



**WSA**  
Writers Space Africa  
Empowering African writers

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# SACRED LETTERS

**Mary Frances Ibanda**  
Uganda

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# JAILBIRD

**Geno Mercy Apachi**  
Uganda

# FEAR

VOL. 7 NO. 4



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Writers Space Africa, a monthly literary online magazine dedicated to giving literary enthusiasts a platform for their work, welcomes submissions for her September 2020 Edition in the following categories:

- Short Story
- Flash Fiction
- Poetry
- Essays
- Children's Literature

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Response time is typically within 4 to 5 weeks after submission window closes.

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**A** white blank page. This is my greatest fear as a writer. The question I am asked by the starkness of this page is: how dare you create? The ability of a writer to create a person, emotions, a whole new world, is the greatest and yet the scariest thing in the world.

My voice hidden in someone else's story. This is my greatest fear as an editor. The question I am asked from start to finish is: are you sure you haven't altered the author's voice in this story? The ability to write ourselves into someone else's story is something all editors must be aware of and subsequently proceed to cage.

An unfulfilled life. This is my greatest fear as a person. The question I am asked when confronted by the reality of life is: what if I go through life and never achieve anything significant? The possibility of a man living a colourless, mirthless, worthless life is a foreign notion that makes absolutely no sense to me; yet it makes all the sense in the world.

Despite these fear, here I am, a writer whose white page is now filled with black and is a little less stark; an editor who has no fear of being in the background because she believes that the best editors are the ones who leave no trace of their existence in a work of writing; a person who lives life one day at a time because all of life is perspective and none matters more than mine.

If you have fear, that is fine; it is all part of the process. The most important part of it all is that you get up and you do – write, edit, live.

Always Remember, Ubuntu.

Warm regards,  
Nabilah.

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# FEAR

Franklyn Usouwa  
Nigeria



**M**ost people do not know what true fear is. You cannot be afraid of the dark, or of heights. That is not fear. That is caution. You do not know what is in the dark. But someone, or something could be there, waiting for you. So, you are cautious when walking alone at night. I have fears. I am six feet and seven inches tall, weigh two hundred and eighty-four pounds, and I am not afraid to say that I am afraid. Trust me, anyone ashamed to admit fear, is not truly afraid.

I am afraid of being stabbed between the ribs with a pocket knife by some dimwit mugger, half my size, who thought he could take me on. I am afraid of

that specific scenario because I have lived it. I know exactly how painful it was, so I know what I am afraid of. As for the mugger, he could not possibly be afraid of the dark, could he? I mean he waits in



a dark alley for people to come through so he can rob them, so that is very unlikely. If he is honest, what he is really afraid of, is trying to mug a six-foot-seven, two hundred- and eighty-four-pound guy who beats him within an inch of his life despite the knife in his side. He can be truly afraid of that, because he has lived it.

Now, I am afraid of Jennifer leaving me. I am afraid of Jennifer leaving me, because Clara left me. I know what you are thinking: "how can you be truly scared of Jennifer leaving you if Jennifer has never left you before?" Stop being a smartass. The point is, I have had a girlfriend leave me just before I proposed. So, I am scared of it because I have lived it and know exactly how much it hurt. Now that we have that all

cleared up, I am sure you understand why Jennifer is tied to the bed. It is because I am afraid. The gag is because she would not stop screaming. She keeps thrashing too, struggling against the ropes. She has messed up her hair, but she still looks beautiful. The most beautiful woman I have ever known.



Have you noticed how when people lose a husband or a wife, it is not really over? They remain the person's widow or widower, and the dead person remains their late wife or husband. Until they choose to move on, maybe remarry, in the eyes of everybody else they are still together. They are still a couple. So, when they put out the fire and find her burned corpse with the ring on her finger, they will forever remember her as my dead fiancée. Speaking of which, I have not proposed yet. I retrieve the little black box from the back pocket of my Levi's. I sit next to Jennifer on the bed and take a deep breath. Honestly, I am a little nervous.

"Jennifer," I begin, my voice cracking with emotion. "I know we have not been perfect. We've argued a lot over the past three months. You keep saying that I'm a psychopath. I keep telling you that I'm not. You keep asking me to get these weird drugs. I keep telling you that I don't need them. They are for crazy people!"

My voice is going a little bit higher than I planned so I stop, realizing I have drifted a little bit off topic. Another deep breath.

"But," I resume, "all of that, the fact that we are still together, despite all the conflict only makes me more convicted in my belief that we are perfect for each other. We are meant to be together."

I place the box on the nightstand and loosen the rope holding her left hand. I pick up the box and open it revealing the ring. I take the ring out. She tries to use her free hand to loosen the other.

I take her left wrist in my hand, and though she struggles against me, she is nowhere as strong as I am. She must be nervous too. Maintaining my grip on her wrist, I continue my proposal.

"I have never felt as complete in my life as when I am with you. I have a lot of fears, but spending the rest of my life with you is not one of them. It is the only thing I'm sure I want to do."

She has stopped struggling, but she keeps shaking her head and trying to speak but her words are meaningless mumblings against the gag.

"Please do me the honor of being my wife," I say. "Will you marry me?"

More head shaking and mumbling. There must be a 'yes' somewhere in all of that. Still, this is a serious matter, better to be

sure.

"Blink if you mean yes," I say.

I have never seen anyone open their eyes so wide and for so long before. It feels like eternity but finally she falters and blinks. With that, I slip the ring onto her finger. She continues shaking her head, tears streaming from her sexy eyes. Tears of joy, I presume. She must be as happy as I am. Why wouldn't she be, I made it all perfect. I contemplated popping the question at her office where we have our twice-a-week dates, but her secretary, Sarah, is a bit of a busybody. I knew Jennifer would prefer something more private. That is why I tracked down her house and decided to surprise her here. I resist my own joyful tears as I tie her hand as before despite even more vigorous struggling. By now I can smell the smoke and the room is obviously much warmer. I turn to the door. Black smoke is creeping in through the spaces between the door and the walls and floor.

The fire is moving quicker than I planned. I should leave now. I know that I should, but the thought of losing her feels too much to bear. I know, I know. I said death is not final and all of that.





Seriously, stop being a smartass. The thing is, I will never see her again. Her sexy body, her suggestive eyes, it will all be destroyed by the fire. We will never have our spirited conversations at her office during our dates, which always made Sarah rush into the office to “check if you are okay, Dr. Hill.” I swear I will miss those. I will even miss the nosy Sarah.

I walk to the door and open it, I am greeted by a wall of smoke and flame. I shut the door, coughing. As the coughs cause my eyes to water, an image forms in my mind, but it is like I can see it with my own eyes, so vivid. It is not one body they shall find in the burned ruins, but two. Two lovers cuddling in bed as the flames surrounded them, its heat forging

them into an eternal embrace. That is how we will be found. That is how we will be remembered. How romantic.

I join Jennifer on the bed. First, I remove the gag. Her screams make no difference now. I can already hear the sirens outside. But they will not be quick enough. Next are her hands. Surprisingly she does not try to hit me or undo her legs herself. She just watches as I untie them for her. As soon as she is loose though, she bolts. But not fast enough. Halfway to the door I catch up to her. Wrapping both hands around her abdomen, I lift her off her legs and carry her back to the bed. She thrashes about, hitting, biting, scratching, and screaming all the way. But it is just meaningless flailing.

On the bed, I maintain my grip on her, putting a little bit of my weight on her. Not too much though, just enough to keep her in place. I distract myself with the smell of her hair as I wait for the flames to turn us into the charred sculptures of my imagination. But the peachy fragrance is quickly overshadowed by the choking smoke. As we both quake from the force of our coughs, I still maintain my grip. But that weakens soon enough. Yet she does not run. She stays there, coughing, choking. The heat is intense now. The flames have come through the door and encircled the bed. The curtains are burning. The heat is almost as intense as our love. This is where we are supposed to be. I cuddle her in my arms. Surrounded by flames, the love of my life in my arms, right here and now, I am not afraid.

