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JANUARY 2024 EDITION

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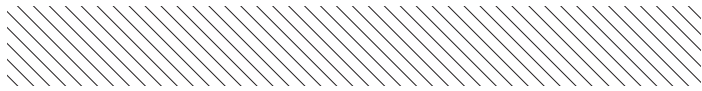
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EDITORIAL

Comfort Nyati, SDB
Chief Editor

Dear reader,

When one stands at the entrance—gate or door—the very step taken forward drives us inside, into an ambient, whether familiar or foreign. It’s at this entry point of the year that we find ourselves, electrified with mixed feelings about the tidings this new ambiance of 2024 holds for us. We shouldn’t weigh down what we left outside (the past year). Rather, it’s through those channels, people, and places where the meaning of our “be-

ing in 2023” remains historically defined in its own right.

Dear reader, as you forge new resolutions and chart paths for the avenues ahead, remember: you are the champion crafting this new age. Destined for a purpose, akin to a flower planted to bloom, may you blossom in every season of the year.

Let’s embrace this new episode of a lifetime (2024) with renewed synergy. The capacity of this synergy varies with context,

dreams, and diverse orientations. Therefore, in this 85th edition, we peruse through the creative vigor of an African child while listening to the voice of Africa through the authors featured in this edition. This could be yet another threshold for both you and me to gain momentum for a vibrant kickoff.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!!!



WSA
Writers Space Africa
Empowering African Writers

Call for Submission

THEME: MOTHERHOOD

Writers Space Africa (WSA) magazine is accepting submissions for its 87th edition (March 2024 Edition).

We accept submissions in the following categories:

Creative Non-Fiction – 1,200 Words maximum

Children's Literature – Prose and Poetry

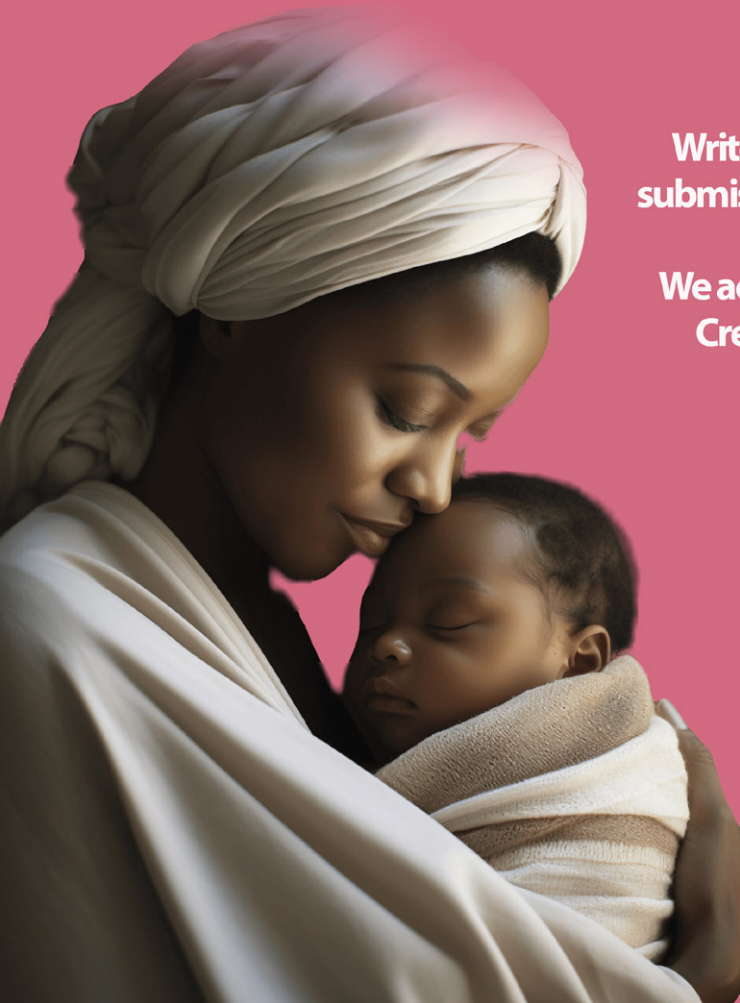
Flash Fiction – 300 words maximum

Poetry – 1 poem, a maximum of 24 lines

Short Stories – 1,500 words maximum

Submission closes 15th January, 2024

To submit, visit:
www.writersspace.net





Children's Literature



MANDLA AND HIS NEW BICYCLE

Moipone Thandeka
South Africa



Mandla was a six-year-old little boy from a small town in the Free State province named Frankfort. He was a very smart boy who had just started his first grade at school.

