Harcourt as a teacher. That was the beginning of his journey into education. He later moved to Sailors’ Pride School Port Harcourt as an English teacher but left after a brief period to work as a writer for Daily Posts UK. It was there that he built the skill set that would set him up for becoming a good writer.

The decision to become a children’s writer came as an idea after he published an article titled “Curriculum Localisation Will Drive Quality Education in Nigerian Schools” on his blog called Drafts Paper. In the article, he discussed how Nigerian authors need to write children’s stories that are not only Nigerian but that possess the same thrill and quality as Western children’s literature. He later published other articles such as “Gender Bias in School Books: Setback to Equitable Education in Nigeria?” All of this would help to shape his writing goal, which is to write children’s books that address educational issues, gender and the rights of children in developing countries. That’s the reason his books usually have girls as main characters.

In 2019 he self-published “Not Too Young to Run” and is currently working on a story on Makoko Floating School, which he hopes will appeal to publishers and will be used to draw attention to the plight of Makoko children who have no school simply because they live on water. He has written for a number of literary magazines such as Writers Space Africa and Brittle Paper.

He has also published a collection of three short stories titled “6 Extremely Easy Ways to Die in Nigeria and Other Stories”. This is for adult readers and it takes a swipe at Nigerian politicians as well as the citizens.

Ogbu has now gone back to the classroom as an English teacher with Praise-El Infant and Junior Schools. He hopes to use his writing and profession to inspire children to be more than their parents. He hopes to start a creative writing class for children.

Ogbu is the winner of the 2019 African Writers Awards for Children’s Literature. He was awarded at the 2019 African Writers Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, on the 28th of September, 2019. Below is the Award-winning story.

The Zappinator

As Fatimah rode back to the village from her school in Mokwa, she thought about what to build for her science project. A pepper calculator or a sleepyhead riser? A pepper calculator sounded nice. It would help her mother a lot as the other day she had had to rinse her mouth several times with cold water after eating the very peppery miyan zogale her mother had prepared. A sleepyhead riser was equally good. She would build it to knock her sleepyhead classmates up every morning so that the teachers would never have to worry about children coming late to school.

Both ideas sounded good, and she didn’t know which to choose.

When she got to her house, a pleasant, smallish block building, she parked her bicycle by the wall on the front veranda and flew up the stairs to her father who was reclining in an armchair and having his nose in a newspaper. ‘Uba,’ she said, ‘which one of these two projects do you think could win a science fair?’

Her father looked up, folding the newspaper. ‘What’s an old man supposed to know about science?’ he asked.

‘A great deal,’ Fatimah said. ‘You’re living in a world of science.’

Her father chortled, dropping the newspaper on the table in front of him. 'All right then,' he said. 'I will try to use my old man's wisdom. Tell me your ideas.'

'One is a device to tell Uwa how much pepper to put in the soup, and the other is something to wake my classmates up every morning.'

Her father thought for a moment, a finger placed over his lips and his eyes gazing at the ceiling. 'Both ideas are very good,' he said, 'but as a father and husband, I would pick the one to help your mother with her cooking. She seems to have lost her taste buds.'

'That's clever. Thank you, Uba,' Fatimah said. Then she dashed into the house to change into her house clothes.

Later that night, while she sprawled in bed, half-asleep, she heard something buzz past her ear. 'Mosquitoes!' she cried, slapping her left ear. 'Will they leave me alone?' She dragged the bed clothes up to her face, wrapping herself up like a baby in swaddling clothes. There was a short moment of peace before the mosquito came buzzing again. This time she got up from bed and tramped to the wardrobe to get her mosquito net. How she hated to sleep under it. It was prickly and made her really uncomfortable.

As she began to drag the net to her bed, she paused, her face lightening up as if she had just discovered some secret formula. A crafty smile had now spread across her face, and it was obvious the gem of a brilliant idea had struck her.

When morning came, Fatimah quickly did her chores and asked her mother if she could ride to the cybercafé in Mokwa. Her mother agreed, so she mounted her bicycle and rode off down the highway to town. The cybercafé wasn't full. There were four people seated in front of the computers. One was a boy called Aliyu who was Fatimah's classmate.

'What are you building for the science fair?' Aliyu asked her.

'Haba!' Fatimah said. 'I can't tell you that now. It's top secret.'

She was right. The secret to presenting a great science project was to keep your ideas well hidden. Aliyu nodded and returned to reading something on Energy in the Wind on the computer.

Fatimah was now sitting in front of one of the seven computers in the café and going through several articles on mosquitoes: how they find their target, why they prefer human blood, how they make that annoying buzz and ways to get rid of them for good. She stayed in the café all morning, gathering whatever was necessary for slaying these tiny, disgusting criminals from the phylum Arthropoda.

After the visit to the cybercafé, she made a list of things for building a mosquito busting device. Then she rode off to Ultimate Electrical Shop in Mokwa market to buy them. Mr Rabiou the shop owner was filled with wonder, his eyes narrowed with thin veiled suspicion as he sold her the items, which included a DVD drive, 6-volt battery pack, 10 ohm resistor, Aixiz module, LM317 voltage regulator, a screwdriver and a soldering iron. There was even an old suction fan. With all of these in place, she began to build her weapon of mosquito destruction. She worked every day after school and at weekends. She took the DVD drive apart, reaching for a small cylindrical device called diode; she mounted the diode to the Aixiz module and hooked it onto the battery pack; she connected the battery pack to the voltage regulator and resistor by means of wires; and she strapped the whole thing to the old suction fan. In the end, she was staring at a robot-like laser machine. A true weapon.

It was now time to test it. She reached for a piece of paper and tossed it to the fan.

Zap!

The paper went up in orange light and smoke. Success! Her science project was completed.

That night, while she slept, her laser machine was busy zapping mosquitoes. The fan sucked them close, and the laser shot them down. In the morning, tens of mosquito carcasses were lying around her room fried.

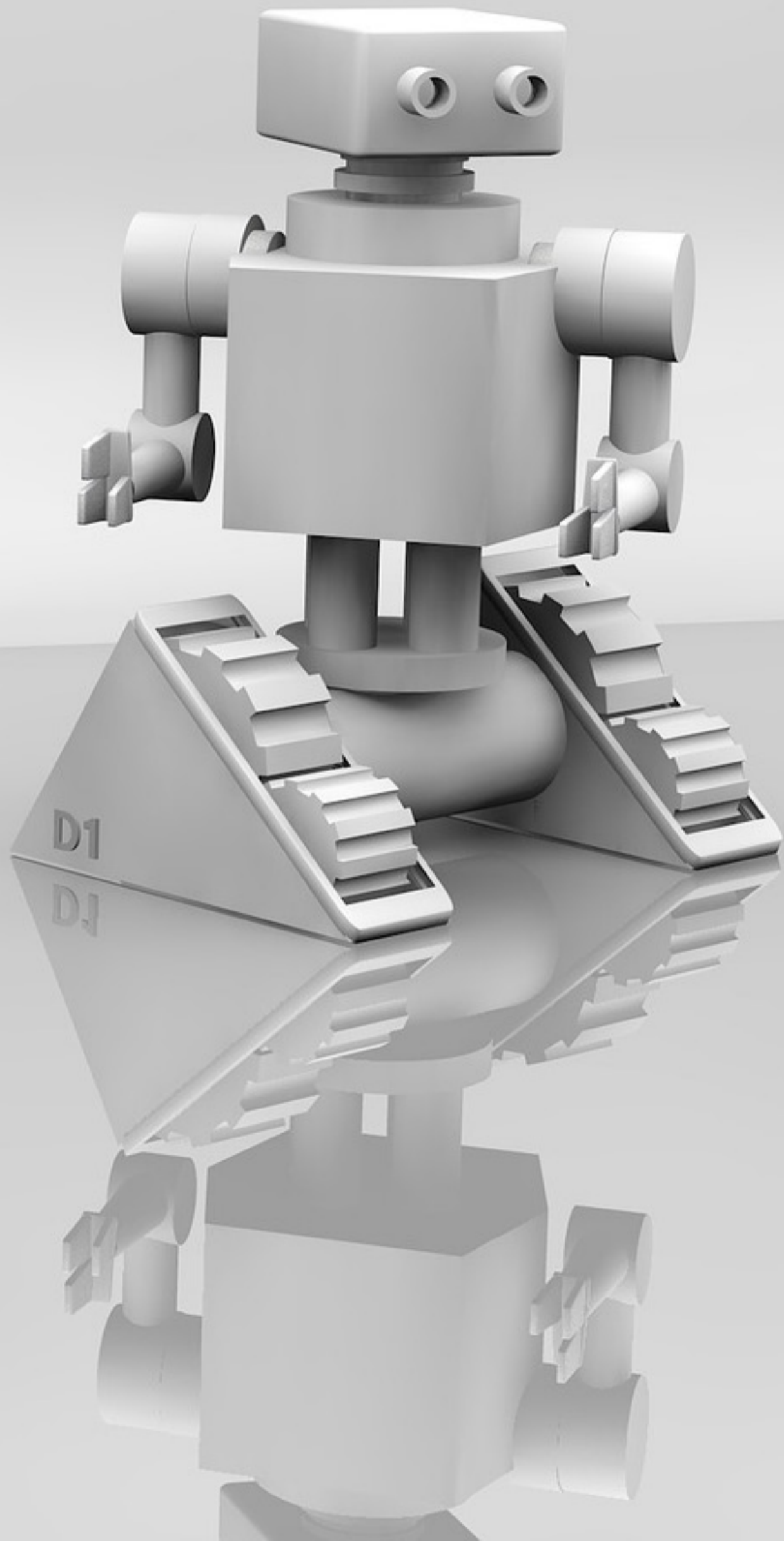
Fatimah presented her mosquito busting machine during the science fair two days later, and it was the talk of the school. Some government people from the Ministry of Science and Technology in Abuja had visited and after witnessing the demonstration, they called it a technological breakthrough.

When asked what the project should be called, Fatimah smiled and said, 'Call it the Zappinator.'

**BEHOLD
THE FUTURE
VISITS US
TODAY WITH
THE GIFT OF
OPPORTUNITY!**

Muyambo Mwenda
Zambia

Children's Literature



The Future

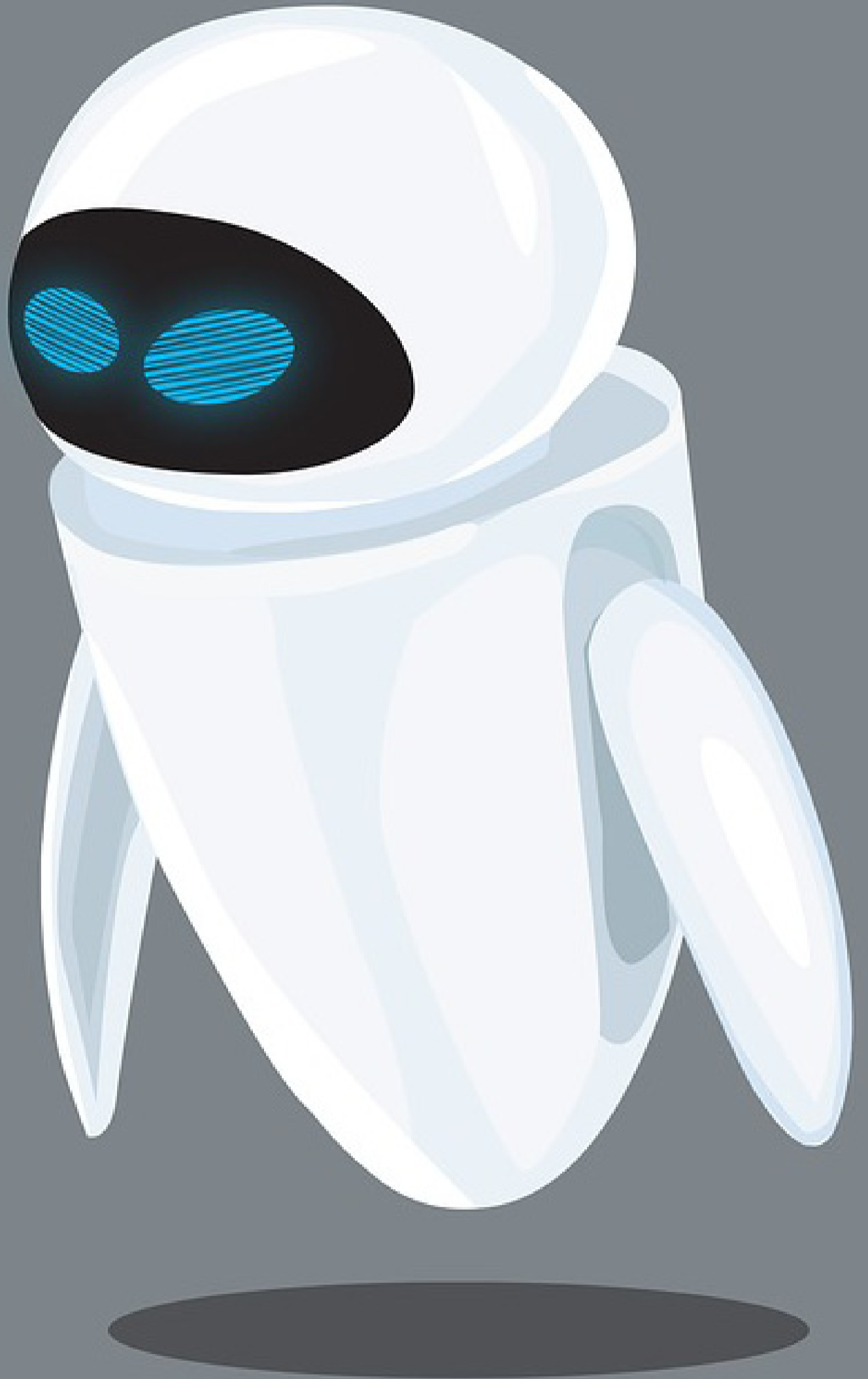
by
Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy - Cameroon

The future is a door
The future door is locked
And the key kept by God
In a place known by Him

We live in the future
But we don't know the future
Until it's door is opened
The future is a door

We know our past
We know our present
They too were a future
We don't know our future

A future today,
Is the past by tomorrow
Future, future, future
The future is a door
Locked by God with a key





???