# THE PANDEMIC

Thirikwa Nyingi  
Kenya

I am awakened by some noise in the cave, I slowly feel for my flashlight and flick it on in the direction of the sound. A big rat scampers away through a hole in the cave wall. I sigh with relief as I go back to sleep. I wake up again a few hours later to a flood of sunlight streaming in through the opening of the cave. I busy myself with preparing some porridge on the fire I have just made with dry twigs. I ran out of cooking gas a few days ago and I hope I will not attract anyone with all the smoke I am making. But a man has to eat and the cave has so far been impregnable. The only access to it is through a drawbridge across a yawning chasm tens of feet wide. I sip on the hot porridge as I recall the horrendous events of the last few months.

It all started when a strange flu we had been hearing about finally arrived at our shores. Two people had already been diagnosed with the disease and put in quarantine.

It had been ravaging other parts of the world where it had claimed millions of lives. The government was cagey about the whole thing only issuing directives that people should avoid coming into close contact with people with flu-like symptoms and to report such people to the relevant authorities. In the meantime it was business as usual. But a week or so later, hundreds of people had been infected and a good number of them had succumbed to the disease.

We were discussing these worrisome events in the village kiosk over a cup of tea when we were startled by a piercing scream. We ran out and a ghastly scene assailed our eyes. A woman lay there bleeding from numerous fresh wounds inflicted most likely by a wild animal. One of her hands had been bitten off and a trail of darkening blood followed her all the way down the street. She kept pointing in the

direction of the forest but nobody could get a coherent word out of her amid the screams of the frightened village women. She had lost copious amounts of blood and died before she could make it to a hospital. Then news trickled in that the patients in a nearby quarantine centre had escaped after overwhelming the security officers and were attacking innocent civilians. They had killed a number of people before they were repelled by military forces into the nearby forest. No doubt they had attacked the dead woman. There was panic all over our village. People jumped at the slightest sound at night. Dogs howled dreadfully at the pale moon which cast a ghostly light on the country. The trees danced wildly in the wind as leaves skittered across deserted village streets. Our house groaned and sighed as if under the weight of a malignant spirit. We were lucky to be alive in the morning.

The government spokesperson came on the television to assure the people of their safety. A strange thing happened as he spoke, a woman who was standing next to him suddenly turned on him and bit him on the neck and would not let go. The scene turned chaotic as people moved in to pull her away from the screaming man on the ground. It was proving hard to disentangle the woman from her victim. One of the security guards pulled out an automatic and shot the woman twice in the head before she let go. I stood there staring at the screen in utter shock before they stopped the live coverage of the horrific scene. I switched to another channel and I was met by scenes of terror-stricken people fleeing in all directions in the streets. Large clouds of dark smoke floated from the nearby buildings. Something knocked down the camera but it continued to transmit pictures from a tilted angle. I recoiled in horror as a hideous-looking face suddenly filled the screen before it went blank. It was now clear that this disease was more virulent and deadly than the authorities had let on. The situation was completely out of control. I was all alone in the house as everybody

else had gone to attend to their business. I was not sure whether we were safe anymore.

I stepped out of the house and looked around. It was about eleven in the morning and the weather was quite pleasant for such a horror-filled day. Our house was tucked away in a wooded hill that overlooked a school and a church. I was still trying to come to terms with what I had just watched on the television when my attention was caught by faint noises in the direction of the school -like screams of frightened children. I ran for my field glasses and zoomed in on the scene below. I literally jumped out of my skin as a horde of creatures like the one I had just seen on the TV ferociously fell upon the children leaving a trail of blood and dead bodies in their wake.

I called my sister on the phone but she was not picking. I tried my mother next but the connection was very poor. I shouted to her to hurry home but I did not think she got the message because I could still hear her tinny 'Hello? Hello?' issuing from the handset. I quickly texted both of them to get back home as fast as they could

because there was danger out there. I paced up and down the compound as I tried to calm my distraught nerves and think logically. I knew it was only a matter of time before those monsters arrived at our doorway. I was in this state of anxiety when a mouse darted in front of me into a hole in the ground and I hit upon the idea of the cave. I worked feverishly as I packed as much foodstuff as my old motor scooter would carry and then I hung around to wait for my mother and sister. It was getting rather late and I was already giving up on them when suddenly mother rounded a corner in a run along the track that led to our house. She was hotly pursued by a multitude of the demons. I made to go and help her but she waved me back frenzily before a tackle from behind brought her hard to the ground sending debris flying all over amid her screams as the monsters set upon her while others advanced menacingly towards our house.

My scooter exploded into a deafening roar as I kick-started it which startled the monsters making them to pause momentarily before continuing on their forward march with a

renewed vigour. I rode out of the scene and up the hill at full throttle in a cloud of dust and a shower of pebbles. I flew across the deep-rutted track and negotiated hairpin bends at full speed with incredible ease – a feat I had only associated with stuntmen before. I came to the drawbridge and quickly disembarked. In the fading evening light I transferred all my cargo to the cave and raised the small bridge. I sat down in the cave forlornly and wept un controllably .

It has been three months now since that day and I have not heard from my sister or anybody else. The phone does not work anymore as there is no signal and I only get static from the small transistor radio I managed to grab from the house. Something is stirring in the bush. I conceal myself as somebody emerges from behind it. It is a woman. I discover to my surprise that it is my sister. I call out her name and she starts at the sound. She looks in my direction as I come out of my hiding. I wave at her and she waves back. We approach each other cautiously at first, then we race towards each other. We fly into each other's arms in an



emotional hug. I hold her back to get a good look at her. Her face has surely changed. What is the matter with her eyes? They look funny without whites in them – like two dark pits. She is smiling at me now. Only then do I notice the fangs. Too late. I feel a sharp pain as she sinks her teeth into the side of my neck. I scream and I wake up suddenly and sit upright. I am sweating profusely and my heart wants to break out of its cage. I look around the cave in alarm. My eyes meet the glittering gaze of two tiny eyes of a rat in a

dark corner of the cave. I hurl an object at it but my aim is terrible. It scuttles off into a hole. The sun is almost setting, time to cook my supper.

# SACRED LETTERS

Mary Frances Ibanda  
Uganda

The women, all at different stages of pregnancy were chatting as comfortably as only women can having just met less than an hour ago. There is something about shared plight that draws us to each other; we seem to believe that our feet can snugly fit in the other's shoes. Looking at them, a passerby would imagine they were bosom friends.

To wade off the stifling heat, some of them had casually unbuttoned their blouses or dresses and were fanning themselves with their yellow antenatal forms. At this kind of sisterhood meeting, there was no need to play at modesty.

At 8:30am, a motherly midwife took to the podium to speak to them about HIV and babies.

Matsiko's attention shifted to other things. The roof needed repairing in several spots. If it rained...whoever thought of this shed for pregnant women was smart... must have been a woman...only a woman can understand a pregnant woman's need for fresh air...interesting, most of us are seated at the back...

It is easy to tune out when one has heard the same old message in song and seen it on TV countless times. It is easy to tune out when billboards of Lifeguard condoms lining the sidewalks of the town

like street lights become an everyday sight. It is easy to tune out when you think you are safe.

'Ho! To go for that test is to court early death!' whispered one woman.

'Why?' several of the others asked.

'Trauma.'

She pointed to the three rooms on the ground floor of the building in front of them.

'That's where the world as you know it comes to an end. Inside there, you're handed your death sentence. The last time I was here, I saw some women being taken there from upstairs Soon after, their wails assailed this place like police sirens!'

Conversation ceased like a tap turned off. Camaraderie sprinted away as fast as it had come.

Matsiko had decided to take the test because it was the right thing to do.

'Collect your results from third floor, room 002,' the friendly lab tech said.

Thirty minutes later, in a room adjacent to 002, a counsellor showed her the results on her antenatal form, pointing to letters on a dotted line. 'See here? This means you're negative. Stay that way.'

Just a few letters! Nothing spectacular like a

doctor's illegible scrawl, just an abbreviation!

On her subsequent antenatal visit, while the mothers waited to be examined, they discussed money and men.