On his birthday, his father surprised him with a very special gift. His father told him

to first finish his meal, pack away his toys, and then he would show him the big present.

When Mandla had done all that he had been told to do, his father gave him his gift, which was a very beautiful blue and white bicycle.

Mandla was so happy; he could not wait to show his friend and go on bike rides with him.

As happy as he was, he remembered that he could not ride a bicycle because no one had taught him how to. He went and told his father about it, and his father said, 'Don't worry, son. I am here to teach you. Tomorrow we will go out to the park so that I can teach you.'

Mandla was very excited and could not wait to learn how to ride the bicycle.

The following day, Mandla and his dad went to the park. His father taught him how to ride the bicycle. His father held the bicycle to make sure that he-Mandla does not fall. They practiced everyday for a full week, and at the end of it, Mandla's father asked him to try to ride the bicycle on his own. At the end of the week, Mandla went to the field alone this time to ride.

On his first attempt, he fell and went back home. He did not tell his father what had happened. The following day, he went to try again, but the same thing happened. He went back home and didn't tell his father anything still. Mandla tried again for the third time, but he fell again and hurt his ankle. Mandla went back home crying and told his father what had happened. He also told his father that he no longer wanted to ride the bicycle again.

His father told him that he can not give up yet, and encouraged him to keep on trying.

The next day, Mandla went to the park together with his father. His father cheered him up when he got on his bicycle. This time Mandla managed to keep his feet on the pedals and did not fall. He was thrilled that he could now ride his bicycle on his own. He started riding his new bicycle with his friend, all around the park. He would carry his friend and have fun. All this happened because Mandla had not given up and kept on trying until he succeeded to ride the bicycle on his own.

Today, Mandla is the best cyclist in South Africa because he chose to not give up and keep on trying.



Creative Nonfiction



WHEN A GRANDMOTHER DIES

Winnie Wekesa
Kenya

I was only five years old when my grandmother died one afternoon almost three decades ago. I remember my uncles speaking with my grandfather in hushed tones. And then when my mom and aunties were informed, everything seemed to stand still. While my memory of that day keeps fading, I could never forget the wailing. It's unbelievable how sharp, piercing, and painful the cries of death sound. I knew in my heart that something important had happened, something bad and permanent.

When the cry reached the village, our house flooded with villagers in a matter of minutes. They gathered as Af-

ricans often do in moments such as this. My mother and my aunties were inconsolable. So, the older women present simply offered them comfort by letting them cry, wail, and roll on the ground, whatever they needed to come to terms with this asteroid-sized blow that had just hit them. They had lost their mother after all—a matriarch and guide had fallen. No, this was no ordinary day at all, and there would be no more ordinary days. This was a sackcloth and ashes moment.

But it was the look on my grandfather's face that I can't seem to forget. Before that day, my grandfather was a rock of a man: tall,



strong, and unshakable—the embodiment of authority and power itself. But on this day, I saw a man shriveled by grief, his face darkened, his head bowed with shoulders crouched in unimaginable pain. His love was gone, and with her, the sparkle in his eyes. He looked at me, but he didn't see me. I could tell as his gaze wandered from person to person, mumbling something to himself but saying nothing to anyone. So, I sat with him,

in fact, I insisted on sitting by him during the wake that first night. In my little heart, I must have thought that maybe if I sat next to him, this big, terrible thing that had happened would hurt a little less. But sometime that night, I must have dozed off, as children often do, because I woke up in my usual bed, the one I shared with my mother. Then my memory of the events of the day before loaded in—a massive heartache on a tiny heart.

That morning after, our house was swarmed with activities. Visitors and mourners flooded our home. I slowly moved into the background, only observing from the sidelines. A big fire was lit outside our small kitchen, and big sufurias (cooking pots), the likes of which I had not seen before were placed on the fire to make endless cups of tea for all present and those on the way. This went on for days as food and tea took turns on the fire.

Bonfires ruled the nights too, as crowds of mourners sat around them telling stories about my grandma, sometimes breaking into song and at other times into thunderous laughter. I was confused that anyone could laugh at this time, but grief, it turns out, is a complicated emotion.

