



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Magazine
JANUARY 2023 / ISSUE 73



Meet
**TESTIMONY
ODEY**

African Teen Writers
Award Winner

**Into The
Light**

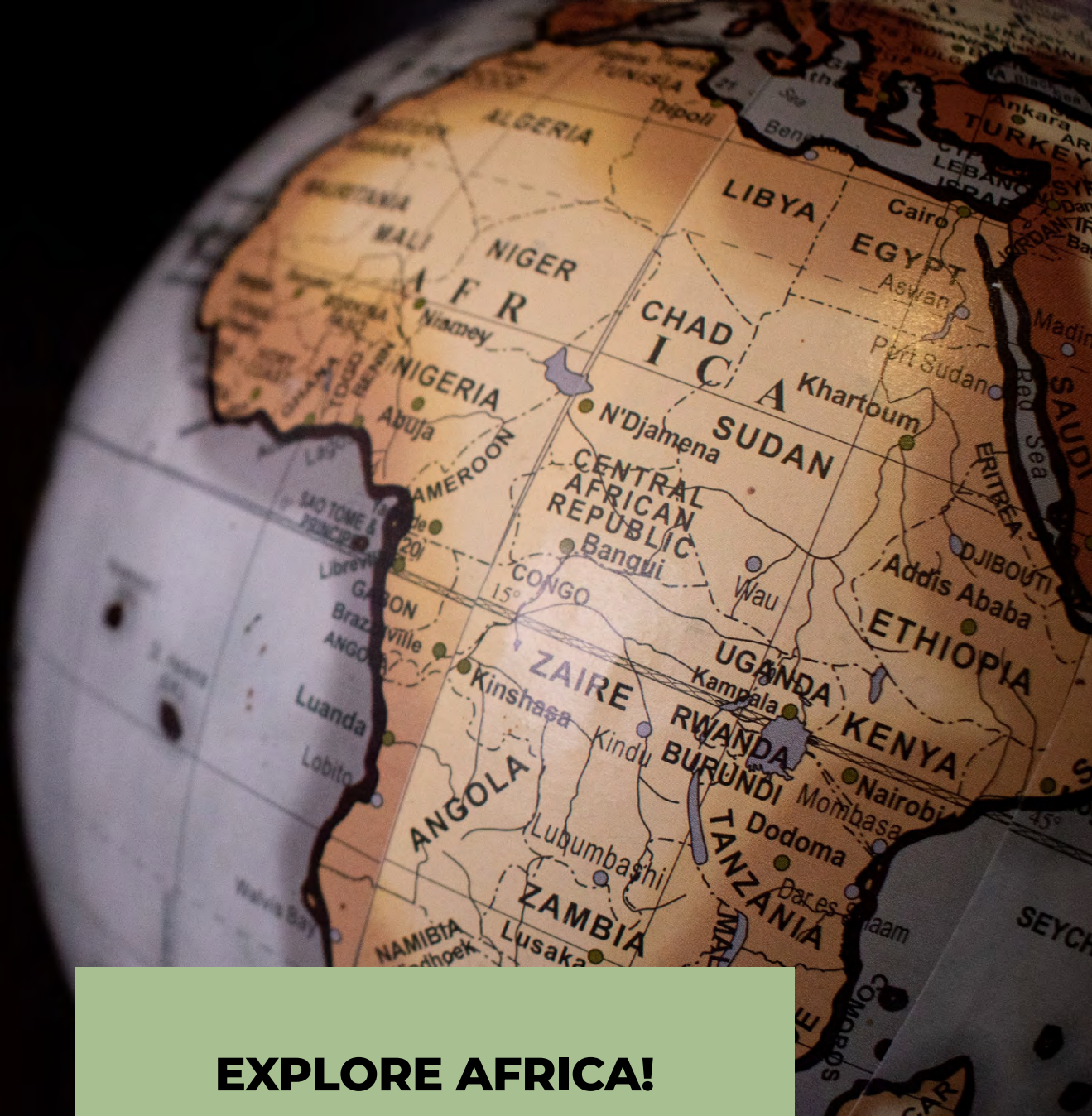
Privilege M Chisumbu
Zimbabwe

**Nounou and His
Eternal Companion**

Ouday Prakash
Mauritius

**African Cranes
in the Shadows**

Patricia Furstenberg
South Africa



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M a g a z i n e

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Welcome

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

— Nelson Mandela

The first day of the year is perhaps the day that we attempt to build castles on quicksand by making resolutions that we are not prepared to keep. For example; we tell ourselves that we will achieve most of the things we failed to accomplish the previous year such as reading a book a month or exercising more often but we fail to ensure that our habits accommodate our resolutions. This is like chasing shadows.

However, we can make a difference this year. We can awake from this failure. We can become deliberate in setting our goals, taking them one step at a time.

Rather than attempt to read a book each month, maybe we could begin with a page a day and then scale up to a chapter daily.

You can as well add this magazine to your reading list, and read a story or a poem a day. In no time, you will achieve your reading goals.

So, let's continue to try. Let's be better with each passing day. Let's be more!

Above all, please enjoy this magazine and remember to share it with others.



Anthony Onugba



On the cover

→ This edition's spotlight is on the multi-award-winning Nigerian teen writer, **Testimony Odey**, who is one of the winners of the inaugural African Teen Writers Awards.

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Awards

- **Best Monthly Digital Literary Magazine (Africa) - 2022**
(Global Business Awards 2022)
- **Best African Literary Magazine - 2021**
(MEA Business Awards 2021)
- **Writer Promotion platform of the Year - 2021**
(The Corporate LiveWire Global Awards 2021/22)

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Chief Editor's Note

Scholar Akinyi (Kenya)

Dear Reader,

Happy New Year.

It is with immense joy and gratitude that I welcome and invite you into the new writing and reading year, 2023, and to especially thank you for cruising with us through the year 2022. WSA is because you are. Thank you! And welcome, yet again!

The new year comes with its own share of newness, and even as we remain with the events of the previous year lingering around us like a shadow cast against light, we acknowledge this new chapter; this new beginning

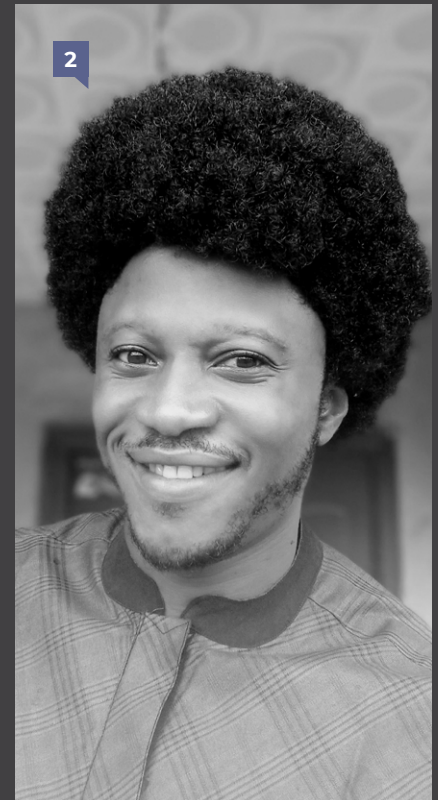
and all that it holds in waiting for us.

This year's first edition has our writers focus on SHADOWS; the evidence of the existence of matter against light, even if a flicker. If the year 2023 is to bring anything to you, dear reader, may there be shadows that will remind you that there is light somewhere reachable and that the light will find you and renew you. May we all embrace the newness that comes with this beginning, in its fullness.

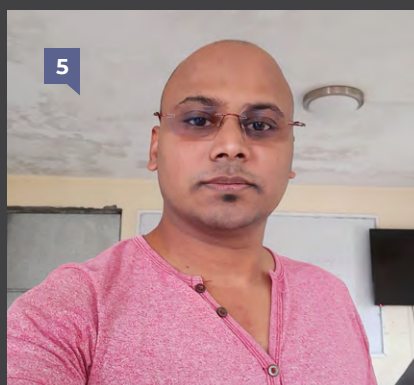
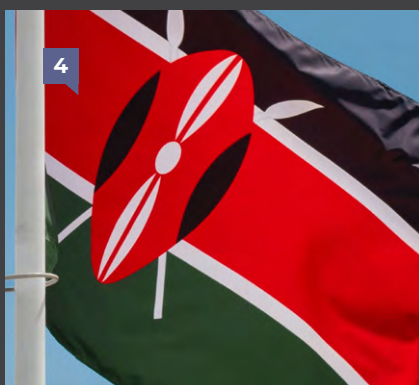
Have a happy New Year and a Happy writing and reading year.

This month's picks

Every month, our editors select their favourite entry which would be given the 'editor's choice' badge. This badge symbolises excellence. Here are the picks chosen by our editors for this edition.



Did you know?
The first edition of this magazine was published in January 2017.



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Fleeing from the Shades of Gloom

Trapped

Nounou and His Eternal Companion

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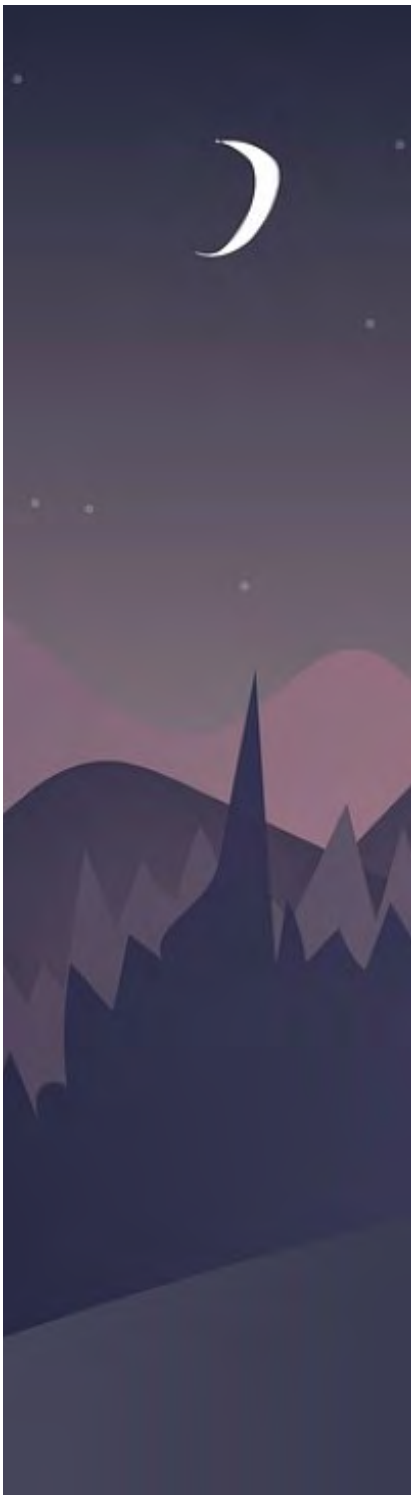
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HOW SHADOWS CAME TO BE

Adetoyese Odekunbi
Nigeria



Once upon a time in the land of Kaputo, there was total darkness over the land. The land was always cold and each morning came with fog.

The people oiled their lamps and placed them on the streets and in front of their houses for passersby to see.

In Kaputo, there lived a couple named Moon-ella and Sun-jiba. Moon-ella was a trader while Sun-jiba was a hunter. The couple had been struggling for years to have a child of their own. They consulted many traditional doctors from far and near but none of them could help Moon-ella conceive.