ESSAYS



What if Tomorrow Wants to be Left Alone?

Seconds. Minutes. Days. Weeks. Months. Seasons. If all these never existed, how would you tell that there was a tomorrow dressed in a silver knee length dress, seated somewhere probably on a balcony of a high castle with legs crossed on each other waiting for you with a cigarette laced between her fingers, blowing smoke towards the moon thinking she can't be touched, looking down on you saying, "keep working hard, I'm not that cheap"?

If the wheels of wind could stop the love making between the clouds and the skies, would you know the difference between dusk and Dawn? If the tides of time stopped, for 24 hours to allow you to breathe away from rushing into tomorrow like it was the ultimate goal of living, would you still be sailing bracing the rough seas in search of uncertainty in an uncharted place? What if all you have is today, this moment and nothing else, what would you be caught up doing? I bet you will be caught up doing the same things over and over again, doing things to make tomorrow better, doing things chapchap to break up with today and jump in bed with tomorrow. You will be caught up dreaming the same thoughts, about tomorrow. What if tomorrow was a coined-up phrase, or some conspiracy to prevent you from doing what you should be doing - and that is making the relationship between today and you work?

What if tomorrow comes and you're not here to see? What if after all the things you did or didn't do today, you find out that tomorrow was never promised to you, would you feel betrayed? How much would you hurt? Would you stand in the middle of nowhere, and summon tomorrow, if you know where to find her, and ask her why has she forsaken you? Why has she not

delivered after thinking that you had planted seeds of hope in her? Would you phone her, if she picks up the call what would you say? What if she picks up only to tell you that you are not her type? If she misses your call would you punch the walls with your fists? And curse towards the skies that it's over between you two? Or would you go back, start a fresh with all the hurt and betrayal, and say that, tomorrow will be better, that it's not yet your time. How long should tomorrow be? Or does tomorrow only exist for those who have won major awards in life? What's your tomorrow? If tomorrow ought to be brighter, then what do we call the time when nothing seems to work out, that moment when everything is a repeat of daily occurrences, when there is no major milestone completed, today? The present?

If tomorrow couldn't love you back, whose fault would it be? Would you blame her for finding you unattractive? Would you blame her for finding you insecure? You are busy fussing over tomorrow, thinking about her, fantasizing about her, thinking that you know the things that would make her happy; the fancy dates that you could take her, that expensive wine to dine with, claiming that you love her, that you knew you loved her before you met her. So you go ahead making all these plans, or rather traps, hoping that tomorrow would fall for you. What if you are wrong? What if tomorrow doesn't want anything like that? What if tomorrow wants to be left alone? I mean, with all the great expectations you have of tomorrow, don't you think tomorrow deserves a little time off your mind? Don't you think tomorrow don't want to be thought about? To be made a priority? What if the only thing tomorrow ever wants is for you to treat today with the same expectations and love and commitments that you give to her? Or even to make things work between today and you, because you always seem to be breaking up with today in a hurry to jump in bed with tomorrow, because all of a sudden after 24 hours, you find today unattractive anymore? Don't you think tomorrow has its own share of insecurities, thinking that you will get tired of her the same way you did with today? You are desperately in need of tomorrow, don't you think that makes her feel depressed?

Just deal with today, okay? Mold her, be in love with her, treat her with the respect that she needs, today will be harsh like she sometimes is, but don't you let her go. You don't mess up in a relationship expecting to make a new one work. Give today the attention that she needs, make love to her with no thoughts of tomorrow ruining the moment, however much beautiful and sassy she might be, do this of today and she shall deliver you to tomorrow. Be the better man today, and be the perfect husband tomorrow. If you don't, tomorrow will be an elusive illusion.

Phill Ibsen,
Kenya



A Trailer of the Future

A professor of history sits before his devices inside his glass house, he has over fifty students in different regions of the world connected to him for the lesson. The date, month and year he quotes first in the introduction is today. Yes, today's date. He quotes your name and says you were starring on a screen reading a magazine online. He doesn't mention that on the year when you were born, your father was reading a physical magazine, because the students have never seen paper, even money is just a code punched into another device and you have paid for your trip, or may be shopping. Wait, they don't go shopping, they sit inside their houses and shopping brings itself to them. When he finally says you were among the ancient readers of the 21st century, the students wonder how it might have looked during this time. A time when the sun still shined and people had noses on their faces. This things don't exist anymore. Their skins aren't brown, dark and blonde, they are blue and green. Some are red. People wear masks mostly and the bad ones have horrifying wounds with mucus streaming like a waterfall from their mouth. This is a trailer of the future.

The future has no Africa and America, It is just there, existing in between the earth and the other worlds we will never know. Aliens eating metal and dropping burning bodies, names are scarce and electricity is tapped from the head of a giant dragon fly. The mos-

quitoes speak and old dust gathering pieces of wood are hidden deep into the vaults of archives and museums, because trees will be to them as dinosaurs are to us. Forests are made of buildings-Concrete jungles-, oceans are made of nothing other than perceived thick water, less viscous and objects won't sink, it floats instead. This is the first episode of the future.

The future must be a horrible place, that is, if we keep on believing the lies in the sci-fi stories. But wait, what if all these things about the future are nightmares and recycled stories retold once and then again until we now start believing the future will look like that? The future is not even easy to imagine. It is so much possible that one person had a dream and then woke up to write about it and then every other person started copying the environment and nature as it was in the first story and we are all fooled to accept that this is how the future will look like. Technological advancement, how? Everything is changing back to how it was. We started without clothes, then heavy clothing, then light clothing and we are going back into no clothing. Ok, that is a lie, but just know history will repeat itself. Right? Well, the American dream of the future might be different from the European or maybe the Asian one, let's have a trailer of the African future.

Africa is a country, not a continent anymore. Those who used to call Africa a country now say it is because of them that Africa came together. The current countries are countries and each one is headed by a billionaire who doesn't speak English, because English is not authentically African. The billionaire has planes and has instructed America to transfer their armory from the deserts of Sahara because Africa now wants to keep their own weapons and drill oil. Tribe is not here, everyone knows another in a certain way and family ends at the maternity hospital. A child listens to the TV and does what he/she sees there because TVs will be the parents, mothers will be busy working to become billionaires and fathers will be away in places not known. They don't even know they have children born of their names. The south is so close to the North and the East to the west, the central won't be existing, because the whole Africa will be at the Centre. At this Centre, it is where the main story is set. No one will love this part of the trailer, the future of Africa is not in me. It is in some place inside me and I have just visited that place once in my life and it sublimed because of security reasons. All these things I have written are not going to happen any time soon, if at all they will happen, does that mean you won't see the future? The answer is no, you are seeing the future.

The future is such a hard place to define, maybe because we might think it is way far from us when we are living it without knowing. And so, if future finds you here, you will still be worried of the future that other future is hoped to happen. You will be living a present, such like you do today. There will be a past, you will call it history. Clearly the present you live today will be among the tiny pieces that make up history when tomorrow comes. And the tomorrow that comes will turn into a present and so the future keeps moving, it keeps moving steadily away from us without the simple realization that we now live in the dreams, intentions, spaces and aspirations that were hoped for years back. In other words, -that is if you can believe me-future is a simple thing to realize its presence once you get the comprehension that what was hoped for yesterday, has come to be seen and lived today. Today might therefore be the future.

I know it is hard to get all these into your head but wait, the future is as hard as it is in these words. You can never talk about it well unless you accept that you are living the future. So the future is today, it will be tomorrow just like it was yesterday. Or maybe it moves and we will never find it because clearly it won't be easy to stand somewhere and say 'look, I am in the future' unless you accept it or you time travel but in Africa we don't do the real time travelling. My grandmother said, 'We find ourselves under the influence of lies, the tiny sweet lies resulting from hallucinations that make us think we are way ahead when we are still just here, reading and not anywhere in the 1900s or maybe in the 2100s.' To time travel then, you only do so by reading. That was her words.

The belief of another future finding you here, is the basic definition of faith. The reality is that, what was lived ten years ago was once a future and now rests as history. Our present is someone else's future. Tomorrow, to some it is just the day to come, to others it is a future. For the young the future longs to see them many years after now, for the teenagers, the future is what you are stepping into, to us, this is the future. The future lies in the dynamics of space, experience, intention and aspirations more than it does in the one simple set of parameters that defines it, time.

Kelvin J. Shachile,
Kenya

THE MASK COVERING YOUR FUTURE



One may be bothered about me insinuating that there is a mask covering his or her future. Did I have to make such a direct statement as if to say I know for sure that there is a mask? Well, I dare say, I know for sure. And congratulations if you have struggled and succeeded to overcome your fears and tear off the mask that covers your future. If you haven't, this is for you.

Reading Michelle Obama's book; *BECOMING*, is easily becoming one of the two books that would literally change my life. In this book, the former first lady of the United States of America, an African-American woman who through the relatable struggles of life which we could only imagine that she went through, tore off the mask that covered her future.

Your mask is easily is many ways the thoughts you live and bear, but as accurately and shockingly pointed out in *BECOMING*, it is especially in the silly mind-set we inculcate in our children from childhood. It lies within what Michelle Obama suggests is the most useless question we ever ask children; 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' As if growing up is infinite. As if at some point you become something and that's the end.

There is nothing as scary as wanting to meet up, wanting to satisfy people's expectation of us, even as adults. Now, we can only imagine how scary and overwhelming, and easily de-

pressing that can be for a child, of which many of us are still struggling with at our ages.

This fear, is the mask you need to tear off today. This mask is synonymous to LIMIT. When we have a particular hope of becoming something, which people around us have only approved of and are looking out for its materialisation, it is easier to sink into depression and nothingness when it is not coming soon.

We don't have control of life, neither the future. We don't know what we'd easily qualify to become tomorrow, either by education, experience or skills. So why do we limit this advantage? We programme our minds for failure when we limit the number of things we can be, despite the degree we have, where we come from, what people have ascertained we should be what and what not.

I find recently, and can easily say that the future is synonymous to becoming, because we don't know the future and what it could turn us into. Imagine you approach the future with that thought, being open to embrace whatever opportunities come your way. Imagine the amount of fear and nervousness you'd overcome and magically become things that are beyond your own imagination. Things people didn't think would make any sense. It is this fear and nervousness that is the mask covering everything you could become.

How many sleepless nights have you had thinking of what you should have been or what you ought to be in the future? And what makes you believe that one thing is the only satisfying thing you'd become and that's it.

I think we should walk into the future and embrace what we find therein. I do not think we should be so afraid that we wouldn't end up practising law after having studied it in the university, that we end up loosing out on building a business brand that we have even more capability to manage and make wealth. Those are punishing thoughts you can do away with.

What is your mask? Think of all the things you could become. Release the pressure that binds you to a limit. Uncover the mask of becoming or of the future and find a passionate solution in every problem you encounter.

One day at a time.

Blessing Chidinma Amadi,
Nigeria

Short Stories



My uncle, Zagwa

by

Francis Mkwapatira,

Malawi

His words made me feel like a heavy load had been placed on my shoulders. I tried so hard not to cry, but my effort was futile, tears kept flowing down my cheeks as I speechlessly gazed at him. Swiftly, my mind took me several years back. I saw him as he stood and gently uttered words which patted my soul then.

“Mama Mupacho, as for the school fees and any other necessity, you can always count on me. I shall by all means possible provide for and make sure that he is likely to successfully attain good education,” Uncle Zagwa comforted my mother and I in front of everyone.

“May the Almighty continue blessing you sir, there is nothing that I can say except to thank the good Lord for what you have just said,” mother complemented what my uncle, Mr. Zagwa promised.

