



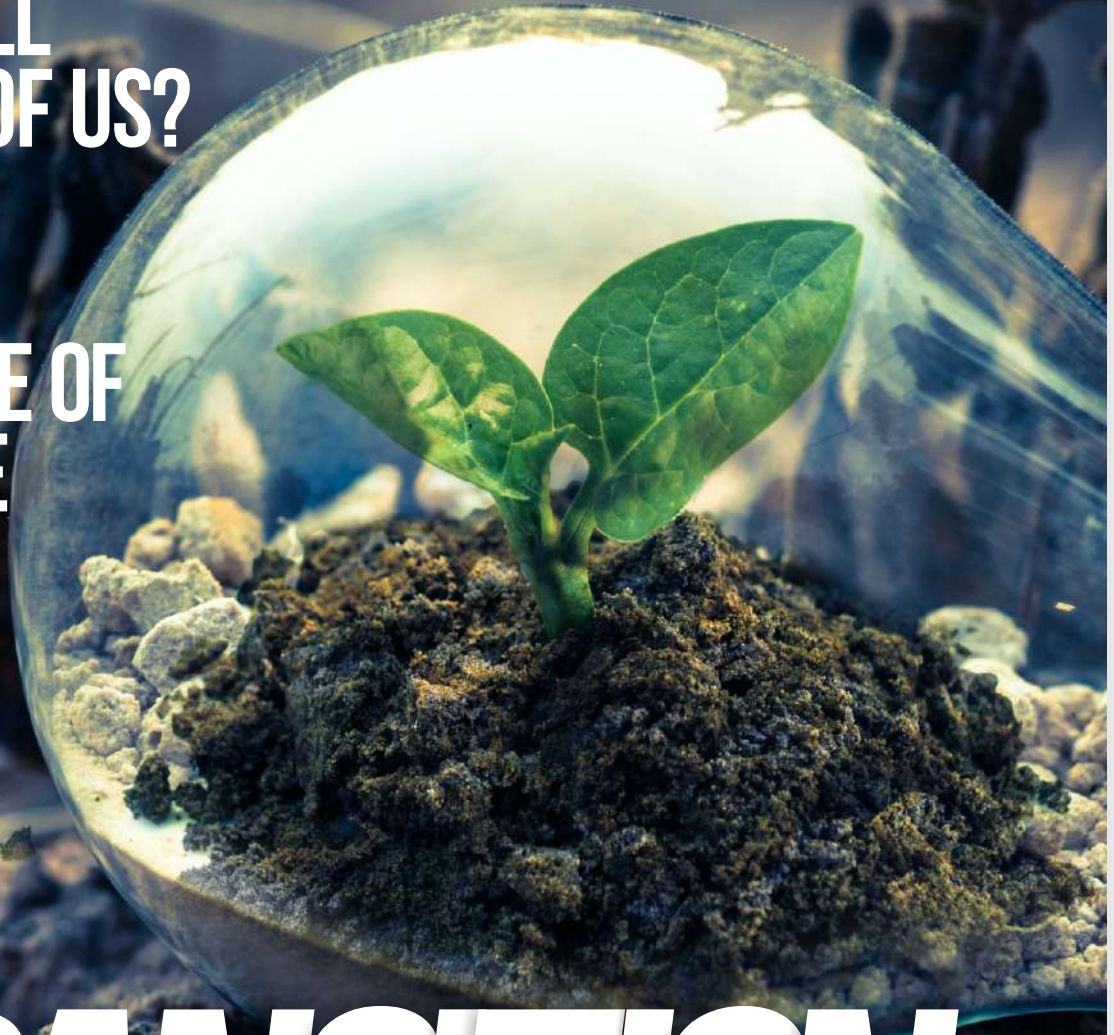
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WHAT WILL BECOME OF US?

LEO MUZIVOREVA
ZIMBABWE

THE DANCE OF SELF LOVE

NDANU JACQUELINE
KENYA



TRANSITION

BECOMING

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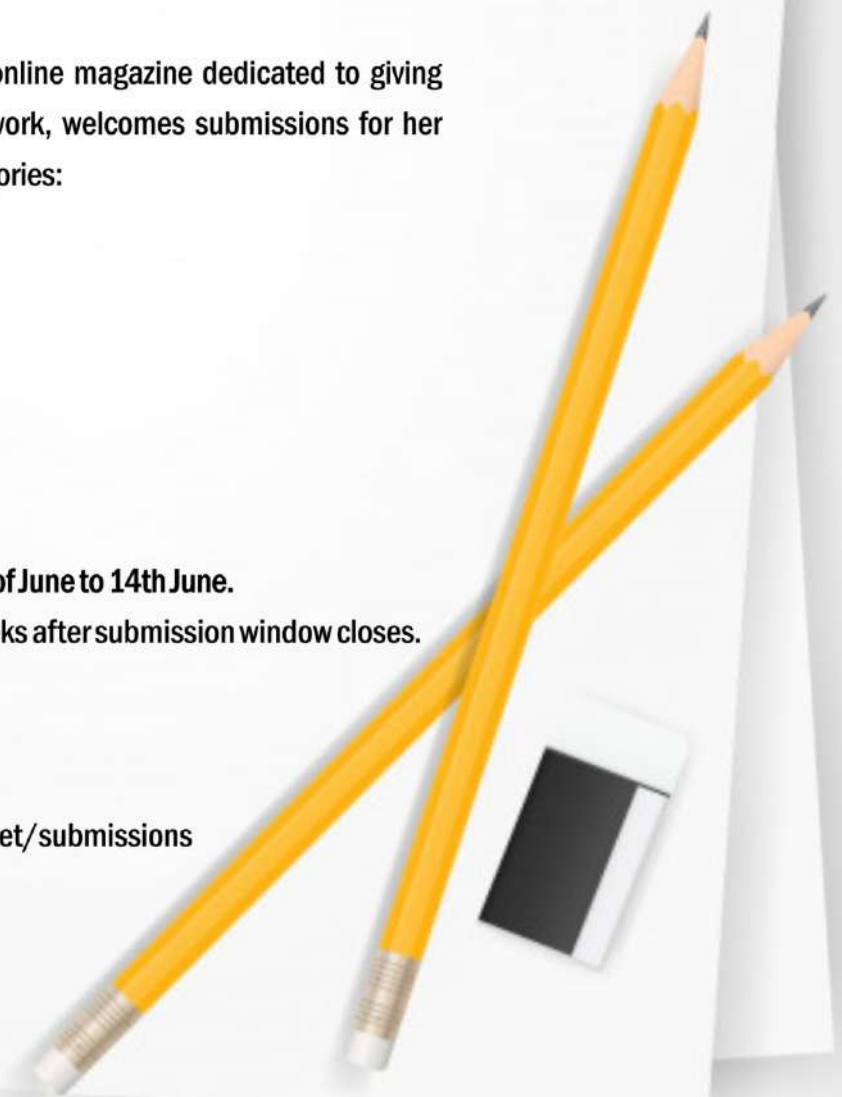
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We look forward to receiving your best.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In the various stages of our lives, we are often tempted to believe that we have “arrived” the end of the journey and all things have reached completion. This image is itself a comforting one and I wouldn't mind dwelling in the rest that it brings. However, life is hardly ever that simple. It is interesting to know that no matter how many years you have lived on this Earth, each day you wake up in is a day you have never lived before – every moment is a new moment, one filled with potential.

