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Writers Space Africa  
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NOVEMBER 2023 / ISSUE 83

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**ESHUN**

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**WSA**  
Writers Space Africa  
Magazine

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# Editorial

## Scholar Akinyi (Kenya)

What, in comparison, would be a delight to the eye? A single star floating in the vast sky, or star clusters?

I stargaze involuntarily. It comes to me to look up at the sky and search for a star. And some nights happen to present a galaxy. Those have been the best stargazing nights—the beauty of gatherings, the gift of the universe to gather beauty for the delight of my eyes. I have always found it fascinating.

Our humanness, our being, our patriotism, and everything that defines us as human has always been depicted in gatherings: funerals, weddings, politics, worship, festivals. Oh, even a roadside motorist accident, and we gather. Isn't it a thing

of beauty that when it matters, through the thick and thin of life, we gather, as if there's a magnetic pull within us that will always gravitate us toward each other? The enduring spirit of Ubuntu that, today and forever, I hope holds us together, much like the forces that hold the stars in a galaxy.

It is also my hope that this month's edition of the WSA magazine illuminates your literary eyes with a beauty comparable to that of stars.

As we approach the festive season, which is the culmination of gathering, I pray for delightful galaxies for your eyes, bodies, and souls.



### On the cover

→ Maame Efuah Eshun is the visionary behind Golden Quill Editing Solutions and the dynamic coordinator of WritersSpace Africa (Ghana chapter)

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### WSA Awards

- **Monthly Digital Literary Magazine of the Year - 2022/2023**  
(The Corporate LiveWire Global Awards 2022/23)
- **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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# CALL FOR SUBMISSION

THIS CALL IS AN OPEN THEME

Writers Space Africa (WSA) magazine  
is accepting submissions  
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We accept submissions in the following categories:

Creative Non-Fiction – 1,200 Words maximum

Children's Literature – Prose and Poetry

Flash Fiction – 300 words maximum

Poetry – 1 poem, a maximum of 24 lines

Short Stories – 1,500 words maximum

SUBMISSION CLOSING DATE: 15TH NOVEMBER, 2023

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# THE ELDER'S THIEF

Jessica Murage  
Kenya



According to my father, his grandfather was an elder of the clan, one of the highest ranks among the Agikuyu. He had been given birth to by a traveler thus rising through the ranks on his own. A year before his death, my father had told me about the traveler who gave birth to his grandfather. You see, he was not a traveler only; he had been exiled from his land. So my mother had not been entirely wrong when she had called my paternal grandmother a witch; after all, the old blood still ran in her veins. That had been the last time I had

heard my father laugh.

Anyway, this story is not about my father or his grandfather. It is about my cousin who has brought shame to the family name. He is named after my great grandfather, the elder and he is a thief.

The clan is gathered in my uncle's compound today to listen to his case and deliver his punishment if proven guilty. He will be found guilty; the village knows, we know, even his mother knows. She prepared sweetened porridge for him in the



morning and drew him water for a bath. Children are not allowed in the gathering of elders, but my uncle has a big mango tree behind his rickety store and I intend to hide there.

My uncle is an elder and he is leading the case. My cousin's neighbor starts and gets in the center of the circle. "Karoki came and told me that the cows to be vaccinated were to be vaccinated. As I don't go out much, nobody had sent word to me. As you all know, I'm an old man whose feet cannot take me to the cattle dip. I was overjoyed when he offered to take my cow for me. As you all know, my children are grown and don't visit home." He stops and spits, and all the other elders spit. It's a shame for a child not to visit a sick parent.

The old man continues, "When I went to help myself behind the tree just outside my compound, I came across my neighbor and asked him whether Karoki was back with the cows from the cow dip. He told me there was no vaccine, and his cows

were in the shed. Karoki had stolen my cow. I don't have a cow and an old man's bones need milk."

The next and last victim is my other uncle. His story is short. "Karoki stole my pesticides, sold them, and used water to spray my fruit trees; now I have no produce." The elders are quiet for a minute and then they start chattering. Messing with a man's produce is against the law of the land. Who will pay for his son's dowry now? And the child's dedication? His wife will surely leave him.

My uncle hits the ground with his staff and the elders stop chattering. "Karoki will be banished from this village for ten years. It is decided." The crowd is silent; the mother wails and his father shakes his head. The branch snaps, and I panic then fall in the center of the circle. My mother gasps and my uncle shakes his head. Luckily for me, children cannot be banished, but I don't feel so lucky when the staff lands on my back.





# A LETTER TO EDWARD FRANCIS SMALL

## A GAMBIAN STATESMAN

Fatou B Camara  
*The Gambia*



Dear Edward Francis Small,

Estelle Morris once said, “Politicians want to create an irreversible change because when they leave office, someone changes it back.”

Every man in the shade today sits because the tree was planted years ago. We can call him Gambian politics’ doyen, pioneer, and father. You educated and freed your people with your pen. Religious leaders opposed British rule before your famous Gambian politics. You’ve been honoured for your Gambian political work. Today, we honour your heroic sacrifice that freed the Gambians. National grandeur depends on mothers’ unflinching dedication and sacrifice. You and other brave soldiers fought for future freedom and dignity for years. Breaking free took time. Freedom fighters like you let us express ourselves, believe in our values, and be proud of our heritage. You died so our nation could live with bravery, honesty, sacrifice, liberty, freedom, and independence. We salute your heart struggles, tenacity, passion, and commitment to our motherland, Gambia, which has grown from peasant cottag-

es, ploughs, huts, cobblers, and sweepers.

“Ask not what your country has done for you; rather, ask what you have done for your country,” Jawaharlal Nehru once said.

Many recognize your exceptional Gambian political accomplishments. You wanted to help Gambians, especially farmers and labourers. Being one of the few educated Africans in the territory, you taught them. Evening schooling was supplied to the villagers.

The Gambia Farmers’ Cooperative Association began in 1917. At the 1920 Ghana Conference, you gave a powerful address on West African self-rule. Your amazing move created the National Congress of British West Africa and the Gambia branch. In 1922, you founded “the Gambia outlook and the Senegambia reporter”—the colony’s first nationalist newspaper and one of the earliest Pan-African tabloids—to give the people a voice.

You founded Bathurst, the first legally recognized trade union in The Gambia, in 1929. Your greatest accomplishment is

rising, not staying put. The 1935 internal issues that broke up the Bathurst trade union, now the Gambia labour union, led to a new union.

“No taxation without proper representation,” was your early 1920s campaign slogan with other West African Patriots to advocate elective representation and give the people tax control. The Ratepayers’ Association won all six African city council seats in 1936, becoming the first political party. Since it benefits everyone, you created this political party in 1930. In French West Africa, you formed political networks because a small group of devoted people with a solid purpose can change history. You were definitely appointed to the Legislative Council to represent Bathurst in 1941. You defeated IM Garba Jahumpa and Sheikh Omar Faye in 1947. Gambians elected their first citizen directly.

You were reappointed to the executive council in 1951 after being appointed in 1947. Mr. Francis Small, these extraordinary achievements led to independence and republic-hood. The people of this great nation only have sovereignty because of you. Light brought you out of the old world. You won after seeing that politics is the art and science of ruling. You and other great thinkers fought colonialism. You campaigned for African racial representation in colonial rule and West African cooperation on common challenges.

Like all true revolutionary Pan-Africanists, you fought between western Christian and Muslim and anti-western forces to set the Gambian people against colonial

rule and toward self-determination and independence. You trained JC Faye, Garba Jahumpa, and others to continue the independence movement under your guidance.

You inspired many, including Alieu Ebrima Cham Joof, who led the 1959 Bread and Butter March that led to Gambian independence. Many Gambians will continue your heritage of independence thanks to your inspiration, freedom, religion, memories, and patriotism.