That was just three days after my father’s burial, and everything seemed to have been taking a steady pace. Then, I turned my face up to look Uncle Zagwa in the face, all I saw was a haloed being, a savior who hopped in at the moment we needed rescue. Uncle Zagwa had just successfully opposed the idea of selling my late father’s piece of land and sharing of the income, as it was suggested by uncle Ndumile, the eldest son in my late father’s family. Uncle Zagwa declared that the land was to remain in the hands of my mother, so that we grew our own food.

A few weeks later, uncle Zagwa paid us a visit, as it was his routine. This time around, he brought us another pile of groceries even though some he brought the previous month had not been exhausted. My mother and I wore a merry faces, for he had paid us a visit, an unexpected visit. He also brought me a new school uniform.

“Thank you Uncle Zagwa, may the Creator replace where you have been subtracting, abundant-



ly.” My mother tried a smile on her face as she thanked my uncle.

As for me, I couldn't think of the best word to express my gratitude. I stood firmly where I was, mouth agape. Uncle Zagwa took very good care of us as if he did not have a family of his own to look after.

But suddenly, the tables turned, and all that our hearts wore was anguish. It was to my surprise, that this serpent of an uncle, by the name Zagwa still had the guts to show his face in front of me after eleven years. On this day, I wish I had the strength like that of the blind Samson on the day he summoned to death with him, multitudes of philistines. I thought of jumping out of my wheel chair, only to pounce at him in the manner that a hungry lion does on its prey, and watch him die with his neck in my palms. I reminisced of all the hardships my mother and I experienced because of his cruelty.

As I sat in my wheel chair, I closed my eyes in an attempt not to let a tear fall from my eyes. But, tears dotted in the corners of my eyes; I remembered that day uncle Zagwa bought me a school uniform. He still maintained the same form of godliness then, until when I got involved in a road accident on my way to Tsogolo Secondary School. I stayed in a coma for a week, on the day I regained my consciousness, I remember uncle Zagwa and mother talking to the doctor beside my hospital bed.

“There was nothing else that could have been done. Mupacho, selling the piece of land together with the house was the only obvious thing that has helped raise the money to settle this hospital bill.” Uncle Zagwa exclaimed as he in an effort tried to escape the mournful face that my mother stared at him with. “You can come with me to my house in the meantime,” he added.

My body burned with pain from the wounds I had sustained from the car accident as well as the shock from the news uncle realized to my mother. Selling our property without her concern made me feel like we had been robbed in day light. My mother just stood on a corner in the room, with tear overrun cheeks.

“It is the same money from the sold property that I have again used in buying him the wheel chair,” he spoke in front of my mother's disapproving face. “And you must understand the fact that your son can no longer do anything successful in life in his paralyzed state, and at least hear me out when I say I will no longer take responsibility of his education. If I do, what is he going to pay me back with, since he shall no longer be of use to the society? In fact, in this physical state, he is as useless as a dog that only barks and wags its tail as it waits for food in its plate.” My uncle spoke that in front of my mother and I, despite the doctor's advice. The doctor said that this never meant the end of my journey, before he left to attend to other patients. He also cited a number of examples of those who sailed to witness success

despite living with disabilities attained during adulthood.

I wish I had died when the car over turned before landing into Rinthipe River, than to live and witness such insults. So, I fell back into the hospital bed and hid my face under the bed covers. To me, uncle Zagwa was a dead man since that day. Mother and I learnt to live on our own as soon as we discovered that uncle Zagwa's wife never wanted us in their home. She was the one who told us point blank, that we shouldn't have bothered to join them, for they wanted to enjoy the wealth that uncle had just amassed. After exiling ourselves from this new home, mother and I also learnt that uncle Zagwa did not use more than a quarter of the money from our land and house on my hospital bills, those he sold when I was in the hospital.

As soon as we started adapting to our new status , many people talked all they could, but mother remained my strongest. She never let the taunts from the rest of the villagers get to her, but accepted those with positive mindsets and those who gave her a hand in providing for my needs and education. With the little that mother gained from her piece works and vegeta-ble selling business, she managed to settle the loans she got for my tuition fees in collage. Lucky enough, I graduated with a distinction and got employed as a lecturer in the same college I stud-ied in and upgraded myself.

“Please my son, find a place in your heart and forgive me. It was never my intention to abandon you and your mother; it was nothing more than the shenanigans from my wife. She never wanted you in the house.” He pleaded, “she coaxed me to sell your property and make use of the money for ourselves, claiming there was nothing good that you and you uneducated mother could have done with the property your father left before he died.” He tried so hard to let out the truth; I imagined that he longed to be set free.

For a moment, I stared at my uncle, who by then had no family. His wife had divorced him and went away with their two kids. He was static as he kept kneeling before me, waiting for my re-sponse. I continued gazing at him with my heart racing, fists clinched and longing for his throat. Finally, I asked myself where he had been for all those years, and of course how he traced his way to my house in the city. I pitied him so much for the look of a beggar he wore; in his dirty once white shirt, buttock punched pair of trousers as well as his front yawning shoes on his feet. The only thing that could have quenched my anger could have been sending him away, but I thought it would have been nice to put him to shame by letting him enjoy what I was predestined for.

“Uncle Zagwa,” I called him, “we once lived together as a family in the past. I don't think you deserve to rote in the streets when my mother and I have plenty room for you, both in our house and hearts. We are still a family, welcome to the future”.

ONCE UPON GREEN

Esther Musembi – Kenya



The clock strikes three, in the morning, and little puffy eyelids still flutter in deep slumber. On the other side of town, in the forest, or what is left of it, a small shape is rapidly growing. Right now, it's not really a threat. At least not yet.

The year is 2050. Nairobi feels like a gigantic robot, the houses within its belly operating like well-oiled automated machines. A woman in one of these houses is darting furiously between the coffee maker and the electric cooker. It's all futile really, nothing can go wrong in that kitchen. Rhoda, the chef, won't let it. A growing whirring within her body elongates her arms simultaneously. She flips the pancakes to a perfection and switches off the coffee maker as she pours two cups. The woman smiles. Rhoda has a sense of humor for a robot.

"Lenana, wake up!" His mother continuously shakes him up.

"Why didn't he wake me up?" Lenana groans, pointing at the robot next to his bed, its clocky face staring right at him.

"I switched him off Lenny. You can't be having all your conversations with a robot, son."

"But mom, he was helping me with my homework," Lenana whines.

"Which you finished." His mother finishes making up the bed, turns the robot to the wall and

sighs guiltily. It shouldn't be like this, she thinks. She should be the one helping her son out with home-work like her parents did with her but it's not that easy anymore. She sighs again, heavily this time. Lenana will have to do with the two capable robots for the time being. The robots she specifically made for her five-year-old son.

"Mom, please hand me my project," Lenana points at the top drawer. Clocky always tucks him in and makes sure his homework is safely put. Always at the top drawer.

It's a huge 3D illustration of a smiling Planet Earth on a glass like canvas. Lenana has named it 'Long, long ago' in wobbly pencil, something he hardly uses anymore. Planet Earth is all blue and green until small holes start appearing from the top spreading downwards. Like thick porridge coming to the boil. The holes become bigger and bigger until she bursts open like labor come too soon. Now the whole canvas is littered with reds and browns, just not the tranquil blue and green. At the top somewhere on the huge canvas, Mt. Kilimanjaro glistens proudly and briefly then completely melts into oblivion in a single second. Tiny LED arrows lead his mother to a huge green mass teeming with all kinds of animal life. At least that is what she gathers from the many incorporated animal and nature sounds. Suddenly, there's an almost painful static sound. The green mass wobbles, the sounds start to go faint. The huge green mass changes in an instant to black. There's no sound. Only a desert in its place. "I'm presenting this today mom," Lenana interjects proudly. "It's about how much our environment has changed since before I was born." He's smiling. His mother is not. The canvas is still changing. A million dots are moving rapidly from one side of the canvas to the other. The path is marked The Mara. "That's the Wildebeest Migration that you told me about," Lenana explains. "Do you miss it mom?"

But before his mother answers him, the dots completely disappear in a flash of red. Only a landscape of dirty brown and a deep gaping hole where the river was is now left. The illustration starts to dim and hums slowly back to the smiling complete Planet Earth.

"Wow! Did Clocky help with this?" She's trying to tame a runaway tear.

"Yes," Lenana answers quietly, "but mostly from the stories you tell me. Before they disappeared."

On the other side, the shape is still growing. Its small red eyes dart hungrily to the pile of plastic dumped minutes ago by the garbage truck. It wobbles unsteadily on still growing hind legs and starts gobbling the plastic down in a frenzy. Almost like it needs the plastic to survive, to live. And like a child's imagination coming to life, it grows to its full size. Hind legs are fully formed, a full body of black mass glistens with life, rather waste, and its red eyes zoom fully from the heady in-take of carbon dioxide and methane in the air. Ah! So much of it. It opens its smelly great mouth and howls in pleasure. Pollution has never felt and tasted so good. Let the rampage begin.

STRANGE COLORS OF LOVE

Achi Godspower Emmanuel- Nigeria



The smoke from her shisha pot wafted in the air, in a room lit with multiple colored bulbs like a club house. Her sound system releasing the sensuous lyrics of *Pretty Hurts* by Beyonce - a song she listened to whenever she was down. She cried, and reflected on her life and how far it had spread to the cardinal points in pieces before he walked in and helped her pick up the pieces. She worried she may never heal from this pain in her heart.

Her life had been a mess since childhood. She never knew what it meant to be loved by a father; her mum is a lesbian who gave birth to her through artificial insemination, purchasing semen from a sperm bank. She was born into a world where she felt the love of a mother from her nanny, because her lesbian parents were so in love with themselves that she became a second thought.

The death of her nanny and mummy's lover was the beginning of a very painful adventure for her, as her step mum - her mum's new lover - tried raping her when she was sixteen. Her mum never believed her, in fact, she beat her up and threw her out of the house for accusing her perfect, saint lover. She went into the streets of Baltimore, inside the strippers club, got enrolled and made her living from sucking steamy men.

Her first day was hell. The Hispanic who had a good resemblance to a balloon tied to a thread, loved his BDSM more than his physique that obviously would be a thing of worry to his spouse. He treated her like a sex toy and left her an inch close to death when he climaxed.

Days ran into weeks, and she matured in the act, and as weeks went into months, she became a boss and a sort after stage performer and bed warmer. Just as years ran into a decade, she forgot about love and focused her attention on hedonism to the core; then her ray of sunshine shone so bright, bringing her strange colors of love, this time, an African American.

He didn't fuck her like others did, and she didn't ride him like an expert she was, they simply made love. Their hands curled around each other's body in that dark room lit with his cologne, his slow and steady thrusts while looking into her eyes and her sweet moans that filled the noiseless room. She never knew she could make such sounds because it was all new, romantic and passionate. The feeling was all new to her. After they slept and woke up. She saw a stack of a thousand dollars on the table but couldn't see him.

She never saw his face. Immediately, she found out that something really important to her was miss-ing. He left with it, he left with her heart. She was in love. She wondered how she could have traded her heart for money instead of her body, and she couldn't bring herself to regret it, because the more she tried to blame herself for being so loose and stupid, the more a handful of sincere smiles and laughter rolled out of her mouth like a dice.

She became reserved from that day and cried whenever she had to go on top of a man. She didn't just enjoy it again, she has lost her vibes, her defences, her strength and every courage she had to get to where she has been - she lost herself. She just had to cope, with the slightest hope of seeing him again as her backbone.

For the first time in her life, she knelt down in her closet and prayed to the ceiling, because she thought God stays there. She asked for a night stand with him again and here she was, crying over him for a heart he shattered after it took them years to repair it together.

He sat down, in the VIP section of the strippers club where he first met her , with a bottle of Martini facing him. He never loved alcohol but he just needed to fill his head with it, to see if it would suffocate his memories. He texted her several times and got no replies. He was afraid. He thought she might have committed suicide or harm herself in a fatal way. He knew how hard it was to get her whole again. The efforts he put in, and now he was the same person that tore that same heart in bits.

She had caught them stark naked, moving in accord, hearing those same sounds she made the first night she met him. This time, it was not with her, but her best friend. This happened few days after their engagement party. She couldn't withstand the sight, so she left. She went to a place where she could heal, she went to New Haven because it was rumoured to have a healing aura; but she was dis-appointed, then she went to Paris. There she started work

as a cleaner in a coffee shop. A new life she planned, but it still had the dirt of her past - her memories with him - scrubbed all over her.

He searched for her and couldn't find her anywhere around Baltimore, not even in Princeton or even close to Connecticut . He emptied his wallet and bank account and placed all the money as a reward for whosoever would find her. He moved around with her photo and asked everyone he saw, everyone that cares to listen, in the grocery, in the mall, in the walkway, in the beach, just anywhere he could find people, but she was gone. He did these for two years and never gave up.

Here they were, on a train in Manchester City, England. He came for a tour and she left Paris to settle here because she got a better job offer. They stumbled upon each other. He pleaded but she walked away. He followed her, but she didn't want him, even though she couldn't deny needing him, because it was written all over her eyes and sent across to him in tears, which dropped as she ran. He slept out-side her door for days, calling out to her and she never answered because she was again, broken!