I don't remember much about my grandmother, except that I think about her often now. I have very few memories of her. I don't even remember her face. But I remember that she was often sick. In the months leading to her death, she was unable to do anything for herself. I remember that she liked to sit under a Chinduli tree that was right outside her house, so during the day someone would take her outside for some sun and bring her back in if it got cold or about to rain. She listened to the radio a lot, always singing along to the songs they played on KBC. I loved that she let me sit with her during these moments as I played with my toys and things. And I loved her.

Her death changed everything at home. After her funeral, only sadness remained. When the mourners left, and my family members who had jobs and school went back, only four of us were left behind: my grandfather, my mom, my aunt, and me. And we were not a family that talked about our feelings. My grandpa was beside himself; he barely ate or left his room. He changed bedrooms. I bet he couldn't bear the thought of sleeping in the same room he once shared with his beloved, now departed.

A home that once filled with laughter was

now silent. It reeked of loss and echoed an insane loneliness. Everyone seemed to withdraw. My mom and aunty spent their days at the farm. My grandfather, when he could, would leave home in the morning only to return when it got dark. He also visited the gravesite every day and I observed him whisper some words, maybe he was praying, which was strange because my grandfather was not a religious man, not at the time.

Oh, but grief will strip you bare.

I never processed the grief myself. My childhood was gone at the age of 5 and I didn't even realize it. I had to grow up. I went back to nursery school with my friends and classes and things, and the place in my little heart once occupied by innocent joy was replaced only by dread. Having received no explanation about the events of that August, my mind conjured up scenarios of only loss and desolation. I worried that what had happened would happen again. I grew up very afraid and anxious—a constant dark cloud over me.

But now, in my thirties, I, too, listen to the radio a lot, often to the same local broadcaster my grandma would listen to, in a desperate attempt to stay connected to the woman who in life and death significantly shaped my worldview and my life. I find, now, that it brings me comfort, to remember her this way; she liked something, she liked music. So, I sing along to the songs she once sang along to.



MORE THAN A REALITY **OUR REALITY**

Akoth Otieno
Kenya

There's an aching for home. I've been working on a crocheted wedding dress. I love weddings. My best friend just got a prostate cancer diagnosis. Another friend called, excited; his son just said his first word. Dada. Another just got divorced. For the third year in a row, I forgot to memorialize my son. Guilt. It's been eight years, so it should be easier. I should be over it.

Mos Def is being a little too painfully tender on Creole. The first time I listened to that song, I was at Face A La Mer, Cotonou. I was meeting someone I'd always wanted to meet. I needed her to like me. We needed it to go well. So, we overdressed. I laugh

every time I think about it now. I wore a tiny little red backless dress that would perhaps tell her that I'd been working out. That I took care of myself. It had a long sleeve to hide an insecurity: my arms. I'd always thought they were too thin. We meet on the street and awkwardly hug as I apologize for being late. I have always been time-blind. She kisses me on the cheek. She says something about red being her favorite color and I say green is mine. She is wearing green kitten heels that say she has an opinion but not a point of view. I wanted to know her.

On her second glass of chardonnay, she started telling me about her mildly toxic ex



while I looked at paintings of mushrooms on her phone. She loves mushrooms. We talk about her daughter, failed friendships, love, and death. I was tempted to marvel at the extent to which she is irrepressibly herself, but I knew there was nothing irrepressible about that moment. It takes effort and courage to be so exactly and so extravagantly who one is. It comes with age.

The waiter brings my second bottle of la Beninoise. The slogan for la Beninoise is “Plus qu’une bière, notre bière” (more than a beer, our beer). Slightly modified, it captures how I was feeling during my first sip— “More than a reality, our reality”. We were both experiencing what it meant to be an adult. At what point do we start calling growing up aging? After how many losses?

“I was not the kind of mother I wish I had been to my children,” she said. As an almost mother, I didn’t know what questions to ask, so I listened. Nothing came. We focus on eating as if eating were the conversation. We both sigh simultaneously.

“I started feeling the pressure to be perpetually incredibly attractive when I was 20. As women, we’re not supposed to age. The pressure to look young and unrealistic is relentless.”

“I watched Frances Ha yesterday. I need to work on my friendships.”