It is in these days that we find ourselves becoming who we are meant to be. The process of becoming is one we make without ever realising we are making it. Transitions are more times than not, a quiet, uninspiring (and sometimes short-lived) moment.

Maybe these moments are meant to go by unnoticed, maybe they are not. Neither of these matter. What matters more than anything else is our willingness to transition; our desire to become; our audacity to reach the end. All of this can be found in the little things; the ones we hate to do because they are difficult, boring and annoying. These are the things that give us the ability to become whatever we may.

Remember this in your writing, because the keys to a well-lived life can easily be applied to a well-rounded writing career.

Always remember, Ubuntu.

Warm regards,
Nabilah.

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GABORONE RANGERS

Nkululeko Diteko
Botswana



We would gather around the common room, listening to him talk about his beloved Gaborone Rangers, how they humiliated Desert Cosmos in the Super Cup final back in 2015 and how Killer Kgosidialwa scored a brace on that day. He narrated the mesmerizing performance of Stanley 'Dog Engine' Mosojane and Bobby 'The Great' Motlhala. Smaller children would listen

keenly, but as for us, big girls with pubic hairs, we came to the gathering not for some football mumbo-jumbo, but to get a whiff of testosterone, for wherever Gaborone Rangers was, so were all the boys.

Mrs Halabi insisted that we should call him by his given name, Lebitso, however Gaborone Rangers was on the tip of our tongues. Since he came to the shelter a month ago,

Gaborone Rangers was all he talked about, day and night, awake and asleep, literally. In his sleep talk, he would imitate Ray 'Papa Action' Sechele, the legendary sports commentator.

His football fascination once got him in trouble with a bunch of hooligans. Young Stars Football Club they called themselves, but there was nothing young about them, their faces were mountainous

with pimples and their calves were hard as rocks. They were not even a club, but a bunch of unemployed jerks that puffed marijuana and drank cheap spirits before they chased the ball in the dusty field near our shelter.

The hooligans had foul mouths.

"It's AIDS that killed your mothers, not us" they would say to us.

Mrs Halabi told us to stay away from them, but that was impractical. Their playing field was on the pathway to both the school and the church.

We were on our way from church one Sunday. Smaller children, bawling of hunger, were walking slowly at the back of the horde, but us, big girls with raised chests, were at the front, trying to keep up with the boys. Not just any boys, but those with deep voices, the ones with broad shoulders, those that got a bulge whenever they saw us in our panties after evening baths. And Gaborone Rangers was one of those.

Just as we passed by the football field, the hooligans' ball went out of play, and came rolling in our direction. We all looked at him, praying he wouldn't do anything stupid. The hooligans did not like it when we touch their ball, but he did not know them as we did, he was a newbie. We stopped, and so seemed everything else around us,

well, except for the ball, and of course, him.

He charged towards the ball, and trapped it under his foot. We thought he would pass it back to them, like Kara once did. No, but not Gaborone Rangers, he had to drive the ball back into the field with his left foot, much to the annoyance of the big, dark skinned guy who came to the touchline to collect the ball. He tried to grab Gaborone Rangers by the t-shirt, but he cleverly ducked away, dribbling around him.

Other hooligans ran towards him, but he dribbled easily around them, one after the other, some of them falling to the ground, until he was left with only the goalkeeper. With his finger, he pointed to the top left corner of the posts, and the goalkeeper followed the finger, diving devotedly in that direction, but Gaborone Rangers kicked the ball softly to the bottom right corner. It was a goal.

He ran to the corner-kick spot in celebration, taking off his t-shirt and spinning in the air two times. It was only on the landing of his second spin that he realised that he was in trouble, the hooligans were already upon him, pinning him to the ground at once. From where we were, we could hear their thumping fists. We thought they were going to kill him, but he was saved by the shrill of a whistle.

"Let him go, you imbeciles" said the pot-bellied man with a whistle in his hand.

"But coach, he...." they tried to protest, but he blew his whistle again. "I SAID LEAVE HIM ALONE!" he yelled, and they did, at once.

Gaborone Rangers did not make any attempt to stand up; he was focused on his bleeding nose. He stared at them one by one, right in their eyes, as if he was recording them in his memory.

"What's your name, son?" asked the man with a whistle, reaching out his hand to help him up. But there was no answer, Gaborone Rangers' gaze and concentration were still on his persecutors.

"Gaborone Rangers" we said "What?" the whistle man turned to us.

"His name is Gaborone Rangers" we said again, in chorus.

The whistle man's gaze went back to Gaborone Rangers, exploring his blue and white football shirt. He grinned at the sight of the emblem.

"He stays in the orphanage too? I haven't seen him before" he said.

"Yes, he's a newbie" we said and the man smiled, again.

"Okay, you can take him home now, tell your matron I'll come by and talk to her later" he said to us, and then turned to Gaborone Rangers

"I am really sorry, son, I'll make sure these idiots pay for what they did to you"



Indeed, the man came to the shelter that evening. He had a lengthy conversation with Mrs Halabi, who seemed not to be agreeing with anything that was being said. After the man had left, we asked Mrs Halabi what he said, but she wouldn't tell us.

The following day, the whistle man came with two other people, a man and a woman. It was another lengthy discussion, in the garden, distant from our eavesdropping. Once

again, after they left, we asked Mrs Halabi what the meeting was about, but she wouldn't tell. Instead, she called Gaborone Rangers aside, and they had a chat, in private.

Later that night, in the common room, with bowls of porridge in our hands, we asked Gaborone Rangers what Mrs Halabi had said to him, but he didn't give us straight answers. He just smiled and repeated the word, Trials.

What were Trials? Was it the name of his new family? Whenever a man

and a woman came to the shelter, it was for one reason only, and that was adoption. But families seldom adopt fifteen year old boys.