After your death in 1958, other independence movements prevailed. The Gambia was Africa’s longest-running multiparty democracy. The Gambia’s transition from a democratic government under Sir Dawda to a dictatorial government under Yaya Jammeh, a coalition government under President Adama, and now a Barrow government is an intriguing case study that should be fully examined in the context of African politics. Understanding how the country has changed since independence from Britain in 1965 is crucial.

Mr. Francis Small, since then, the country has thrived and suffered under different political periods in terms of health, economy, education, and security. When the presidential elections were held in 2016, Adama Barrow emerged victorious, and by all means, that was seen as a turning point for the country. Gambians were optimistic that a new dawn had arrived, which would usher in a new Gambia. A new Gambia that was on the right trajectory but got short-lived. What went wrong?

Dear Francis Small, in 2016, President Bar-

row initiated several reforms, including the Janneh Commission, which revealed how Jammeh's regime looted the Gambia; the TRRC, which revealed Gambians' suffering and brutalities under Jammeh; and the CRC, which drafted a new constitution to change Gambians' lives and political landscape to consolidate democracy and usher in the third republic. Many Gambians who wanted a new constitution were crushed when Parliament rejected this draft constitution.

My dear Edward Francis Small, due to recent massive losses, many Gambians are wary of President Barrow's policies. President Barrow is offering Jammeh allies key positions in his cabinet. He nominated several for high-level parliament jobs.

Revered Edward Francis Small, "How far has the Gambia come in its 57 years as an independent state?" A million-dollar question.

Is Gambia living up to your agricultural, political, and educational vision? "Where is Gambia in global development?"

Mr. Francis Small, Gambia's agriculture economy remains undeveloped despite your efforts. Subsistence, rain-fed, and low yields require imports. You fought British exploitation for farmers, but nothing changed. Farmers must feed the nation but have a weak market. The government doesn't help them grow agriculture, and greedy dealers exploit them. We have patronage and tribalism in politics. We elect inept leaders that jeopardize national prosperity because people aren't politically educated.

Education is free in Gambia, but our system is a mess, Mr. Francis Small. Poor education policy and curriculum. High unemployment and insufficient job options for graduates contribute to high crime rates.

After COVID-19, the health sector deteriorated. Paracetamol is scarce in our hospitals. Rising maternal and child mortality. The economy is down, commodity prices are high, house rent is rising, and the cost of living is rising, making it tougher for Gambians to live. Social vices include corruption, bribery, inequity, and high crime.

Finally, our beloved Francis Small, after 57 years of freedom from Jawara's rule through Jammeh's and now Barrow's, the Gambia you envisioned and anticipated has not materialized.

Government change was like repackaging old wine. It tastes like 57-year-old wine. Corruption plagues our nation. Rising debt causes an economic downfall. Gambians are poor. Youth, education, and agriculture are departing for greater possibilities. Poor remuneration makes civil servants live hand-to-mouth. Gambians have had issues since 1965. The Gambia was supposed to be redeemed in 2016 when we overthrew a ruler. Gambians are growing desperate as President Barrow appears to be failing. When will politics' messiah appear? A good leader will be honest, incorrupt, and patriotic like you. We hope God gives us another leader like you.



Presents

— DAY  
**01**

CREATIVE WRITING

# WORKSHOPS **6.0**



**Funminiyi Akinrinade**  
(Nigeria)  
Poetry



**Nahida Esmail**  
(Tanzania)  
Children's Literature



**Khumoetsile Magonare D'Arcy**  
(Botswana)  
Fiction/Spoken word poetry



**Nicole E. Gandaho**  
(Benin Republic)  
Poetry



**Grace Tendo Katana**  
(Uganda)  
Children's Literature



**Efua Eshun**  
(Ghana)  
Creative Nonfiction

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-NOV-  
-2023-

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# THE CRAYON FAMILY

Taiwo Adewuyi  
Nigeria



I hear someone's footsteps outside the door before the door opens. From the assault of disinfectant on my nose, I know it is Mrs. Abigail, our cleaner.

"What are you doing?" she asks. Something metallic moans on the floor as she drags it.

"Visiting my family," I whisper rudely, as if she doesn't know today is the day my family visits or I visit them as the case may be.

She has to take a few steps before she sees them.

"Oh, I didn't know," she apologizes. "Good morning sir."

My father waves his hand and says good morning in a silent voice. My mother sits under the big tree in the room, dressed in a gown. Her eyes are staring at me unblinking but full of love. My younger brother is holding her hand. I don't know yet whether he should wear clothes or not. But he seems happy to be enjoying the evening breeze.

I wish my paradise was not in an eternal sunset.

"It is time for breakfast," Mrs Abigail says.

Can't she see that they brought food? This is supposed to be a picnic. And I want to enjoy this day. It is after all, the only time my family gathers to celebrate my birthday.

"His head is not on his neck and you have yourself three hands," the cleaner sighs.

I don't blame her. It is my fault. I have never seen my family before and I have never seen myself before. Neither can I see what I am painting.

My imagination falls apart. But I keep the cardboard on the bed to eat breakfast.

Then I realize that Mrs Abigail and the bed are gone too.

I live under the bridge with a senile woman.

# GATHERING RELIQS

Umaru Jennifer  
*Nigeria*

---

I flitted around preparing for my surprise birthday/engagement party. My boyfriend of two years was going to propose. I was floating to the sky from the pleasure, but a bleak shroud of grief held me down. My reflection in the mirror testified that I looked gorgeous in my red flowery gown.

“Achile, come say happy birthday to your sister,” Mummy announced. Achile ambled into the room with a glassy stare fixed on me. The looniness in his eyes slowly faded and the years became real. I rushed to his side and held his arm. “So, you are turning 22 today?” he smiled with intense eyes that looked over my body. Gladness for being remembered filled my heart. The best birthday present ever.

“You became a woman,” he added as he brought his eyes to my face. “Yes, brother. I am getting married soon.” His eyebrows twitched as he laughed.

The abrupt display of mirth confused me, I was still confused when he said;

“Don’t be long oh, return quickly so that you can help Mummy with dinner. You know she’s heavily pregnant and Baby Pat won’t let her rest.”

The last time my mother was pregnant was fourteen years ago. And Baby Pat no longer existed. I picked up this memory and wrapped it in my heart. It joined the stash of memories I had compiled over the years. I wondered if he also had gatherings. If he saved the moment when I massaged his back and he confessed that I was his favorite sister. Did he remember how Baby Pat had died in the accident that took his memory? Were all these lucid moments gatherings of memories that would never be fondled by him?

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— DAY  
**02**

# WRITERS MINGLE

6.0

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A  
TOOL FOR AFRICAN WRITERS**



**NOV. 3, 2023.**  
@ Alliance Francaise, Accra

**02:00**  
-PM-  
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# Creative Spotlight

- Maame Efua Eshun





*In this edition of the Writers Space Africa magazine, I had a chat with the founder of Golden Quill Editing Solutions and the current coordinator of Writers Space Africa-Ghana, Maame Efua Eshun. Join me as we discuss her writing and editing journey.*

**PPBlessing: Could you briefly introduce yourself**

**Efua:** I am Maame Efua Eshun, but everyone calls me Efua. I'm a writer and editor at Golden Quill Editing Solutions. I'm currently the coordinator for Writers Space Africa-Ghana and Assistant Communications Manager at Ghana Food Movement. I'm introverted and extroverted, depending on my environment and the people around me. I love to read whenever I can and have a passion for art as well.

**PPBlessing: How have you been able to combine doing all of these things?**

**Efua:** Honestly, it hasn't been easy. It was even worse when I was editing for WSA, editing for my business, working part-time, and schooling at the same time. But one thing that helped me and still helps is always creating a to-do list of things I want to do in a day (at least 5 things) and trying my best to finish them by the end of the day. That gives me some kind of

routine that I can follow to get things done and also keep track of what I've been up to.

Also, being disciplined counts. Now that I'm done with school and have a little bit more time on my hands, I'm learning to discipline myself and distribute my energy across board so no area or task is left lagging. It's not easy, but I'm doing my best.