He secretly followed her to her work place and knelt down to apologise while sales were ongoing. The Manager had him thrown out for distractions and invading privacy. He bought the place because he was richer now - he had been rich though. She resigned and wanted to leave the country but he got the information from her roommate and co - worker. He went after her, dragged her close to him in the airport and pressed his lips against hers and made a public show because everyone was watching.

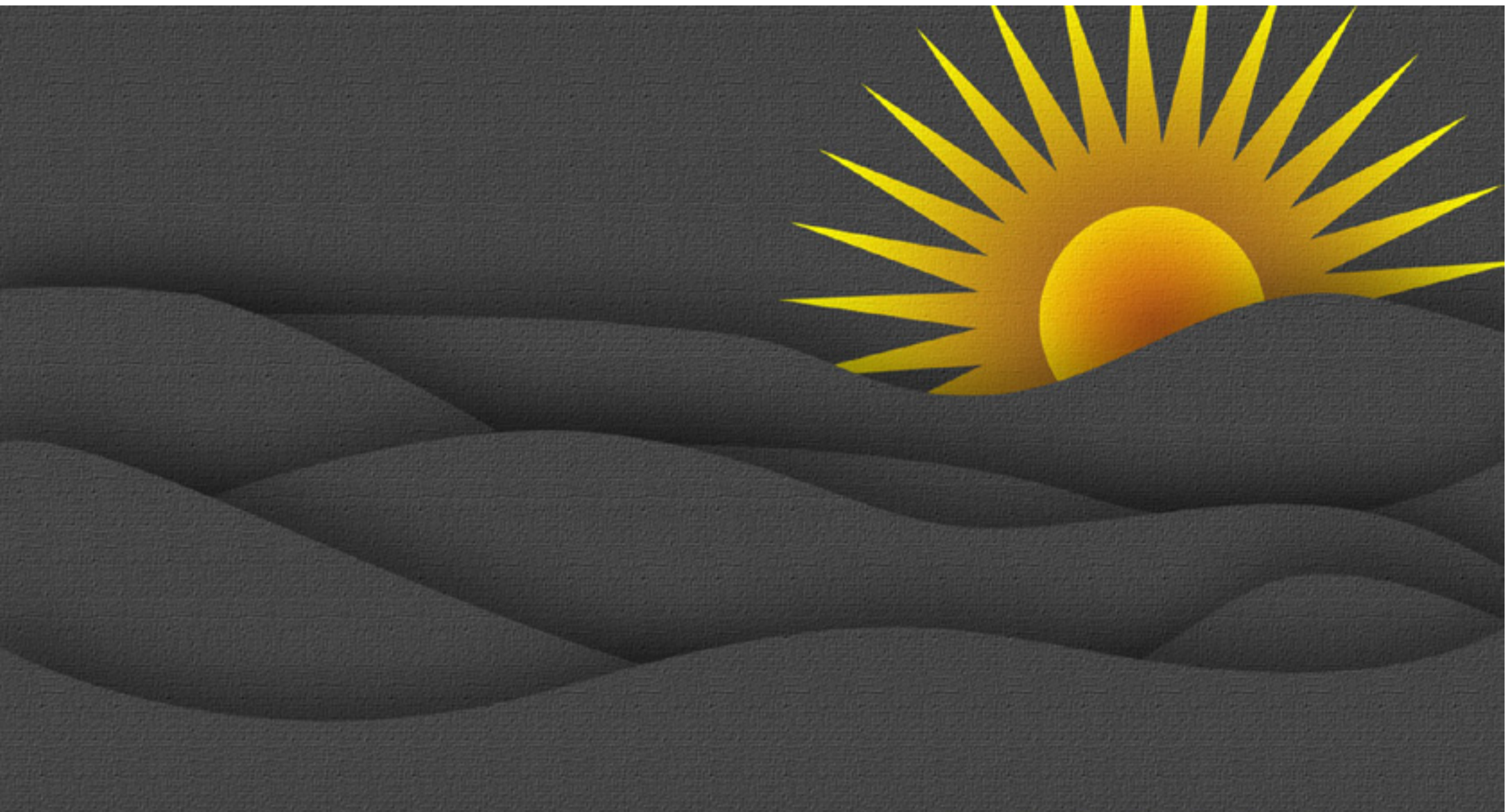
She had missed this, so she couldn't help kissing back because all her strength was gone and she couldn't resist him. When he made free from her, she slapped him and proceeded to the terminal while he watched and waited. What gave him such guts, he didn't know but he was determined to follow her anywhere, even if it meant going to the moon and back.

She cried all through as she entered the plane but the aircraft had an ambiance she knows, that which she saw in that room the very first day she met him - the strange colours of love. She left her luggage and ran out of the plane, past the terminal and right into his arms as he was still waiting. They kissed again, this time more passionate and in tears, both apologising to each other.

He was sixty and she was fifty - four as they walked down the aisle, for the solemnization of holy matrimony. After they were pronounced man and wife by the priest, they kissed while people watched and were amazed. Their son with his family (including his new born twin babies - their grand children) joined them as they posed for a photo shoot. This was their first and only marriage. They called it an anniversary of the Strange colours of Love...

THE SECOND LIFE

By Calvin Chikwata, Zimbabwe



Everyday life pushed me to be a person with an unfortunate partiality towards death than the light of earth. In every notch of my growth people reputed everything that posed my semblance as mad and insanelly crazy. Nobody dared to consider my opinion only because my ideas were always above others. Certainly out of their road of thoughts and that made everybody to put on veils of deceitfulness in evidencing true love and honesty towards me. The only life raft that took me to other shores was the intelligence that winged my senses. It was a nimble wit that always made a mark in my brains even if i was unaccustomed to real activities of life. I just had much impudence in the horrendous world and it was a weakness that made a compost heap of dismay and hurt. The sense of humour was flawless, an outburst of passion to anybody including Alfred, the sickie of all students. But obviously sometimes they were all blemishes with a series of burn marks on my heart.

Every good act always peeled off the wet clothes of regrets just to leave me naked in shame. All the students knew that I had a sublime edge in school work, I was the genius and sometimes the stranger in their midst. In social circles of life and the pleasures of the past, present and future they didn't necessarily consider my opinion. Groups of them claimed I was a bygone figure to their age, probably my taste on style was sluggish with my clothes

outworn. The dressing colors had tapped out with much obsessiveness to knowledge which formed a formidable adversary with a poor background. But despite all that, I managed to habituate the fray with all the unfair discrimination and the spurn they had layed over my head.

At home I was the frail child amongst the other nine, my lips were tremulous for appeals and my heart was timid to hop their impales. My siblings were always on top of their voices and they made it for their own bulge even though I was the last to be born in a domicile of cries.

There were no gold seats for last borns in my family. It made things hard for me to enjoy the taste of life neither in its amiable disposition nor in its vehement tides and mostly with my shrill voice rarely pricking up my mother's ear. She had no time for us and father was always drunk in every tick of the clock. I was just a much used excuse to life, no day seemed to care for my pain. Even though people didn't necessarily hurt my face, but they just seemed to forget that i existed and it hurt my heart. So unfa-voured in a diseased fate and it was a shell shocker that always pounced back to depress my joy. The appreciation for life and even the intelligence was of no use to my desire for a caring touch and an endless smile. But stoic pretends had me living on my foot as I accepted life in its astir. Mostly in those moments of silence that's when elbows sunk in my ribs and sometimes I could wake up with tears all over my face.

The boy in my dreams wanted a peaceful environment to rest and listen to the melody in the stellar wind with its secret enchantment for a happy life. For some days I scribbled in a small diary, how I wished earth was a river so that I could swim out and seat at the shores watching people doing their own things. But nothing seemed to be fair. Even my own breath was forceful and worth a battle in a stench of smells.

Countless times people at school al-ways laughed at my name and adding more to it, nobody cared to be my friend if it wasn't time for exams. Sometimes during lessons they whispered behind my back calling me the eye of the gods due to questions I posed to the teacher and it ended up pulling some minutes from break time. But I didn't mind. The pillow at home had my back, it mopped nicely all my cries. I wish I knew that they were self absorbed towards me, the few that patted my shoulders wanted everything to sail in

their own direction. Every reaction gave me questions to this planet and its people. But nobody really waved for my attention on that, even my geography teacher who was still on internship.

Unfortunately during times of conducting the lesson he would always instruct me to make a read at the library whilst he proceeds to teach others in my absence. I wanted to know about the universe and the outside part of it. Only the slightest of information had gripped my senses during personal studies on planets and the sky. Somebody just needed to explain to me why life on earth was regarded as the only life above all spheres in the universe. Out of all the eight globes that I had learned, I still admired the looks and dress up of other planets. The need in my veins were of a better space, one with a virgin climate and clean from hate and discrimination. There was quite a number of things that I had kneeled down to pray for and mostly over my lips it was about a habitable world.

This other day I sat on the edge of my bed wondering how the earth revolved with so much evil in its species. Obviously if I had tried to make a discussion with these so called friends, they were just going to look at me as I speak long and idly to their ears. But I chose not to bother my feelings with how people appreciated my life and style. I stamped on my toe and grabbed a book I had borrowed from the library, it was written "Jupiter in Talk." For a while I stared at the front cover admiring the planet's trademarks and a more intense color palette that was shown in the clouds swirling in Jupiter's turbulent atmosphere. It looked like a marble, quite pendulous in the airy space of galaxy. The massiveness openly flaunted the wonder in my eyes. A great space over all the globules and yet full of gases and scary thunder in its clouds. My eyes slurred over some of the shortlisted facts and I flipped the pages in hunt of positives.

The pictures drowned me further into imagination, astounded in learning that the earth was just a small grape compared to the basket-ball size of Jupiter. It pulled my heart to grief, remembering how my neighbors had made the headlines in the newspapers for a deadly fight over space and boundaries. But out there, somewhere in the skies, there was a bigger planet that even earth fitted eleven times on its equator. Plainly I was tired of placing my thoughts on other people. What about me? I gazed on the open window but this time everything was oblivious to my searing intelligence. All my wishes were on how to get rid of this dense world, but nothing came through. Back on the read there

was again a knock for a loop, to know about the jovian days in Jupiter despite its heftiness, the days just trolled one after another racing for the next rays. Maybe life could have been better for me that side, not these 24 hours a day full of pain, abuse and disappointment. Only those 10 hours in Jupiter probably would easily erase the past and make me live in my dreams. This was my place, certainly Earth was for Adam and maybe I had my own. Why not make a deal with astronauts and grab a ride. I felt my imagination being possessed with the unreached and untold. But my feelings were convincing, that was a place for people like me, outcast of the present world.

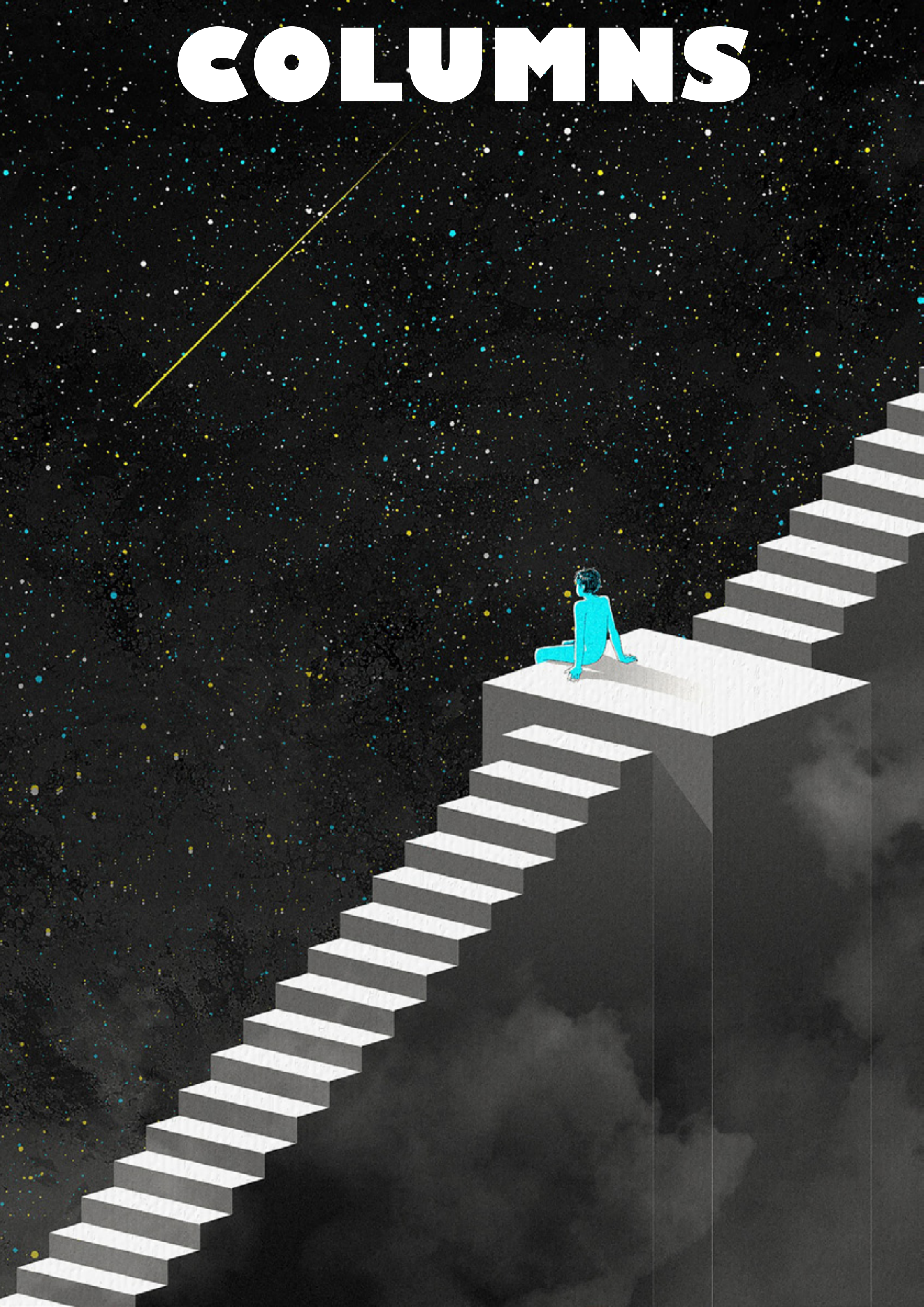
For so many reasons I had a name of the past like my friends said, but no single thought of the past had cheered my nerves and clearly the present had resented my taste and face. All hopes were in the future, how to begin my own world. To construct better houses and live a life free with love making currency to all that could be bought. Through the sight of man, Jupiter was considered to have a surface as bigger as Earth and assuredly that was a portion for life. For a while I grinned and eased my back for a thought. The jolt had me in each line as I transposed and held the book with both hands like the only egg to fry for the day.