When we gathered up for breakfast the next morning, we were twenty eight instead of twenty nine, Gaborone Rangers' seat was empty. We made our own conclusions, he was gone.

Later that evening, we heard a big engine sound at the gate, it was a bus, and there he was. He was still wearing the blue and white colors of Gaborone Rangers Football Club, except, these ones were new. On his feet was a modish pair of sneakers, and he was wearing blue track pants. Gaborone Rangers Football Club emblem was embroidered to the upper left corner of his dazzling white t-shirt, and his initials, L.B, were printed to the upper right. A blue sweater was knotted around his waist and he carried a travel bag loosely with his left hand.

He stared at us, one after the other, fighting back the tears that threatened to escape the corners of his eyes.

It was done, Gaborone Rangers was now a Gaborone Ranger. As for us, big girls who liked him so much, we would only see him on television, not as Gaborone Rangers, but Lebitso 'Great Thy Name' Butale of Gaborone Rangers.



THE DANCE OF SELF LOVE

Ndanu Jacqueline
Kenya

The day is slowly coming to an end, sun rays shine boldly into my living room and I take the moment to appreciate the warmth they come with. Filtering through the golden curtains in my studio apartment, they somewhat resemble golden showers and I can't help but bask in the beauty of it all.

Kisumu has always been known for its magical sunsets, but this one seems intent on putting on a show. Oddly enough it's eerily quiet outside, the neighborhood children must have discovered another play spot. To me however, the illusion is not lost, the sense of quietness and peace resembling the stillness after war. Only this time the war was within myself, and I am both the adversary and the attacker. Right now, I'm consumed by a sense of peace, which has felt alien in this body of mine, like an impromptu guest. I have had to try it out and break into it much like new shoes on the first few days.

I leisurely walk to my speaker, select a



playlist and sweet notes of afro soul fill the room. Almost automatically, my hips sway to the beat; a joy that I've only recently acquired. You see, during war, every last available resource is spent on necessities for the sake of survival. I am no different. For me, joy was a luxury I just couldn't afford, always an outlier in the budget of life. In the background, the beats get groovier, interrupting my

train of thought and my whole body is compelled to join the dance, a celebration of life and victory. They say some of the hardest battles to win are the ones within. I had however fought valiantly, learning on the job with more failures than victories. There had been a few lost battles albeit the war was eventually won.



The music fades out as the song comes to an end and I find myself walking to the mirror. I gaze at the tall curvy dark-skinned female in the mirror, skin glistening from my dance earlier. At a height of 5`7, I had always towered over most girls my age. This however was not without fault. I always seemed to attract a wide variety of opinions: “too tall for a girl”, “can` t wear heels”, “maybe if you were shorter”.

My mind goes back to how shrunken the little girl within felt. I run my hands through my coarse hair firmly held in place in a short bun above my head.

Years and years of straightening it had taken its toll. The damage had been almost irreversible save for its resilience, a trait I knew all too well. And this skin, beautiful ebony skin that had housed my body all these years, always glowing in the sun rays. How sad it is, that I spent so long fighting the war within, a completely senseless war.

I`m brought back to the present by the beats to my favorite song, and soon again, a smile lights up my face. My black silk dress swishes one way then another following the span of my curves, as I find myself breaking into

dance once more. The sadness that earlier loomed on my head already vanishing into air, nothing but a distant memory. I can` t help but pride in the woman I have become, the hard work that went into becoming her despite the odds stacked against her. Joy ripples in my chest, this moment is perfect. In the end, I have transformed from that quiet little girl to a confident self-loving woman.

Perhaps what I never anticipated is how much strength and beauty I would acquire in my transition.

LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

Ugbede Ataboh
Nigeria



There comes a time in every man's life when he must decide whether to remain stuck or move forward; in this context, Nigeria is "The Man".

I woke up this morning at peace with God for preserving me and my family during this trying period of the Covid-19 pandemic, but angry at

the Nigerian government for neglecting and failing to safeguard and provide for Nigerian citizens at a time like this. All business sectors except the food and drug sectors have closed down indefinitely; unfortunately, prices of food and drugs have escalated. This is a time when the love of and for the average Nigerian has waxed cold. Imagine

me storming out of my neighborhood drug store earlier today after what should have been a mundane purchase...

"Good morning dear, please do you guys have face masks for sale?" I asked the attendant cheerfully.

"Yes we do" She responded, as she lifted her head from the counter tiredly.

Poor girl, these people on essential duties are not finding it easy this period. " Okay then, please let me ha..."

"Good morning! Please what would you like to purchase?" A chubby middle aged man wearing a lab coat asked as he emerged from the consultation room behind the counter, interrupting the ongoing exchange between me and the store attendant with his irritating high pitched voice. He must have noticed my displeased expression but decided to press on, unfortunately.



"What do I call you? Is it Miss or Mr?
The lower part of your hair is shaved,
while the upper part is permed.
Hehehehe"

Some people think they can crack
dry jokes about trending hair styles
these days and get away with it. They
obviously have not met me, I ignore
him completely.

"My dear, please how much is your
face mask?"

"Five hundred naira each"

"What?! Are you guys kidding? Five
hundred naira for one disposable
pathetic looking surgical mask? You
can as well join the gang of day light
robbers currently stripping our
nation of what's left of it! Bloody
ripp-off's!" I rant as I storm towards
the exit.

I totally believe our government is
the number one problem we are
facing as a nation, followed by our
Police force, and then, "We" the
masses.

Imagine the government refusing to
properly disburse and give account
of the Fifteen billion Naira donated
by Nigerian philanthropists to fight
the Covid-19 pandemic and cater to
Nigerians during this trying period.

Imagine the lack of involvement of
our police force in trying to curb the
shameful theft and mayhem
currently taking place in Ogun state
and some parts of Lagos mainland.
Neighborhoods are currently
burning tires on their streets to serve
as a source of light at night. No
power supply and people are being
robbed to make matters worse.

Imagine we Nigerians unable to love
each other. Active business owners
inflating their prices instead of
giving reasonable discounts;
Restive youths robbing the poor
and vulnerable instead of
safeguarding and rebuilding their
wrecked communities; Narrow
minded Religious leaders
misleading the flock with

frightening and demoralizing end-
time messages instead of preaching
spirit lifting messages of hope,
revival and renewal.