'The only time you can get a substantial amount from a man is when you're pregnant,' someone declared.

'How?' an eager young woman asked.

'The only thing they know about babies is how to make them. They don't understand pregnancy and are afraid of childbirth. Take advantage of this.'

All the women, their discomfort momentarily forgotten, leaned in to hear this ingenious money-making scheme.

'How?' the girl asked again.

'Easy. Inflate prices for pampers, baby clothes...'

'But that is wrong!' Matsiko interjected.

'Hmm, perhaps your husband is generous, mine has fingers made of super glue.'

'Tell him antenatal visits are twice a month but only come once,' she continued. 'Develop complications that require expensive drugs and regular reviews. No man wants to deal with a sick pregnant nagging woman. He will do anything. No questions asked.'

'Unless he is a doctor!' said the young girl.

The woman sitting next to Matsiko cracked up, her belly bobbing up and down like a balloon on water. As she made to support it, her antenatal form slipped from her hand and landed at Matsiko's feet, who bent down to pick it up. That is when she saw them, the other letters, the ones that were the opposite of those on her antenatal form! Abbreviations still, but of a different weight.

That was two years ago. Today, she sat on the front bench, several metres away from the sisterhood that clustered at the back of the shed.

This time around things had changed. At his funeral last week, she'd learnt that her husband had fathered three other children, all of them younger than her two year old daughter, each one of them by a different woman! The bastard! He was lucky he was dead! Wherever he was, he should thank that drunken driver who had bashed him. After she found out about his treachery, her tears were for herself and her children only. Now, those ugly letters on someone else's antenatal form threatened to pitch camp on hers as well, to hijack her life!

The same midwife from two years back, took to the podium at 8:00am.

Matsiko latched onto her every word, several times shushing the women who were whispering behind her.

'I hope you make the right decision,' the midwife concluded.

Some women fidgeted with their bags. Others became watchful, waiting for someone to set the pace.

Bolt! her legs were telling her.

But my child...

Three children by three women, what are the odds? She rose abruptly and ducked into the testing room.

The nurse swabbed her skin then pierced into the vein. Matsiko watched the crimson key to her sanity



inch into the syringe like a disease slowly consuming a limb. Hidden inside there, were the symbols that would mark her for life.

'Collect your results in thirty minutes from room 002 upstairs.'

Thirty minutes of purgatory! She dared not sit down. To sit down was to invite the thought of fleeing to take shape, to enter, to settle. Like an itch, it was tagging at the edge of her frayed mind, so she decided to walk around. At the children's ward it was vaccination day. Several little bodies were flailing wildly in their mothers arms, straining to escape the terror of the nurse's needle. She quickly turned back to flee their agonized screams.

Ten minutes to go. Time to pray.

'Our Father in heaven...Lord...'

Her mind was blank!

'Father I promise to be good. I'll just be good,' she muttered. 'I'll just be good Father...'

She trudged up the stairs, repeating her new mantra over and over .

In 002, she found several of the mothers already seated. But for the shortage of space on the benches, each of them would have preferred some degree of physical distance, to be allowed to ponder a life doomed to be shrivelled down to a few alphabetical symbols in solitude. The room was a pressure cooker about to explode. Matsiko took a seat next to a window where a fly trapped between the window netting and the glass fluttered in a mad frenzy to set itself free.

'Bring me luck,' she whispered. It was gone as soon as she opened the window.

Shortly after, a counsellor came in, called out four names, and asked the mothers to follow her into one of the adjacent rooms. The rest of the women sat up straight. Immediately after, another counsellor came in and did the same thing. Now only Matsiko and one other remained.

'We are the sick ones!' the other woman declared, abruptly standing up.

Matsiko's heart plunged into her stomach.

'Be strong,' said Matsiko with bravado that she was not feeling.

That is when a counsellor arrived to call out their names. Her face closed, her tone bland. No clues. And, was she avoiding eye contact?

'Matsiko, Acol follow me.'

She headed towards the stairs! Now she was going down!

Inside there you are handed your death sentence...

I saw some women being taken there from upstairs...

Matsiko's legs turned into jelly! Some force was moving her heavy legs along. A puppet on strings, she had lost control of her joints and was certain her bowels would follow. Her head reeled. She reached for the banister to steady herself. If only she could just sit down there on the germ-infested hospital stairs and just go limp!

When the nurse opened the door to one of the three rooms, Matsiko bent doubled over, clutching her belly as if the baby was threatening to escape.





'Jeesuus!' Acol wailed, both her hands flying to the back of her head.

'Acol, wait here on the bench, Matsiko come with me.' She strode into another room. Putting Matsiko's antenatal form on the table, she pulled a chair. Matsiko hung back in the doorway.

'Come sit down.'

The urge to steal a furtive glance over the nurses shoulders at the letters just before the pronouncement of her fate was overpowering, as if seeing them before would somehow make the facts less true.

Let it be the clean letters Father...the good ones....

Those mere symbols had now taken on a sacred significance. To steel the trembling of her hands, she clasped them together in her lap and her index finger started to mercilessly worry the hang nail on her left thumb.

'Have you ever tested for HIV?'

'Yes'

'And the results?'

'Negative.'

'You are still negative.'

Her head dropped into her hands.

'Have you ever tested for syphilis?'

'Please give me a moment.'

'Why, were so scared?'

'Hmm.'

'Uhm yes. I tested negative for Syphilis.'

'Here take your form. Stay safe.'

Matsiko managed a nod.

'Please ask Acol to come in.'

She found Acol sniffing and she motioned her to go in. No eye contact.

Matsiko briskly walked out but barely made it to the deserted shed. Sinking to the ground, she let the tears flow freely. By her feet lay the yellow antenatal form, in the corner of which sat her now favourite hallowed alphabetical symbols on a dotted line.

# LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

**Ugbede Ataboh**  
Nigeria

I have had to let go of a lot of things in life in order to heal and move on; in order to smile and be the happy thankful soul I was created to be. If you know me well, then you know how I have loved naively and lost. Overtime, I have been able to build and love my own space, but sometimes, the fear of living through life alone creeps up on me. Yes oh! I have come again with my #ManProblems. The Covid-19 pandemic has actually increased the number of “broken hearts” thanks to boredom and extra free time. Please bear with me as I recount my unpleasant episode.

Remember Kay? Yes! He came recently with a very vague proposal. The kind of proposal a guy makes when he says “Babe, give me a few months or years of your life so we can enjoy each other and in return, I will waste your time and move on when I have had enough of you”. That’s what I interpreted his proposal to

mean after professing his love for me...

“Ugbede, you are the main chick. The one I truly love...If only you’ll let me explain the type of relationship I’m in...”

“Please don’t tell me because I am not interested in knowing anything about the girl you are dating. I thought we had both moved on from all of this? Why are you back with all your drama and shenanigans?” I lament, as I feel a treacherous flicker of hope in my heart.

“I am back because I am not okay. I have not been myself since you walked me out of your room and your life. Please I need the joy and laughter you carry with you. I feel warm and happy whenever I’m with you. I love you.”

“Yes!!!” I let out an imaginary joyful shout leading to a myriad of fireworks released into the night

sky as our silhouettes merge together.

\*\*\*

I wake up the next day feeling happy but unsettled because of “the elephant in the room”. 10am, 2 days later, it lets out its trumpet call on Kay’s social media status update. My whole body, mind and soul vibrates as I view one update after another with a montage of “her” pictures and a heartfelt message - HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE LOVE OF MY LIFE, YOU DESERVE THE WORLD.

How dare he play with my emotions so carelessly? I was already getting over him until he came and crept back into my bed. In mad rage I dial his number and He picks at the first ring.

“Ugbede, I know you hate me right now but just know that I genuinely care about you so...”

“Liar!!! How dare you treat me like a side piece? I have always

treated you right. Why humiliate me in such a manner? I assumed you were going to end things with your girlfriend after we spent time together! Now listen to me clearly... from today, I am neither your neighbor, friend or romantic interest. Kay, you no longer exist in my world."