**PPBlessing: That's wonderful. How did you get into writing?**

**Efua:** My writing journey started when I joined Writers Space Africa-Ghana (WSA-G) sometime around 2019. A friend of mine—Phyl—whose poems I used to proofread, introduced me to WSA-G in that year. I started out with poems, very whack poems, and some of the critiques I got broke my heart to pieces, in fact, to powder! But they were all for my good and I got better with time and more practice. I was also introduced to other genres and fell in love with Creative Nonfiction (CNF) so I chose that and poetry to specialise in. But currently, I write more CNF than poetry. I think I'll just stick to the former, but time will tell.

**PPBlessing: Will you recommend joining such writing communities to others?**

**Efua:** Absolutely! I can say for a fact

that I wouldn't have become as good a writer as I am now if I had learnt everything on my own. The critiques, other people sharing their works, workshops, and lectures etc. inspire and shape the writer and I highly recommend such communities, especially for amateur writers. Aside from learning, joining WSA really widened my network. I've gotten to virtually encounter a lot of cool people I probably wouldn't have met if I hadn't joined. It's like an online family on its own and I thank God always for planting me in there!

**PPBlessing: Have you always wanted to start your own editorial business?**

**Efua:** Funny enough, it wasn't my goal when I started. I didn't even think about it. I started with editing my friend's poems every now and then, and after I joined WSA-G and then WSA main later, I could easily spot errors in the works some of the other writers shared, so I'd say it came to me easily. Fast forward, I ended up editing PenBoss's articles and screenplays almost every week before he shared them. That put me in the spotlight during my early days and more people in WSA got to know about me and some came to me for editing which I did for free. I then realised that it's something I could monetize. So, I took it seriously, took a few online courses, read a lot and practice more frequent-

ly, and I got better and better. In 2020, I started thinking of business names, it wasn't easy, surprisingly, but I ended up with Golden Quill Editing Solutions. Golden because I believe there's power in my fingers which flows to my pen/keyboard and makes things better... Quill to signify a writing tool, necessary for manual editing... Editing to show people what the business does or is about... and Solutions because I have the solutions to your editing problems!

I started monetising my editing somewhere late 2021 and set up social media accounts for it and all. And in May this year, I registered the business officially. Over the years, I have been able to put some systems in place that make it easy to deal with customers and also give them a good experience. I'm still learning and I believe it can only get better with time.

**PPBlessing: So apt! What has been the most challenging work you've had to edit so far?**

**Efua:** I can't mention any one work but there have been a few works that gave me migraines! There have been a few occasions where I had to stop editing, sleep, and go back to the work later before I could figure out what the writer was trying to say. This is very important because an editor must nev-

er touch the original meaning of someone's work. Yours is to correct it, make it better, not change the story or tell it your way. So, I take my time with such 'challenging' works, because though the writer's English may sometimes be very rusty, I always want a smile to appear on their face after they see what I did with their work.

**PPBlessing: What are some pointers you can share with someone getting into the editing business?**

**Efua:** Reading wide does the trick baby! Read wide, whenever you can. It does wonders for an editor. And research a lot. Learn the intricacies of the English language, or whichever language you choose to edit in, so you can make corrections from an informed position. And when you feel you're ready to monetise it, don't relent, because editing takes a lot of time and energy and can be draining, so why not be compensated for it? Besides, writers will never go extinct, as such editors will always be in need. So monetise it when you can. Go for the mula!

**PPBlessing: As a writer, what exactly, do you want to achieve with your writing?**

**Efua:** I haven't really put much thought into that, but first, I'd like to get better, and then in the very near future, I'd like to publish at least two

books, specifically Creative Nonfiction that give people a glimpse into my life but also give them the opportunity to enjoy creative storytelling.

**PPBlessing: How about poetry?**

**Efua:** I don't know if I'd go back to poetry, but it's quite unlikely, to be honest. I feel like it takes more work to write poetry than Creative Nonfiction. I love poems and all the poets out there, but this is how I feel, no offense, haha.

**PPBlessing: I take no offense on their behalf. How has being a former editor with WSA magazine contributed to Golden Quill?**

**Efua:** Two things: it has added to my experience and enriched my practice. I edited the creative nonfiction genre of the WSA for 2 years, and I must say it was a good experience for me, you know, working with other editors, learning to work within stipulated timelines, meeting deadlines, etc. All of these things gave me a rich experience, and by editing these entries every month, I got the opportunity to sharpen my 'editing eyes' and my attention to detail. Even learning to balance editing for the magazine every month while doing my school work (since I was still in school at the time) was a different kind of training on its own, and I'd say it's been a worthwhile experience.

**PPBlessing: Do you have mentors?**

**Efua:** As far as editing is concerned, I used to look up to Namwanja Margaret Chukwabi of blessed memory. She owned Rosebud Editing in Zambia. She was elated when I told her about my first paid editing gig and later about my desire to set up my own editing business. She encouraged me and was willing to help me find my feet, only for death to do what it does best. Her death really broke my heart and I still haven't come to terms with it, but I know she'd be impressed with the progress I've made so far with Golden Quill Editing Solutions. But for now, one person closest to a mentor, who likes to call himself my cheerleader is Yaw Antwi Owusu. He's been amazing... always cheering me on even when I make the least achievement, and encouraging me to be my best at all times.

**PPBlessing: How has your course of study contributed to the work you do for Ghana Food Movement?**

**Efua:** Quick fun fact, I got my job at Ghana Food Movement through WSA-G, but more on that later.

I read BA Communication Studies (Public Relations major) in school and I work part-time as the assistant to the Communications Manager of Ghana Food Movement. I started as an Of-

fice Administrator (I still do that in addition to the communications). It's a fairly young food/agri organisation that's already making waves in the industry! By working there, I got the opportunity to practice what I studied in school, so everything communication and other things on the side. Through this work, I also learnt that life on the field or on the job is very different from school and that not everything you learn in school would be needed on the job. But, thanks to my boss, Lydia Amenyaglo, and the cool and accommodating work environment at Ghana Food Movement, I've been able to adjust and thrive. I've been there a little over two years and I'm glad I grabbed the opportunity to work there when it presented itself.

**PPBlessing: Why did you choose to work with a food company?**

**Efua:** Because I like food. Also, it's called Ghana Food Movement because we're a network of food and agriculture enthusiasts drawing positive attention to Ghana's food system and highlighting its potential.

I didn't say no to working there because due to the program I read in school, I'm able to work anywhere, granted I can put my skills and knowledge acquired to use.

**PPBlessing: That's wonderful. What**



**have you learnt about the food industry so far with your role and are there lapses that can be improved?**

**Efua:** One most important thing I've learnt is that Ghana has the power to feed itself without having to spend billions on food importation... money we could use for other important things. We have arable lands, we have good weather, we have several indigenous ingredients that are nutritious as well, and we have the human resources to do the job, i.e. tilling the land and developing technologies for agriculture. All we have to do is focus on supporting ourselves, hone our abilities, develop a taste for locally made products, and support local businesses, among other things and then we'll be on our way to self-sustenance as far as food and agriculture is concerned. And that is what Ghana Food Movement is all about, drawing people's attention to issues like these and making use of the opportunities in the food and agri industry.

**PPBlessing:** **That's commendable. Tell us about how WSA-G brought you the opportunity.**

**Efua:** Some time ago, WSA-G organised a series of workshops and I had to coordinate it—and I wasn't even the country coordinator then—especially with communicating details of the workshops to the various facilitators, keeping them updated on any developments, sending them remind-

ers, program outlines, etc. from the time we reached out to them for the workshop till they delivered. Abdallah Smith was one of the facilitators who also happened to be a co-director of the Ghana Food Movement. He mentioned that he was impressed with how I was keeping the facilitators abreast with the preparations and whatnot and that he was part of an organisation that needed someone to do just that with their management meetings, etc. so if I was interested... and here we are today. Best decision I made in my young adult life!