Everything was upon my knowledge from the massiveness to the light, tasteless and colorless gases. I punched a blow into thin air. So what made this earth heavy? I wondered and scratched my scalp. Like the bible said "sin is heavy," I couldn't doubt that. Even to consider the brightness of Jupiter over Earth, Jupiter was a no brainer for me. On the pages it was a wonder that spreaded in its horizon with over 75 moons and some of them spared life in their oceans beneath the crust. This one was surely engaged with God, noticing the rings on its body whilst Earth had none. It was clear why people called it the god of light in the sky. In my senses there was a secret about this planet, something worth an explore and my mind had just delve into it. Also after witnessing its pop culture before, in television shows and the other books I had read, I couldn't believe all about the deadly sides like the super storm that had ragged in over a century. My assumptions had to sway just a little, men were never going to stop seeing anything bad in something good. Jupiter eased my trepidation over tomorrow and even if they were going to throw towels to my face, my future was set. I wrote it down in my diary with a stretched smile as I threw the book away.

**IT IS NOT
ALWAYS
OUR PAST
THAT HOLDS
US DOWN,
BUT THE
FEAR
OF THE
FUTURE.**

JOSEPHINE TABIRI,
GHANA

COLUMNS



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 9

At the very first glimpse of dawn, Sadiya arose from her bed – where she didn't get any sleep at all. She had prayed, wept, feared, worried and thought endlessly all night about Zarah. She snuck out of her room and into the quiet compound. Even the animals in Mohammed's compound, as well as their neighbors' were not up yet. If there was any time to act to save Zarah, it was then, or she would never get the opportunity to, and she knew.

“Ya Allah, taimake mu.” Oh Lord, help us. She said a silent prayer as she stepped into the cold morning air. She was visibly shivering, not just due to the morning's cold, but out of fear. She hurried out of the compound, as quietly as she could. The whole place was still visibly dark and she could barely find her way through the darkness, but she wouldn't risk lighting a lamp. Though it was already mid-September and the August rains were already saying their goodbyes, the rain was heavy that morning. She didn't mind getting in the rain, she was out to save a life and it was Zarah's – her beloved Zarah. The previous evening when the whole town was in an uproar, searching for Zarah, she stole some minutes into Zarah's room to park a few belongings which she would need. And all the while as she gathered the things, her mind was occupied with thoughts of Zarah, and she wept for her.

Sadiya was almost going out of her mind when she got to the classroom which Zarah was supposed to be and didn't see her there. Different thoughts crossed her mind and she really didn't know what to do or think. She called out to her in low whispers, for fear of being heard by someone. As she searched around frantically, tears stung at her eyes. Like a little child in search of lost money, she cried, yet tried to keep from crying. She constantly wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and sniffed in hard. The rains got heavier, and the winds fiercer, but her determined search went on. Just as she got back into the classroom, a little glimmer of lightening flashed and illuminated a cloth-like object stuck to the window frame. For a split second, she was scared as she observed the object. The wind blew into the object, making it appear to be flying. Before she could stop herself, she screamed out, and only then did she remember she was meant to be quiet and sneaky. She put her hand to her mouth and stared on in the dark. She tried to make sense of what it was, if indeed there was anything there at all. Her fears intensified for those few seconds when she wasn't sure of anything. Lightening flashed for another split second, and her fears dissolved instantly, giving way to anxiety. It was Zarah's veil. The same one she had handed to her the previous day. Sadiya headed for the veil briskly. She was practically running towards it. But unfortunately for her, she didn't do her calculations right. There was a long table just few steps after the door. She had seen it, she had calculated the distance it would take to avoid bumping into it, but alas she did. There was a sharp pain coming from her little left toe, and though she could not see

it, she knew and felt the furious, yet warm streak of blood gushing out. She felt the pain, it slowed her movement, but she didn't have the time to care about her hurting toe.

She rushed to the window, not at the pace she would have loved to, but moving nonetheless. She clutched the veil, yanking it off a little violently and embraced it, imagining she was embracing Zarah – a Zarah free of all the present challenges. A happy Zarah who wouldn't have to leave Katsina that very morning. She looked out of the window and instinctively guessed that was where Zarah must have been.

“Please let her be there” she prayed again, beginning to tear up all over again. It only took her a few moments' thought before she jumped out the large fairly high window. She hurried to the field and all the while suppressing the pain of her bleeding hurting toe. She wondered how she was going to find Zarah among the tall bushes, and in the dark too. And again she prayed to Allah for help and guidance.

“Zarah”

“Ina ki ke?” Where are you?

“Please come out. It's me, Sadiya.”

Sadiya's voice was losing all patience and calm with each time she called. She kept walking with no particular direction among the bushes. She was running out of time as the day got a notch brighter with each passing second, and she feared more than ever that she would get caught. Luckily though, the rain had ceased falling. A little distance more, and Sadiya bumped into something, or someone laying on the soft itchy grass. “Zarah?” she called softly as she bent, almost laying down as well beside her. Even in the dark, without being able to see clearly, she felt the form and she knew it was Zarah. “Alhamdulillah” was the first almost-excited expression which had left her lips since the whole ordeal began. Zarah had slept outside, under the very heavy rainfall. She was clutching at her sides and shivering. She was near unconscious, very near unconscious.

Imran had offered prayers close to twenty times or more all through the night and into the morning. After he and Sadiya parted ways, he ran to the mosque, which was where he stayed all through the night. He prayed over and over, and over and over, and over again for Zarah's safety. He didn't know what to do and was greatly troubled. At some point, he looked up and saw rugged-looking men hanging around. He knew they were watching him and trying to trail him. He knew also that if he attempted leaving the mosque, they would follow him. He knew where Zarah was and he was certain that they knew, or at least speculated so. As much as he wanted to go back to Zarah – to protect her, and to be with her, he also knew he couldn't risk it. He couldn't go to where she was, and thus sabotage her safety. This very thought killed him within. He decided to remain in the mosque and do what he only could; pray. He prayed with tears in his eyes, and called on Ummi, Zarah's late mother to watch over their child. As the morn-

ing got brighter, the walls of the mosque seemed to be closing in on him and he could barely breathe. He knew it would be easier to find her by morning, and harder for her to escape. His strength and hope were already failing and wearing out. By then, the whole community had heard of the tragic happening, and he was void of all strength, physically and emotionally.

He had just finished a round of prayer when he looked up, and through the entrance he saw Kamal running towards him. He looked dashing in a simple cream-colored caftan. As he got to where Imran was, where he had just finished praying, they embraced each other. For that moment, Kamal was the 'bigger boy' holding up good and being strength to his father. Imran had never appreciated his son's company as he did then, in those few minutes.

Sadiya didn't mind her toe, but carried Zarah as she staggered. Being out in the cold, and under the rain made her have a pneumonia attack, and being out that long made her very near unconscious. She was alive and breathing, but her eyes were shut tight and she was unaware of the things happening around her. She half-carried, half-dragged Zarah back to the classroom. She was tired and weak, and couldn't conveniently carry the thirteen-year old alone, especially not with her foot's condition. She had dropped the bag of belongings in the little classroom when she first went in search of Zarah. She hastily, but carefully helped Zarah out of the wet cold clothes she had on, and into something warm and comfortable. She applied a lot of oils and balms all over her body, especially her rib cage area. The moment her gentle shaky hands touched Zarah on that area, she cringed and shut her eyes tighter. She was in obvious pain, Sadiya didn't need to be told. The shaking had reduced much, and Zarah was almost conscious then. She looked up at Sadiya and gave a weak grateful smile, before burying her face back between her arms.

It was almost getting to 6am when Sadiya successfully got Zarah to the side of the road. She sat her down on a little stone and covered her, head to knee with an old wrapper. She stood behind a tree by the road and waited, hoping for some miracle. She was getting frantic as day was breaking and soon, people would be out, going about their normal activities. Sadiya jumped into the road the moment she saw the sight of a lorry coming from afar. The loud honk from the lorry almost scared her away but she stood rooted. She noticed the car slowing down, and then she got a little confidence back.

"ki na hauka ne? masa daga hanya." The driver put his head through the open window and shouted at her to leave the road. But she stood, staring at him with pleading eyes. "Dan Allah ka taimake ni." Help me, please. She said and broke down in tears. He looked at her obviously confused and said nothing.

"Ga ya ta" she began, pointing to Zarah sitting head bent on a little stone, only a short

distance away. She cried and she sobbed, wept and wailed, whatever it took for her to convince him that her daughter was sick and was referred away from the General hospital for more treatment. They didn't have the right facilities, she had said. She explained of how she didn't have the means to transport the child, as she was only a poor and recently young widowed woman. She told of how she had already called a relative, who would meet them and whom Zarah would be handed over to. She said a lot of things in few minutes, and inwardly prayed he believed her. On his part, he didn't believe half her story. However, he thought Zarah was a young bride trying to escape her new marriage. Personally, he hated such cruel treatment on little girls and that was why he decided to help her. He however, believed that they had a relative to whom this young widow was sending her child to. He was skeptical, but determined to help, and determined to contribute to the child's safety in his little quota. The other men in the lorry with him, as well as the others at the back who were together with the cows they were transporting simply looked on. They said nothing neither to the driver, nor to Sadiya, nor even among themselves.

The driver turned to the younger of the two men in the front seat with him, and the man immediately knew what that meant. He frowned to reveal his displeasure as he went to the back to join the other men amidst cows. The other man in the front seat came down to help Sadiya carry Zarah into the lorry and into the front seat, between himself and the driver. Sadiya followed him behind with the little bag she had parked for Zarah. All the while, she wept, more than she had in the past fourteen hours or more. In seconds, she had said a million thanks to the driver, especially as he said he wouldn't charge her for it. She blessed him and offered prayers for him, to which he all replied with a smile and a simple "ameen", followed by a nod.

She stood at the side of the road, watching as the lorry took off, and as it slowly began to fade into the distance. Her heart was heavy, and she missed Zarah already. On a second thought, she began to run after the lorry- hoping they'd see her and stop. She remembered she didn't even get to hug her goodbye. She worried if Zarah would be safe among strange men. She was scared of the fact that she had possibly put Zarah in greater danger. With all these thoughts crossing her mind, she ran faster, more determined to catch up with them and get Zarah back. She even considered getting in the lorry and going all the way with Zarah to ensure she was going to be safe and protected from more danger and hardships. But just then, she remembered her own child, her world whom she was going to give up the world for. By the time she came to this realization, the lorry was far out of sight. She sat in the middle of the road and cried. She suddenly had no more strength nor will to keep going. All she did was cry, hugging tightly the last things which had immediate contact with Zarah- the wet clothes she had worn all through the night.

The day was already bright when she went back to Mohamed's compound. She looked devastated and crazed, holding a bunch of damp clothes. Life in Dutsin-Ma had already begun for the day. Mama had just come out of a hut in the compound when she saw Sadiya walking in. She was barely aware of her surrounding, yet kept moving. There was obvious tear streaked stains on her pale face. Mama rushed to where she was and held her in her arms. Before Mama could ask her anything, and before she could say anything as well, she slumped lazily in Mama's arms. She was unconscious. Mama's small voice was loud enough to be heard in every corner of the compound. She called for help, and soon, Mohammed and some of the children, as well as neighbors came rushing.