"Ugbede, please be reasonable, you and I know that we vibe in a unique way. Can't you keep me in your life? I'm sure we can find a way to figure things out with the passage of time."

"Ah! Kay! You have indeed been wicked to me. I will rather let you go and wait for my own man because this unique vibe you are talking about is trash! I will not waste my life and my time with you. Good bye!" I end the call rather dramatically.

Later that day, I ask God why my sinful soul is not content with having him as the one and true lover of my soul; and why I let my annoying need for physical companionship override my sense of good judgement every time.

Then it hits me! God is the lover of my soul and spirit but not the lover of my flesh...I am pretty sure He created a man for that



purpose.

In the absence of a sensible man, should I just have a child through artificial insemination and be content with him or her as my lifetime companion? I know a top beauty queen who delivered two beautiful twin boys through this method and seems content and happy. Ah! But Socrates has a saying- "Know thyself". The "Me" I know will still long for a man to spend my life with. I have met shitty guys but I know there are

still good men out there. There is a man for me and we will not miss each other.

Permit me to quote- "An "experienced" and kind Man is worth his weight in gold; When you find him, Pamper and nurture him for he will take care of you, blow your mind with the skills of Eros and fill your womb with his seed. He is indeed a gift from God".

P.s- This quote came straight out of my heart just in case you are



wondering if I lifted it. If you are a Radical feminist, chill out and accommodate other perspectives. Thank you.

Hmmm... my dear, it is time for me to call on God again oh! If there is a woman to pray, there is definitely a God to answer. I am confident that God will answer me because He has never turned deaf ears to my prayers and He will not start now...is He not still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who destined Rahab for Salmon and sits supreme on the throne? I truly wonder why I had to wait this long before crying out. Anyway, no need for regrets now because I am ready to move forward. So I pray in Jesus name- My dearest God Almighty, please bless me with a Kind, "skillful", Prosperous, Passionate and healthy man who will treat me like his Queen and take care of me; One who will

fertilize my womb with healthy sons- the kind of sons who will contend with our enemies at the gate and always emerge victorious according to Your word in the book of Psalms 127 & 128, amen.

Guess what? I am not the girl who gets kicked to the curb, I am "The Girl" who gets The Ring; I am "The Girl" who loves passionately and gets loved back with as much passion and more; I am "The Girl" who gets roses on Cupid Day and has her pictures splashed all over Her man's social media handles. I am a Queen and I will be treated as such. It is either I get it all or get nothing at all...and nothing is not an option for me because My father in heaven created me with hot, passionate blood flowing through my veins- this means I need a man...a sensible, kind man. I personally believe my

expectations are realistic so please do not even drop the stereotypical "She is too demanding and unrealistic" line so thunder won't fall on you from heaven's arsenal.

Let's get things straight, I will not sacrifice a lifetime of true companionship for an unknown period of shallow fleshly passions due my fear of being alone; I am not "that girl". I am "The Girl" who is ready to wait for a period of time(short I pray) in order to get a lifetime companion. A companion who may occasionally want to stray but will ditch the idea of being with another woman and choose to always reinvent and spice up our mundane life with the sweet nothings of life. I know God's plan for my life comprises of prosperity, fulfillment, victory and peace. I will not give up all of this, and more because of my occasional momentary fear of being alone...I choose to preserve my dignity as a woman by not giving myself cheaply to men with the hope that one will decide to stay and build a life with me. I choose to guard my emotional health while I wait on God to bless me with the current desire of my heart...rest assured, He will do it, so I will not fear. -Matthew 19:26-

# THE POLITICS OF FEAR

Leo Muzivoreva: THE OBSERVER  
Nigeria



**F**ear is arguably as old as life. It is deeply ingrained in the living organisms that have survived extinction through billions of years of evolution. Its roots are deep in our core psychological and biological being, and it is one of our most intimate feelings. Danger and war are as old as human history, and so are politics and religion.

Demagogues have always used fear for intimidation of the subordinates or enemies, and shepherding the tribe by the leaders. Fear is a very strong tool that can blur humans' logic and change their behaviour.

Like other animals, we humans can learn fear from experience, such as being attacked by a

predator. We also learn from observation, such as witnessing a predator attacking another human. And, we learn by instructions, such as being told there is a predator nearby.

Learning from our conspecifics (members of the same species) is an evolutionary advantage that has prevented us from repeating



dangerous experiences of other humans. We have a tendency to trust our tribe mates and authorities, especially when it comes to danger. It is adaptive; parents and wise old men told us not to eat a special plant, or not to go to an area in the woods, or we would be hurt. By trusting them, we would not die like a great-grandfather who died eating that plant. This way we accumulated knowledge.

Tribalism has been an inherent part of the human history. There has always been competition between groups of humans in different ways and with different faces, from brutal wartime nationalism to a strong loyalty to a football team. Evidence from cultural neuroscience shows that our brains even respond differently at an unconscious level simply to the view of faces from other races or cultures.

At a tribal level, people are more emotional and consequently less logical; fans of both teams pray for their team to win, hoping God will take sides in a game. On the other hand, we regress to tribalism when afraid. This is an evolutionary advantage that would lead to the group cohesion

and help us fight the other tribes to survive.

Tribalism is the biological loophole that many politicians have banked on for a long time: tapping into our fears and tribal instincts. Some examples are Nazism, the Ku Klux Klan, religious wars and the Dark Ages. The typical pattern is to give the other humans a different label than us, and say they are going to harm us or our resources, and to turn the other group into a concept. It does not necessarily have to be race or nationality, which are used very often. It can be any real or imaginary difference: liberals vs conservatives, Middle Easterners vs white men, the right vs the left, Muslims vs Jews vs Christians vs Sikhs. The list goes on and on.

When building tribal boundaries between “us” and “them,” some politicians have managed very well to create virtual groups of people that do not communicate and hate without even knowing each other: this is the human animal in action!

During the first year after my arrival in Cape Town, South Africa, one night I entered a public

parking lot to turn around. People were leaving a building in Orthodox Muslim dress; it was a mosque. For a short second, I noticed a subtle, weird but familiar feeling: fear!

I tried to trace the source of this fear, and here it was: my home country is almost all Christian, and the few Muslim people are looked at with judgement, almost resentment. We grew up hearing funny but scary stories of Muslim priests whom people visited when thieves broke into their houses. The thieves, in these stories, all developed funny stuff on their bodies such as goat horns and some would turn into cows.

Having come from a well-educated family that respects all religions and being, and having some Muslim friends at school, I felt embarrassed that still the child within had taken those obviously false stories a bit seriously, only because that child had never met a Muslim.

This human tendency is meat to the politicians who want to exploit fear. If you grew up only around people who look like you, only listened to one media outlet and heard from the old uncle that



those who look or think differently hate you and are dangerous, the inherent fear and hatred toward those unseen people is an understandable (but flawed) result.

To win us, politicians, sometimes with the media's help, do their best to keep us separated, to keep the real or imaginary "others" just a "concept." Because if we spend time with others, talk to them and eat with them, we will learn that they are like us: humans with all the strengths and weaknesses that we possess. Some are strong, some are weak, some are funny, some are dumb, some are nice and some not too nice.

Politicians and the media very often use fear to circumvent our logic. Looking at the U.S. media,

one would think they are disaster pornographers – they work hard on triggering their audiences' emotions. They are kind of political reality shows, surprising to anyone from outside the U.S. When one person kills a few others in a city of millions, which is of course a tragedy, major networks' coverage could lead one to perceive the whole city is under siege and unsafe. If one undocumented illegal immigrant murders a U.S. citizen, some politicians use fear with the hope that few will ask: 'This is terrible, but how many people were murdered in this country by U.S. citizens just today?' Or 'I know several murders happen every week in this town, but why am I so scared now that this one is being showcased by the media?' We do not ask these questions, because

fear bypasses logic.

The same narrative is also evident in Africa. Revolutionary party governments embark on reigns of terror particularly during election times harassing and beating up people who are accused of supporting opposition parties. The electorate will obviously tilt in their favour as the people are scared.