**PPBlessing:** **What do you do for leisure?**

**Efua:** Sleeping and reading! I do either of them depending on my mood.

**PPBlessing:** **What are some of the things you'd like to achieve as an editor?**

**Efua:** It's my dream to edit Chimamanda Ngozie Adiechie's novel someday, or one of these other well-known writers, at least, but Chimamanda, preferably. I'd also want to get to a stage where I can employ other editors to work with me, even if on a freelance basis, and also help several writers to achieve their publishing dreams.

**PPBlessing:** **That's awesome. We look forward to that. Are there people you've mentored or currently mentoring?**

**Efua:** Uhm, no, at least not strictly in the sense of the word. There are a few people I advise, encourage, and inspire in what they do, but I wouldn't call that mentoring. So no, none yet.

**PPBlessing: Who are your top 3 favorite authors of all time and why?**

**Efua:**

1. Chimamanda Ngozie Adiechie
2. Yaa Gyasi
3. Chinua Achebe.

Why? These three have some powerful minds and words! I'd choose their books over movies any day!

**PPBlessing: If you hadn't gotten involved in writing or editing, what field would you have been in?**

**Efua:** The arts or tech industry, maybe. The former because it's a natural talent that I could hone and make good use of, and the latter because I have a little interest in it and I think I could excel if I ventured into it.

**PPBlessing: When you said you have a passion for arts, what exactly do you mean?**

**Efua:** I'm naturally talented when it comes to art: drawing and painting. I like how art is able to soothe one's mind, even just by looking at a piece of art. Everything about art excites me, basically.

**PPBlessing: Which book among those you've read or edited has had a lasting impact on you?**

**Efua:** Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing. That book made me want to know about my family tree or line so badly. It made me wonder how my great great great grandmother looked like, did she have to deal with slavery? Was her husband or children taken away on slave ships? How was life back then, etc? I thought about these things for days after I read the book and still do sometimes. If any book that leaves you thinking about it for days on end is not excellent, then I don't know what it is! It made me think of the slave trade and the colonial times a little differently. In short, I really enjoyed that book. I may read it a second time when I get the chance.

**PPBlessing: If you had a chance to change anything about your writing and editing journey, what would it be?**

**Efua:** I would have started doing them earlier than I did!

Thank you for reading through to the end, I hope you've been inspired to pursue your dreams in writing, editing, or any other field you are interested in.

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# African Writers Conference



# PHILETAIRUS' NEST

**Bongani Zungu**  
*South Africa*

*Layard, Cuckoo, Quelea's Widows*

You treacherous thief at the tip  
of tails and twigs, twisting thy  
thorny troubling fangs; a feast.  
A nest's cling wails with the wind.

Yet yesterday, at the far end of  
oily palms, soft as a sponge of  
neverending holes, was a closely  
weaved complex of red-billed wings.  
All her rostra hang and halt all  
hail's tumultuous clouds.

Should socius' repaired pairs ever  
descend vertically toward cucullatus'  
circular chambers, hers of portioned  
walls of bladed glass tenderly balanced  
near gregarious haystacks of dry  
cocoon.

Yet yesterday, one knew what they felt  
when they settled for the night;  
growing and singing of sympathy  
through the toilsome decades.



# THE HOMESTEAD

**Marial Awendit**  
*South Sudan*



We gathered behind the herd of calves,  
Separated from their mothers.  
The green grass licked with dewy leaves  
Our skins.  
Thick stripes of dew dripped down  
My legs,  
I mused several mornings  
Gathered together their dew.

We drove the calves far into the green trees,  
Where they cannot sneak back to eat  
Groundnuts and cowpeas from the fields.

I sang jokey songs  
With the boys of my herd, but I recall  
You were the one we escaped from them,  
To dig up from wet soil  
Baboon's onions & wild roots.

Eight years now, I have not seen you.  
Last year, I returned to the homestead  
Where we played in the light  
Of the full moon.  
One half of the broken bowl of clay  
Held the memories of rains.  
The two shea butter trees we climbed  
Stand dry & leafless.

# A MURDER OF CROWS

**Elias Denen Dodo**  
*Nigeria*



Like seasons holding time,  
like branches collecting leaves,  
I've called you here like shadows  
where darkness teases lights,  
I've called you here like vultures  
where mortis defeats life,  
I've called you here to nectar  
like bees acquiesce to queen.

I bid you like the joining  
where wispy winds embrace,  
the chaos of the congress  
when waves relive their tales;  
the ramblings of the waters,  
the gurgling of wet throats,  
as seas divulge in confidence  
the wonders they have towed.

Come, birds of likened feathers,  
sons spread like sower's seeds,  
come, daughter of my mother  
to the breasts that you did feed,  
come back to grease the fulcrum  
from whence your fate was spun,  
congregation of wanderers,  
a homecoming of crows.

# IMPOSED NUPTIALS

**Matrida Phiri**  
*Zambia*



Their hunch-backed, pot-bellied forms slither across the brown grass  
 The village elders stealthily approaching my father's yard at his behest  
 A pack of indolent sly foxes, ready to harvest where they did not sow  
 Bouncing on feet as if padded with cotton wool and garbed in rubber  
 Faces set in that primitive egotistical expression that worships the self  
 They come ready to negotiate my bride-price as though I were a goat.

A hideously sinister assembly which apes the coiled black mamba  
 Encircling the repulsive calabash of over-fermented illegal alcoholic brew  
 They intend to pronounce over my life an unmerited lifetime sentence  
 A cold inhuman instrument of unfairness meted out without compassion  
 To handcuff me to the most affluent of the village in a matrimonial jail.

And when he appears, all sorts of hellish things lift their heads within me  
 The chosen one, older even than the elders, his bald head shining like the moon  
 Sinister in appearance and strange in the ways of men, he commands respect  
 There descends an ethereal and sudden hush over the dreadful circle of old men  
 The invisible pedestal upon which this ancient being has been placed is lofty  
 A throne so high, it reaches and merges with spiritual wickedness above the sky.

The covenant gourd is passed over to the chosen one with traditional flourish  
 Moon-head flaunts then stuffs disgusting ill-begotten bank notes into the calabash  
 Kneeling before the monster, my father receives the spoils, grinning like a buffoon  
 The dreadful deed accomplished, loud invisible chimes resound, sealing my fate  
 Fragments of my dream to be a lawyer drop like dry petals from my defeated grip.

# BEES AT NIGHT

**Sarah Frost**  
*South Africa*

The bee man removes bees at night  
when they're home from foraging.  
Dark is a hive filled with sleeping bees,  
carried unawares through the streets,  
as bats' echoes locate between trees,  
and children are sent to bed to dream.

Father, please take the bees in my head,  
and put them where they cannot sting me.  
I want rose petal thoughts, unfurling soft  
as the dove confessing his love from the branch,  
not these guilty questions with no answers,  
that steal my nectar and flit away.

The beekeeper brings his fragrant smoke,  
drugs the drones unconscious.  
So careful, he carries the fecund queen,  
brooding ruler, who must not be harmed,  
and her courtiers, their spears laid down.  
As if caught in honeycomb, I wait for absolution,  
the absence of bees, such sweet taboo.





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# WELCOME HOME STRANGER

Adedolapo Grillo  
*Nigeria*



I am like a stranger, relegated to the background in my home as I watch the festival preparations from my vantage point on my late father's balcony. Women crowded in groups around several fires, cooking different meals, while the men slaughtered the animals for the ceremony. The children chased each other around playfully. The whole town was celebrating, and I smiled as I watched. I remember celebrating this festival some thirty-two years ago—me

and my peers —when I was just a boy of fifteen. I scanned the area for my wife and kids, but I couldn't find them. They'd followed my sister to the market.

"Is that you, Dolapo?" The voice drew me from my thoughts. There they were—Dayo, Gbenga, Yinka, and Ibukun. I'd not seen them in thirty-two years. Nostalgia hit me like a water wave.