Sun-jiba's mother would mock Moon-ella and urge her husband to take another wife who will give her plenty grandchildren. The pain of childlessness

became intolerable; even when they tried to forget about their woes, they were reminded by the mockery of their neighbors. Moon-ella would return from the market crying each time she got into quarrels with other market women when they called her a barren witch.

One day while Sun-jiba was in the forest checking his traps, he came across a brown gazelle with golden horns, whose hoof was caught in a trap. As he approached, he heard a voice of a woman crying. He was surprised and afraid when he realized it was the gazelle crying for help. The gazelle begged Sun-jiba telling him she was one of the children of the forest spirit.

The gazelle led him to the front of a giant baobab tree where she lived. An old

woman with pale brown skin and white wool hair came out from the tree. The old woman thanked Sun-jiba for returning her child. She said she was grateful as she had lost many of her children to wicked hunters in the past. The forest spirit asked Sun-jiba if he had any wishes and Sun-jiba told the forest spirit about his childlessness. The forest spirit went back into the baobab tree and returned with two palm kernel seeds. She asked him to give the red palm kernel to his wife to eat, while the black palm kernel was to be planted behind their hut. She told him as the black kernel germinates so will the red kernel grow into a baby in his wife's womb. She warned that the day the palm tree dies, the child will also die.

Sun-jiba rushed home to his wife and they followed the instructions of the forest spirit. After the first month, Moon-ella's stomach started to bulge and she gave birth to a very beautiful girl several months later. Sun-jiba and Moon-ella were overjoyed and out of gratitude to the forest spirit, they named her Sussina which means "the earth is our mother". Sussina grew so beautiful to the extent that rumours of her beauty began to spread among neighbouring villages.

One day during the village wrestling competition, Sun-jiba drank so much palm wine that he revealed all the secrets about his encounter with the forest spirit. Out of envy some of the men decided to cut the palm tree. After cutting down the tree, Sussina fell very ill. They administered different medicine but she didn't get better. Sun-jiba out of desperation sought out

the forest spirit. The forest spirit reminded Sun-jiba of her warning. Sun-jiba knelt and wept as he begged the forest spirit. The forest spirit was moved by his tears and told him the only way to save his daughter's life was if Sun-jiba and his wife sacrificed theirs. Without hesitation, Sun-jiba agreed. The forest spirit gave Sun-jiba two yellow palm kernels.

When Sun-jiba returned home himself and his wife chewed the yellow kernels as instructed by the forest spirit. After chewing the kernels, Sussina recovered while Sun-jiba and Moon-ella's bodies started to vaporize into the sky. Sussina wept as she watched.

Sussina groped in darkness and loneliness with no one to oil her lamp. Out of love for Sussina, her parents lit her way and took turns to watch over her. They continue to do this till this very day.

Each time Sussina looks up at the sky she smiles knowing that she is never alone. The villagers say that the shadows came to be because of the light from Sun-jiba and Moon-ella.



SHADOWLAND

Stephen A Kube
Cameroon

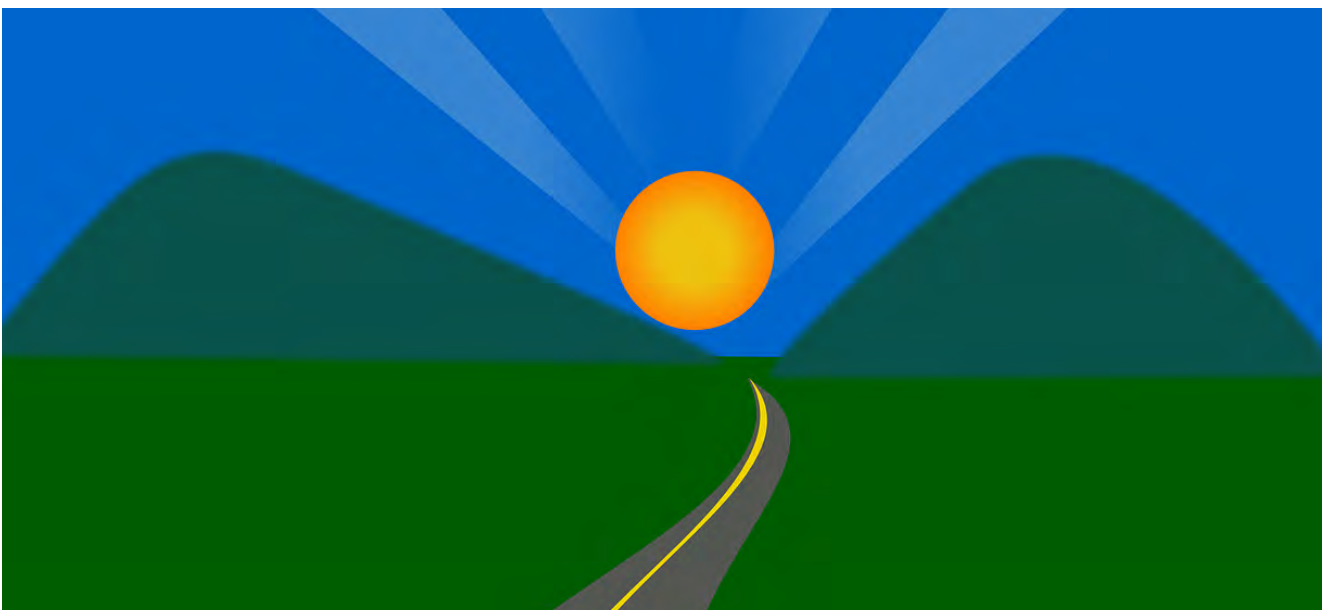


There is a place called Shadowland. It lives side by side with us and maybe you know of it already but here is a story of how I experienced shadowland. In shadowland, shapes of all sorts and sizes exist. They thrive the most in darkness, but not without light of course. Without the light, we would be unable to know of their existence.

Because so many of us don't know much about shadowland, we are scared when we first see it and the people that live in shadowland. Most of the people in Shadowland can take different shapes and they like to play with our minds, you know. In the night, you will see the people of Shad-

owland grow tall and short all at the same time. It can be so frightening that it makes even the elderly afraid to walk in the dark. Also, some children like to sleep with the lights on, because they have somehow seen shadow people before and like the elderly people, they are afraid of the dark, where shadow people live.

Do you want to know a secret? Shadow people can also be very friendly because they like to play a lot. During the day, if you have noticed, shadow people come out to play with us too. Yes, they do! When you walk during the day, if you are keen, you will notice that they walk beside us, trying their best to look like us. When the



sun is up directly above us, they are almost under our feet, hiding because if the light is too bright, it will make them disappear. When the sun is just rising or setting, you see shadow people look taller and longer. They may even look bigger, but all the time, they try to copy us. If you raise your hand, they will raise their hands. If you turn your head, they will turn their heads in the same direction as you. If you laugh, they will laugh, only you will not hear them laugh, but they copy us like the copycats.

Shadows can be whatever we want them to be when they really want to play with us. And we can call them out to play even in a dark room. All you need is a flashlight and a wall in front of you. We can make the shadow people take different forms and shapes making use of our body parts. All you need to do is be creative. Are you creative? Here are examples of some of the shapes and forms my papa and mama use to make the shadow people play with us in the night: we shaped them into bats, dogs, birds, bulls and cats, in fact, whatever we wanted. To do this like we did, make sure to have the light behind you as though it were a projector. Flash the light onto a wall and step in between the light and the wall and use your hands, legs, etc to make different shapes.

We can make fun memories with the shadow people of shadowland. That is the superpower of shadowland and its people. Shadows can be our best friends if we befriend them, and they will always come out to play when we wish. And you can

be a superhuman if you speak shadow language just as I do and did with my Papa and my Mama every night when they were home and wanted to spend quality time with me. Today, my siblings and I play with shadows. I show them how awesome it can be doing that. Do you want to play with the shadow people and walk in and out of shadowland? It is up to you. Just be creative and you will be as amazing and even more amazing than I am.





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Call for Submission

Theme:
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- ☒ POETRY
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Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, a learned Egba woman joined the protest. The Abeokuta Ladies Union earlier formed became Abeokuta Women Union. Together, with Mrs. Eniola Soyinka, her sister-in-law, they spearheaded the union.

THE ABEOKUTA WOMEN'S PROTEST

Joseph Ikhenoba
Nigeria

In the late 1940s, the Egba and Abeokuta women were ordered to pay taxes by the British Colonial Government. This became shadows on their flesh. Oba Ladapo Ademola II was the traditional ruler of Alake Land, charged with the collection of taxes. He was only answerable to the British Colonial Government. Perhaps, the women weren't only angry about the imposition of taxes but the exclusion of the *Egba* women from Sole Native Authority, a union concerned with controlling market prices and collection of taxes.

The *Egbas* have a rich history. They were once part of the Oyo Empire until they broke out to form an independent country. This lasted for a few years, when Lord Fredrick Lugard, a British colonialist, rescinded their independence and introduced the Indirect Rule System. *Egba* kingdom was amalgamated with other villages including Abeokuta. Oba Ademola Ladapo II, the Alake was selected by the British government to head the other kings

and collect taxes. This brought bad blood between them.

Many of them refused to pay taxes and were tortured and jailed by the British Colonial Government. This led to the Adu-bi War, a war against the British Colonial Government. About 600 *Egbas*, Oba Osile, a High *Egba* Chief and a European trading agent were killed. The *Egba* women didn't want a recurrence of the war. They wanted edpeace. They wanted the government to yield to their demands.

However, the government remained obstinate. Therefore the Abeokuta women pleaded again on behalf of the *Egba* women but nothing changed. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, a learned *Egba* woman joined the protest. The Abeokuta Ladies Union earlier formed became Abeokuta Women Union. Together, with Mrs. Eniola Soyinka, her sister-in-law, they spearheaded the union. So, the *Egba* market women and artisans were inducted into the union.

"I think we have to educate the market women and artisans. We have to teach them how to defend themselves from tear gases and other arms," said Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti.

"That's a good idea, ma. The people will welcome it," replied Mrs. Eniola Soyinka.

"Tomorrow, we shall summon a meeting at Abeokuta Grammar School. The women would be told our plans."

The women began classes. Absenteeism and lateness weren't tolerated. Though, some of the women became frequent absentees and latecomers. They told Mrs. Funmilayo how some tax collectors often harassed and confiscated their goods on their way to the class. She was enraged.

One early morning they marched in throngs to Oba Ladapo's *afin* to demand their rights. They hired W.N.A Greary, a foremost lawyer, to defend their actions. However, when the Abeokuta Women Union continued to protest the king escalated the situation. They held non-violent protests. When the king still wasn't yielding to their demands, Mrs. Funmilayo Ran-

some Kuti travelled to England to grant interviews and publications, concerning the bedeviling shadows faced by her people. She wrote some excerpts to editors in various newspapers. One of them read:

"On the assurance from the Egba Central Council that all matters relating to taxation of women would be suspended.... During this period of waiting, Egba Women have been summoned, worried, harassed and ill-treated by the tax collectors. Others have been actually jailed by the Court. A woman was jailed with a nine-day-old baby... Will the authorities please act without any further delay? Thanking you Mr. Editor for space allowed."

She also wrote another petition:

"We, your children, entreat you respectfully and obediently, to kindly consider the cases of women who have been specially assessed... because there is no work that women do at present to justify payment of special assessments.... Therefore the system of conditional sale, now in practice, does not permit any appreciable gains on goods..."