We joke about her taste in men as we stumble back out, her arms in mine. We’d visit Dassa the following weekend, then Ganvie after that. We danced to the hypnotic rhythms of traditional vodun ceremonies, fell in love,

and collected stories. We toasted our friendship.

Aging taught me how to have a high affinity for the everyday. It taught me life is all about the little moments. That things don’t have to be spectacular and magnificent to be important. I’m writing this from my friend’s kitchen. We’ve been friends for over 3 years since Benin. She just turned forty-nine. She’s complaining about plumbing while making me a salad. I love her salads. She compliments my nose. I smile. I tell her I might be in love, again. She asks if he makes me happy. Kidum’s “Mapenzi” comes up on the speakers and we both start dancing. Her flowy silk dress dances with us. Soft, gentle, intentional movements. This is aging. This is home. This is the story of us.



NASHIPAE

Beth Ruga
Kenya

Nashipae sat at Dr. Kiambo's clinic, lost in thought. She was horrified by what was about to happen. The last jab was painful, the capsules nauseating.

She looked across from her seat to where her two co-wives sat. She was the youngest of the pack. Naserian was the eldest, while Naiseae was the second. There was no telling whether Nashipae would be the last. They looked pensive. She had no doubt that they had questions too. They had no idea why they were there, but there was a pattern. Every time Lekishon would take cows to the slaughterhouse in Kiserian town for sale, they would soon after

be required to visit the doctor for this treatment or the other.

After every boom from the cattle sales, the randy Lekishon would patronize the town's hotels and bars until his proceeds were nearly exhausted. Twilight women were a high priority on his menu. At the end of the few days, he would spend club-hopping, there would be Syphilis, or Gonorrhoea, or some other sexually transmitted ailment. There could also have been HIV, but he said not to be tested for that. He paid handsomely for it. Kiambo became his partner in the crime of not only exposing his wives to potentially fatal infections but also

the right to know their predicament. It was an unspoken agreement between the two to scratch each other's back at the expense of the naïve women whose ignorance became the bliss of the two rogues.

Lekishon's trusted doctor was keen to advise him each time that if he was to heal, his wives should be treated as well. That was how the three women found themselves at Dr. Kiambo's every four months or so. The only information they had was that they were being treated for what their illiterate husband referred to as *mugonjwa ya wanawake* (The sickness of women). None of them would dare question Lekishon's orders, not even Naserian, the eldest, who was accorded certain privileges by traditions as the first wife. Lekishon was the violent type, and the three had long learned to steer clear of his anger. He never once allowed for dialogue in matters. He gave orders and expected them to be followed without questions or debate. Nashipae thought of the

hassle she had had to go through, as she waited for her turn to see the doctor.

There was the denial to have an education. The genital mutilation at only nine, and how the excessive bleeding nearly killed her had it not been for a couple of doctors from *Medicin San Frontieres* who had put up free camps at their village at the time. The being married off to Mzee Lekishon at only ten!

Now at seventeen, a year below her age of consent, she was not only a mother of five but had been treated for more ailments than her first nine years of life before she got married. This was pretty much the norm in her neighbourhood which was tucked so far away from civilization in the depths of Maasai land. It was the way of life and only a few were bold enough to deviate. Her father did not try—Lekishon would definitely not—maybe she could change the narrative if she tried.

She decided that she should consider running off to the safe house that Njeeri, the social worker, had suggested

to her. That way, she would be able to change the trajectory of her life—at least for her children! 'Yes, I have to.'

"Nashipae Lekishon," Kiambo called out her name.

As she entered the doctor's room for the job that day, she knew she would do it!

"Nashipae, nahitaji kufanya kipimo cha damu na mkojo" (Nashipae, I need your blood and urine samples for tests) Kiambo asked her without even bothering to explain to her the reason for her visit.

"Kwa nini napima mimi?" (Why do you require them?) Nashipae asked in broken Swahili, sending a shock wave in Kiambo's system as he was not used to her being inquisitive.

What he did not know was that her resolve for change began then.

WRITING CAN SET **YOU FREE**

Rosieda Shabodien
South Africa

As I sit in front of my computer, I ready myself to write. The writing journey starts with me tasting the words as they pop from my mind and roll onto my tongue. They whisper, "Write me down." However, often, I'm like those vintage cars that require cranking to get going. Sometimes the spark ignites, propelling me forward, while other times I'm just but an old dead battery. Yet, when I'm charged, my fingertips dance across the keyboard, and I liberate the words to drift into the world. They tell stories I thought I had long forgotten. I type fast without pause, fearing that if I pause, it might invite writer's doubt to assume citizenship in my mind and

leave me bereft of words. What else does my writing do besides making me, at times swim and sometimes drown in words?