"Yes, it is me. I am coming." As I trudged

down the stairs, I remembered the time I left and the promise we made to ourselves. I never kept it. I have been running for thirty years. I shivered in anticipation of my reception as I walked up to them.

“Welcome home.” Yinka’s high-pitched voice brought back sweet memories. He gave me a hug that squeezed my ribs so hard that I grimaced in pain.

“Yes, the prodigal has finally returned.” The tone of the voice was harsh.

“Ibukun, not now!” Yinka restrained him. I could hear the plea in his voice.

Ibukun forced a smile. “Welcome home, Dolapo.” He stretched out his hand, and I shook it. It was not a warm handshake, but at least it betrayed some emotions, and for that I was grateful. I took turns greeting the others, awkward as the entire ritual was.

“Do you take beer?” Dayo asked me in a manner that reflected his disappointment at not knowing whether I drank or not.

“I do,” I answered.

“Haa... Let’s go to the parlour and... talk.”

“But the festival?”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. We will still make it in time for the grand finale,” Gbenga replied. “The beer parlour is not far from here. You remember Mama Fathia’s palm wine shop?”

Startled by the question, I answered, “She’s still alive?”

He laughed. “Yes, she is. But she’s retired

and very old now. Fathia is in charge of the shop, selling beer and pepper soup. You will like what she’s done with the place.”

“Now that I think about it, she liked you once. So, we might get a discount.” We all laughed at Ibukun’s joke. It was the ice-breaker we needed. For the first time since meeting my friends, I relaxed. We reminisced as we trudged the small path to Mama Fathia’s parlour, pointing at houses and telling tales of the old days.

“Wait, is that not Iya Agba’s house?” I singled out an old thatched-roof hut surrounded by tall trees. The compound was abandoned, and the weeds claimed every space they could find, even the windows and doors.

“Yes, it is. She died some months after you left.”

“Ahhh, what a woman!” I said wistfully. I remembered how Iya Agba would gather children in her compound in the evening, give each of us a piece of dried fish, and tell stories of the past. She was the oldest in the community at the time and was well respected. “But how could this place be left like this? What about her children? Don’t they visit?”

“They came home when she died. They’ve not been here since. At least, that’s what my mother tells me whenever I ask.”

I looked at Yinka incredulously. “What do you mean, ask? You should know since you live here.”

He stared at me hotly, a look they all shared. Suddenly, I felt foolish. “Did you



think you were the only one of us who left? We all left for school and now work. But we come back every year.”

“That was the promise we made to each other or did you forget?” Ibukun jibed.

“I didn’t” I protested weakly. “I am sorry.” We’d stopped walking at this point.

“Sorry?” Gbenga asked. “You didn’t even come home for your father’s funeral—your father!” he barked out the words.

“You wouldn’t understand...”

“Try us.” Yinka folded his arms as he answered. I couldn’t speak. I just stared at the floor. “No answer?” He hissed and walked away. The rest of us followed him in silence until we got to the bar. Though the parlour wasn’t far from my house, it felt like we’d been walking for hours. I was tired.

The bar was so different from what I remembered. It was modern and cleaner. We sat down at a corner table and placed our orders—beer and beef pepper soup. While waiting for our food, Fathia came to our table and playfully bantered with my companions. She froze in astonishment when she noticed me. She looked back at my friends, and a realization hit her. All of a sudden, she drew me into a tight hug.

“You came.” She said without releasing me from her embrace. She studied me for a few minutes. “You look well. That’s good.” The waiter came back with our order. “Serve them everything they want. It’s on the house.”

“I said it!” Ibukun shouted triumphantly.

“We will drink for free today.” The cheers were deafening. Even Fathia couldn’t restrain a laugh. “It’s only for today,” she said, eyeing me. “Because Dolapo has come home.”

After everyone had settled down, Gbenga asked me the question they’d been meaning to ask: “Why? Why didn’t you return as you promised? As we promised! Every year, we would all come together to celebrate our friendship. It was your idea for us to gather like that. But every year, you were nowhere to be found. Even when your dad died. Why, Dolapo?”

“He told me never to come back, even if I heard he died.”

“Your dad?”

“Yes, my dad.” I downed my beer. “You all remember Baba Fagbenro, my uncle?” They nodded. “Well, I don’t know if you know this, but he died the same year I left. Customarily, the family oracle needed a replacement, and I was chosen. My father refused. He believed in education and was wealthy enough to send me to the university.”

“To send all of us... Any child who wanted to further their education, he sponsored.” Dayo sighed as he spoke. “Your father was a great man.”

“He was. My greatest regret is that I couldn’t be by his side when he breathed his last.” I wiped off the tears that threatened to fall from my eyes and continued my story. “I also didn’t want to be a priest. My father’s refusal caused a serious rift in the family, which led to threats. Life-threatening ones.

In fear, my father sent me secretly to his friend in Ibadan with a letter. He instructed his friend to send me abroad to further my education. Before I left, he gave me a warning. That I must not come back home, no matter what. He said if I was to come home, several years must have passed. He died four years later, as you know.”

“Why didn’t you tell us all this before you left?” Yinka said.

“I wanted to, but I couldn’t. My father swore me to secrecy. I missed everyone—all of you. But I couldn’t come home. I got married in the US. My wife and kids are here with me. I would love you all to meet them.”

“We will love that too,” Yinka replied.

“So am I forgiven?”

“If you will always come home. We love to come and celebrate ourselves, our friend-

ship, and the community. So, promise us that this won’t be your last visit.”

“I promise.” As I said those words, I heaved a sigh of relief. I was home again, a boy of fifteen running around with my friends. I had been haunted and had lived my entire life afraid of my shadow. But for the first time in thirty-two years, I felt free.

The festival was almost done when we got back. People were eating and drinking. Some were dancing to the music blaring from the speakers. I saw my kids with other children, running around like I once did. Just then, a loud gong sounded and halted all activities. Everyone—old or young, man or woman, rich or poor—gathered together, forming a circle. A small, bald man walked into the centre and knelt. We all did the same. And he prayed blessings upon the community for the next year.



# UNDER THE VEIL OF DARKNESS

Chitsanzo Changa  
*Malawi*



A colossal, ominous cloud loomed above Duka village. A foreboding presence that sent shivers down the spines of its inhabitants. Flashes of lightning danced within its depths, and its eerie hum filled the air as it slowly descended upon the village. Panic seized the villagers, who scurried into the safety of their huts. Darkness descended upon the entire village, despite it being well past midday, as the cloud settled over the communal playfield.

Inside his hut, the village chief cowered in silence with his wife and three children. However, his sense of duty eventually overcame his fear, and he ventured outside to investigate the strange phenomenon, despite his family's protests. The village was shrouded in an eerie hush as he made his way to the playfield, with curious eyes peeking through their hut's windows.

Arriving at the playfield, the chief stood at a cautious distance from the colossal cloud, unsure of his next move. His mind raced for a plan, but he found himself overwhelmed by the magnitude of the sit-

uation. In a sudden, heart-stopping moment, a small section of the cloud began to part. Fear gripped him, and he instinctively wanted to flee, yet his legs refused to obey.

Two humanoid figures emerged from the cloud, walking in perfect synchrony. Clad in kilts and coats fashioned from what appeared to be animal hide and adorned with peculiar creature-shaped necklaces, they wielded staffs in their right hands and shields in their left. Thick, black hair cascaded from their heads, and their bodies exuded strength and vitality. Their eyes, obscured by swirling, circular flames, held an otherworldly allure. Their feet seemed to meld with the cloud's surface, adding to their ethereal presence.

Identifying themselves as messengers from the gods, they spoke in deep, echoing voices, each word accompanied by a small flame that flickered from their mouths. They instructed the chief to gather all the villagers for an important message, warning of dire consequences for those who re-



fused to attend. Reluctantly, the chief returned to the huts, instructing his fellow villagers to assemble at the playfield. Fear and trepidation spread through the community as they reluctantly complied.