When she returned several protests were held. The women didn't want to revert to



violent protest because of the aftermath of the Aba Women Riot in 1929. They marched in thousands to his *afin* with their food, water and mats chanting different abusive words.

“I can’t continue to take these insults. These women have grown wings. *Tí òjò bá dá tán, ti abé igi kì í dá bọrọ*. When the rain subsides, the dripping under trees seldom ceased. Guards arrest them,” ordered the king.

“Your Highness, our people say *Bí inú bá bí baba tó bá gbé omọ ẹ̀ jù sí inú èrùn, bí inú ẹ̀ bá rọ, inú èrùn lè má rọ* – If a father gets angry as to throw his child into a raid of army ants, by the time he calms down, the ants may not be. Please, let’s dialogue with them.” Said one of his chiefs.

The other *Egba* chiefs nodded in support.

Days later, the women were invited by the Council and chiefs to dialogue peacefully. They were represented by fifteen members.

“You have been protesting for days, our mothers. What is the problem?” Asked King Ladapo gently.

Mrs. Funmi stood and spoke boldly.

“Your Highness, we are not happy with your reign. We can smell injustice everywhere. A king’s role is to make peace and see to the happiness of his people. The *Egba* women don’t have a single representative in the Sole Native Authority, yet your tax collectors humiliate and harass them. We also admonish you to remove the taxes

from women. What works are they doing that demands this pay for sanitary, market and water taxes? We also demand that women who have been abused and ran away to seek refuge in your *afin* shouldn’t be sexually harassed. In conclusion, we have turned our backs against you. We no longer want you to be our king. If these demands aren’t meant, we shall all go naked. Remember that *kò sí bí imú ẹ̀ lè tóbi tó, kó lè gba ọ̀rọ̀ ẹ̀nu sọ* – No matter how big the nose is, it can’t take over the speaking role of the mouth.”

He was confused for days. Then, he travelled to Jos to ruminate on their demands, while his chiefs mediated on their complaints. When he returned, taxes against women were abrogated. But, the women didn’t stop. They wanted him out. The pressure became unbearable. His chiefs who knew his treacherous and abusive nature supported the women. They dethroned him by ringing a bell and beating the traditional drums. On January 3, 1949, the king vacated to Oshogbo to their sole excitement. Thereafter, The Sole Native Authority was replaced by *Egba* Central Council. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and some members were elected and taxes on women was abolished. They were all excited to have defeated their shadows as they say:

Mọ̀jà mọ̀sá nsi ti akínkanjú; akínkanjú tó bá mọ̀ ọ̀ jà tí kò mọ̀ ọ̀ sá á bá ogun lọ – “Warriors must know when to fight and when to retreat, a warrior who knows when to fight but not when to retreat will perish in battle.”



All these kids from the school some of whom never liked you kept posting about how you were such an angel and how you have gone too soon. How they are hurt and what-not. You were a celebrity that day and weeks after that day and all of that somehow made me angry.

HALF-LIFE

Faith Simbizo
Tanzania



I'm writing from the future; you can call it time travel. It's two years later but your absence still lurks in my presence; that's wherever I'm in attendance. My mother still says I look like death, I always believed I was dead inside before I knew what death feels like. But now I know, I was never dead, I was just tired.

Even the voices in my head are merciful whenever I think of you, they know not to torture me more than I can handle. Aren't I only human and don't scientists say the pain threshold for an average human being is around 11 dol.

The day you died, I thought nothing would ever hurt me the same in this lifetime, I thought that was my threshold for pain; that was my 11 dol. I thought I would die too.

But the hypocritical part is that somehow, I lived through all the stages of grief. Some of them were a blur, I'm not so sure everyone passes through these stages in al-

gorithms.

My denial was different. When they first called me and said 'you were badly injured and fading out of consciousness', I knew you were dying. Even when their next sentences were always encouraging "the doctors are doing all that they can". A part of me knew I was losing you that day. Still, I kept praying my sixth sense was wrong for the first time in my life.

I agree, after some time I was angry; I was angry that the world seem to not notice that my world has fallen apart. The sun still rose and set, the winds still blew, there was oxygen and there was carbon dioxide, there was photosynthesis and there was pollution. I mean everything was ganging up against me, somehow mocking me.

All these kids from the school some of whom never liked you kept posting about how you were such an angel and how you have gone too soon. How they are hurt and whatnot. You were a celebrity that day and

weeks after that day and all of that somehow made me angry. I mean they still had their friends when mine was six feet under.

It is darkly humorous how when you are gone people start listening, people start loving and people start posting all these long paragraphs celebrating the life of a corpse.

At some point I knew that life has to go on for me too, I knew you were never coming back, and somehow, I have to find a way to defeat death; your death, my death. But it wasn't easy when sympathy was in every corner I came across; in the smiles people gave me, in the way they said my name like I was a wounded animal; I was indeed wounded. In the way people approached me; like I was thorium and any

time could be my half-life. Some of them were brave enough to say their condolences to my face.

The stage that was remarkable the most was depression; I was depressed that I was sure of. Nothing made sense, no one made me happy. The songs we liked left a bitter aftertaste on my whole being. I was never sure I will listen to them again, leave alone dance to them. I was never sure I will be able to face the people you loved without it stealing my breath away. I was never sure if I will ever see the world the way you did. Maybe I'm still depressed.

Regardless, I had to accept that fate had been cruel to us this time. And so, I stopped putting your pictures as wallpapers on every electronic device I got. For this was somehow a coping mechanism that you



are still here.

I had a bracelet made with your initials on it, CJ; the burgundy bracelet reads. And when people ask me about its meaning, the explanation no longer makes me feel like I'm suffocating. I have learned to celebrate your life; a life too precious to be thrown away just because I am a coward.

I still talk about you like you are in the opposite room though, like you just went to town for groceries and you will return as the night falls. Like you just went to a friend's house for a sleepover and you will be back at breakfast. I still have your phone number and you are still pinned in my WhatsApp chats. I know I'm never receiving a message but I have not been brave enough to make alterations.

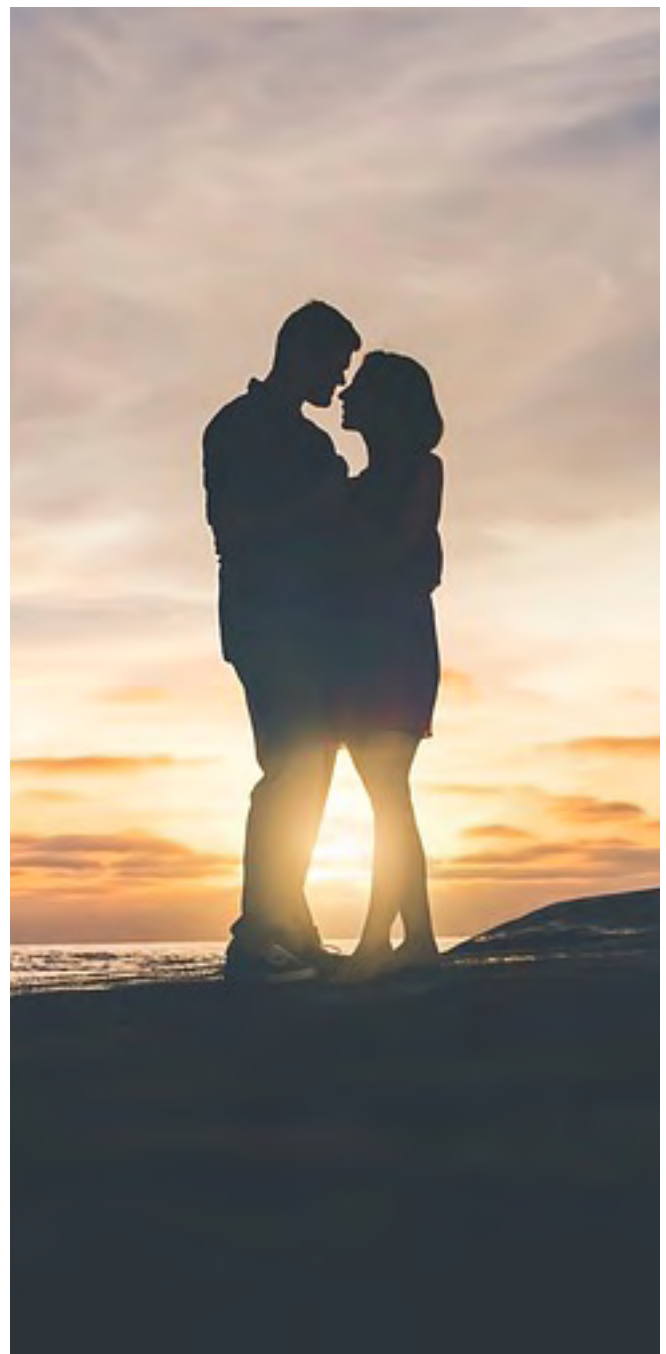
I've been trying to become a better person, so that you knowing me, and you loving me was never a waste.

I have learned to be present in moments because every moment could be the last. I have learned to embrace people a little tighter, and a little longer every time I see them because every embrace could be the last. I have learned to forgive, to ask for forgiveness and to believe I'm forgiven because life is too short to hold grudges, too precious to let pride reign and too beautiful to live in guilt.

I once read somewhere that loving someone is attending a thousand funerals; of the versions of themselves that die each day. But loving you has been attending a single funeral to bury all the versions of yourself that died that day. And loving you has

been attending a thousand birthday parties to embrace all the versions of yourself you could have been, all the versions of me you could have been proud of.

I'm writing for the future; you can call it time travel. It's two years later but the shadows of your presence still lurk in my existence. I'm grateful, for your decay led to an isotope half amazing as you.



DÉJÀ VU

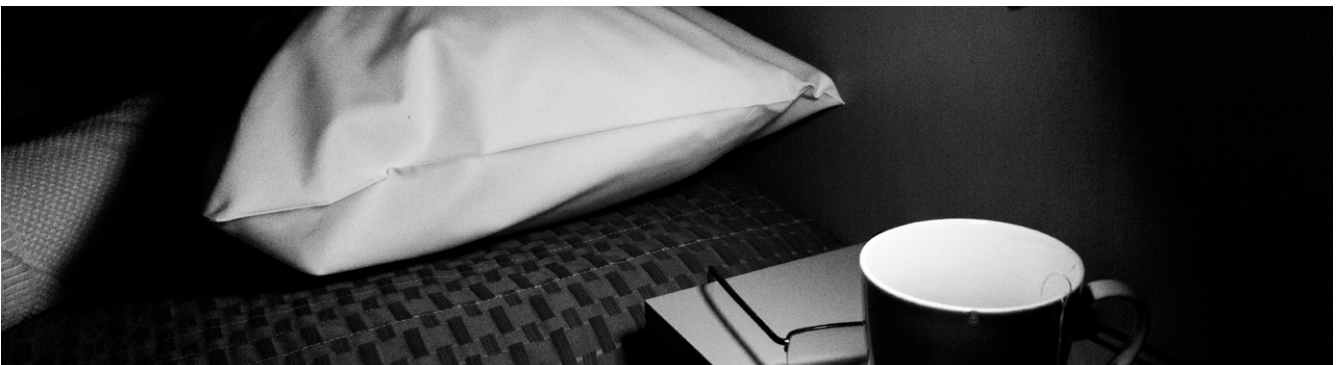
Muoghalu Britney
Nigeria



I'm a "go with the flow" kind of girl and I owe spontaneity about a third of my success. Everything in my life started with an unplanned trip to Ghana; that's where I met the supposed love of my life, that's where I sold my first art and also where I got swindled of my entire cryptocurrency. Life after Ghana was thrilling! I finally got to understand how life was to be lived, it was during this trip that I realized I could fall in love not strategically but recklessly. It wasn't the kind of love portrayed in movies, it was haphazard and random but I fell fast like I had nothing to lose. Because in reality, I didn't - I never bought into the concept of monogamy talk more of marriage. I believed the only place one could truly lose themselves was in a marriage and so I let this bi-racial god sweep me off my feet and into bliss.