There is a reason that the response to fear is called the "fight or flight" response. That response has helped people survive the predators and other tribes that have wanted to kill them. But again, it is another loophole in human biology to be abused. By scaring people, the demagogues turn their aggression toward "the others," whether in the form of vandalizing their mosques or harassing them on social media.

When demagogues manage to get hold of people's fear circuitry, they often regress to illogical, tribal and aggressive human animals, becoming weapons ourselves – weapons that politicians use for their own agenda.



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# BABU

**Hellen Owuor**  
Kenya

**B**abu was always wetting the bed and then he would blame his younger brother for it. As the eldest, their parents took his word for it. He was 12 while his brother Kabu was only 9. Every morning you would hear Babu quarreling his little brother on why he wet the bed. Being meek, the brother would reply that he wouldn't do it again. The cycle went on and on until one day, their parents decided that each boy would get his own bed.

"Mama Babu, I will make a bed for one of the boys so that each can sleep on their own. I am sick and tired of all that arguing," Babu's father told his wife.

"I agree with that, we should have thought about it a long time ago,"

Babu was scared, he was going to be discovered! He was a big boy and big boys don't wet the bed. He had to think of something. The following morning, he wet the bed as usual and still insisted that it was Kabu's fault. He however, did not quarrel him. He just told him that it was okay. Everyone was amused at this new behaviour. The new bed was brought on that same day.

Once alone in their room, Babu told Kabu a very scary story and cunningly invited him to sleep on his bed. Kabu accepted and when morning came, the quarreling began.

"I will never invite you to my bed again, look at what you have done!" Babu shouted at the top of his voice.

Kabu walked away silently and went into the kitchen where he found his mother preparing breakfast. He told her how he ended up sleeping with Babu. Their mother sensed foul play but did not say anything to Kabu.

During the day, Babu bragged about having his own bed, he knew that most of his friends shared a bed with their siblings.

That night, their mother told them a bedtime story and after they slept, she slowly went back to her room. Babu had been pretending to be asleep and crept out of his bed into Kabu's as soon as their mother was out. Sometime around midnight, their mother came back to check on them. Babu's bed was empty! She carried Kabu into Babu's bed and left Babu on Kabu's bed. In the morning, the truth would come out.

Babu woke up very early and on a wet bed. He searched everywhere for Kabu and finally spotted him on his bed. He was furious! He quickly removed the wet clothes and put on clean ones. He knew that he had been found out. During breakfast, he was very quiet and his parents knew why. They sent Kabu out to play as they wanted to speak to Babu.

# KANTO AND THE BEAST

Grace Tendo Katana  
Uganda



**K**anto breathed and panted like a dog then stood up to go. He got his toy car and walked away quickly. Up the hill he climbed trying to get away from him. In his senses, he thought that he would reach home where he would get rest and at least be at ease from his nightmare. His legs grew weary but he had to go faster. Kanto just didn't know why the man was following him. He turned to face him and warn him.

"Please, Mr, I ask you for the last time. Stop following me!" Kanto said looking serious.

The man didn't say a word and when he raised his little hand to hit the man, the man also raised his hand. This made Kanto confused, he panicked and began to sweat profusely like someone had poured a bucket of water on him. Whatever move he tried out, the man also did that exact thing and continued to follow him closely. Kanto then decided to walk as fast as his small legs could carry him without looking behind.

He only glanced behind to see how far the beastly man was! At least that was what he thought since he had read a story about a man who was very huge, very dark and looked fierce and was always on the lookout for children who were left alone or

those who played far from their homes. He prayed that this wasn't the man that he had read about.

He got home after a while and screamed out for help,

"Mama...mama...please help!" He shouted.

His mother rushed to him.

"Why are you shouting like you have seen a ghost?"

His mother asked

"Mama, that man has been following me all along."

Kanto said panting and pointing to the dark man.

"What?" His mother scoffed, "It is only your shadow, you silly boy!"

"Huh!" Kanto said looking over his shoulder. "Mama, are you sure?"

"Yes, my son." his mother said. "You know what, I have always told you not to play too far from home. And look what scared you! From today onward, if you ever go far from there" she she said pointing to the jackfruit tree in the compound, "I will have to punish you."

From that day onward, Kanto learnt to never play far from home. He even decided to invite his friends from nearby such that they played together near home.

# NOSI THE FIG TREE

Benita P. Magopane  
Botswana



**A** long time ago, in the land of Bechuanaland, when fig fruits were still popular, there was a beautiful orchard of fig trees. It belonged to a rich young master named Osi, and he loved it dearly. His were the sweetest figs that even Kings and Princesses would come to buy. They were his source of wealth. In those times, whenever a tree would reach maturity or fruit-bearing stage, it would gain the ability to walk and

talk. However, no human being was to ever find out, for even on account of one tree discovered, regardless of its type, a great curse would come upon all trees. They would lose the ability to walk and talk, therefore, they all lived under strict rules and the constant guard of their caretaker birds. Well...not all complied.

“Nosi!” Kidi, an elderly fig tree thundered. She'd caught Nosi, a sly young fig tree sneaking into the orchard at night. “What did I say last time?”

“That you'll loosen up and stop being such a bore.” Nosi grinned and Mabobo her Green Twinspot caretaker bird, hid her face with her feathers.

“Obedience is fear, try not to forget that next time.” At that, Kidi walked into the orchard with Lefofa, her owl caretaker bird frowning at Nosi.

“What does that even mean?” Nosi mumbled.

“If I tell you, will you listen?” Mabobo asked, “Because I know you'll hear me, but will you listen?” Nosi rolled her eyes. “You never listen!” the bird thundered. “Did you listen when I told you not to leave the orchard because it's almost fruit-bearing season and ALL trees need to stay put? No! No, no!” Mabobo flew away frustrated.

Nosi returned to her position frustrated too

Mabobo didn't understand. She couldn't stay put. She had to find that secret well of life. And the strange bird that had told her of it said it was in the city of Moseja. Nosi was the most beautiful tree ever, birds of the sky sang of her beauty, and even the young master worshipped her. She feared losing that adoration, the winter season that would rip her naked of her leaves and her chirpy friends too. She feared that maybe someday her leaves wouldn't grow beautifully back and she'd be as ugly as the other trees. What would become of her feathered friends and master's love then? She would find that well of life and drink of its water, then she'd be eternally evergreen and beautiful.

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In those days was also a great man in the land, who performed astonishing signs among the people of Bechuanaland. And Osi, searching for answers on how he could live forever and not die, visited him. Instructed to give up his possessions and follow him, Osi left and went away downhearted. He feared losing his treasured possessions.

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One night after tree pruning, Nosi snuck out and left for Moseja. Mabobo's echoing yells after her died slowly as she scurried into the nightfall. Upon arrival, she searched and searched fruitlessly. She searched desperately till daybreak such that she was not mindful of a poor Oldman who'd seen her. Exhausted, she rested by the wayside, thinking to herself to continue later again. But that morning while she slept, the great man, with his friends, happened to pass by hungry. And seeing Nosi, he went up to her in search of figs, but finding none, he cursed her saying,



"May no fruit ever come from you again!" And at that, Nosi withered. Forever.

Her greatest fear had come upon her. For many days, birds sang lamentations over her, and because she'd been discovered, all trees, in all the earth lost their ability to walk and talk. Fig trees couldn't be as fruitful as before and even lost popularity. Therefore, Osi lost business.

"Are you ready to listen now?" said Mabobo as she rested on Nosi's bare branch.

Nosi finally understood. Obedience is fear, meaning respect. She'd feared selfishly for herself that she'd failed to fear instructions.

# FEAR

Christiana Agboni  
Nigeria

“Why are you sweating?” I asked my younger sister, Rose, with rising panic in my voice.

“What if it comes here, Lily?” she asked me, her eyes so huge in her face I was afraid they would pop out of their sockets.

Uneasiness was beginning to creep into my throat and my heart felt heavy.

Everything about Rose was infectious and I was fast contacting her fear about the stupid far away virus. I could taste bile in the pit of my stomach.