As Nigerians, we are fighting
enemies on every side; We are not
just fighting the pandemic but the
fear of poverty. I dare say a time will
come, not too long from now, that
Nigerians will come out of their
homes and resume their daily
mundane but income generating
routines; whether the Pandemic
chooses to vanish or remain "the
elephant in the room". This is not a
radical remark, but a realistic
forecast, considering the current
state of affairs in Nigeria. Fear of the
Covid-19 pandemic will keep us
locked in until the overwhelming
fear of poverty will eventually drive
us out; and by "Us", I refer to not
just average Nigerians, but the
upper class as well because one
thing the Rich fear more than
untimely death is the fear of falling
from "Grace" to "Grass".

We will get through this, but only if
we can boldly transition from being
Wicked unpatriotic citizens to
Compassionate human beings
willing to join hands in order
overcome national challenges...
and if we do not? We will definitely
not be annihilated by the pandemic,
but we may finally give in to the
impending doom of disintegration.

WHAT WILL BECOME OF US?

Leo Muzivoreva
Zimbabwe



Where will we be in six months, a year, ten years from now?

I lie awake at night wondering what the future holds for my loved ones, my vulnerable friends and relatives. I wonder what will happen to my job, even though I am luckier than most - I can work remotely. I am writing this from South Africa, where I have self-employed friends who are staring down the barrel of months without pay and friends who have already lost jobs. The coronavirus hit the

economy hard. Will anyone be hiring when most people are in need of work? Being a journalist is like being a boxer, what you write is solely your responsibility just like how what goes down in a boxing ring is to the boxer.

Allow me to air my sentiments regarding what I think will become of the world around me after this novel virus is gone or at least controlled. Already, tonnes of writings have surfaced on the

geopolitical implications of the coronavirus. Most analysts rightly concur that the world changed in those hard-to-pinpoint moments when the outbreak went globally viral.

It is now virtually cliché to refer to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) or simply coronavirus as a global phenomenon. The World Health

Organization (WHO) designated it a pandemic on March 11 after the fact. In other words, the novel coronavirus was global before it was declared pandemic.

What are the implications for Africa? It would help if the whole kit and caboodle of African governments, academics, businesses and civil society comprehended the fact that the world will not be same after the dust settles on the pandemic.

The words of Italian communist leader and scholar Antonio Gramsci uttered in 1929 ring true today: "The old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born". With lockdowns, curfews, conspiracies and moral panics, the whole world has not only dramatically changed but continues to do so before our eyes. The suddenness and fluidity of the pandemic means that political, economic and financial projection and risk assessments for 2020 and the 2020s decade have to be re-analysed given the upended global optics. It is for this reason that rating agency Moody's downgrading of South Africa on March 27 is not only preposterous but also based on a world quite different from the one we knew just the other day.

Economic downturns in places like South Africa caused in part by poor

governance and in places like Nigeria due partly to oil price wars between Russia and Saudi Arabia will have to be revised afresh.

Parallels have been drawn between the current crisis and past crises of all kinds. Because the pandemic is both a health and economic problem, the global financial meltdown of 2007/08 has shown a particularly unnerving similarity.

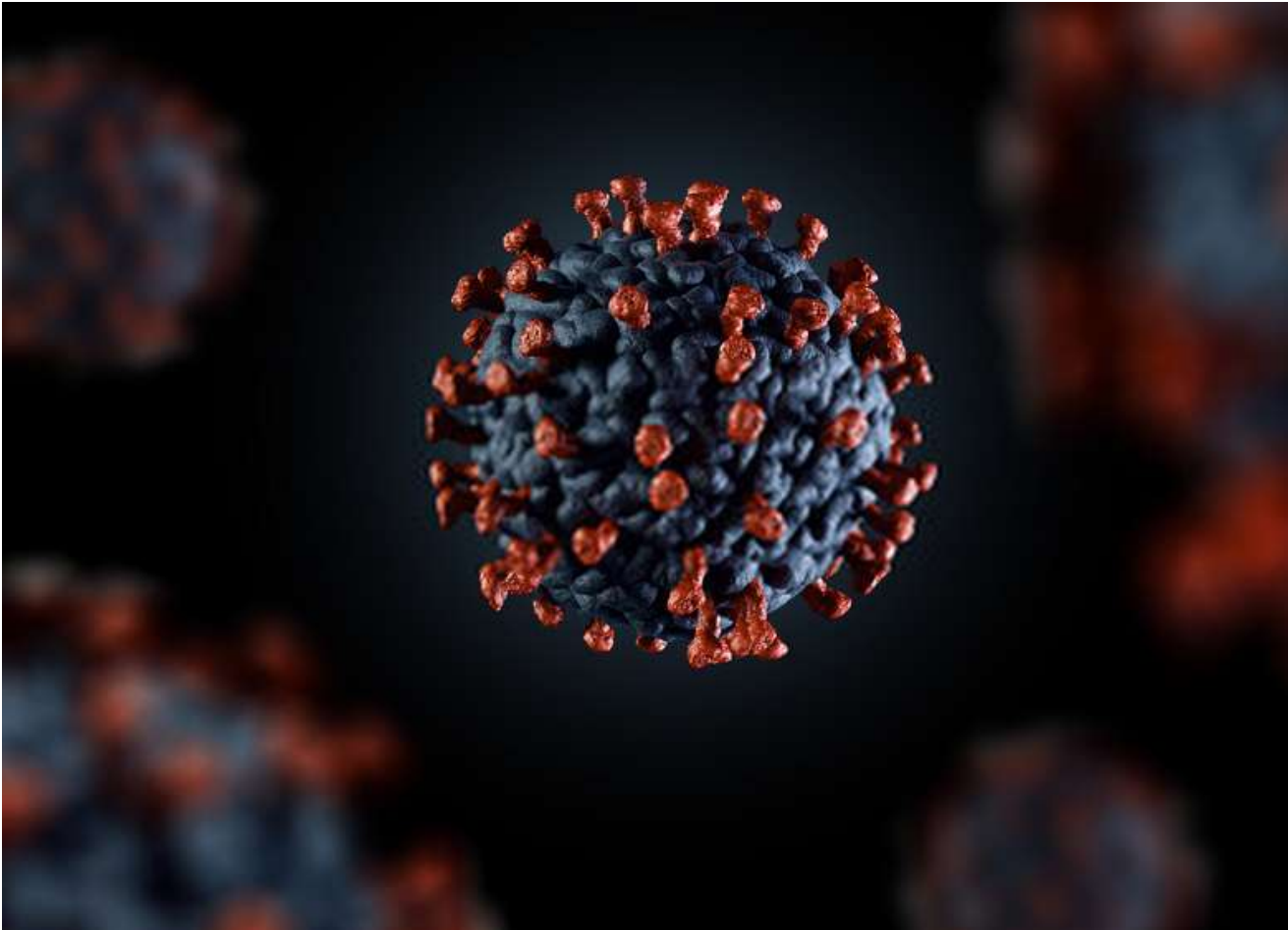
How the big powers in the global balance of power manage the crisis on their shores and abroad will be a major barometer for the new world that we are uncertainly entering. During the 2007/08 crisis, talk of the decline of the West and the rise of what would be referred to as emerging economies was rife. It is perhaps time to revisit the works of analysts such as Dambisa Moyo (Dead Aid, 2010, How the West Lost 2011) and Fareed Zakaria (The Post-American World, 2008) to mention but two authors.