Till today I cannot explain how I screamed a tearful yes when he went down on bent knees; or how I walked down the aisle in a princess dress to tie myself to someone permanently. In hindsight, I'll say that spontaneity played the biggest role there. Well... whatever it was, I am married now. I'm a doting wife to a bipolar, bi-racial man who sees the need to constantly be on those little, blue pills. Everyone who's heard of his condition has sent their condolences, I've also heard their gossip that six months was too short a time for courtship. For me, this is déjà vu. It's my parents' marriage all over and so I do the exact thing my bipolar mother did.

Spontaneously, I place a pillow over my sleeping husband and hold still till he stops fighting.



Testimony Odey



Creative Spotlight

This edition's spotlight is on the multi-award-winning Nigerian teen writer, Testimony Odey, who is one of the winners of the inaugural African Teen Writers Awards.

Interview by PP Blessing

PPBlessing: *Who is Testimony?*

TO: I'm a writer, poet, artist and author of two award-winning novels, 'Uloma' and 'Feathered,' which were winning entries for the Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors (2021 & 2022). I write all sorts of things ranging from short stories, poems, and essays, to novels. I'm also a YouTuber - I talk about my journey as a writer, give writing tips and advice, talk about my life lessons, Christian journey and everything in between. Books are also one of my favourite things on earth - I can read all day! I love to connect with other creatives and make new friends.

PPBlessing: *Such interesting activities. Congratulations on the awards. There is no mention of school here.*

TO: I just gained admission into a university.

PPBlessing: *Congratulations again! What are you studying?*

TO: English and Literature.

PPBlessing: *Why this course?*

TO: I actually wanted to study Creative Writing, but the course is not available in any Nigerian university at an undergraduate level. So I didn't really have a choice but to study something a little bit related, and I decided on English and Literature. I've always been interested in the art of storytelling. Literature was one of my favourite subjects in secondary school, so I think I'll really enjoy my course.

PPBlessing: *Do you want to pursue a career in writing?*

TO: Definitely.

→

PPBlessing: *You recently won the short story award in the African Writers Teens Prize. Is the story, my Juicy life, a true narrative or fiction?*

TO: It's purely fiction.

PPBlessing: *What inspires your writing?*

TO: Everything - from the air I breathe to the magical vastness of the blue sky, to the red roses with thorns as sharp as a needle,



to the strangers on the street, to the conversations I listen to, to my relationship with God, my family, friends, and other people... Everything inspires my writing.

I'd like to tell you how my second novel, *Feathered*, which won the Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors (2022) came about. I was walking around the house that day and a word I had never heard of flashed into my mind. That word was 'feathered.' I looked up the word in the dictionary on my phone and the meaning left me in awe: covered with feathers. So, I wondered. What does it mean to be covered in feathers? What and who should be covered in feathers and for what reason? I could feel my heart racing at the realisation that this strange word could serve as a tremendous inspiration for a story. And that was how my second novel, *Feathered*, was birthed.

The littlest things can birth mind-blowing ideas. There's inspiration in almost everything.

PPBlessing: *How about Uloma?*

TO: Writing *Uloma* was a wild ride. I think I thought something like, "What if death was not a barrier to love? You know how people say, the dead and the living have nothing in common? Yeah, I was like, what if death was not a barrier?" It's a great story, and I feel fantastic when people give kind and honest reviews of the novel.

PPBlessing: *Part of your tagline on Twitter reads, redefined feminist. What does that mean?*

TO: I've always been in love with the idea of feminism, which is the equality of both

A point to note...

→ These days, however, I say, “I’m a feminist.” That’s because feminism is equality, and not all feminists think the same. I mean, there are pro-life feminists, and pro-choice feminists, feminists who believe in different things.

sexes. But I hear people say stuff like, “to be a feminist, you must do this and agree with this,” and basically what they’re doing is trying to make their personal opinions what everyone should follow and believe in.

Feminism is synonymous with freedom... one should not have to believe or agree or act a certain way because they’re feminist. I didn’t want to be chained to people’s ideas of what feminism should include or be, so I decided to make my own type of feminism: redefined feminism. I had these questions in mind:

Shouldn’t there be things that should be removed, added or given more recognition in feminism?

Aren’t there some ideas associated with feminism that some feminists don’t agree with or support, but feel pressured to agree with or support?

What are some changes you would make if you could redefine feminism?

These days, however, I say, “I’m a feminist.” That’s because feminism is equality, and not all feminists think the same. I

mean, there are pro-life feminists, and pro-choice feminists, feminists who believe in different things. What unifies feminists is that all feminists believe in both genders being equal.

PPBlessing: Hmmm. So is redefined feminism only about the equality of the sexes?

TO: Yeah, equality of the sexes in all spheres of life, as well as the removal of restrictions on females. It means gender should not be a yardstick for who should, for example, be promoted, respected, or get the job, but rather, who has worked hard and has proved that he or she deserves it.

These days, it’s really not about the physically stronger person anymore... it’s about who is more creative and intellectually intelligent. So, redefined feminism is also about living what you believe in, and speaking out when others are oppressed, especially when it’s based on gender.

I’m a Christian, so God is a really im-

Now we know...

→ I started writing when I was 7. I wrote because I had great stories in mind, and I couldn’t keep them inside me. I wanted people to read them too... My mum used to write when she was younger.

portant factor in my beliefs. I believe that in whatever movement one is engaged in, one must fear God. I mean, honour and respect Him. That's a pretty cool factor in redefined feminism as well.

I'm still figuring 'redefined feminism' out. I mean, I'm only human. For now, when some people ask me, I tell them, "I'm a feminist."

PPBlessing: Thank you for explaining. What do you do as an artist?

TO: I draw. I'm a really good artist. I'm also an aspiring singer. I write my own songs.

PPBlessing: Wow! Such embodiment of talents. Where can one listen to your songs and view/purchase your paintings?

TO: I post covers on my TikTok account @ Testimony Odey. I haven't posted any of my written songs yet. I might though...you never know. I also have not begun sharing or selling my paintings... it's still a hobby for now, not something I'm really ready to share. I'll certainly share it someday, by God's grace.

PPBlessing: We wait for days to come when you share the songs and artworks with the world. What do you hope to achieve with your writing?

TO: I hope to change the world through my works - promote virtues, help people deal with grief and other emotions, entertain, and make people forget their troubles.

PPBlessing: What made you start writing?

TO: I started writing when I was 7. I wrote because I had great stories in mind, and I couldn't keep them inside me. I wanted people to read them too.

PPBlessing: You started quite early, do any of your parents write?

TO: My mum used to write when she was younger.

PPBlessing: Ah! It's genetic then. How many poems and stories have you published so far?

TO: When you say published, do you also mean the ones I self-published on my Instagram?

PPBlessing: Yes, published either online or in hard copy. Whether by yourself or some other person or publisher.

TO: It's over 60!

PPBlessing: Wow! That's awesome. What writing communities do you belong in?

TO: I belong to the HillTop Creative Arts Foundation. It's a community of creatives: writers, poets, artists/painters, spoken word artists... so many creatives! We all inspire each other and it's fun!

PPBlessing: How has your writing evolved with each award you've won?

TO: Well, it has not only made me feel honoured at the recognition my work is getting, but also motivated me to do better, to write better, to encourage people, to speak to people's minds, and also to enter-

tain people better. It has introduced me to other creatives who inspire and make me happy.

PPBlessing: *Which authors inspire you?*

TO: Authors who are not afraid to speak the truth and stand for what they believe in. So many authors inspire me but some are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Francine Rivers, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Abi Dare, Peace Ado Mezie, Damilare Kuku, Oyinkan Braithwaite, Sunday Saheed, Pacella Chukwuwemeka, Abdulrazaq Salihu, Johanna Ataman, Mahmoodah Oyeleye....I have a lot, but I'll just stop here for now.

PPBlessing: *What will you tell teen writers who write but are sceptical about entering writing competitions and awards?*

TO: I'd say, "there is no harm in trying." The first time I wanted to post my poem on social media, I was scared, I thought people wouldn't like my work...but I was wrong. People actually liked it. So I would say, it's better to enter a competition and not win, than not enter a competition and not know if you could have won.

PPBlessing: *How did you publish your award-winning books?*

TO: Both of my novels were winning entries for the Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors, and the prizes included the publication of the winning entries.

PPBlessing: *Tell us about the Christian girl journal, prolife Africa, and beadfro.*

TO: Sure! I'm the creator of all three Instagram accounts.

Christian Girls Journal aims to speak about the Bible, truth, encourage others, and be a community to those who may or may not feel lost.

Pro-life Africa is about youth empowerment, amplifying African voices, and fighting for the defenceless.

Beadfro is dedicated to speaking about beads, and showcasing and selling my beaded works. The full meaning of Beadfro is Beads By An Afro Girl (I'm the Afro Girl by the way). I make beads, it's fun and another way to be creative!

Thank you for reading through this interview. Make it a date next month when we bring you another awesome African writer.

What you should know...

→ Testimony Ode's short story, *My Juicy Life* (Winner of The 2022 African Teen Writers Prize) is available on the WSA website - www.writersspace.net. You can use the search feature on the website or simply use google to search for her name and story title

I have seen the shadows swirl
 To the bland drums of the winds,
 And watched the moon paint
 Silhouettes of already dark things.

Its late sombre gleam mocking
 The coldness of this sunken land
 Of sullen night birds, sulking
 With their frail crows and coos

I've heard them sing these elegies—
 For a divinity native to us,
 From our swarthy to fair images.
 We picked ethereal chirps in mist

Translated them from our infant eyes—
 For through the wit of young and old
 Grew our richness and blight
 —or the cheer of the starry sky

I wore a hermit's ears and heard
 The night's faint portentous shrills
 Oscillating as beads sitting upon
 Voluptuous hips, like hills.

In the dreary air I saw members
 Of our pantheon sail the chilly ocean
 Like rafters paddling in cold Decem-
 bers.

We since, have made messiahs of all
 semblances.

A HERMIT'S WAIL

Abayomi Ayo-Kayode
Nigeria



BRAVO 2023

Evanson Njuki
Kenya

Bravo 2023, turns out my faith in you is fragile
 Built on sand, not concrete
 When I make plans, when I draw goals,
 When I create projections, the ideals for a smatter you
 For a sustainable you, I drain into a frenzied irritant
 Not touching out my abs: I am out of oomph.

The buzz of your coming, the bravado notwithstanding
 Which we have always had for New Year is vanished
 It is iced in let-us-wait-and-see
 Particularly in the peak of global Panasonics
 All the same we welcome you

2022 is your bizarre rehearsal
 Where all humanity was a Chloe Ting, drop out
 Fooled by the uncertainty of both life and occurrences
 We still want to start, and end fresh
 But the fear of the unseen is unsaid: we are a worried lot.