The day we heard that it had gotten into the country, my mother's breath turned ragged and harsh. Instantly, I turned into a nervous wreck. I trembled with

cold from within. I wrapped my arms around myself and rocked my body from side to side to wade off unseen chills. I was instantly cloaked with dread. I literally felt



my blood pressure skyrocketing and my glucose clinking as it dropped to an abnormal rate.

Nightmares serenaded my sleep; my body broke out in hives riddled with stone cold goosebumps. Staying put was not helping but going out was murder. My throat was always dry and my hands clammy and cold.

This was torture—this elevating primal fear that had forever logged in my chest swamped by rushing bile and weakened muscle. I have been frozen in

place looking helplessly as the numbers increase, watching it steadily making its way to me, to us.

My heart lurched at the slightest thing. It was unnerving. We followed the safety rituals to the T. My palms were

now tender and white, and the slightest spot on my face turned my skin ashen grey.

I cringed and waited for the inevitable while my mind played a sickening game with me; will it come? Lily, you've got it already.

# HOME ALONE

**Juliana Sam**  
Nigeria



**T**hat cold moonless night is one you can never forget. creaked slowly and you whimpered, 'who is that?'

Your parents had travelled for a meeting leaving you alone at home. The crickets had increased their cacophony and you strained your eyes but could only see a dim image with dark eyes.

Around 8:40pm, the Power Holding Company interrupted the electricity and darkness filled the room. Your heartbeat had already tripled and sweat broke out from your forehead.

The symphony of chirping crickets and croaking frogs were the only sound in your room as you dozed off to sleep. You felt pressed and before you knew it, liquid droppings had messed your bed.

As the night darkened, your door As you reached out for your flashlight which was on the table,

a cold hand grabbed you and you shrieked in horror.

'Help!,' you screamed but your voice echoed in the room.

And suddenly you felt a sharp object near your neck, 'shhh' the masculine and deep voice whispered to you.

You felt as if your heart was ripped from you as it raced faster than a horse and it's rider.

Will he rape you?

Will he kill you?

Will he rob you?

All these filled your mind and miraculously light flooded the room.

Staring at the intruder whose knife glinted in your eyes, you passed out in shock.





# THE MONSTER

Ogechukwu Peace Egwuatu  
Nigeria



**M**y heart beat rapidly. I wasn't sure what was going on, what I was hearing. I could hear heavy breathing but with my heart pounding in my ears, I couldn't tell if it was mine or if the monster had finally found me.

"Why, there you are," a voice so soft I was surprised I could hear it amidst the pounding in my ears froze me, it's iciness spreading a chill through my body. It had found me and it would take me far

away. I would never return. The thought of this made me tremble.

"Now don't be afraid," the icy silk voice continued. "Let us go," it said picking me up. I screamed. "Chioma, Chioma," the voice of my sister Nnenna pierced through my scream.

I open my eyes to see wide brown tear-filled eyes staring at me. I breathe a sigh of relief. It hadn't taken me away. The beep of the machines remind me that I am in

the hospital. "It wanted to take me away," I choke out as soon as I catch my breath enough to speak.

A tear spills from her eyes. "It... it won't. I won't let... let it," she stutters. I eye her doubtfully. "You won't die, Chioma. I promise," she tries again.

I wish I could believe her but the stark fear in her eyes won't let me.



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# FEAR

**Katsala Joseph**  
Malawi

I know you, yet i don't  
I want you gone, yet you won't  
I've seen you, yet you're unreal  
Is there a cure for what i feel?

Driving me through uncertainty  
Between dread and anxiety  
Illusion yet real  
Some unsettling chill

Without you there is no fall  
Without you I could soar  
While crossing the wild sea  
Life's breeze beneath me

To Walk with grace and poise  
Facing you is the only choice  
I'm yet to defy thee  
Of courage I shall be

---

# A CODED CAVE

**Eunice (Shera) Muthoni**  
Kenya

She looks into the mirror,  
Her oversized bed stares back at her  
Her box of jewelry too,  
Her closet of shoes in the far end, not left  
behind,  
The only true witnesses to her wounds,  
Wounds healing underneath her concealer,  
And priceless gown.

Her two years in nursing school pay off,  
He hit her cheekbone well this time,  
But it doesn't hurt anymore,  
It feels familiar even,  
The warrior, lest they see under her face  
The smile, rehearsed to perfection, a blind man  
will follow.  
The blood, a cheap price for her place in  
society,  
The woman who holds his hand in public.  
The hand in private, that will turn on her so  
hard her world spins.

The cost of speaking out? Her witnesses. Too  
expensive.  
And that of friends? A slap or two.  
So she bravely retreats into her coded cave,  
Holds on to his hand a little tighter,  
"It is all you got," Fear whispers.

# AHWENEPAN NKASA

Asamoah S.  
Ghana



Silence is a bang—  
my ears bleed like a hole guns make.

A clock is dead for ticking  
The time keepers keep day and night still.

Every word is blood from my slit throat—  
kind I wear plenty concealer to decorate.

Mother's tongue drags a wet piece of shore up a  
ladder  
through a door that opens into a hole guns make.

My grandmother's womanhood is a silent shot on  
a coast.  
It strays into mother— I'm never born.

In a true story, a girl is taken  
and her tongue circumcised. with a manhood.

Today, out the windowsill,  
Two crows tells me of revolution

Yet, here in my corner room,  
It's still yesterday like dust chatter in air.

When grandmother was taken for DTP,  
I did not mourn,  
I was not born.

# BAD OLD FRIEND

(A SONG OF WOE)

Chunke Anasthasia Mbarmi  
Cameroon



Forth, he surged from hades' shore  
Frail, haggard and starved to core  
Flaunting, undaunted, a ghostly visage  
Far hideous in figure, even wilder in rage  
Fear became earth's only sage

For ages he's prowled through encumbered  
hearts  
Fending off buds of valor with poisoned dart  
Frenzied to halt man's courageous leap  
Freely he sows, more patient to reap  
Frozen nectar, sweetest, to sip

Fiendish to man and all his ends,  
Fire holds less wit than this hades' friend  
Foolish we string up in his queue of shame  
Fighting within with naught but us to blame  
Fortunate however, for fear's fleeting fame

Fear became earths only sage  
Even while we watched on enraged  
Anchored in hearts as old adage,  
Rigor beguiles us to rise from the cage

---

# DO NOT ASK ME

**Ruth Ongaga**  
Kenya

Do not ask me to sleep alone,  
I beg of you  
There is a ghost in the dark  
And it seeks to have my blood.

Do not ask me to stay awake alone  
For my skeletons haunt me  
Reminding me of my misdeeds,  
And making me regret bitterly.

Do not ask me to walk alone,  
Please, I beg of you  
There are voices in the wind  
And they tell me I should die.

Do not ask me to sit alone  
For there are images in my head  
That only a warrior can bear  
And I am no warrior.

Do not ask me to sleep alone  
Lest I run away from myself.

---

# AWAKE AT NIGHT

**Faith Chepchumba**  
Kenya

The night drags on  
As I stay up staring  
With the cold biting my skin  
And the silence deep

As I stay up staring  
My mind is in turmoil  
And the silence deep  
With my chest feeling heavy

My mind is in turmoil  
I am afraid to go to sleep  
With my chest feeling heavy  
For I may sleep and not wake up

Afraid to go to sleep  
I stay up wide eyed  
For I may sleep and not wake up  
As the night drags on

---

# FEAR

**Jide Badmus**  
Nigeria

The eloquent grope in  
the dark of incoherence  
like fidgeting statues.

the wind shivers,  
pavements break  
into sweat &  
heartbeats crawl  
like furious waterfalls




---

# CALLS FROM THE HINTERLAND

**Popoola Damilare**  
Nigeria

The whispers of fear is akin to calls from the hinterland  
Vague, eerie, desolate and dark  
When you lend them your ears, you forget who you are  
What's not yours becomes yours  
You chase freedom though you possess it  
You pine for hope when you need none

I'm River; that's what my mother — who is Nature — christened me  
And I should flow; forgetting my past glories  
Renewing myself as I listen to the voice within  
As I teem with flora and fauna

But I hear these calls from the hinterland:  
I ripple when teased by a pebble; creating circles that wind into  
oblivion  
And when I get the chance to hop on a storm, I get frivolous  
I throw myself in the air if perhaps I could fly like a sparrow  
In those moments, I forget I was born to flow  
Till mother calls my name and clears my uncertainties

Perhaps I need to hear these calls sometimes  
As they amplify my vanities and uncertainties  
They hold me down so I could see what lies ahead  
They give me a chance to hear mother call my name  
But I fear that someday, my ears would no longer hearken to  
mother's call  
Therefore, even though I constantly hear calls from the hinterland  
I rise daily at dawn only to listen to mother call my name.