More importantly, the global power-play revolving around the coronavirus-enforced dynamics will signal the geopolitical shifts that African countries will need to consider. One point among others is that the period immediately after the global financial meltdown over a decade ago, saw relations between African nations and emerging powers surging with China as the de

facto leader. What happens now that both China and the West have been hammered by the virus?

The new normal post-Covid-19 might mean that African nations reliant on aid from the global north and some emerging economies find themselves on their own as hitherto wealthy nations – badly hit Spain, Italy and China come to mind – struggle to reconstruct their battered economies. Six years ago when the Ebola virus ravaged Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone; the US, China and the EU stepped in to fill the gap. Today, African countries are virtually on their own as these countries battle the pandemic at home with limited wiggle room to extend a helping hand abroad. The little we have seen in assistance is the \$500,000 support by the USAID to South Africa, the African nation with the highest number of infections on the continent. China, where the virus is commonly believed to have started has been more agile in donating testing kits across the continent. At this point however, the assistance falls short of traditional American and Chinese responses to disasters of the Covid-19 magnitude on the continent.

The foregoing indicates that African countries that entertain the optimism of the world bouncing back to the pre-pandemic times



should better get used to the fact the world is already moving in an entirely new direction. Even though the WHO has been censured for slow action when the virus first surfaced in central China, it would appear that this UN entity is the one that has done the most in providing testing equipment and providing public health information to the continent. Should African leaders therefore lobby for a bigger role for this cash-starved entity – and indeed the UN system in general – in the post-pandemic period?

The pandemic is a live demonstration and consequence of

globalization while at the same time revealing and accelerating its fault lines. Save for selected pockets such as South Africa's fledgling tech industry, Kenya's nascent innovation hubs and Nigeria's tech-savvy Nollywood industry, many of the leaps in globalization have eluded the African continent. For instance, appreciable use of the internet – globalization's enabler – started gaining traction only in the mid-2000s, long after it had become a way of life elsewhere.

Ironically, Africa's late insertion into the heart of the globalization may have been a blessing in

disguise, shielding the region from what would be an early uptick in coronavirus cases. As a demonstration and consequence of globalization, coronavirus has smashed the records in terms of reaching all the corners of the world at supersonic speed. The dense worldwide web of aerial, marine and terrestrial transport systems played a definitive role in the jumping of the virus from China to the rest of the world. These infrastructure that facilitate globalization ensured that the virus could be in one location in one hour and materialise in another location in a couple of hours.

BEST STUDENTS

Montanyane Halieo
Lesotho

Leseli had two friends, Letlotlo and Liketso. The trio were the noisiest and naughtiest students in their 5th Grade class. They were always the first suspects whenever a pen or book was stolen in the class. That was why their teacher, Miss Lira never bothered to put their names on the list of students who would get a gift on a Friday of Appreciation. In their school, every Friday was an Appreciation day for two students who performed well in class and general behavior.

One day when Leseli was going to school, he found a phone on the side of the road. He took it and hid it until after school. Then he took the phone home and showed it to his father. His father took the phone and studied it. It was an expensive phone and looked brand new.

“So what will you do with it?” His father asked Leseli.

Leseli looked at him blankly. He had expected his father to keep the phone and use it.

“Don't you want it?” He asked his father.

“It's not mine.” His father said

“I don't know its owner. I would rather give it to you than play with it.”

“Tell you what?” His father said, “Take the phone to school with you. Try to find the owner. Give it to your teacher if need be. But if you still can't find the owner,

bring it back and I will use it”

Leseli nodded. However, he knew that if he gave the phone to Miss Lira, he might never see it again. So he decided to come up with a plan with his friends.

When they arrived in school the next morning, Leseli showed his friends the phone. After a long discussion, they agreed that they would wait until the following week without telling anyone about the phone. But later in the class, Miss Lira made an announcement about a lost phone and the owner wanting it. Leseli stood up and presented the phone to Miss Lira. He even told her that it was his friends and him who found the phone.

Everyone was shocked at Leseli's actions. Miss Lira took them to the principal and handed the phone personally to the principal. Leseli and his friends were declared the best students of the month. They were presented with gifts from the principal and the owner of the phone. From that time on, Leseli and his friends became better students and were chosen as students of the week more often.

FINUM GOES TO THE VILLAGE



Namse Udosen
Nigeria



Finum lived on a big farm in Kaduna. He had a big room to himself. All the other goats stayed in the open space next to his room. In the morning, Mr Asake would open the door and lead him and the other goats to the greens to graze. Finum enjoyed tearing up the grass from roots very fast. He would gobble up mouthfuls after which he would go and lie under the mango tree. The other goats would not eat until he had finished. They were all scared of Finum. If any of them came any close to his grazing spot, he would lunge his big head, horns first at them.

One day a group of people came to the farm with Mr Asake. Three men walked towards Finum. He felt something was wrong and made a dash for the pen. The men gave chase. Finum turned left and right in quick succession. One of the men tried to grab his horn and fell. All the other goats shouted "run, Finum, run!" The second man caught his left hind leg. Finum kicked! He made a dash to right but he ran straight into the arms of the third man. The man held his horns and pinned him to the ground. Finum struggled, but the other two men joined in and tied his legs.

Mr Asake smiled and told the men, "tell Papa this is my birthday gift to him."

The men drove off with Finum securely tied at the back of the truck.

Finum tried to be brave. Memories of how Mr Asake used to stroke his head and rub his belly came flooding to his mind. He let out a loud bleat! He couldn't take the betrayal. "So this is how I die." He cried all the way.

The place the car stopped was strange to Finum. They put him down and untied him. He was surprised. He quickly made a run for it. The compound was not fenced. There were bushes all over the place and Finum dashed into one. He was happy he had escaped. He was going to find his way back to the farm.

"Silly you! Where do you think you are running to?"



That was the big brown Bororo goat standing in the middle of some tall grasses. The goat was surrounded by six others.