We learn, not through basics, but through experience
 How difficult it is to hold on the walls of the planet earth
 Where your greatest dependents, your wildest subjects live
 The floods, the hurricanes, and now the global menace
 Have made it volatile to live in: All the same, bravo 2023!

I'm so joyful today as it rains,
With no car, no umbrella, soaking wet!
I'm so happy as I reached work,
Late for breakfast, desk full of files!
I smiled as my boss complained,
He said that my work is vain!
I chuckled, as the board campaigned,
She should be sacked, her work is plain!
I laughed when my mom explained,
I'm a duff, so dumb no brains!
I giggled as my father complained,
You're not married, You're a burden, get a life!
It's so funny that I'm filled with pain,
But a smile is all I portray,
I hide behind my smile,
Even my shadow leaves when I cry.

FICTIONOUS JOY

Doreen Mayombya
Tanzania



FLEEING FROM THE SHADES OF GLOOM

Allen Laika Tatah
Cameroon



Its clanging and banging cadence killed my catnap
Like *Mabuh*, its whispering *Mbuh* flew past my ears
Its humming and fuming boom killed even grass
A swirling and whirling figure encroached
Like a hydra with countless heads and tails
Swapping and wrapping its cold body around my neck.

On light's wings, I flee the alien's curdle,
Its cuffing movement killed my peace
Where my feet left, its fists were embossed
And its claws danced around my head
Longing to entwine me in its curly nests
But from the flea I fled.

When my energy slumped, fear plumped my wings
As I soared higher, my predator spat fire
Soon I knew, I would forever be an athlete
Fleeing from the fleet of my amoebic nightmares;
The shading shadow of my glittering destiny.

In the broken bottles are men
overweighted by marital issues
drowning dreams in streams of
fermented drinks, bodies ashamed
of their roles in an existence captive
to a cycle of recurring mistakes.

In the aisles of gods, broken women
piously pray for miracles to free them
from vicious violent blows
as they kneel on thin carpets of veiled
sin, heads bowed worshipping, while
the echoes of their prayers are drowned
by the politics of the clergy's greed.

Broken bones heal, but these scars of time
tell the story of young minds trapped in
a circuit of reincarnating ghosts.

Day after day in this erosion they grow older
— the fumes of hate wafting from their own
desperation leads to a stupor of indifference
when they see their dreams dissipated into
the polluted rivers, drained into the lakes of
a political system's unquenchable gluttony
— and in the classroom, the teacher stands
preaching water to a room full of thirsty kids,
while he sips from his thermos of liquor,
trying to escape the darkness.

TRAPPED

Mwangi Ndĩritu
Kenya

NOW YOU SEE ME

Somi Okechukwu
Nigeria

A million lenses each with one focus: me
Blinding beams demanding my perfect pose
I would turn my back to them but the gloom
would appear before me
Reach to trap this in my fist but it would slip
through my fingers
Haunting ghosts brought on by these judging gazes
Sunny faces of shady people lighting up every spot of me
Scouring every inch for flaws, making little of every detail
An eternal show from sunrise to sundown
I wear masks and shades but they bring brief relief
I scream, I cry when I am tired of baring teeth
I am the maniac chasing and the insomniac being chased
Fighting, fleeing, hiding until I realize
They are unreal, they are not who I am
They are the angles through which these gazes pierce me
Mere mirrors revealing more of their status quo than of me
If their feet were placed in my shoes they would have no taunts
I could fix my eyes on theirs, keep the darkness behind me
I could close my eyes to them, let them keep pace if they so wish
I could carry on cat walking on my two left feet
They could be props, the audience but this is my show
I love the light, I hate the light but I will bask in it anyways
Maybe I prefer these ghosts to the dark, lonely silence

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Zainab Omotayo Raji
Nigeria



When the times are tough,
And the roads long and rough,
When the birds no longer sing,
And the swings no longer swing.

Dear, you are not alone,
Know! You are not alone.

Whether the tide be high or low,
When you don't know which path to follow,
You will have nothing to fear,
For you are not alone, my dear!

Know, you are not alone;
Say, "I am not alone!"

Thru the waters deep and shallow,
Thru the filled fields and hallowed hollows,
Even when the lights may burn low,
I'll be there with you like your shadow!

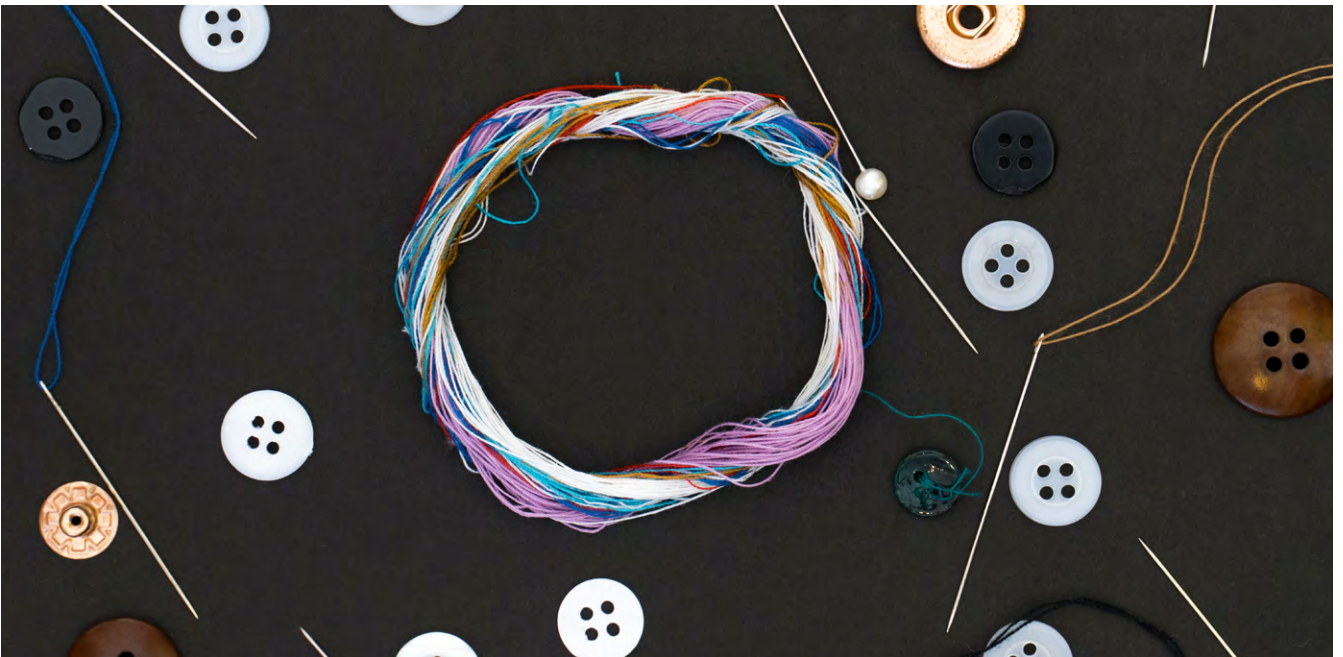


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PoeticAfrica is Africa's first trilingual poetry magazine published quarterly. The magazine showcases rich and diverse poetry in English, Kiswahili, and French from all over Africa to the world.

I MET A HOBO ONCE

Tumisang Shongwe
South Africa



The annoying part of it all is that I wasn't even paying attention. Such stories usually switch me off because I'd much rather discuss the Ukraine bombings and engage in conversations that make me feel intelligent, like I have chosen the right crowd. Fellow intellectuals like me.

It's often expected of an educated man that he should have certain interests and so, to make sure that I fit the mould perfectly, I gave up on pursuing hand embroidery

and focused instead on politics. The thrill of the needle piercing through a reluctant yet helpless piece of fabric makes my blood boil. But I can't even watch such videos on my YouTube because search history can be found accidentally by just about anyone.

I was 'passing by' the Singer shop at the mall, where they sell sewing machines, and where their big screen often played this beautiful video of the evolution of sewing and embroidery. Slow classical music was

the video's soundtrack, I got a good long look at that old woman firmly forcing that needle through the thick fabric, and after the fourth stitch she pricked the supple part of her wrinkled finger causing the whole thing to fall as she jerked — and still her masterpiece was created.

To her left was an olden-days machine which required the foot to constantly be pressing on some foot pad while the hand rolled a wheel for sewing to happen. Then in slow precision, the tailors gradually displayed the evolution of sewing until they got to the Singer overlocker machine.

This very unlucky day, while I was willingly aroused by the sight of a needle, a beggar-like man who seemed to have lost a few of his marbles came to stand next to me. This was at a mall in an expensive suburb where hobos are normally not expected to be found. His presence was accompanied by a pungent smell of oldness, abandonment and cigarette smoke. I wanted to excuse him but my mind and body wrestled to coordinate. I just couldn't move.

"My girlfriend liked to sew you know." He threw in the information, nudging me with his elbow like we were old pals.

"Oh?" I responded as graciously as an angry and embarrassed young professional could ever muster.

"Yeah! She imagined herself to be a top fashion designer, and it made me angry how she could like something that always got her pricked. I was tired of hearing an 'ouch' because she pricked her damn finger."

"So, what does she do now?"

It was too late for me to be uncivil. One of my fake passions is humanity, because it is a trending topic. Deep down I thought people were unrealistic to think that all animals are equal and none is more equal than others. But being at the forefront of 'humanism' got a young black professional more attention. When you help the cleaning lady with her heavy bags of God-knows-what on her way to the bus stop, you get celebrated.

"Aaah, that one. She's probably hovering around me right now. I think her full-time job is protecting me, because boy have I been lucky since she died," He laughs, "Do you know how many times I nearly got run over by cars just today?"