---

# IN DARK WE REST

**Zerida B Claire**  
Uganda

Things I never understood, I appreciated.  
Abandoned mansions!  
With ghosts, blood scars on walls,  
Broken pale bath-tubs, cracked floors, Silence!

They tell deep stories  
Peeling walls, dark corridors  
Faded rugs hold lost feet  
Thoughts and teardrops conceived in worn-out  
sheets  
Scattered books- lost souls return to search  
themselves  
Through the shelves and pages

In the dark... my crooked ray of light lives  
Life's dark. Light, an illusion.  
In dark we rest. No way of breaking free.  
If we appreciate our pale, we ease the pain

---

# FEAR NOT

**Nnane Ntube**  
Cameroon

Ah! When shadows  
Crawl down the dark bushy road,  
Rasps of breath wince,  
Ignited pulse  
Mounts: faster, faster,  
Over and over again,  
Needling pores  
Yawping for sweat.

Fear dying for fear: flight,  
Eyes glassy with eerie,  
Anxiety? Addled?  
Relax! Don't run!

Numb not!  
Outsmart it!  
To fear, you're the foe.

Fear is an angry ghost, an  
Enemy to watch out for,  
A hacker to keep out of reach.  
Ruin its plans and stay strong.

# CAN WE?

Henry Nuwamanya  
Uganda

Can we not shudder in tears?  
When the gullible are becoming a mess?  
When the ashy and edgy are less curvy?  
When the "thieves" are smiling at a glance?  
With our little give-aways in their dirty pockets?  
Like notable criminals?  
When our "starve" is their fortune?

Can we not fumble in fear  
When the whole world is frozen?  
Leaders stuck malignantly with thoughts?  
When "us" and "them" are, but miles apart?  
When the "religious" are hiding and the "scientific"  
are grappling with resumes?

Are we not, but the experiments?  
The experiments of hunger and despair?  
Standing in the face of the moody vultures,  
Ready to strangle and divulge  
On our faith and hope?

Aren't we the needy?  
Is this coming to an end?  
Can we rather breed  
the last humanity in our pockets?  
Can we rather not hide our cries and hunger?

# GENITAL TALE

Nzere Chinedu  
Nigeria



it creeps in on me like the paws of my deranged  
uncle  
peeping beneath my purple coloured skirt  
making way for his rage  
leaving lethal patches on my fragile heart  
reminding me that my mother was bought for a  
token  
on a market day  
it reminds me of how Rinji was shot at close  
range  
by trigger-happy uniform boys  
that night, Abuja slept in whispers  
it reminds me of how papa died  
on his death bed he said; Ada, the world is a  
horror thriller  
read only under the watch of the sun  
for the moon steals your voice with it's stigma  
if i die in this poem  
will you bury me in the words of my ex?  
will you teach me the tricks of loneliness?  
or will i become another genital tale on the  
pages of the newspapers?



---

# I KNOW A FRIEND

**Adedamola Adedayo (Jones Phoenix)**  
Nigeria

I know a friend who sits by the riverside of tears  
To develop lyrics from the noise of silence  
Whenever the track of a night is remixed in the records  
of time  
Then her fate begs for that night to be devalued too soon  
So that morning may profit in its trade of hope

I know that the heart of my dear friend  
Expels the aroma of derision  
Because it has become a dumping site for leftovers of  
fears  
Manufactured by an industry of adrenaline  
In response to the promising dosages of a stepfather's  
semen

Although my friend's clouds may be remote colonies  
Under the aegis of a discourteous sky  
I know they will, someday, find their voices  
In an emancipation of downpour

Dear friend, do not think that only the howling owl  
Brings you empathy amidst the fears you laud  
Whenever your eyes are drowned in the candled  
darkness  
And the irony of a sequel waters your dreams  
But I am also a composer of songs that feature mild  
hopes  
From the studio of dwindling fears

---

# Y.O.L.O.

**Temani Nkalolang**  
Botswana

What will people say?  
It's a chain of bondage!  
It's a high price to pay.  
Living life like a used bandage.

It's a chain of bondage,  
Living life in fear.  
Living life like a used bandage,  
Isn't it too much to bear?

Living life in fear;  
A life not worth remembering.  
Is it not too much to bear?  
Live life and stop wondering.

A life not worth remembering?  
It is a high price to pay.  
Live life and stop wondering  
What people will say.

---

# HELLO FEAR

**Himi Asulu**  
Nigeria

I'm not talking as a friend  
For you are only a counterfeit  
A liar to a truth

You block doors to entrances  
A shade to the light  
Obstructing, blinding  
You are mud on a path

How I wish I never knew you  
Cause the virus you infected me with, has been  
loads of regret  
Killing so fast the courage inside of me

I want a change  
I have been sick of hiding in my shell  
I want to stand the crowd..

---

# JAILBIRD

**Geno Mercy Apachi**  
Uganda



I want to write a political poem

One that shall march down the aisles of history like  
a bride and groom  
A petition that the optimistic citizens shall ride all  
night like a witch's broom  
A gift that shall be Uganda's heirloom

'Bazukulu' shall adopt it with new rhyme and rhythm  
For its syllables of justice shall be as clear as prism

But every hour my ink starts to threaten  
I hear the song of the jailbird and I hearken

Sell thy ears to me blooming writer

I once swirled the truth at my finger-tip  
Voiced my heart out at the weekly Stand-up

Paid my dues from the audience's standing ovation  
Fed from the empty tables of the pleased opposition

Stripped my "Kitenge" and bore my feminine chest  
to chauvinism  
Published my chapters and name with utmost  
professionalism

Yet here I sit crooning deuces to the wind  
My wisdom and truth mercilessly cuffed

Sell thy ears to me blooming writer  
Bake your cake in the oven of venom  
But save it for the winter you can never fathom

# TRASH IT

**Oluwasina Gbemisola (ElegantInk)**  
Nigeria

We face it, right from childhood.  
Some were scared of heights; others of the dark.  
It's a wonder if it does us any good.  
Perhaps, it blesses us with the restraint we lack!

But, it has also crippled many  
And limited the expression of the best  
That quietly resides in men.  
Fear could be seen as a test

Of our determination to go through  
With whatever we want to be.  
It's a subtle referee; informing us too  
That we can be more than we see.

The best way to deal with it  
Is to look it undauntedly in the eye  
And, fully armed with grit,  
Reach, rise and soar really high!

Let your fear fear you!  
It can't get any realer than you let it!  
It's limiting and frustrating, too.  
Do well to trash it in a pit!

# FEAR

**Carol Nderitu**  
Kenya

I don't know how to chew at the table, I'm afraid,  
"Close your mouth when you eat!" she shouts,  
I am only five, breaking down, and sad,  
"Don't act like a child, you brat!" she scolds,  
Since dad left my spirit died,  
"You are just like that useless man!" she retorts,  
Since the separation, I stutter and wet my bed,  
"Shut your beak and go clean yourself!" she yells,  
My grades suffer because I barely read,  
"You will never amount to anything you stupid!" she screams,  
I struggle moving her heavy body when she is intoxicated,  
"Hold me up!" she shrieks  
I'm afraid of my mum, she is always mad,  
"You'll be a mum soon," she whispers.