Finum was shocked! He was also happy. These goats must have escaped from the bad people who brought him. This must be some sort of hideout he thought.

"Good day guys!" He greeted. "I want to escape back to my farm. Don't you guys have a farm too?"

The goats gave a loud bleaty laugh. Another farm goat on a lost cause.

The big brown Bororo goat came close to him, sniffed him over, then nudged him with curved horns.

"Stop that! Just tell me the way back to my farm."

The big brown Bororo, stared Finum in the face and told him there was no going back. He told him the story of how farm goats always tried to escape but ended up dead or lost. Finum was scared. Big brown Bororo told him to be a tag along with him and he would enjoy the village. He introduced him to the other goats.

First of all, Finum had to learn what leaves to eat. This was unlike the farm where he had sweet grass prepared for him. Big brown Bororo showed him grass for

different occasions. "If you have an itchy tongue, eat these wide, hairy leaves and you will be fine" Bororo said as he munched on some.

Later in the evening, big brown Bororo told Finum it was time to go home. Finum was lazing under an Udala tree, regurgitating and chewing the cud while waiting for the master to take them home. Big brown Bororo told him, they would follow the yellow ball in the sky back to the compound. He taught Finum how to follow the big yellow ball and tell when it was time to go home.

They all marched home with big brown Bororo leading the way. Different groups branched off when they got to their compounds.

When they got to big brown Bororo's compound, some women and an old man grabbed Finum by the hind legs. He bleated, asking big brown Bororo to help him. The old man, tied a piece of red cloth around his neck and let him go.

Big brown Bororo smiled at him, "you are now one of us."

BECOMING

Mwanduka Peggy
Kenya



It was not expected,
It defied everything she had planned.
Things had taken a complete turn,
She stood, because it was impossible to run.

She knew the only way to deal, was to face it,
Feel the mixed emotions and go through it,
She didn't have to like it,
But she had to do it.

Embrace her fears,
So that she would no longer be afraid
Wipe her tears,
So that she could move forward.

To fight another day,
For her shoots to unravel,
For her flowers to blossom,
For her to become.

Seasons would come and go,
Change would be unavoidable,
In moments high and low,
Her resilience would be unstoppable.

BLURRED VISION

Chisaka Kevin
Kenya



My ink is fading
Hazy state from too much thinking
Loud silence from too much paining

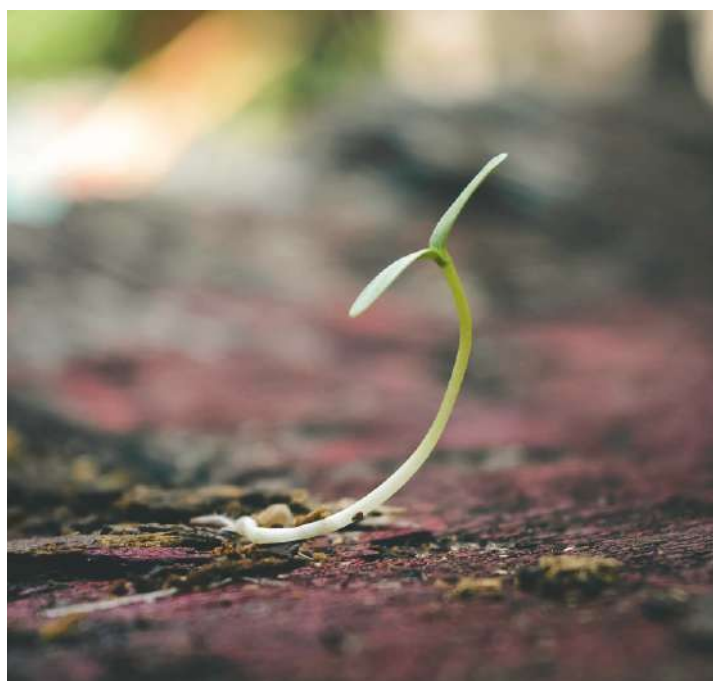
Afraid and scared to trod
Unsure what the future holds
I can hear reverberations and screams
But too late to chide and scheme

Tears won't blur
My dreamy visions
Grin will light up my world
And fulfill my now far-fetched mission
As I transit from this paranormal night

BREAKING FORTH



**Temani Nkalolang
Botswana**



A seed in the ground,
Takes root, then a new life sprouts.
Change, the wheel of life.

BECOMING A SUPERHERO

Tambedou Muhammed
Gambia

Be the man they say !
Shoulder the weight of the earth without making a sound,
Master the art of dying without your soul screaming!
They say!

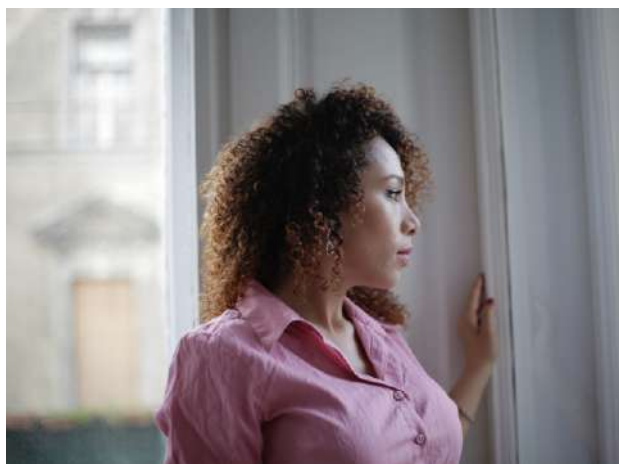
Becoming a man, means becoming a superhero!
Piercing your soul without your skin trembling,
without your eyes setting tears like a plain desert

They say!
To be a superhero,
is to swallow every bit of your grief,
never letting a wound fester into a scar,
And be the first to dare the flames,
Be the first to jump into belly of the beast,
Be the sacrificial lamb to embrace the demon into your
soul!
For those whom you love!

To be a man they say!
Means growing the stomach to swallow every storm,
Swallow every tornado!
bear the burden of being a man,
dare the blunt knife of a butcher,
to be a life jacket or die like a martyr for those whom you
love!

RECONSTRUCTION

Elizabeth Onyango
Kenya



Sometimes I wonder, in tears,
About my own mind and ears,
Have had them all these years,
With different songs of hope.

Contradicting songs I play!
So happy! Excited I may say,
For all I hear and feel today!
To prosper, I will someday.

To prosper someday?
Toiling below the scorching rays,
Dust to dusk with a pinch as pay,
Lifetime dreams seem nay.