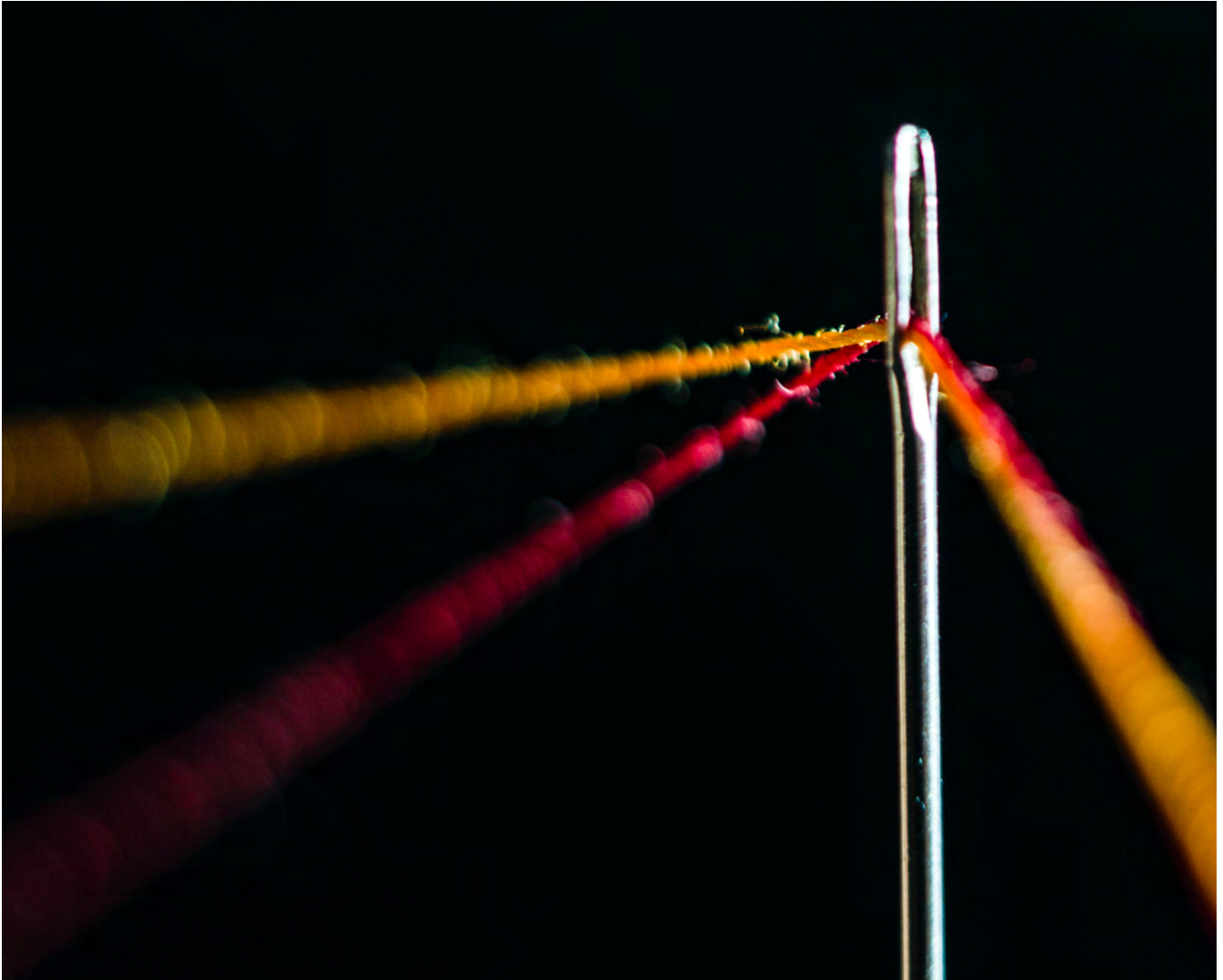
"My condolences, bro."

"Don't even worry about it. I am ay-okay! I actually have a job you know that? They really like me there even though I once overheard my boss telling someone that I revolt him. How rude is that?"

My companion had no brakes on his mouth. I do not know anyone in the world who would disclose such unfortunate news about themselves.

"Really? So why do you still work there? Your boss sounds like an arse," I asked.

Of course, I knew why one would endure a horrible job, I was only saying what my colleagues would say. 'People had many options and yet even they didn't have many options. Only about half a handful of them were very well connected.'



“He is an arse, but I got him right where I want him. He’s probably even wondering why he likes me so much!” My companion burst out laughing like a mischievous child playing tricks on an old woman.

Then he muttered, “I wiped his spoon with my dirty sock just before he ate. He had briefly stepped out, I don’t know for what, and I did it. You know, if you want someone to like you, you must make them eat your dirt?”

I could tell the man was convinced about what he was saying but I was still trying to figure out if he even had a job at all or if he lived inside his head.

“That’s sick, man! Why would you do such a thing?” I burst out.

“I just told you. Are your ears okay man? I didn’t even whisper that much.” Then he leaned in, “to get someone to like you. You should try it. I promise you it works like magic. Better even!”

“So someone eats your dirt and suddenly they’re a love-sick shadow of themselves?” I thought out loud.

“Yes,” laughing, “I wouldn’t have put it that poetically though ... Just like you my man,”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re only a shadow of your own true self. I have seen you slow down every time you pass this shop. You’re too concerned about what people think of you. Just go in and buy a sewing machine already man! Don’t you know that male fashion designers are some of the top in the fashion world?”

My heart raced for a brief moment. Who the hell was that guy? I started to wonder if he was spying on me but there was no way of finding out. I was also relieved that he didn’t quite know my secret. I hate this about mad people, they always sneak into people’s minds!

I didn’t know how to respond to that accusation, so I kept quiet. I needed to build a case in my defence — but the man was right. Perhaps it was time I walked into that shop and request for a copy of that video and a needle and fabric. Then I would be able to indulge myself in the comfort of my home. The thought of it made me quiver.

“Don’t be upset my man. You’re still young, you can still live your true life. Do you have money?”

I looked at him suspiciously.

“Look, if you got some cash, go buy that sewing machine and start living your true life. It could start as a hobby. And who knows? Maybe you too will be a famous fashion designer someday.”

“Thanks bro. But I’ll pass.”

I left the strange man and that evening while lying in my bed facing the ceiling and reflecting on the day, I found myself thinking about what he said. That feeding

someone of your dirt could make them like you. How could such an absurd thing possibly work? I mean, I knew that mysterious things happen possibly once in a lifetime for everyone, but to believe in that rubbish sounded like pure madness to me.

For the first time, I considered going into Singer to finally get what I want. I was confident that I could coin a good lie and convince them to share the video with me. Have I not a lifetime’s worth of experience with lying? Or hiding in the shadows, as Mr Hobo would say.

A girl from my office was coming to my place for the first time that weekend, we had a PSP and popcorn date, and I intended to keep it clean. That’s how you hook these decent girls, you don’t rush them until they can’t contain their heat any longer, then they will make the move. She was out of my league and that made my palms sweat a bit when I was around her. I considered trying that spell of feeding her my dirt so that she could love me. Otherwise who would want a man who gets excited by needles — a man who got beaten into his late teenage years and could never fight back because he was supposed to be grateful to his caretakers? That man didn’t know me, and he was wrong about me wanting a sewing machine. But he dug up a question that I had never been brave enough to ask — why was I still only a shadow of my true self? Was I that bad a person? I toyed with the idea and all its perfect possibilities until I fell asleep, resolute to go for it, both the girl and the needles. I had a few dirty boxers to use and nothing to lose.

INTO THE LIGHT

Privilege Masimba Chisumbu
Zimbabwe



To think the past never became the future I imagined...mph.

“Do you have anything to say, Nyasha?”

I was hooked out of a pool of thought. Seven pairs of eyes pierced through my glasses. How could I avoid the stares? I glanced down and cleared my throat.

“No. I’ve nothing to say.”

“That’s alright, Nyasha. Feel free to share your story anytime you’re comfortable.” [Reverend Honde drifted his attention to one pair of goaded eyes that shifted their attention from me].

“Shalom, you may continue with your sto-

ry.”

So I muttered words and frowned whilst Shalom was sharing her experiences. At the thought of this, I sighed. She stared irately. I can't imagine how wound up she was.

“I swear to you I wanted to end her life!” [she started], “How could my sister whom I took care of for eight years under my roof and sent to school till she finished college cheat with my husband? She...he...they took me for granted!” [and she sobbed] “I was the one who paid for my husband and sister's betrayal! My assault was nothing compared to their filthy acts in my bed! Now they're together. They get the reward and I get the punishment. Mph, the irony...”

Shalom appeared aggressive. I had met her outside the church earlier. She was smoking by the entrance and at the same time pulling her sleeves repeatedly to cover her hands from the frigid weather of the sub-tropical winter morning. I greeted her.

“Do I know you?” She asked.

“No, but I was just...mph...never mind.” I walked into the hall twice as irritated as I was when I arrived.

“Shalom,” the reverend spoke. “Have you ever expressed your anger the way you did that day?”

“No, reverend, I never expressed anger at anyone. People told me that I had a big heart. Some said I took after my mother. She named me Shalom. She was a pacifier naturally. Even when my father beat her

so much to the point that she would find it difficult to walk.” She sighed.

I thought it was out of relief for unburdening herself of something I think she rarely or never shared. “My father beat her to death...and then killed himself. I lived my whole life seeking peace like my mother but I guess the day I assaulted my sister...I acted like my father.”

“I'm curious to know how this works,” Joyleen spoke. “How a woman clings onto a violent husband to the point of death.”

She looked around demurely and said, “Sorry, I just started talking...”

“It's alright, Joyleen,” Reverend Honde said and signaled to her to continue.

“I was also in the same situation as your mother, Shalom. My husband beat me up so many times till he fractured my arm.” She pointed at the plastered arm whilst staring unnervingly at me.

“When the doctors asked me what had happened I told them that I had slipped in the bathroom and hit my arm on the bathtub.”

“And why would you say that instead of reporting your husband for what he had done?” a young man asked irritably.

“I was afraid.”

When I walked into the hall that morning she was sitting by herself scrolling down the broken screen of an old smartphone. There were three other people in the hall standing close to the altar. They were young. Perhaps they made Joyleen feel out

of place. So I approached her and said hi. She replied bashfully as if she had done something wrong.

“May I sit here?” I asked. She simply nodded, and I sat and pointed perceptibly, “What happened to your arm?”

She attempted a smile but ended up sneering instead. “An accident...”

“A car accident?”

“Um, yeah.”

After she revealed the truth, I figured that Shalom’s story had made Joyleen want to open up even though it wasn’t her intention to do so initially – the reason for her lying to me about it. Her look towards me was remorseful as if my exoneration meant anything or everything to her. There was nothing to forgive because there was nothing for her to feel contrite about. I understood her and hoped my expression would convey that message to her.

“I don’t know why I was too afraid to report my husband,” Joyleen continued, “He was mean. He was hateful even to our children. He always claimed that they were not his children so he never treated them as his own. I thought I could love him enough to make him stop. He didn’t. He’s in prison now.”

“I was told your husband was a respectable member of his church,” the reverend stated.

“He was.” Joyleen said. “No one knew the kind of man he was except for me and my children. He poured boiling water on our ten-year-old son. I reported the case and

everything else to the police. Still, at that point, it wasn’t easy to tell the whole truth. I even tried to defend him even when our son was in a critical condition.”

“I understand,” the reverend claimed. “I’ve come across women who’ve shared similar stories of abuse. It is traumatizing to be hurt and controlled by someone you love. Sometimes, you doubt your judgment and you blame yourself. It’s commendable that you’re now able to speak out and bring these shadows into the light. Now you’ll need to work on your self-worth and we’re here to help. How’s your son?”

“He has not entirely recovered.”

“He can never entirely recover. He’s lost his beautiful skin. He’s lost his esteem, and his father...however abusive he was. I just hope my son won’t turn out to be like him. Sometimes I think the reason I stayed is that my husband was the one who provided for me and the kids. He didn’t want me to work anyway. Now everything is on me. I thought the community would assist us in any possible way, reverend. Where’s the help?” she asked with a scowl.

“Joyleen, all we knew was the abuse you experienced in the hands of your husband,” the reverend asserted, “But I suppose we’ll have to add you to our program and try our best to attend to your family’s needs.”

“What about me? Can I receive help too?” It was the young man who had spoken earlier. “I... there’s something I need you all to know about me.”

“Alright, Takunda, you may go ahead and

speak," Reverend Honde said.

He nodded and said, "I am a happy person. I'm...optimistic, positive, fun, and energetic but...just yesterday, I thought about killing myself."

The room dropped dead. Nobody uttered a word.

Takunda continued. "I've been lying to myself that I should always be happy and not feel sad or mad about stuff. Now I'm troubled."

"What troubles you, young man?" the reverend asked looking as though he wrestled with himself to ask. His words were soft and calm but he grimaced at the man's confession.