---

# THIS THING CALLED FEAR

**Abigail-Tydale Bassey**  
Nigeria

This thing  
called fear  
is as fiery as Hell;  
burns strength to weakness  
and grinds confidence to tears,  
wears the aura of a home  
but nurtures one to death.

This thing  
called fear  
is deadlier than death;  
dresses like a manager  
but smells like a toll,  
its face is hid  
yet it preys for souls.

This thing  
called fear,  
is a license to failure.

So ladies and gents,  
be like the good old man  
who walks away in the dark  
with a pipe  
and a half drunk bottle of whiskey\_  
watch fear amazed  
how you do not care at all.

---

# THE NIGHT RACE

**Nwobi Chidubem Valentine**  
Nigeria

On a moonless night,  
My heart raced  
My feet grew cold and weary.  
I jumped mountains,  
And flew across oceans.  
I ran faster than an antelope  
My speed was in meter/second  
My shadow pursued me like a hen,  
Whose chick was stolen  
When i ran out of breath  
And was ready to accept my fate  
Only then did i realize,  
That fear had created an illusion  
And had set me up on a race

---

**GENRE: SHORT STORY**

**TITLE: THE DANCE OF SELF LOVE**

**WRITER: NDANU JACQUELINE, KENYA**

**REVIEWER: FUNMI RICHARDS, NIGERIA**

**T**he title 'The Dance of Self Love' tells a story of learning a dance, failing and trying again to perfect the steps, then, learning that perfection is not in the dance but the practice of it.

The title, itself, is its own story but when merged with the story beneath it, it becomes a world of its own. A personal world that is unique to the storyteller.

When the writer begins, she begins by creating an atmosphere where this world is meant to exist. Then, she proceeds to describe the motions behind the dance – transitions, phases if you could call it that, all of which she likens to war within self (introspective in other words). This build-up follows through with a conclusion that self-realization, self-love as it were, comes with its perks.

However, the reader experiences a slight disconnection within the story because there is a not so tight delivery of events, and some inappropriate use of articles, collocates, determiners, and prepositions in some sentences:

“Another play spot – another spot to play

Breaking into dance once more – breaking into a dance once more.

Loomed on my head – loomed over my head

I can't help but pride – I can't help but take pride”

All in all, the setting is backdrop as it does not directly affect/influence the story, the imagery captured in the progression of the story is descriptive so that it creates a picture that allows the reader connect to the allusion and relate to the verisimilitude and transition of the story's character.

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GENRE: COLUMNS

TITLE: LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

WRITER: UGBEDE ATABOH, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: COLIN STANLEY KARIMI. (THE\_POWERHOUSE), KENYA

**T**his episode of 'Life as We Know It' is raw unlike previous ones. It is large enough to incorporate the Nigerian government and also its citizens. With the ongoing pandemic, the article shows the rot in morality in the country in the sense of service delivery and patriotism of the Nigerian person. This episode is more alive as the writer, Ugbede, acts in utmost regard by purchasing a mask from a local chemist. Nonetheless, despite the rot in the Nigerian government, it is evident that Ugbede Ataboh is a staunch Christian.

The article further reveals the writer conversing with the attendant at the chemist. It is clear that the writer is cheerful with her environment, as it would be casual behavior for any sick individual seeking assistance in a medical facility. However, disappointment crawls in as even the attendant is showing signs of weariness primarily because of the crippling Covid-19. More to this, another attendant described as a chubby and middle-aged man in a lab coat appears and rudely interrupts the conversation between the two. He at first notices the trendy hairstyle rocked by the writer, and goes to an extent of asking her gender. This rubs the writer the wrong way but she decides to be the bigger person and ignores. She continues to ask for the mask from the first attendant. The price is ridiculously high and pushes the writer into a quick spasm of anger having realized one goes for five hundred naira. This sets off a series of questions on what the Nigerian government did with fifteen billion naira collected from well-wishers. Having reached such a point, one ponders on the functioning of the government structures put in place to protect its citizens from the deadly virus. More questions arise as to the competence of the elected leaders in their various positions.

Nigerian culture presents itself as it highlights the poverty level amongst the larger population of the nation. With hunger pangs likely to nub even the wealthy, one would realise vanity is around the corner, and learn to appreciate the true values of being African; sharing and assisting each other to reach our goals straight. Maybe this pandemic should be an eye-opener for us Africans to unite and share our wealth and resources with other great nations. As a reviewer, I also look forward to the end of Covid-19, and maybe a much more considerate African leadership.



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**GENRE: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

**TITLE: FINUM GOES TO THE VILLAGE**

**WRITER: NAMSE UDOSEN, NIGERIA**

**REVIEWER: NGALIM JUSLINE VEEYEENYUY, CAMEROON**

**F**inum Goes to the Village is a fable or an apologue that describes the life led by goats in a farm. The main character is Finum. The story opens in a farm in Kaduna owned by Mr Asake. Finum is introduced and is said to live in a big room unlike other goats that live in the open space. Mr Asake takes good care of Finum, obviously one of the reasons he sends him to the village as his father's birthday gift. An act Finum interprets as betrayal and he fears he is surely going to be killed.

Finum is taken to a strange village where life is completely different from the one he left in Kaduna. While there, he first attempts to escape but falls into the hands of a great companion called Big Brown Bororo. He discourages him, saying that escaping is dangerous for some have attempted and died or gotten lost. Big Brown Bororo also teaches him on the kinds of leaves to eat and when to eat them.

Life in the village farm is completely different from life in the Kaduna farm. They are served with sweet leaves in the farm in Kaduna while in the village farm you just have to select from the many types which are edible. Also, in Kaduna, once it is evening the master leads the goats home, but in the village farm, Big Brown Bororo informs Finum that they follow the yellow ball to know the time to go home.

Big Brown Bororo leads the other goats home, and each group stops at their compound as they arrive their destination, typical of life in a rural setting by kids from different homes or even adults after carrying out daily activities together and it's time to get back home. As they arrive home, an old man ties a red cloth round Finum's neck which marks his initiation as Big Brown Bororo says: "you are now one of us."

Namse's apologue is quite interesting and good for children. They will enjoy reading or being told the life led by goats in the farm which behave exactly like humans in their daily activities. Not only do the goats talk, they eat, walk, and do other activities daily like humans. The magazine's theme of transition (becoming), is quite glaring in the story through Finum our major character, as he changes environment, lifestyle and becomes member to a different family.

Themes such as, transition, membership, companionship, love, fears are vivid in the story.

The contrasting setting lends credibility to the story and provokes reality.

There are also moral lessons: kids can learn to adapt in any environment and in any conditions.

Kids can also learn to be one another's keeper through the relationship between Finum and Big Brown Bororo, the differences between city life and village life; these and many others abound in the fable.

Namse's apologue is quite interesting and relatable and reminds of me George Orwell's Animal Farm read at a surface level.

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GENRE: POETRY

TITLE: BREAKING FORTH

WRITER: TEMANI NKALOLANG, BOTSWANA

REVIEWER: OMADANG YOWASI, UGANDA

**T**he Biblical paradox, "a seed grows unless it dies" has left many believers confused as to why one would die and live, forgetting that Jesus died and continues to live. Death brings about resurrection! Let me not preach...

The poem BREAKING FORTH by a Motswana poetess Temani Nkalolang is written in a traditional haiku form. It is metered as 5-7-5.

Line one has five syllables, line two has seven syllables and line three has five.

In this haiku, the poet clearly uses a natural image (seed) to tackle the theme of Transition (Becoming). She figuratively "kills" the seed to germinate into a seedling thereby giving life to a hitherto "dead" seed.

This haiku brings to reality the truth about reincarnation. In order for the old to come back to life, they must die and their names be given. This brings out the themes of death and reincarnation.

The poet uses concrete imagery; "seed, ground, root, and wheel" all to create a visual image with significance and relevance.

Understatement is also well employed in line one. "A seed in the ground." It's not in the ground by mistake or chance but it's "buried in the soil" so that it grows with favourable conditions.

The "wheel" in line three symbolises continuity of movement/life. Life has to go on as long as change is still part of the equation for man's existence.

The diction is appropriate. The tone is formal.



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