Lifetime dreams growing cold,
Of persistent pursuit of the gold,
The other - "Stop! You're getting old!"
Unending struggles of becoming bold!

TEENAGE FANTASY

**Nkoketsang Onalenna
Botswana**

Nobody told me...

Growing up comes with complications

Adapting to new behaviors

Living up to everyone's expectations.

No one to share fairytales with.

I've always wanted to grow up,

This is not how the television portrayed it

Point a gun to my head if I'm wrong.

Nobody told me;

Becoming a teenager

Came with much responsibilities.

No one told me;

Growing up came with much pains

Insecurities, duties and body shaming.

I never heard, anyone mentioning betrayal

"When are you going to grow up?"

Enquired mother, not knowing...

The agony growing inside me.

Here I am today;

Strong enough withholding the pain

Still learning...

How to deal with strained emotions,

The sorrow engraved in me became...

The perfect definition of a teenager.

TRANSITION

Alexandra Kukunda
Uganda



Partially here
shedding off bits of me
chip after chip and layer on layer
my little ones with their little
immortalizing my temporal being
pegged where I walked
silent monuments
the lonely sojourner
ultimate blossoming
of the capsule
I once was

THE SUN AND I

Ejang Patricia Peace
Uganda



The setting sun closes today
Dusk shadows the known
And with it my childhood

I wake up to a new day
New challenges, new fears
My voice deepens
I rise, and so does my courage
I'm ready to leave the nest
To learn how to fly
Dawn brings a new beginning
And with it my youth hood

The setting sun closes today
Dusk shadows the known
And with it my old age descends.

THE TUNNEL SERIES

Mukonya Mukonya
Kenya



By the river you sat; reminiscing
Dark clouds had prevailed, preceding rains
Floods! Your gullible soul almost drowning
Now a clear sky; you forget your past pains
And to the sound of the throbbing river
You would hum a melody, rejoicing
Danced! Outdated moves you did deliver
You had reached where the tunnel was ending;
Saw light, and still continued to travel.
Down the narrow path you walked carelessly
Into another! Narrower tunnel.
Still managed to march on confidently
For you are a product of such action;
Blind thrust that left no chance for retraction.

DAYBREAK

Ng'uni Simon
Zambia

The walls are falling down
The walls are falling
A lot of what festers beneath
is rotten with concealment

Kumbuli nikufa komwe
Ignorance is death itself

When slow motion seems intrepidly rushed

Save for memory, there is no going back to this thing
All that has been will be
When all that shall be has been

Will you see the river
mountain in lilac times

Will you be there
when the day pleads
to start over

left field aright and centre
readjusting course
the things that go
beyond appearance and happening with stain, and silence
thick lipped, dimpled smile tipped to eternity and changing
when it happens will you be there to see the secret wedge
night from day
moon polished, present at noon and fading through stages of
its course

THE BECOMING

Joseph Hope
Nigeria



First I was nothing, then clay
And if science is right –
I'm going to be something clay becomes,
When beaten un-cautious—with a rod of fire

I was something made from clay
then stone—wood—dust.
And if science is right—
I'm going to be something
everything becomes after they decay—
an element or less

GENRE: SHORT STORIES

TITLE: ADELAIDE, I WHISPER

WRITER: PAUL WAFULA, KENYA

REVIEWER: THUTO VANESSA SEABE, BOTSWANA

What happens when a writer pulls you into a story and you become a part of it, leaving you with raging thoughts and questions?

There is a need to stew over this intricately written story undisturbed and solve the mysteries.

Adelaide, I Whisper reads like a layered story, pungent with instances of solitude throughout its skeleton. Herein lies a man trapped between reality and memories past. Not only is he searching for a face (Adelaide) from the past, but he is searching for his identity through her.

Who was he before he came to be alone in this place where strangers roam?

The character "Brody" does not remember who he was before, he does not take note of how he loses himself and his memory after every injection.

If he was to remember when he was sober, would his state be any different? Or would solitude still be his portion?

Happiness and human contact are so foreign to him, memories of both emotions are fickle, why is that?

In this moment I ask myself, is the character weaving memories out of fantasy to escape solitude, are they genuine memories or are they memories he wishes he had?

Adelaide represents hope, a light at the end of the tunnel.

He is a man with no past, present and future sense of self, no identity except for the one he must assume, Brody. Even though Brody is newly born, solitude has already managed to find him, in a body that is not his, surrounded by people who know who he was.

Paul Wafula has done this story justice. I rest by saying this, a man dead inside holds solitude more grave than one found in a casket.

GENRE: COLUMNS

TITLE: LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

WRITER: UGBEDE ATABOH, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: COLIN STANLEY KARIMI, KENYA

In this episode of Life As We Know It, the Ataboh brings in a new twist by revealing her reflections as a writer and a creative. With the theme being Solitude, she clearly defines the lifestyle and behaviour of a writer. With such a depiction, the reader can - for the first time in the series 'Life as we Know It' - get into the writer's shoes.

Ataboh raises the bar as she champions the independence of being a female writer. In the column, she proudly wears the tag of a hopeless romantic, which is confirmed with her saying she has been in the wrong hands one too many times. In this case, solitude shows its nasty negative side. However, upon reading on, there is a glimmer of hope.

The writer becomes assertive in this episode and she dares a hike. This changes her perspective on a deep spiritual level. Nonetheless, according to the reader, this might be a sign of weakness, as we introverts (Creatives) like being alone and building stuff with our golden hands.

More so, to the adult readers, one can see the transition from young girl to young adulthood in the last paragraphs of the column. The writer finds joy in dancing and admits to planning classes.

A key aspect in this context is that she realized being a hopeless romantic was pulling her imaginative abilities backwards, and with the hike, she realized the world is beautiful. In this episode, solitude reveals its vicious claws of being non assertive. However, the column also reveals being human is in fact a gift from God.

With these new twists, one can only wonder what the writer Ugbede Ataboh has in store.

GENRE: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

TITLE: THE WARMTH OF FRIENDSHIP

WRITER: IMMACULATE S. AJIAMBO, KENYA

REVIEWER: RACHAEL TWINOMUGISHA, UGANDA

The Warmth of Friendship is a beautiful title for a children's story. Don't all children love to make friends? I love that the story starts in motion. That is gripping for a child's mind. It kept me gripped too.

A brilliant Madge - class five pupil at Baraka Junior School - tells her classmates an interesting story which leads them to finding the source of her juicy stories: Cucu, an elderly woman, living in solitude.

Madge, also tells them about Cucu's loneliness and vulnerability to hunger and old age. The children ask their parents for presents to bless Cucu with so as to get to hear her stories too.