With the entire village gathered, the messengers began to speak in unison, as though their words had been rehearsed for millennia. They conveyed the gods' wrath at the villagers' waywardness, listing their sins and emphasizing the need for human sacrifice to appease the divine anger. Those willing to sacrifice themselves were called upon to step forward, and the messengers made it clear that without enough volunteers, the entire village would be consumed by a devastating fire.

Intrigued and fearful, the villagers exchanged puzzled glances. Then, an elderly woman took a determined step towards the portal created by the messenger's staff. Her family tried to dissuade her, but she pressed on, pausing at the threshold to wave at her loved ones before disappearing into the darkness. A spine-chilling scream pierced the air, followed by an eerie silence, as if she had been swallowed by an abyss. Panic and sorrow engulfed the villagers as they watched in horror.

The messengers remained impassive, their expressions unchanged. Eventually, the chief, along with his wife and children, walked toward the portal, attempting to persuade others to stay back. Yet, they too entered willingly. Soon, more villagers followed suit, and in the chaos, families were torn apart.

After a quarter of the villagers had entered the portal, no one else moved. The messengers inquired again, but there was no response. A few more brave souls ventured in before the messengers closed the portal with a mere raise of a staff-bearing hand. The messengers commended those who chose selflessness and sacrifice, sparing them as the righteous. They announced their intention to establish a new village founded on principles of humanity and virtue.

In the blink of an eye, panic spread among the remaining villagers, and they rushed toward the portal, desperate to gain entry. Yet, an invisible force repelled their efforts. Desperation and hopelessness overwhelmed them as the messengers now turned away, entered the cloud portal from whence they came. The portal was sealed shut, and the dark cloud ascended into the sky.

The villagers left behind watched in despair as a colossal fireball erupted from beneath the cloud, consuming them in a blaze of unforgiving fury.

# FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Ogooluwa Jayeola  
*Nigeria*



The allure of forbidden love is captivating and intoxicating, weaving its enchantment until complete immersion is inevitable. Such was the fate of Oyin as she stealthily ventured out of her home in the dead of night, her heart racing and her mind pounding.

Oyin, whose full name was Oyinkansola, hailed from a lineage of Adeola, the esteemed village blacksmith, and Abike, a skilled basket weaver. Renowned for her captivating dance skills and striking beauty, she possessed a slender waist, shapely hips, and a captivating dark complexion. Her attire consisted of an Aso-Oke

wrapped around her chest, another gracefully adorning her waist, cascading down to her knees. With an exposed flat stomach, her waist was embellished with vibrant strings of colourful beads. Simple braided hair elegantly framed her face, reaching the base of her neck, further accentuating her exquisite features. Her destination was the Osun River, the primary water source for the entire village.

As Oyin's heart pounded, a radiant smile illuminated her face, reminiscing about his words from earlier that day, "Meet me by the riverside tonight at sunset." She fervently hoped he was still waiting, rather

than having departed. She inwardly cursed her brother, whose late-night wakefulness had delayed her and jeopardized their rendezvous.

Upon reaching the riverside, her heart fluttered with delight upon setting her eyes on his sturdy back. Akinjobi, her beloved, stood there. He was the son of Bayo, a formidable warrior in the village who had succumbed to madness during a conflict with a neighbouring village, allegedly due to the opposing village's herbalist

Akinjobi had come into the world shortly after his father's descent into madness, growing up without a conventional paternal figure. This unfortunate circumstance bestowed upon him a stigma within the village. Nonetheless, Akinjobi's unwavering determination and strength propelled him to become a renowned warrior. Despite this, most individuals avoided him due to his father's condition, believing that the herbalist's curse would inevitably befall him as well.

However, Oyin refused to distance herself from him. On the contrary, she cherished him even more, admiring his valour and tenacity in pursuing his aspirations despite the village's judgment. Their relationship had commenced several nights prior during the village gathering, following Oyin's captivating dance performance in celebration of her coming-of-age ceremony, symbolizing her readiness for marriage.

Numerous young men within the village sought Oyin's hand in marriage, yet she

remained uninterested until she noticed him. His aloofness from the crowd caught her attention, and she couldn't help but notice that his gaze towards her was pure and devoid of lust, a refreshing departure from the stares she had encountered that day. Initiating a conversation with him marked the beginning of their deepening bond. Upon discovering their connection, her parents warned her to distance herself, but these admonishments only fueled her affection for him.

To evade her parents' watchful eyes and the prying gazes of the village, he softly instructed her during their encounter in the marketplace earlier that day to rendezvous with him at the riverside. The mere thought filled her heart with exhilaration, solidifying her realization that she loved him. Upon sighting him by the riverside, she rushed towards him, her hurried footsteps causing him to turn towards her just as she leapt into his embrace. In the moonlit glow, they stood entwined as if attempting to merge their souls. They began to sway gently to an invisible rhythm, a rhythm that only they could hear—the rhythm of their love.

"I missed you," she softly spoke.

"As did I," he replied.

They then found solace by the riverside, accompanied by one another throughout the night, their forbidden love ensnaring them deeper and deeper within its intricate web.



# WRONG MOVE

Joshua Laryea  
*Ghana*



Today, East Ridge High’s senior and junior students are about to engage in a football showdown. They have been preparing for this event since the start of the term, and it is their last match as students of the school. The juniors’ best players will graduate soon, but the stakes for this game are higher than ever—the year twos, unofficially acting on behalf of the juniors, challenged the seniors with a bet. The year twos collected fifty cedis from their classmates and they wanted the seniors to win

or triple if they lost.

Myself and two other boys were the only ones who hadn’t contributed to the bet money. I understand why a lot of them paid the money; this is how teenage boys amuse themselves, spending their parents’ hard-earned money in a vain effort to appear cool in front of each other. This time, I was dragged into it, no matter how much I tried to stay on the sidelines. Jacob, a friend, asked me for some cash so he could pay his part of the contribution. He was

one of the ‘representatives’, so he had to chip in more than everyone else. Normally, I wouldn’t have given him anything even if he begged me, but this shameless guy blackmailed me with information he had overheard from my conversation with the math teacher. With that, I finally agreed to loan him what he needed - plus some extra for interest.

The big day had finally arrived, and I had to go watch the game to determine if I’d get my money back or remain in debt. I’d never before been so devoted to a football club. Beads of sweat started building on my forehead as I switched from my uniform into ordinary clothing. Though the field was over half an hour away on foot, this moment, under such pressure, it didn’t matter. I must be there. My father would be infuriated to learn that I gambled with the funds instead of giving them to Sir Isaac as he’d requested. He would also be mad if he found out I put off repayment by fabricating financial difficulties and using my good conduct and excellent grades as proof.

The path to the field was mostly shaded by the trees on the side of the street. The students had gathered at the gate and were waiting to be escorted to the field. The headmaster allowed the match to happen because the seniors had pleaded unremittingly and were done with their exams. The only condition was that the outgoing sports prefects had to make sure the students didn’t go anywhere but the field and back. I joined the students as we waited for the sports prefects to come back.

“I heard the seniors have scored oo” one of the students happily informed her friend. “How did you know? Have you been to the park?” I asked grabbing her by the shoulder, my eyelids stretched as wide as they could. She, however, answered ‘no’, rudely sliding my hand off her shoulder, saying “I just heard it around”. I didn’t know whether to believe it or not. The prefects soon came, and we started our walk to the grounds. I was feeling restless, a ball of nerves knotted in my mind. I prayed what the girl said was false. I was tempted to run, but I couldn’t be the prefects’ scapegoat; not during their last days. I had only heard stories, but I prefer that to it being my story.