"I got my ex-girlfriend from college pregnant. And we agreed we were going to keep the affair a secret and terminate the pregnancy because she was already engaged to someone else. The abortion attempt didn't go as planned and she..." Takunda paused as though he forgot he had forgotten part of the story he was telling. He was only pondering over his own deeds. "She died...and only I know she was carrying my child but many blamed her fiance when the news broke. The guy claims he is innocent but the girl's family demands he pays for what he did...for what 'I' did. I keep telling myself that I'm fine but it's weighing hard on me."

"Takunda, don't let another man take the blame for your actions," the reverend said.

"I need your help, Rev," Takunda implored. "I don't know how to face my parents and I don't know how to face Andile's

parents. I don't know how to face life anymore..."

"We're here to help," the reverend assured him, "That's the reason for this exercise..."

This exercise had become a confession exercise. I felt the growing uneasiness.

"It takes courage to be able to speak about this, Takunda," Reverend Honde continued, "What you did was wrong, yes, and there's a penance for your actions. The guilt you feel now is part of it...but you don't heal by taking your own life. You now need to make things right for everyone and remember, it's okay not to be okay." It was then I felt the reverend's eyes piercing through my glasses again. It was my turn.

"Wow," I said and faked a smile. "Reverend Honde, I've studied the psyche...and I'd like to think if our souls had shadows, then these emotions, traumas, denials and hidden personalities brought into the light would be..."

"Nyasha," the reverend cut in and asked seriously, "Would you like to share 'your' story?"

Mph, to think the past never became the future I imagined.

"No reverend...not today."

NOUNOU AND HIS ETERNAL COMPANION

Ouday Prakash
Mauritius



A bluish sky, inviting the rays of the sun made the glory of the day. It was a wonderful Saturday, announcing the blossom of Easter and a bright and fulfilling April of 2016.

The abrupt and breathless words of my niece dazed me.

“Uncle, uncle, I’ve got a puppy, I’ve got a puppy...he came into our old house.” Her enthusiasm welled up an inexplicable surge of emotions inside me.

“My father used to stay in the old house, on the other side of the road during weekends and he found him at the side of his

bed that very morning, wondering where he had come from.”

He was a little puppy with blissful and silky fur, and he brought a smile to our faces. However, I knew that he had been lost and his owner could soon claim him. Despite passing on the message of “a lost puppy” in the neighbourhood, even after one week, no one came to claim him.

The whole family was delighted to have him, and he was so playful with everyone as if he had taken birth at our home itself. His beautiful light brown eyes made him attractive and I held him in my arms just like a baby. At night my mother placed him on the sofa and asked him to close his eyes which he would obey, eventually falling asleep peacefully.

He would wake up early in the morning and would “assist” my mum in the kitchen, making the morning tea, impatiently waiting for his piece of bread and butter with a slice of cheese which he relished.

One day, while he was running, my brother accidentally stepped on his legs. His loud and piercing whimpering made me almost fall off my bed. But the pain was soon mitigated by the soft hands of my mother.

In May, I baptized him “Nounou” while my mum preferred to call him “Garson” (boy in our native language). My niece found another name, “Moumouh”. He was called names out of love and affection.

Nounou always accompanied me in my backyard garden. While I was busy weeding the garden and taking care of plants

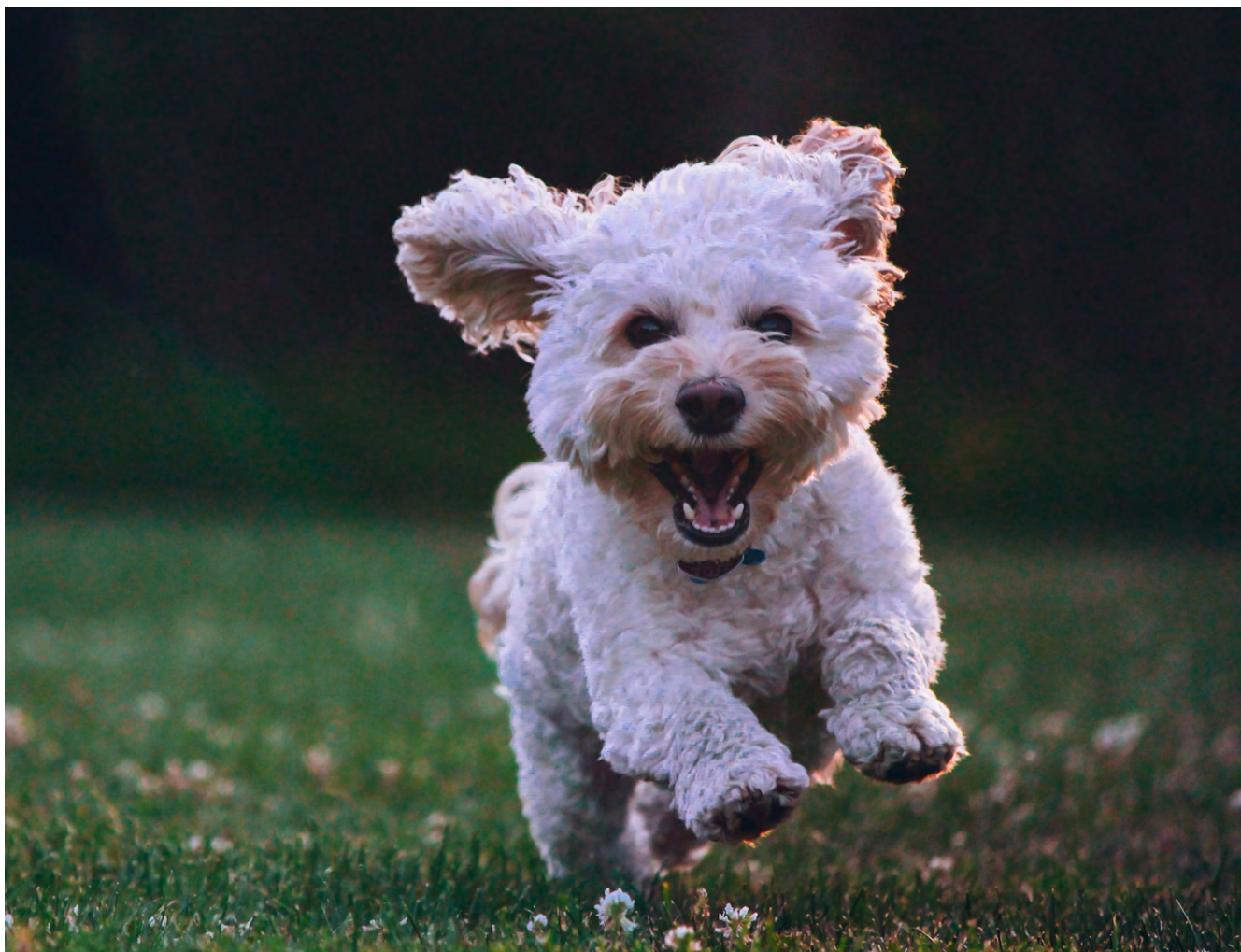
and vegetables, he played in his favourite spot, the left-edge corner of the garden. He accompanied us when we used to harvest bananas further away in the field behind our house. Often, my mother had to hold him just to prevent him from being too close to falling banana trees as he could hurt himself.

Nounou had been with us for five months and we couldn’t imagine a day in our life without him. In November, the summer season gracefully ripened the litchis, tinting them in magenta. At night, I had to guard the two litchi trees against robbers and by instinct, Nounou got to know that he should guard them. Together, we enjoyed a peaceful night with the twinkling stars like eternal companions.

One night, Nounou got entrapped by the net used to cover the litchi trees for protection against bats. I could not take him out and I quickly got inside the house to wake up my mom to help me out. Luckily, he made his way out without our intervention, God only knows how he did that!

During the day, while sitting beside him on the stairs, I held him by my arm, feeling his silky fur while the sun mingled our shadows into one. My mother gave him his food three times daily while my niece “stole” sausages and gave him without letting her mother see them. He was pampered with all types of cakes without forgetting his favourite Marie biscuits.

By the end of the year, Nounou looked more beautiful and his eyes glowed in the



rays of the sun. He had the bad habit of running behind cars and cyclists. Perhaps he liked this and made fun of it. He was never involved in any mishap of any kind. However, this action made me fearful that perhaps one day he could hurt himself while running on the main road.

At dawn, he entered the house and would soon fall asleep in the living room. I used to have omelette and cheese with bread for breakfast. The smell always woke him up from his deep sleep and his eyes fixed towards mine said only one thing, he wanted a bite.

One day in my backyard garden, Nounou uprooted a flowering plant which I had just planted. For the first and the last time,

I shouted at him. Later, I realized that he could not decipher between a weed and a flowering plant. He just wanted to give me a helping hand by uprooting weeds.

“Have you beaten, Garson” my mother asked.

“Can I beat him?” I asked with a guilt-stricken face.

I presume out of anger or sadness, he did not eat but my mother was successful later in cajoling him to take some bites.

Nounou became the centre of attraction for everyone, especially my tuition students. My students passed by him at ease and without fear. Perhaps his strong connection towards me and his uncondition-

al love for me made him aware that they were my students.

In November 2017, I was admitted for 18 days in the hospital, recovering from a hematoma surgery on the left side of the abdomen. During that time, my brothers regularly started the engine of my off-road vehicle in order to maintain the vehicle in running condition. But that sound meant something else to Nounou. Being accustomed to that engine sound made him believe that I was at home and he would run as fast as he could to the vehicle, but he would not find me.

On the hospital bed, I felt a shadow beside me, of the same form as Nounou. In my dreams, I saw him praying to God to make his master return home as soon as possible. Then at that time, I believed the thing that dogs really pray for their master.

In February of the following year, I saw a laceration on Nounou's body caused by his chain. My mother and I sent him to the vet. It was a deep laceration and the wound had to be cleaned thus he had to be anaesthetized. As the vet gave him a sharp injection, I held him with one arm and in a few seconds, he went into a deep sleep. The wound was cleaned, and he was cured.

Days passed by quickly and there was no sign of Nounou, but we hoped that he was playing around. But in a week's time, we found him. While going to the supermarket my sister saw him lying in the corner of the pavement and rushed home to get my brother and my mother to fetch him. The greatest fear of my life saw life at that moment, I saw my mother and brother carry-

ing him in a large piece of cloth. He was no longer in that joyful state. He seemed lifeless. Dead. I was afraid. Nounou had been hit by a car earlier that day.

I lay lifeless in front of his body, tears rolling down my cheeks submerging me in sadness as I remembered how on a Saturday he made his way to our home and on another Saturday the road prevented him to make his way to his home. I felt weak, unable to say a word but kept on admiring him for the last time while reminiscing all moments spent with him. His body was not cold and stern but was warm as if he was still breathing and sleeping. My tears made their way to his body as if supplicating him to be on his legs and play again. His eyes would not close as if indicating that he wanted to see his family for the last time.

We had Nounou's burial beside his favourite spots near the banana plantations in my garden. The hands that lifted and caressed him now had to drag soil onto his body. Who knew that the land on which he used to run would one day take him in an eternal refuge. Two days later, in my dream, I saw fluorescent lights rising from Nounou's grave and ascending to the sky. This perhaps, was suggestive of transmigration to another form of life or the ascension to the heaven of dogs.

Nounou now shadows my gardens, my litchi trees, my banana plantations, my family and my existence. He is now free to rejoice eternally in my heart through my memories.