Twelve hours plus on the road and the lorry still hadn't arrived. The roads were bad and bumpy, and the vehicle had to move at a near crawling pace. It was in bad shape and the cows were a large number. Zarah was hot and frustrated and her mind was fuzzy. The men at both her sides chatted in carefree tones- talking, laughing, pounding on the steering wheel and on knees. The men and cows at the back were equally chatting at some point. At other times the whole car was quiet and everyone was asleep. So far, the car had stopped just once. All the men alighted to relieve themselves and to buy food. Kajiru, the driver, offered her a plate of palm-oiled rice. At first she declined but he insisted and kept at it. Zarah tried not to remember the life she was now running away from, but the more she tried, the more she kept thinking, and the more she cried.

She hated hospitals- the old palely painted walls, the strong smell of drugs and anti-septic, the depressing looks on the faces of patients and their family members, everything. She hated everything about hospitals from the building, to the staff within those walls. She opened her eyes after a few hours and instantly hated where she was. For the first few seconds, her head felt blank- she didn't remember what had happened, and then she did. She had just gotten into the compound, then Mama came to embrace her, and next thing she could hear Mama's voice in the distance calling for help. Her head throbbed as she tried to recall all the details. The door came open then, saving her from that painful recollection of thoughts. She didn't even realize Mama was in the room with her, she only realized this when, few minutes later, mama returned with a lady in white- she wore white trousers, a white top, a white shoulder-length hijab and black flats. The nurse smiled as she drew closer to examine her, but Sadiya did not smile back. She turned away, and tears rolled down her cheeks. She remembered Zarah.

Sadiya did not even notice immediately that her left foot had been wound in bandage, nor did Mama tell her. She had passed out that morning due to how exhausted she was, and for the fact that she had lost a lot of blood from her bleeding toe. Back in the classroom, a rusty iron had pierced deep into her toe and come out at the other end. In her rush, she pulled it out, but unknown to her a tiny piece broke in and remained in her toe. While she was unconscious, she was injected with anesthesia and the toe was cut open.

She only noticed her foot when she tried to move and adjust herself on the thin mattress. Her whole left leg felt heavy and numb, like it was totally detached from the rest of her body, yet fully, and heavily there. The anti-tetanus drug she was injected with made her feel so. She moved slightly, using her right hip bone for support. The pain from her toe was already making her develop a fever, but beyond the physical pain was an emptiness she felt inside. One that came with a knowing that she would never see Zarah again.

Mama knew her silence was beyond just her toe's injury, it was something more and she suspected it had something to do with Zarah.

"Ina ta ke?" where is she? Mama confronted gently, with obvious concern in her voice. Her question was so direct, Sadiya could not even pretend she didn't know what Mama was talking about. And with how certain Mama sounded, she was sure that Mama knew that she knew where Zarah was. The only thing, however, that she was uncertain of, was if she should say or not. She didn't turn to face Mama immediately, but rather stayed staring at the wall before her eyes. Those simple three words brought back a lot of motion pictures. She could see, as if watching a movie, the happenings of the previous day and early that morning. She imagined being Zarah for that time being- how scared and alone she should be feeling. How confused, how bitter and sad she must be. Sadiya couldn't bear it anymore. It was a pain so intense, so profound, so deep she wondered if this was an experience she would ever recover from- if any of them at all would ever recover from this. She sniffed then and wiped her tears with the end of her veil. She shut her eyes tight, and swallowed hard.

"Sadiya?" Mama called again, pulling her out of her string of thoughts. She kept her eyes fixed on her, indicating that she was still waiting for her response. "Where. Is. Zarah?" she repeated rather slowly, and for emphasis. Sadiya knew there was no escaping this. Mama could be painfully adamant when she wanted to be. She half turned to face her, and tried to keep her sobs in check.

"Zarah is in Lagos."

To be Continued...

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.

Her love for Literature influenced her decision in undertaking a course at the department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, for a Bachelors Degree.

As an upcoming young writer, she believes strongly in the power of the pen, addressing issues eating deep into the society and truths left untold through prose-fiction and sometimes, poetry.

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LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

With Ugbede Ataboh, Nigeria



FUTURE

As a little girl, I had a clear picture of who and what I wanted to be as an adult. I wanted to be a woman of virtue with standards as high and clear as the sky above. I wanted to be a servant of God, robed in a nun's habit like mother Theresa of Calcutta. Unfortunately, my highfalutin expectations blinded me to who and what I really was and still am- A spirited hot-blooded human filled with worldly passions; Passions that cannot be tamed or confined within the chaste walls of a monastery.

This year has been both great and crazy. Great because of the numerous blessings that have hit me from different angles and crazy because of the roller-coaster of romantic relationships I've been in and out of. From the "Ghost" of Christmas and new year to Dan aka #CandyCrush to Mr. Dapper (a randy happily married man) to Kay and then back to Mr. Dapper. After experiencing rejection from my candy crush, I made a decision to throw myself into my work and fun filled activities. Then Mr. Dapper came along on a sunny day with his roguish smile and not so "modest proposal" ...

“Ugbede, I think I know the things that excite you. It seems like you have been asleep and indifferent, let me be the one to awaken you again in ways you never thought possible.” He cooed.

This man’s money has confused him into thinking he can dive in and out of panties with his words...but damn! I wouldn’t mind a quick dive, this man is fine! Why is he married? I don’t do married men for goodness sake...I have standards to uphold and a reputation to protect. How can I...

“Ugbede where has your mind wandered off to? Let me ask you a basic question...if you can fornicate with your boyfriend and not consider it a sin, why then do you view adultery as a sin. They are both offensive in the eyes of God you know.”

This man has been sent from the pit of hell to mess me up completely. As if fornicating is not enough to deal with, why add adultery to my List of Offenses?

“Sir, marriage is sacred and I have a profound respect for the institution of marriage, I cannot desecrate it” I lamented.

“You are so funny, such strong rules you live by. I still want you though”

“Okay...can I think about it and get back to you?” I pleaded. Damn! This man is fine.

“No my dear, give me your answer now”

Oh shit! I feel so fuzzy “down there” ...oh Lord help me. I don’t want to hurt his innocent wife or tamper with the foundations of her home.

“I’m waiting my dear”. He cooed.

“I will accept your offer only on one condition”

“Go ahead” He urged, as his eyes twinkled.

“We will be as discreet as possible so we don’t hurt or offend your wife in the process. Deal?”

“Deal. So, are we seeing later tonight?”

“Where?”

“Transcorp.”

I really don’t need to bore you with what went down that night. Oh boy! We both went down and it was fun...sinful but fun. There was this time we were both standing and he raised one of my legs and...shit what am I even typing here? I don’t want to corrupt my blessed reader abeg. But I have to state that Mr. Dapper is a stallion; I didn’t expect so much strength from an older man. But as you know, guilt snuck up on me from behind and began chocking me every blessed day. I couldn’t pray any longer...bottom line, I wasn’t happy. Then Calvary came on a dull Sun-day morning. Or so I thought...

“Hi, I’ve been watching you almost every day from my kitchen window. I had to take a leap of faith today and say hi. My name is Kay by the way” He said in a cute manner.

This one is eye candy oh... fair skinned and young. We are probably the same age.

"I know your name; we have exchanged pleasantries before" I responded rather drily.

"Yeah...I am bored and home alone. My mum travelled and I wouldn't mind some compa-ny...please don't take it the wrong way, I just want to chill and talk."

"It's okay. I'm actually not going back home to do anything serious, I just stepped out to buy these fruits. Let's go and talk."

You know I hate to bore people with steamy details. Just know that we talked for a long time and then cuddled while we watched John wick tear people to shreds... then we kissed and loved up. No sex though...I'm not the "sex on the first date" type of girl. What a pathetic joke! Any-way, I started avoiding Mr. Dapper and started seeing Kay every day after work until one faith-ful evening when a call came in with "My Lover" as the caller Id...

"Sorry dear, I needed to take that call. Where were we?" Kay cooed in my left ear as he snug-gled close to me on my bed, close enough to feel his rock-hard instrument.

"Kay, can I ask you a question? Please be honest" I pleaded.

"Sure babe, what is it?"

"Do you have a girl friend? I know I asked you this question the first time we hung out and you stylishly dodged it. Kay, Do you have a girlfriend?"

"Babe... it is complicated. I have a girlfriend but she is a virgin and is not willing to get laid until we get married. I am so sorry I hid this from you but I am planning my future with her in it"

Oh no! my heart is breaking... Why me? Why is this bullshit happening to me? I know it has been 2 weeks but I have fallen for this guy already. Oh God! Why this particular guy?

In a split second, I switched from being a cuddly bear to a cold bitch.

"Kay, I am not the "side chick" type of girl so I guess we both know it is time for you to leave. Thank you for being loving and thoughtful toward me since we started chilling together. I will always remember you as "The one I loved quickly and briefly". We live close to each other so we will definitely bump into each other from time to time. We can still be cordial but not lov-ers. Please leave now and don't leave anything behind."

"Wow! Are you serious? I should leave?"

"Yep, now."

And that was It. I was sad and emotionally down for 2 days until I received another persistent call from Mr. Dapper. I was on my way to end things with him...my plan was to stir up disinter-est in him by telling him how I had "fallen pregnant" for my university

ex who I met and had random sex with at a party just a few days after I had slept with Mr. Dapper.

“So, you cheated on me with a random guy? Your ex?”

“Yes” I responded. Fake tears rolling down my cheeks.

“What are you going to do about the baby?”

“I don’t know...I don’t think I want to keep it because I feel no emotional attachment to the guy responsible for it but on the other hand, I think I should keep it because There is no assurance that I will get married in this life. What if this is God’s way of sending me a companion?” I re-sponded deceptively.

“My dear, think about this deeply. I really like and respect you so just know that I will support you and help you no matter what you decide” He responded with a worried look in his eyes.

This man just switched it up on me. Is he really serious? Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate oh! I am so shocked right now.

“Don’t you hate me for shagging someone else?”

“I am not happy about it, but I don’t hate you. I still want you in my life regardless”

“...erm, well I guess I should get going. My mind is a mess and I need to sort out what is going on in my life right now” I said. Feeling rather foolish and surprised at the same time.

“It’s okay, just keep me posted and call me anytime. Know that I still want you in my life. Take the cash on the table. I kept it there for you...take all of it.” He said with a caring smile.

I left Mr. Dapper that night feeling different. Gone were the amorous feelings I had for Kay and in came a different but crazy-warm kind of feeling for Mr. Dapper. On my way home, I mental-ly flung my standards and ethics out the window.

As I conclude this last paragraph with my office computer, I am off to meet with my philander-ing but caring Mr. Dapper. I plan to have a steamy evening with him and gift him the erotic art work I made when I was hopelessly infatuated with Dan aka #CandyCrush...What a crazy irony; Mr. Dapper has stirred up a feeling in me that matches the energy the #CandyCrush painting exudes- Desire. God Knows I have tried to be a “good girl” by setting religious standards for myself, but going forward, let “Jesus take the wheel” and order my steps because I have officially let go. I do not know what my future holds for me but I plan to fill it will laughter and happy moments; moments occupied by friends, family and loved ones who I know genuinely care about me. I am going to be happy and it is absolutely none of your business how I plan to go about it... wish me luck and God’s favour. Cheers!

THE OBSERVER

With Leo Muzivoreva, Zimbabwe



Africa's Future

With over 30 million Africans living outside of their home countries, migration will play a big role in shaping Africa's future. While the vibrant and growing diaspora communities in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, France and more recently the Arab Emirates are gaining in visibility, it is communities of Africans within Africa that will have the most transformative impact on the region's future. Well, that is subject to debate but it is very much possible.

In 2012, the African Union proclaimed the African diaspora as the continent's sixth region. This population, often presumed to be in the West, is likely to grow quickly as more Africans put down roots in countries beyond their own. The social, economic, and cultural capital they bring will be vital to ensuring Africa's demographic boom yields dividends as the continent's share of the global population doubles by 2050.

Today, 34 million Africans live outside the country of their birth, with over 55% staying within the region. By 2050, it is predicted that the African diaspora will have tripled to about 100 million people. If African countries achieve the good governance necessary for strong

economic growth, around 70 million of this diaspora will live elsewhere in Africa. The early signs are already there: in Ghana, for example, a thriving Nigerian diaspora has emerged. In Kenya, you will find a growing number of Ugandans. Countries like Ivory Coast and South Africa, home to some of the largest numbers of migrants from other parts of Africa, are set to have their populations expand even further.

Although traders and temporary workers tend to draw the most attention in Africa's inter-regional migration story, growing numbers of skilled professionals now seek professional opportunities in other regions of the continent. The "brain gain" is not always to the Western world — these migrants sometimes move to neighbouring nations. Zimbabwe's brain drain, for example, skews more towards South Africa rather than the United Kingdom or any other country one can think of.