On any other day, I would have taken pleasure in hearing the hawkers shout their slogans like “Yes! Pure water” or “Plantain chips!” and watching the children chasing each other with glee. The melodious sound of moving cars in the distance and the loud conversations between shopkeepers full of laughter and political debates would have soothed me. But today it all merged together into an unbearable cacophony. Even the birds in the sky taking flight for home before dusk only served to remind me that I wouldn’t be able to rest until I saw how the game turned out. If Jacob hadn’t been around on this fateful day, I would already be dozing off into a peaceful afternoon nap.

If only he had been forthcoming and open, I could have found a way out. We met on the first day of school, and miraculously became shared a bunk bed. He quickly be-

came the only person I knew since then. Because I never felt I had anything to keep hidden, I divulged much about myself to him; whereas, he mostly listened without saying much. When I saw him standing outside the teacher's office that day, I didn't really think of it as an issue - I trusted him to keep my secrets. It hadn't occurred to me that blackmail was also an option.

We were about halfway to the football field when I noticed a group of senior students walking and laughing amongst each other. This wasn't too unusual, as they had more privileges than us. But why were they leaving? My intrigue peaked. The prefects ahead stopped them and exchanged words with them that I couldn't make out from my vantage point. Eventually, they let the seniors go, and they went on their way towards the school.

I could only make out a few words from what the prefects were saying: 'Dro...' and 'Injury'. If it was true, then this would be disastrous; Drogba being injured. Dro, short for Drogba, is the nickname for the captain of the juniors' team. He is also one of the best players in the school's official team. He was my saving grace on the team, so if I couldn't rely on him anymore, getting money back seemed impossible. I thought of inquiring further, but not daring to due to there being no prior relationship between me and them, none that was positive anyway. Desperately, I stretched out an arm in an attempt to get one of their attentions. When they recognised it was me - their senior - the look of annoyance quickly scrubbed away and replaced with an apologetic puppy-look.

My blank but piercing gaze gestured him to move closer. On a better day, such mischief would have incurred a hefty penalty. I put my arm over his shoulders and menacingly leaned towards him. With a low voice, I asked, "What were the year-threes discussing?" He replied nervously, "Senior, I don't know oo, but Prefect Michael had a very bad expression." I pushed him away with a warning that we'd speak again later. We made our way up the two meter grassy hill and saw crowd of students and players around something on the pitch. The whispered commotion was grief-stricken. The Sports prefects ran towards them shouting about needing a first-aid kit. From this evidence, it dawned on me that my money was gone.

We reached the last turn before a two-meter climb up a grassy hill and descent to the sidelines of the field. I had already heard enough to convince me I had lost my money. During the descent, I saw a mix of players and students gathered around something on the pitch. Their unintelligible whispers, a tune of melancholy. The Sports prefects run towards the crowd, shouting commands that someone bring the First-aid Kit. More evidence.

I asked one of my mates, who was about a meter from the crowd, "Charle, what were the last scores before Oboy get injury". "What are you saying, the match no start. Girome go hurt for some bush inside, and the way he dey bleed, them no fit to start". Ahhh!



# GREEN MEMORIES

Suhaibu Safiyanu  
*Nigeria*



That particular Sallah morning at Bagwai was the coldest I had ever experienced. The chill of the harmattan wind made it feel like something, or someone was being avenged upon us. The previous night's temperature had dropped to its lowest ever, making even adults dread performing ablution with cold water. Everywhere we looked, brown leaves from the neem tree we had in our compound fluttered down and littered the ground my sister and I had just spent time sweeping the

evening before.

The sight of the compound's mess made me queasy and I knew I'd have to do a re-sweep by myself since my sister had gone off to style her hair. As I was considering what to do next, Abdul and Habu raced up to me as if they were chased by a hungry dog.

"What's wrong? Why are you people running?" I asked, sounding terrified.

"Dan Safiya (Safiya's son. Safiya is my



aunt and it was reported that she loved me so much that people began to address me as her son when she was a teen),” Abdul cut in, “we are going to Ramin Tsamiya to wash our bodies before the prayer time.” He added excitedly.

“Are you for real? How many are you?” I asked, my face brimming with excitement.

“We are five. The rest are out there waiting for us.” Answered Habu.

“All right. Let us go, but be careful lest Umma hears and spoils everything!” I warned while melting away.

“Dan Safiya,” began Habu after all but I had stripped off at the grass-covered bank of Ramin Tsamiya stream, “throw water at me and I’ll throw at you.”

That was one unique way to take a bite of the cold water.

“I don’t think I can swim, I am catching a cold. You can play with Abdul, the swimmer.” I suggested, pointing at the latter.

Abdul accepted, and they stepped into the water as if they had been asked to dip blistered feet into a bowl of iodine.

They began with flinging at each other as many drops of water as one finger could carry, then two fingers and soon one palm. In a short while, each was splashing water on the other with two hands. The initial shock gave way to an exhilarating experience.

I watched in awe as I stood a safe distance up the embankment, arms tightly clasped on my chest, teeth clattering involuntarily, and white smoke exuding from my mouth and nostrils as if I were smoking an invisible cigarette. I was envious of my friends who gave the impression that they were enjoying every drop of water they threw at each other.

Kabiru, who was already at the stream when we arrived, stood there beside his plastic bucket, and watching in awe too. He then removed his clothes and walked nonchalantly to the stream, holding a small bowl for scooping up water.

Standing on the edge of the stream, he bent over, filled the bucket with cold water, spun around, took a few decisive steps behind me and, in a flash, emptied the contents of the bucket on my head, wetting my clothes and all.

“You coward! Catch me if you can!” Kabiru laughed before rushing into the stream and splashing water all over his body before anyone could.

I stood there frozen. Shivering. I regret that had I stayed to sweep our compound, I would not have accompanied my playmates on such an early morning trip to the stream, and Kabiru would not have poured cold water on my body.

A cruel, wounded expression was in my eyes. I felt a hot throbbing in my chest. Instinctively, with a taste of panic, I reached down, afraid that my toes would be missing; but they were there - benumbed.

A wave of anger surged through my body when Kabiru jeered at me, sticking out his tongue and pulling down his two lower eyelids at me. I felt like jumping into the water to dip his head down until he breathed his last, but I was not as brave. They had more guts than me. So I quietly melted away with their clothes.