AFRICAN CRANES IN THE SHADOWS

Patricia Furstenberg
South Africa



It was a time when the clouds didn't look down on the foamy crests of the waves and a time when the sun and the moon still gazed lovingly at each other's eyes. Then, an African king got separated from his companions while they were out hunting in the hot and dry grasslands.

Had the king strayed away while watching some small game with greedy eyes? Had his men moved on like shadows, presuming the king was following them? nobody knew. Until the king found himself alone on this side of the grassland and his men found themselves without their ruler, on the other side of the savanna. In the

cool shade of the trees they were unable to spot one another, no matter how high they climbed the baobab trees.

When the king realized he was lost and alone he gasped for air. He felt his heart beating faster like he'd been running, although he hadn't. His palms sweaty on his spear, and his shadow suddenly gone. His mouth was dry when he reached for his water - of which he had none in his keeping. This is because as a king he carried only his kingly spear, nothing else. His men carried his water and food for him, and his soft blankets to set upon the dry grass for rest with tents to make good shade. And

so the king, lost and alone, stroke by hunger and thirst looked left and right, front and back; yet, all he could see was an infinity stretch of dry grass. He then realized he could not find an oasis, neither could he spot a stream. There wasn't even a shadow anywhere.

The air was searing hot. The sun right above his head, like it was laughing at him. Lost and alone, not even with his own shadow as company. Angered, the king stomped his foot. Dust rose, red and hot and settled on his skin and into his nostrils. It tasted like dirt. How the king wished for a sip of water. He could go as far as trading his famous spear for one.

Then he noticed some movement from a distance. 'What was that?' thought the king. 'His court?' He better gets there. 'But what IF they are lions?' he pondered. So he used his hunting skills of approaching without being known. It took him a while, and half way through it he realized he was stalking zebras, not his men. Zebras are friendly horses with stripes, surely they will help the king. Eventually he reached the zebras, who were swishing their tails, their ears perched, grazing nearby. They knew well he's coming and they knew he was alone.

'Please help me,' said the king to the zebra that looked like a chief, for it ate the most abundant spot of grass. 'I am all lost and without my court. I want to find my men, can you lead me to them?' But the zebra chief just munched quietly. Eventually it turned away from the king, snorted a message to its herd, then replied, 'why should

we help you, knowing you and your men have hunted and chased us from our waterhole, taking away our weak and old?'

The king sighed knowing he'd done wrong in the past, and had no answer for the zebra unless he was sorry. But by the time he opened his mouth the zebras were already far away.

When a trumpeting reached the king's ears and a thumping shook the ground... The elephants! Surely they will carry him to his men. Or spare their shade.

The king approached the matriarch requesting for help, but she refused. 'We do not help those who want to kill us,' she said while touching gently with her gigantic trunk, the ivory necklace the king carried around his neck. The king gasped and lost his words, for he thought that was the end of him, but the elephant slowly moved away taking her herd with her. All she left behind was a cloud of dust, the sun, and a lost and lonely king.

Next, the king saw a herd of antelopes and, although he suspected their answer, he asked them too. Of course they refused, had he forgotten that the majestic antelopes were a king's favorite hunting prey?

The king let himself drop to the ground, not minding the prickly grass. He even let go of his spear, for what use will he have of it? He let his head drop on his knees and shut his eyes tight. What went through his mind? Remorse? Fear? Thoughts of a final desperate plan to dig himself a hole and seek the shadows and the coolness of the earth? Become a ghost?.

The king was so lost in thought that he did not feel the shadows circling overhead, neither did he feel the flutter of the wings. He did not hear the 'mahem-mahem-mahem' of sudden chatter. However, just as he was dreaming he was in the gloom of his kingly tent again with his men. He felt a soft brush against his arm.

When the king looked up, he saw that he was surrounded by a flock of birds with long necks and legs. The king could not remember their names, for he felt so weak and thirsty yet he tried. He was a king skilled in fighting for survival, he tried once more and with his voice barely a whisper, he begged the big birds to help him.

Can you imagine? The birds did not turn away. The king thought he was surely dreaming.

Can you believe it? The big birds made shade for him, while a few others flew away, shortly to return with water in their strong beaks, which they gave to the king. The king was sure he was imagining.

The big birds led the king to his court. Walking by this shadow of a man, nudging him, following, pushing, tailing, and dragging him slightly to the oasis, the nearest one at that where his court was.

As soon as he saw his men, as soon as he felt safe, as soon as he drank and sat in the thick, cool, shade of his kingly tent, the grateful king ordered his personal goldsmith to make a crown of gold for each one of the crane birds. He had now remembered what they were, and had ordered a feast too. A feast fit for kings.

The following day the entire dance of cranes flew off wearing their shiny, gold crowns gleaming in the sun so bright that the king had to shade his eyes, watching until the birds disappeared into the clouds, all the time calling good-bye, 'mahem-mahem-mahem.'

The king and his court waved good-bye and the cranes called back, 'mahem-mahem,' till they were out of sight. The king smiled and felt his heart filled with gratitude, wondering if he'll ever see his savior's again.

Sooner than he imagined, he saw them again the following day. The cranes had returned with bare heads, telling the king and his men that the other animals had become envious and angry when they saw the golden crowns on their heads. They had heard how and from whom they got them. So the animals; the zebras, the elephants, and the antelopes had ambushed the cranes and stolen the crowns. Not for themselves, but to destroy them for what they stood for.

The king bowed his head and thought. Then he gave two orders.

One that no zebras, elephants, antelopes, rhino, nor hippos... would ever be hunted again. And second, that new crowns be made not of gold like his kingly symbols, but of golden feathers as light as freedom and could not be removed. As soon as the new crowns were ready, each crane flew off wearing its gold-feathery diadem, so light that they barely cast a shadow. Never to be taken away.

WSA Magazine REVIEW

December 2022 Edition





NANA TO THE RESCUE

A Children's Literature by Pelekani Lwenje, Zambia
 Reviewer: Halieo Motanyane, Lesotho



Nana is Ntombi's faithful friend. Ntombi is a 12-year-old troubled girl who runs away and gets rescued by her faithful friend.

Ntombi sees the cruel life her father gives her mother when he is drunk. The situation displeases her, and she runs away from home. But unfortunately, she chose a bad time to leave as it is nighttime, and bad things happen when it is dark. However, being the good person and friend she

is, she had Nana, who would do anything for her. Pelekani Lwenje shows us a good friendship between the two. The root of a good relationship is kindness. Ntombi took good care and love for Nana since she was just a puppy. And the love and care turned into friendship and protection.

The story teaches us to invest in good relationships; hence they will help and keep us safe in future. This is a beautiful story.

MY LIFE GEM

A Creative Non-Fiction by Ebere Nnabuike, Nigeria
Reviewer: Mathew Daniel, Nigeria



Before dicing into Ebere Nnabuike's 'My Life Gem', a quick revision of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics is vital in the discourse of friendship. On this, Michael Pakaluk premised his examination that "the central case of friendship is a relationship of reciprocal affection..." I have never agreed more with the idea that friendship is finding your "other self."

Nnabuike takes us through an account of her found friendship when she could have otherwise been self-alienated out of fear of mixing up with the wrong friends, which would have been worse than the pangs of destitution in a world where moral decadence is thriving cancer. She tells us about Chidinma's influence in helping her become a "better version" of herself, hold-

ing each other's hands, and encouraging her to grow from a storyteller to a writer. Indeed, good friendships should help friends grow.

The theme of friendship is so ordinary yet profound, comprehensive, and abysmal. Its profundity becomes quite understandable when one puts Aristotle's words into perspective. Can a person enjoy life without friendship and not slip into destitution? The writer answered this question in her well-tailored narration.

Finding one's 'other self', which reflects your character value, even those you're yet to imagine, is like finding a rare gem, and this is by no means an easy find.

GOODBYE MY FRIEND

A Flash Fiction by Poet Darple, Tanzania
 Reviewer: *Bwesigye Laurent, Uganda*



A few flash fiction stories will satiate your hunger for reading, like Poet Darple's story, "Goodbye my Friend." She uses personification as a tool of poetry to convey her feelings of sadness and disappointment with the people's lack of appreciation for nature and how this ended her friendship with a long-time friend.

In her story, she writes about two trees, herself and Baraka, who have always shared the joy of morning telling stories, hearing rumours and gossiping about everyone that passed by the town. She

shows us how humans are indifferent to what trees offer and the double standards we possess. When it's very hot, people cry and claim God has forsaken them, but when it rains, they pull out umbrellas to shield themselves from the rain. In fact, they are so blind to the importance of nature that they will cut down trees to build new buildings and roads.

This is not only a good story of friendship but also a good story on the importance of nature.

DIDI- A TRIBUTE

A Poem by Kiboi Victoria, Kenya

Reviewer: Modise Charity, Botswana



“Of all the things God created, from sunrises and rainbows to black holes and humour, cats are the most fascinating,” so says Jarod Kintz. The poem “Didi - A tribute” by Kiboi Victoria couldn’t have attested to these words any better.

Friendship isn’t limited to only humans; like a sea, it flows and branches into rivers and streams, broad, large, and diverse. In this poem, the persona shares this unique bond with a cat. And with this piece, she has revealed how much Didi, the cat means to her. As the title says, this is a tribute, but to a feline!

It was love at first sight. Passion has been burning fiercely in the persona’s heart from when she first laid her eyes on Didi’s admiration. When she first held Didi in her hand, she was already taken. She admired how her little friend clawed and kicked,

the tantrums he threw when she put it into cardboard only for it to bring itself out, how the little animal trusted her, the small bites it gave her as she tried to feed it, and the many other cute behaviours.

The tone is loving and calm as the persona reminisces about her journey with Didi. It’s fascinating to see how a human can melt at such little details, the tiny paws. Guess that’s the magic of friendship. Deep sadness takes over the persona’s voice towards the end, desperation. Didi’s demise has hit her hard, which shows how much this tiny animal occupied so much of her heart, the kind of friendship that takes breaths away and evokes envy in many!

I love this poem because it explores the human relationship with cats. Friendship is beautiful, even with animals! “Didi-A tribute” has proven.

SEVERAL BLOOD APART

A Short Story by Okorie Onyekach, Nigeria
 Reviewer: M.T. Mazimba-Kaunda, Zambia



In *Several Blood Apart*, two girls are drawn together in the flooded township of Oguta. They do not speak much, but there is a recognition of kinship between them. They assume that since they like each other, they can be friends. They thus agree to meet the following day. But to the first girl's shock, her mother forbids the friendship, revealing that her new friend belongs to an inferior caste.

This story can be considered unusual by many readers. Not least because the two girls are not called by name, just first girl and second girl. This is a clever way of al-

lowing the reader to insert themselves in the place of either girl. The reader identifies with these archetype characters.

Therefore, the discrimination of one girl because of her caste is magnified from an individual experience to a universal one. This story thus speaks to the intimate differences people feel concerning their neighbours, friends and families because they are perceived to come from a low-ranked socio-economic group. In a broader sense, it speaks to the inequalities in society today.

HAPPY
New Year

2023

May this new year be another opportunity to be better and grow in all aspects of our lives. Cheers!

From all of us at Writers Space Africa



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Calling Christian Writers

THE CRUSADERS, an online nondenominational Christian Magazine, is calling for submissions in Christian poetry and stories for its third edition.

The submission window is from December 7 until February 7, 2023.

Theme: FAITH

- We accept poetry, and prose (short stories and articles).
- We also accept illustrations.
- Please use your entry creatively to evangelise.
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