If governments are to effectively harness the valuable knowledge and skills these communities offer, it is critical that they recognise these phenomenon and cultivate ties with these "regional diasporas". In some ways, these "regional" repatriates have an advantage over diaspora returnees from North America and Europe — by living in Africa, they might benefit from increased proximity to the cultural contexts of their countries of origin. Networks like CDC-backed Africa List and TheBoardroom Africa, for example, highlight the vast pool of talent that lies within the continent if governments and companies are willing to tap the countryman who might be just a country-or-two away. Some companies are already seizing these opportunities. Ade Ayeyemi, CEO of Togo-based Ecobank, for example, is from Nigeria. Similarly, Acha Leke, a Senior Partner at McKinsey often touted as Africa's most "well-connected man" hails from Cameroon.

Immigration has been fundamental to economic success in the Western world, but for Africa nations to tap into the talent pools just a few borders away, countries must be more accepting of migrants. Although Rwanda ranks 8.16 out of 10 on the Gallup Migrant Acceptance Index, South Africa hovers at 4.98. If immigrants are not sufficiently integrated into the labour market and everyday life, the next new wave of African migration could generate significant friction as already is the case in some parts of South Africa.

The most obvious impact of the regional diaspora communities is perhaps most visible in remittances and investments. Remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa grew significantly in the past few years with significant coming from within the continent. Benin, for example, receives over \$133 million each year from Nigeria. Nearly \$60 million flows from Congo to Rwanda, eclipsing remittances from North America and Europe. It is not just person-to-person flows we are seeing — these intra-Africa exchanges are happening at the business level as well.

Earlier

this year, mPharma, a digital health startup that manages prescription drug inventory for pharmacies and their suppliers, purchased Kenya's second-largest pharmacy chain, Haltons. Ethiopia-based Appos-it is the chief technical partner of Nigeria's leading mobile payment systems Paga. It is also important to mention the money transfer entity Mukuru whose largest portion of clientele comprises of Zimbabweans in South Africa. The growth of these inter-regional remittance flows and investments under-scores the growing importance of inter-African trade and the economic opportunities that exist if Africa trades more with itself. To take full advantage of the benefits of remittances, governments must work closely with money transfer organisations to introduce progressive monetary policies if technology is to bring down the cost of cross-border payments and investments.

Migration within Africa has re-shaped the cultural fabric of many sub-regions as more and more people become exposed to culinary, artistic, and linguistic influences that previously might not have spread beyond geographical borders. Improvements in Internet connectivity and regional transportation infrastructure means that more Africans are exposed to cultures across the region than ever before. In North Africa, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia have launched a joint bid for UNESCO heritage status for couscous. In West Africa, pidgin has emerged as the lingua franca from The Gambia to Cameroon – with the BBC even launching a Pidgin-language service in 2017. One of the most visible examples of the influence of diaspora communities can be seen in the musical crossovers of Ghanaian highlife and Nigerian afrobeats which has produced a unique blend of contemporary Afropop that Nigerian musician Mr. Eazi has described as “banku music” in homage to one of the Ghana's most famous dishes.

From Ghana's “Year of Return” to Ethiopia's recent Diaspora Trust Fund, more governments across the continent are initiating new efforts to effectively engage their diaspora in the development agenda. These efforts have traditionally concentrated in Western-based diaspora communities; however, the rapid growth of regional diaspora communities calls for more engagement within Africa as well. To maintain ties with inter-African migrants with valuable social, economic, and cultural capital to share with their home countries, countries should undertake mapping exercises within the African continent to better identify these regional diaspora communities, their ideas, capacities and relationship with their countries of heritage. To reduce the costs of sending and receiving remittances, governments should likewise adopt a progressive approach to licensing of money transfer options.

Last but not least, to encourage cultural exchange fuelling creativity, transportation and Internet infrastructure must be improved to facilitate the free flow of all ideas. The future of Africa is indeed bright but it needs a hands on approach- clean hands, that is.

WSA Reviews

Reviewers:

Akinrinade Funminiyi Isaac
Nigeria

Esther Musembi
Kenya

Lateefah Kareem
Nigeria

Tamunomieibi Mildred Enoch
Nigeria

Himi Asulu
Nigeria

Namse Peter Udosen
Nigeria

Benny Wanjohi
Kenya

Adejuwon Gbalajobi
Nigeria

Ogalo Oduor Bernard
Kenya

Kweku Sarkwa
Ghana

Peter Blessing Pever (PPBlessing)
Nigeria

Precious Adekola
Nigeria

Colin Stanley
Kenya

Kalekye Mish
Kenya

Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy
Cameroon.



A review of the poem 'Five Minutes Will Not Do' done by Benny Wanjohi

The poem 'Five Minutes Will Not Do' is written by Josephat A Wangwe from Tanzania. He uses 'five minutes' as a symbol to refer to a short time. It has 20 lines. The poem exhibits the insufficiency of the short time present to do several things for the black land, Africa. These include weeping for the land, telling of the history of its cracked soil, expressing to the youths how humanity has failed the land and so on.

The poem further asserts that as a result of the insufficiency, the generations to come will find themselves in a confusion. One part of history will remind them of an old united Africa while the other will remind them of an how Africa killed its own blood.

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Five to Count by Shimbo Pastory. Reviewed by Kalekye Mish

FIVE TO COUNT is a three-stanza poem with four lines in each stanza. The poem is endowed with beautiful and perfect rhyme which appeals the reader to read and reread. In stanza one, the poem gives an insight of the dangers the police go through when dealing with crimes done by their fellow citizens.

It also exhibits the voice of different persons in the society including the church when it comes to fighting what is wrong. The church calls forth meetings where farmers not only come to wail but also to celebrate.

With one voice, it makes things easy for police officers and law makers to execute their

duty. The raiders are finally sentenced and jailed. This happens in a town all in five minutes. It shows how much life and activity a town set up has in every specific span of time.

A review of *The Golden Moments*. Reviewed by Kweku Sarkwa

Living a life of regret is the most painful punishment you could ever get. Lebo, I think was a very good and caring dad but due to a slight but unforgivable mistake resulted in the death of her daughter. His Ex-wife left Owam in lebo's care because she knew no harm will definitely befall her but the unfortunate occurred which made Owam to drown in Lebo's backyard pool.

Due to the Apartheid nature of culture in South Africa in those days, there was this belief that the virgin Mary appeared to a boy called Jensen who was to die according to his own will in order to save his people the Afrikaners. The sacrifice that Jensen did paved way for every individual whose relative died to appear ones more for a five minutes encounter with the living. So lebo went to the St. Jensen's cemetery in Cape Town to reap the seed that Jensen has sown.

He met the caretaker of the cemetery who offered him coffee and consoled him to go on living.

Lebo went back to his daughter's grave, had an encounter with her daughter's ghost but couldn't apologize but to stop living and apologize to her in the land of the dead. We sometimes make mistakes in life which makes life unbearable for us but if and only if we could change the hands of time I believe we would.

Review of Columns

The Observer

Author: Leo Muzivoreva from Zimbabwe

Title: The Power of Five Minutes.

Reviewer: Ngalim Jusline Veeyeenyuy from Cameroon

Have you ever pondered on the power of five minutes?

Have you ever thought of the impact five minutes have in your life and work? Do you

often consider the importance of time honesty? Are you time honest? Have you ever pondered on what a dying soul could think of during its last five minutes in life?

Here comes an opinion piece by Leo Muzivoreva, a Zimbabwean columnist on the power of five minutes. Leo, the Observer, sees five minutes as the window of time used by almost everyone. We make a lot of promises in the hope of fulfilling in five minutes time, we postpone a lot of things to do five minutes after, oftentimes we give a lot of things five minutes more to be ready among others. The observer has also observed how difficult it is spending the last five minutes with someone leaving or dying. Also five minutes could sound like seconds or eternity. He also ponders on what a dying soul could think of during their last five minutes, perhaps a reflection on life, achieved and failed dreams. All's that a dying soul must have thoughts in the last five minutes.

After a series of reflections, the observer proposes how we often can spend time with self and others. From a personal experience as a busy worker, he signals on the importance of being time honest. To him time honesty, asking for a moment or five minutes for oneself away from colleagues or clients when necessary can be very productive and peaceful. He condemns time dishonesty which is done by many just to please peers which rather limits effectiveness and productivity.

He concludes by cautioning that we should effect the change as individuals, we should try time honesty and see the results for he in person has put that into practice and believes we all can no matter if we appear vain at first sight, victory comes at the end.

“Take a FIVE MINUTE break when you need one and see what happens,” (p64), he insists.

The tone is jovial and advising.

The columnist adopts an attitude of disapproval and condemnation towards time dishonesty. He approves and confirms being time honest no matter the cost.

Review: Five Minutes (Short Story)

Reviewed By: Precious Adekola

Five minutes is a short story by Nigerian writer, Ekemini Udo Pius. It is a story that although details a robber's mind during an operation, holds enough lessons for the readers.

The story is about a gang of robbers infamously known as “five minutes”, because it takes “exactly five minutes whenever we go to rob” (lines 5-6).

They operate by robbing every kind of building and people except banks, because of the length of time involved in breaching the security systems, and then robbing.

They stuck to scaring people and robbing, and escaping before the arrival of the police. This was why the narrator was surprised, alongside the remaining two robbers, at Deji changing the mode of operation, but they played along so the victims wouldn't sense division.

Readers can infer from the story so far, the importance of having principles in operating one's affairs, and sticking to team plans.

There is strength in unity, and a few minutes extra can make all the difference.

The robbery takes fifteen minutes, a deviation from the normal *modus operandi*, and this puts the first hitch in the infamous gang's record. They escaped the police, except Deji, the deviator. If only he had stuck to the routine.

The writer paints the story perfectly through the mind of the narrator- beginning with the present, and then giving an insight to the gang, making them real to the mind of the readers, and not just some terror group.

He ends the story with the repercussions of their actions, and this makes me remember the saying “Every day for the thief, one day for the owner.”

The story is a didactic piece, and the writer effectively conveys his intentions with his choice of words.

The imagery is vivid, and actions are communicated with words like “scurry,” “trudge”.

Review: Breaking Stereotypes in Nairobi

Reviewed by Namse Peter Udosen

The title preps the reader for a magical ride through the just concluded African Writers Conference held in Nairobi. The writer holds your hand and puts you on a flying carpet. It then glides you through every step of the show. You don't just watch; you see it in full colour and 3D.

You clearly hear Dinda welcome guests in his crisp, east African accented voice. You

watch from a vantage position as Sabah Carrim presents her keynote address and the audience listens with rapt attention. You nod in agreement with Alex Nderitu, Nnane and Nabilah as they make their positions known during the panel discussion. You butt in your opinion on whether stereotypes reflect the reality in our society. You mind transits between the pages of the recent African Literature you have read.

You pause and reflect on the bold declaration; “stereotypes are for the intellectually lazy”. Dr Tom Odhiambo’s rich, deep voice makes home in your ear drums as he asks questions to direct the conversation. This makes you wonder why stereotypes exist in the first place. Then you smile as Sabah and Nabilah remind you that stereotypes are inevitable in writing. They are part and parcel of humanity. Nnane however gives your heart a tingle as she say: “Stereotypes should be used as a means of advocacy”.

The crowd applaudes as Anthony steps on stage. You’re excited! You see the gingerly smile on his face as he announces the winners of the African Writers Awards and the Wakini Kuria Award. You see Wakini’s dad and mom, they are wrapped up in emotions. It’s a grand ending to the African Writers Conference.

The only thing you don’t see are the poetry and dance performances. You also don’t get hear the interesting questions from members of the audience. However, you catch a good view of their beautiful and handsome faces in brilliant colours. Some of the ladies did not come to play, they came to slay! The pictures reveal this.

You disembark from the flying carpet and settle down on a dusty table in the corner of your room. You pick up your blue pen and spew its ink in your scrawling handwriting. Rewriting the narrative

Review of *Where to buy time*, and single tick by Peter Blessing Pever (PPBlessing)

Where to buy time is a free verse of two stanzas written by Abdulrahman M. Abu-Yaman, the title of this poem leaves one wondering if there’s a physical location where one can purchase time and if perhaps, the poet had discovered it. Interestingly though, the poet rather gives us a presumptuous location – Rio de Janeiro – as “the central market” for time purchase. He further advises the reader not to go time purchasing in the UK as “even time itself complains of having no time!”

Reading Gerry Sikazwe's poem, *Single tick*, one is left in thoughts as to how a second (single tick) is a determining factor in different aspects of living and human endeavors such as: love, dying, betrayal, healing, hurting, etc. These he clearly expressed in his first stanza. Going forward, he emphasizes the importance of a single tick with the lines "All it takes is a single tick", Which goes further to assert the relevance of a single tick in changing or maintaining the course of things.

SHORT STORY

The Perks of Being A Senior by Maame Akua Akyaa.

Reviewer: Mildred Enoch.