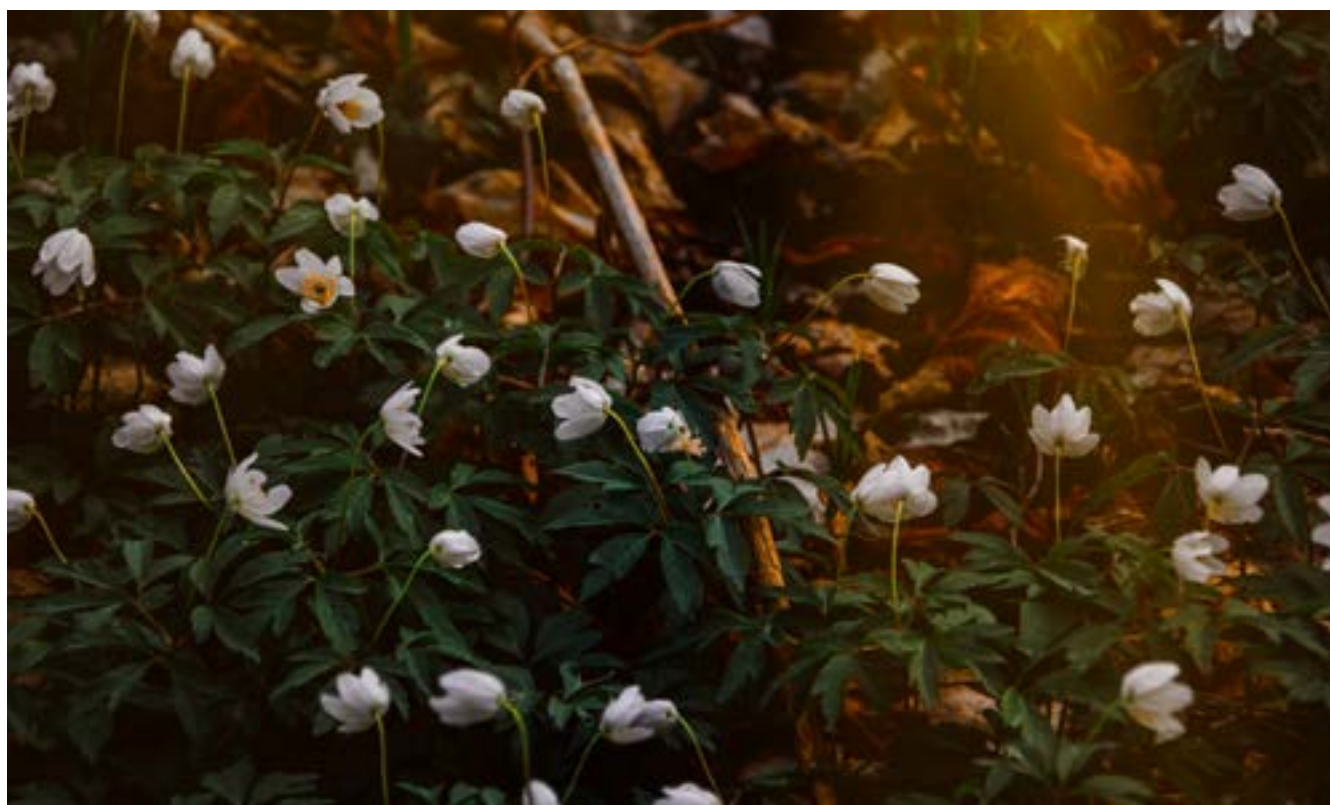
I was on my way home when I got drawn to the children running around an Iroko tree, enjoying the fun of attempting to catch the yellow leaves shaken off the tree by the harmattan wind before they touched the ground, and threading them together to drag home. While others were decorating their <sup>1</sup>dokin-kara with pieces of fabrics they gathered from tailors.

Three boys, apparently not older than me, were walking majestically, showing off their new English wear complete with the

manufacturers' trademarks. I decided to join them to see how many leaves I could catch, keeping my playmates' clothes under the tree.

I discovered that I had not yet recovered from the cold water experience, so I could not run well. With more steps, a little more accomplished like a leper in shoes, I made my way to the foot of the Iroko tree to enjoy the crunchy noise the shrivelled brown leaves make when you trample on them and to rest and wait for my friends' arrival, whose clothes I had taken with me.

No sooner I sat than I saw them trudging shyly, hiding their tiny genitals with their palms. As soon as they saw me, they all ran furiously towards me asking for their clothes. And, they, the clothes, like a flash, were nowhere to be found!



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**BENNY  
Wanjohi**

*Poetry should be simple, smooth and sweet!*

“

Omadang Yowasi, my fellow poetry editor at Writers Space Africa (Uganda Chapter) then, developed the Omadang poetry style. This influenced me to also come up with a Benny poetry style, so credit goes to him. A benny poem has three tercet stanzas with a rhyming scheme of ABB, CAC, and DDA, where A is the refrain.

”

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# AN IRONY OF YOUR BODY

**A Creative Non-Fiction by Chinenye Favour, Nigeria**  
*Reviewer: Lebogang Faith Samson, Botswana*

It's still hard to acknowledge that certain aspects of life are beyond us to change. It's not within our powers to dictate or command death. After all, it's a rite of passage, an undeniable fact. Chinenye Favour, a creative writer from Nigeria, titled her piece "An Irony of Your Body," reflecting on the theme: "A New Dawn." When the storm hits, we strive to breathe through it.

As we witness the persona in this Creative Non-Fiction, she struggled with coming to terms with the passing on of her mother. Death is never a friendly visitor to our homestead. It leaves one perplexed and paralysed emotionally. We do not get used to it no matter how much it frequently knocks on our doors. An Irony of your Body contemplates the distress one undergoes after losing their loved ones, although time heals; well, one gets used to the idea of the absent member, but the mark is forever permanent.

Over time, fake smiles here and there disguise the pain, and for a second, one gets inured to it, and once in a while, a snowball of emotions rolls your way, and the heart starts cracking again. Chinenye draws our attention to this family who lost their anchor, and it's not easy for the family members, even amid neighbours' consolations. Death still stands proud, but they are hopeful for a new dawn. At some point, the storm has to subside, hence new adjustments.

The writer uses nameless characters. The mood is very sombre, therefore a melancholic tone throughout. I must applaud Chinenye on this well-written story as it sets out the theme very well; moreover, readers can relate to all that the persona has narrated.

# GIRLS WHO LOVE LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW

A Flash Fiction by Grace David Ojogbane, Nigeria  
Reviewer: Francis Mkwapatira, Malawi

Ojogbane's story begins with impressive imagery of a true healing sunrise, a therapeutic dose that bandages yesterday's wounds and prepares men to journey into the present day. The narrator lays before the readers a rising sun, which, as it emerges slowly above the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers, its rays seem to dance atop the water before Baye, the protagonist. She seems to have gone there for therapy, to forget a long-gone lover.

Even though she had lived in Lokoja before, she never knew her environment so well. Perhaps, she was so blind-ed by love, that none took her focus from her man, Yebo. It is only now that the imagery of the rising sun before her removes the scales from her eyes, sitting on a hewn rock. She sheds tears for the time lost in loving insensitively, as depicted in the expression, "She had loved one

man like there was no tomorrow." Despite the pain, she still sat on the roughly hewn rock, which implies life's imperfections, hoping to see the risen sun again.

The narrative leaves the reader with an impression that despite the unpleasantness of life, despite the shadows over us, shadows that frighten the hope of ever realising the good that life unfolds before us, it is by no means a call to quit; to stop seeking and hoping for the best to come our way. The lines, "...waiting for the day the sun would rise again, and she could continue this dance of the blind..." depict how much strength she draws from the rising of the sun, the amount of hope she sustains, the will to bury her past and long for a rebound with life, even when it is less promising.

# AT DAWN

**A Poem by Francis Mkwapatira, Malawi**  
**Reviewer: Akuei M. Adol, South Sudan**

In the quiet emergence of dawn, weary souls find the strength to embrace new beginnings, reminding us that hope illuminates our path even in the darkest hours. This sentiment is brilliantly revealed in Francis Mkwapatira's poem "At Dawn," which embarks on a journey through the liminal space between night and day.

Through vivid imagery and profound symbolism, the poet explores the themes of transition and weariness, painting a picture of the sun as a weary soul emerging "over seas and rifts." The piece delves into the universal human experience of encountering a new day after enduring the darkness of the night, capturing the essence of resilience and hope.

However, structured as a haiku, the poem adheres to the traditional form of three lines, lending it an aura of ancient wisdom. Through carefully chosen words, Francis shades a lucid snapshot of the struggle inherent in every new beginning.

In addition, Mkwapatira employs the metaphor of the sun as a weary soul, infusing the verse with a deep emotional resonance. This metaphor conveys an insightful sense

of empathy, inviting the audience to contemplate the challenges the weary soul faces as it emerges into the new day, resonating with the struggles and weariness within us all. Moreover, the poem's brevity intensifies its impact, immersing readers in its meaning.

The poet's language is figurative and straightforward, weaving a tapestry of emotions ranging from quiet contemplation to subtle hope. The poem's mood is reflective, its tone contemplative, urging readers to confront their own burn-outs and emerge, like the sun at dawn, into a new day filled with possibilities.

In a nutshell, the poem is a thoughtful meditation on the cyclical nature of life, offering solace to those burdened by weariness. It speaks to the enduring strength of the human spirit, reminding us that even in our most tired moments, we can find the courage to embrace the dawn of a new beginning. Mkwapatira's work is a testament to the power of poetry to capture the complexities of human emotion, making it a timeless piece that will resonate with readers across generations.



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