There are a number of lessons to learn from the story, most important of them being sympathy. This, Immaculate emphasises through the kids having to ask for gifts for Cucu, and cleaning her homestead once they've visited.

The other lessons include listening attentively before making a response, and always planning on trips or visits before taking one, and not limiting friendship to age or social status.

In this story, even without mentioning that the author is Kenyan, it is quite easy to depict an East African setting. This is shown through the Kiswahili words, names and phrases used frequently in the story. The story can therefore be placed in Kenya, or Tanzania, or even Rwanda as those three countries are typical Swahili users.

On the other hand however, I find the story crowded with characters. I must confess I got confused along the way.

It may be hard for children to identify who the main character is in the story, or to lose track of it considering the number of characters. With about 10 in this short story, including Cucu's two grandchildren and two deceased daughters, their husbands; who do not serve a very vital subplot.

I advise that if a character is not going to have a vital role in plot development, the writer should not name them. It would have been simpler if Madge's classmates were simply referred to as "one", "another", and all being called classmates in the end, rather than each having a name. It would also have been a smoother read had the writer only named Madge, her teacher, and the old woman.

I applaud the writer for the energy towards this story. Keep penning.

GENRE: FLASH FICTION

TITLE: SOLITUDE

WRITER: PROTEUS NAT, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: LEOGANG SAMSON, BOTSWANA

Proteus Nat chose to use the theme for a title which is a good option, but the writer should consider being a little more creative with their title choice

The writer takes us on a lonely ride through Sandra's life which revolves within her bedroom. You may wonder as a reader if the character knows the direction of where the sunrises because she is being presented as someone who is always sad and in solitary - does she ever go out to watch the sunset? She does not have anyone to talk to or laugh with and uses antidepressants to induce a hallucination whenever she feels lonely - something that has been going on for a year.

What may be the cause of her depression? This tablet she uses, the writer calls it Amploxolifimin, did she/he just create a new name for this drug? Maybe the writer is a new pharmacist in the block.

Suspense pops up when the writer mentions that our dear Sandra preferred being an introvert and would watch movies as a strategy to keep her secret, what her father did to her when she was 12. This is the kind of twist that makes a reader's adrenaline rush with numerous thoughts. What secret? Could it be that her father molested her, or did she witness something disturbing that the father might have done like murder or rape, or he is a drug lord?

The writer introduces another character in this fiction, that is the landlord. This registers the protagonist as a tenant. According to the writer, this landlord always has visitors, their laughter seems to mock her, teasing her with what is possible. Whatever it is, it makes her curious. Every time, Sandra feels lonely, she throws in another tablet to dissolve the loneliness away which makes her feel at ease as she hallucinates seeing a cat with wings.

The use of some figures of speech by the writer whips up the reader. For example, the use of a rare figure of speech, Apostrophe, which the writer uses in the line "laughter used to mock her."

Whenever she hallucinates, a cat called Linus appears to her and they start conversing with Sandra expressing how much he misses her. This scene showcases the creativity of Proteus in taking the reader through the mind of a hallucinating person. It also exposes the theme Solitude unambiguously, as the writer illustrates how extreme Sandra's state of loneliness is. This is because of the presence of the cat (Linus) created by the protagonist in her subconscious mind.

Furthermore, Proteus alerts the reader's mind with another suspense in a conversation between Sandra and Linus: " Linus, do you think it's all my fault? Am I a bad person... "

"Sandra you... "

At this juncture, the writer knocks Sandra back to reality before the cat can answer her questions. The reader is left dangling, wondering about the important thing that Linus the cat wanted to reveal to Sandra.

The biggest question now is, what instigated her state of solitude? This brings me to conclude that this flash fiction hits right on the spot as the writer was greatly laconic.

In case you have not noticed, this flash fiction is a rare find, that is why it earned a spot on The Editor's Choice. My instincts tell me that the chief editor chose it because of the outstanding creativity Proteus exhibited. I mean who writes flash fiction with million twists?

Simple diction is used in the story, but it greatly impacts the reader, arresting!

GENRE: POETRY**TITLE: OF ADVENTURES WITH SOLITUDE****WRITER: DEEP MARTINS, NIGERIA****REVIEWER: NNANE NTUBE, CAMEROON**

Solitude opens the door to exciting and novel experiences. It is best spent in nature. A journey with solitude is a cultivation of new skills.

Deep Martins' experimental form of poetry titled "Of Adventures with Solitude" gives the reader a comfortable seat and takes him through different adventures with solitude as the bus driver.

"Of Adventures with Solitude" is a six-stanza poem composed of a quintet, a couplet, 3 tercets (S2, S3, S4) and an octave.

The first stanza is an introduction to solitude at nightfall. Solitude, as the master of the night, is celebrated by elements of nature such as the wind, birds, and its night companions – owls.

Words and lines that project the state of solitude are;

- the adverb "away" that expresses the persona's aloofness to noise or human companions.
- the adjective "quietened" that highlights a place where silence is prioritised.
- "the night wind brings whispers... "
- the noun "requiem" that projects a soulful and solemn musicality.
-

In this first stanza, the persona announces his journey with solitude when he says, "I wander..." This journey is further announced in stanza 2 as the persona propounds, "Solitude ambles by, her tailwind elopes with me, steals me through thin draperies of air." (S2, L1 & 2)

S3, S4, S5 and S6 portray the different places the persona went to, driven by Solitude.

Firstly, his adventure starts with a feeling of nostalgia where he sees his mother in an imaginary mirror calling his name and yearning to see his scars.

Secondly, he recalls his visit to a river with friends.

Thirdly, he flashes back to his love affair with a maiden.

Fourthly, he takes us to his candlelit table where he pens his experiences in a poetic form.

The persona makes us understand that whilst he was enjoying solitude and writing down his experiences,

his jealous lover broke the silence and hastened his return to the place of dance and merry.

However, he underlines that his return is filled with tale, song, and painting - new skills learned in solitude.

Martins' "Of Adventures with Solitude" presupposes that solitude is well-lived and experienced in nature. This poem like those of William Wordsworth, especially "The Tables Turned", opines that only in nature where solitude reigns, can good skills be learned.

The poem puts forth a major theme; the celebration of solitude in nature.

The use of personification is prominent especially with the use of "her" to refer to solitude, and "Africa's tears".

The mood is solemn. The tone is serious.

I admire the poet's expression of solitude in nature. The use of Roman numerals – i, ii, iii, iv, and v, in highlighting the poet's adventures, used at the beginning of S3, S4, S5 and S6 is original and experimental.



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