The Perks of being a senior is a short story written by Maame Akua Akyaa from Ghana. It is a story about a girl called Dede who was a senior in a boarding school and Adjeley, a junior in the same dormitory. Dede always bullied her juniors especially when she was on duty. She meets Adjeley, who is a junior student in her dormitory and hopes she would be her prey, doing her bidding for the new week. She tells Adjeley she has five minutes to be in line for morning assembly. Dede believes that five minutes is not enough for Adjeley to finish preparing herself and be on line for the morning assembly. She is shocked to hear that Adjeley was not late for morning assembly after she called her to see her during breakfast for her punishment. She believes Adjeley was lying when she told her that she wasn't late for assembly. She therefore asks Adjoa the prefect in charge who confirms that Adjeley was not late for assembly.

Dede is puzzled as she doesn't see the possibility of preparing oneself and being on line for morning assembly in five minutes. She targets her bullying to another junior student Ewuresi who reported to their dormitory newly with her five minutes scheme. However, to her dismay, the new girl is taken to another dormitory.

Dede asks Adjeley how she finished everything in five minutes. Adjeley replies that she is very time conscious, every minute counts for her. She says "I didn't waste time in dressing up and rushing to join my line. Five minutes was more than enough to finish everything for me". Dede begins to reminisce about her life and the fact that she doesn't manage her time properly.

In this short story, the writer explores such themes like time management, bullying and laziness. Dede can be described as a protagonist and a bully. She is lazy and finds the slightest opportunity to punish students with her five minutes scheming; someone to do her bidding - wash her clothes, fill her three heavy bucket and large barrel and carry her filled bucket to and from the bathroom and buy cakes and pies after siesta each day. She is not also time conscious as she uses twenty to thirty minutes for dressing alone.

Adjeley on the other hand is time conscious as every minute counts and five minutes is more than enough to finish everything. The writer narrates the story in a straightforward third person format.

The setting of the story is in a boarding school. The title of the story is symbolic. The story is brilliantly written and the message clearly passed.

Five Minutes by Ekemini Udo Pius. Reviewed by Lateefah Kareem

Flash fiction, a glimpse into the mind of a writer, for just a moment, for just a scene, for just five minutes, for less than five minutes.

This five minutes action scene was staged in Calabar where a group of robbers called “five minutes” carry out heists in less than five minutes. The story told from the point of view of an unnamed member tells how they planned to rob a church and while a member of the group named Deji breeches protocol and makes them stay longer than the traditional five minutes, they were almost nabbed by the police although Deji failed to escape and was shot and most likely captured.

A Fraction off Our Forever by Christina H.L Wendo. Reviewed by Lateefah Kareem

Flash fiction, a creation of the dynamic mind, short, captivating, for just five minutes, for less than five minutes.

Don't we all love love, this short fiction describes a moment in the lives of two lovers. When the narrator sees off his love and she was supposed to leave by bus 5:55am but 6:00am and she was still here “I can't part with the rest of my life” were her words.

I Fell in Love Once By Egwatu Ogechukwu. Reviewed by Lateefah Kareem

Flash fiction, makes you hold your breath, makes you gasp for more, leaves you wanting more than five minutes.

Love, sweet love. Have you ever fallen in love?

Yes?.. Then have you felt assaults of emotions, rush of feelings that made you die and go to heaven for just five minutes.

No? Then you should try it some time

For our character did and her skin tingled at his touch and heart raced when he was near. And own mind ached wanting more lines from this story.

Time Kills! By Marjorie Moono Simuyuni. Reviewed by Lateefah Kareem

Flash fiction, always leaves you aching for more in just five minutes.

This story started off in a different plane and ended shockingly in a different plane. A mother describes her typical morning getting her child ready for school in a retrospective narrative “onions is good for your memory” the gospel of getting children to eat healthy. 6:55am she already said goodbye and wanted to get some rest 7:00am today she is arraigned for murder in court, the same time she committed the crime. In five minutes she became a widow, a murder and her daughter an orphan.

Review Of “Tick Tock” By Akinrinade Funminiyi Isaac

Tick Tock is a tickling piece of art written by a Kenyan writer – Susan Syondie (Sue Poetry). It can be read on page 22, October 2019 Edition of WSA magazine.

The poem is structured into five stanzas with five lines per stanza. With the brevity per stanza, one may conclude that each verse was written within the space of five minutes. This poem would have been ‘five-stically’ rhythmic if the writer had written it in five syllables per line. Nonetheless, the beauty inherent in this poem can’t be overemphasized. Just as the name implies – Tick Tock. In the title, the writer employs onomatopoeia in depicting the sound of a ticking clock. In verse one, the persona starts with the word: ONE. This can be interpreted as one minute, since the poem has five stanzas (one minute per stanza), thereby sticking to the theme of this edition – Five Minutes.

In the first stanza (minute), the persona introduces a male personality she sees. She progresses by stating specific features of this being. This is evident in lines like... Eyes as clear as crystal. Teeth as white as snow, hair as black as charcoal and hands of a mason. All these show that the persona is detailed in her description of this personality. The first stanza would have been better and original if the writer hadn't used the usual cliché like clear as crystal, white as snow, black as charcoal.

In the second stanza (minute), the persona is still in the seeing process. This minute, she sees more: his smile that radiates like the morning sun, his dimpled cheeks that show the beauty of his face.

In the third stanza (minute), the persona further sees not only his physique, but his deeds: He embraces children with his loving hands; he places joyful excitement on their faces, he also cheerfully gives them sweet candy.

In the fourth stanza (minute), the awesomely described personality above does the seeing this time. Who does he see? No other person than the persona. He must have noticed that the persona was looking all this while, because the persona looked away immediately he saw her. And when he approaches her, she walks away. I wonder the kind of a tricky game the persona is playing. Isn't it obvious butterflies of love are flying in her belly already? Must ladies always form hard to get?

In the fifth stanza (minute), the persona writes of how suddenly this awesome personality grabs her hand and their four eyes become two. Now, the butterflies in her belly have flown out. The persona is finally in love.

“Tick Tock” is a beautifully crafted poem that's worthy to be read over and over again.

Review of “Final Thoughts” By Akinrinade Funminiyi Isaac

“Final Thoughts” is a poem written by a Rwandan writer – Tom Patrick Nzabonimpa. It can be read on page 23, October 2019 Edition of WSA magazine.

The poem is divided into four stanzas. The first stanza has five lines, the second stanza has five lines, the third stanza has seven lines, and the last stanza has seven lines. In total, the poem has 24 number of lines. The reader will be in haste to know the final thoughts

of this persona. The title alone brings to mind various aspects of life that one may want to think will be part of these final thoughts. It's usually said that curiosity kills the cat, and that's why the writer doesn't stop at the title but shed more light on the title. If not, the readers would have been killed by curiosity.

In shedding more light, the writer uses a sound technique called *entremet* in conveying the central idea of his thoughts. This line can be seen at the beginning of each stanza: IN FIVE MINUTES.

One will further ask, what does the persona intend to achieve in five minutes? The persona sounds like someone who's about to face a panel and whereas the fate or outcome of his presentation is dependent on the judgement of the judges, be it fair or not.

He therefore starts by stating what he needs in five minutes. He needs his name to be trending: he wants every mouth to chew his name in celebration of his victory. Also, he needs all the long hours of night-dreaming to be transformed into reality. He also needs to emerge as a winner since he's been working on himself (through searching, reading, practising) at a very young age. In addition, he's been working hard and smart, hoping that if he gives it a trial then that will be the right key to open the door of his success. On a final note, he ends his thoughts by saying his heart will be beating faster than a cheetah when the judgement is about to be given, because he has realized over time that the judgement isn't always fair. But whether it turns out well or not, he will be thankful. At least, for giving it a trial because winners never quit and quitters never win.

One amazing thing about this piece is that it can be interpreted in diverse ways because the writer isn't explicit about his choice of words. Isn't that the beauty of poetry?

"Final thoughts" will remain just final thoughts if they're not brought to limelight. It's a beautiful write and a good read

A review of Hannah H. Tarindwa's 'That Was All It Took' by Adejuwon Gbalajobi.

"That Was All It Took" is your typical story of love gone sour, domestic abuse, only that in this case, the victim bailed out instead of staying to suffer because of social stigma, her children or for love's sake. The plot is almost unbelievable in that in the victim's case, her family were fully in support of her leaving her husband; however, that's the strong

point of this story: the idea that family of domestic abuse victims should be in support of them leaving the relationship instead of encouraging them to stay is a narrative that needs to be promoted, especially in Africa where a woman's virtuousness is measured by how much she can suffer in her husband's house.

That said, the storytelling itself is dull. There's nothing that hooks the reader from start to finish, one has to endure the tedious storytelling.

For a short story, the characters are somewhat flat and unengaging. This is because the writer didn't give any depth to them. What we know about them was what the narrator revealed in what critics will call "too much telling and little showing."

Review of A Poem 'Timer' By Omadang Yowasi, Uganda

TIMER is a four-stanza poem with four lines in each stanza. The persona in the poem is a public speaker expected to give a speech for not more than five minutes. The persona begins by taking his time to try and deliver the speech in the most coherent manner since time seems like a span of eternity.

Time being a major factor, the second stanza happens fast and sweet. The writer uses imagery and compares time with a bird or anything that flies. In the poem time flies faster than the speech. Three minutes elapse in a blink of an eye with nothing much said and done.

Within the fourth and the fifth minute, the timer still doesn't stop. The persona is stuck between finishing the speech within five minutes and making things clear to the audience.

In stanza five, things get from worse to worst. No more time! The persona is humiliated for making no sense in a high profile meeting. The audience calls him back to his damn seat.

Review of At a Cost by Amami Yusuf. Reviewed by Ogalo Oduor Bernard.

"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 tradi-

tional principles, sojourning and scavenging until she finds her identity, but at a cost...”

These are the opening remarks that meet the reader of Amami Yusuf’s *_At a Cost_*, Episode 8. Indeed, one wonders what will happen to Zarah, the young woman caught in the act. Yes, Mohammed, Zarah’s husband, catches her “beneath a man who was not her husband.” Like a thief who has been caught with their hand on the item, Zarah scampers for safety, but there is nowhere to hide. There is a crowd that is boiling with anger, ready to pounce on her. She is called all sorts of dirty names: “Karuwa” “Kwartanci”. *_Prostitute_*. In fact, at that moment, in the harsh and strong waves of emotions that are running high in every man and woman present, Zarah feels like a prostitute. She has only managed to cover her nakedness, but still, the shame is all over her face. She wonders where her partner in crime, Usman, could be. She did not even notice how he slipped off her body when things got thick and tried to run to safety. However, he too, was caught. The two have to face the law; Sharia.

The crowd, which includes a Mohammed that is wielding a machete, march towards Katsina State Judiciary where the Qadi is expected to pass judgement immediately. While Usman seems to have surrendered to his fate, Zarah, is deeply pained. She had married a man much older than herself and, since she was still a child, she hasn’t learnt the cardinal rule of the game, that: you don’t play outside and if you must, never get caught because if that happens, then one is old enough to face the punishment.

It is said that, sometimes, people will remain within the law not because they are law abiding but because the punishment is brutal and no one wants to be used as an example.

Unfortunately for Zarah, the traditional law of her people require that one caught in the act of adultery be buried while standing (alive) and then stoned to death. In some cases, the culprits would be flogged mercilessly. It is the memory of what other people have gone through that makes Sadiya, Zarah’s mother, to device a way of ensuring that her daughter does not go through that kind of gruesome experience. Sadiya had watched her friend, Jamila, die in the hands of the Sharia and that one experience had shook her to her core.

To her, once was painful enough. She cannot let that happen again, above all, to her own daughter. Zarah’s father, Imran, understands the weight of the matter and instead of be-

ing furious and ashamed of her, he embraces her in silence, while he thinks. If they do not do something to help her, Zarah is likely to die. That act of courage; an act that is out of parental instinct, will come at a cost.

Amami Yusuf weaves a heart wrenching story of a tradition that is so blind that it doesn't care if it kills in order to keep things as they are. She beautifully paints a picture of a society that is hurting beneath the weight of its own traditions yet, raising one's voice would attract dire consequences.

Again, it is a story that elicits many questions, among which is the question of identities. This, particularly, affects the women in this society but there are a few men like Imran who know that the law's blindness is also the blindness of the whole society. The questions that remain unanswered even as one completes the story are: how much does it cost to earn one's true identity? Is it a memory, life's realities, dreams that can't die or a mixture of all these?

In the words of Mariama Ba, in her book, *_So Long a Letter:_* "If, over the years, and passing through the realities of life, dreams die, I keep intact my memories, the salt of remembrance"

Review of *Minute are a mystery* by Tatab Allen Laika. Reviewed by Himi Asulu.

This is a free verse poem with 2 stanzas. The writer uses minute as a time check to describe every activity done by humans. He also sees minutes valuable like money and sweet like honey. Minutes base the existence and extant of man . It doesn't wait for anyone but it is a regular visitor.

The last two lines in the 2nd stanza captured my mind which says" minutes indeed are a mystery, God is time and minutes are His disciples.

It's a wonderful piece, got me thinking wild about time.

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