My writing often catapults me right back to my childhood. It was a harsh world to grow up in, replete with trauma and set in the lap of poverty. Despite these circumstances, love and happiness, nevertheless, lived with us. As a child, I ignored the traumatic things, and frankly, back then, our tongues were unacquainted with the word "trauma" since we thought it was synonymous with "life." The words that flowed from our tongues effortlessly were laughter and happiness since these words



are so easily explained— or so I believed. However, the brain is a strange organ—happiness leaves little foottracks, whereas trauma carves deep ravines. One day in your adulthood when you casually meander down ‘happy lane,’ and all of a sudden you find yourself plummeting into a dark abyss, that’s when the words vanish—precisely when words are the only thing that could serve as ropes to rescue you.

My writing takes me back to a time when my dad once won big by betting on one or other horse races. This wind-

fall allowed for a luxurious treat for our whole family – an entire barrel of Kentucky Fried Chicken and sides. As I pen this, I realize those KFC moments are forever etched in my mind. Closing my eyes, I can still vividly see my family digging into that Kentucky crispy delight as if it happened yesterday. I remember Colonel Sanders smiling at me from the KFC box. KFC’s secret recipe aroma swirling in the kitchen as my brothers and sisters joyfully stuff their faces with fluffy marshmallow-like white rolls, KFC chicken, and sweet coleslaw and slurping

up the soft mashed potatoes crowned with gravy. This simple memory floods me with happiness, and I only want to write about these moments.

Yet, as a novice in the English language and writing, like any beginner, I excitedly blunder along while making exciting discoveries at every turn. In my youth, I was a voracious reader and swallowed the words quickly as a means of escaping my then reality and dreaming of another world that I had not yet set foot upon. Now, it is different. I read in slow motion

by embracing words and stories. Literature no longer serves as mere escapism but rather an enriching force that liberates me from the confines of everyday adult life. It enables me to walk through this world in a state of awe, at times wowed by people—how they think, how they speak, and how they relate to their surroundings. Often times I just soak up the words that spill from their mouths. Their utterances provoke deliberations and contemplation at times. Occasionally, they spark a wide-eyed, open-mouthed response, or at times elicit tears, but mostly they evoke wonder.

My mother tongue gracefully curls around Afrikaans words, whereas the English language remains an unfamiliar territory and often requires me to juggle English words with my tongue until they fit. I repeat words like, “ac-cen-tu-ate,” “phe-nom-e-no-log-i-cal,” “ve-ra-cious,” and such words over and over until my tongue acquiesces. I seek help from my English-tongued literature-loving husband to pronounce certain words that I can’t seem to wrap my tongue around such as “cha-r-grin, sa-grin, sha-grin.” He says, “shagr-in,” and it flows so effortlessly from his tongue. Just when I thought I mastered it, to my chagrin, he quips, “However, it also depends on if you want to pronounce it like an American or like a Brit.”

As part of my writing journey, I am also a collector of interesting words since I think they help me understand the world and can explain who I am. Just recently, at my writing collective, I shared my ambivalent re-

lationship with the word “envious.” In my faith, and probably in any faith, being envious of someone or something makes you lean closer to the unvirtuous category. Hence, my need to search for a word to capture the feeling I have when I encounter a writer who masterfully strings words together just the right way, causing sentences to sing and make my heart do a little pirouette. I say to my writer’s group that I feel envious because I desire to write like that. However, I do not want to use the word envious. Without skipping a beat, they juggle a few exotic words in the air and plug the word “compersion,” for my consideration. I agreed then that compersion sounds about right, but only because it sounded like a sophisticated word. Nevertheless, I was not entirely convinced that it is the right word for what I feel towards writers who get their work published since my lazy-ass approach to my writing might just result in my first draft stories dying on my computer. So, for now, envy is what I must live with until I, too, can make my sentences sing and gain the courage to publish my writing. Yep, for now, my byline reads: An unpublished, lazy-ass, envious, wanna-be writer.

At times when I write, the words do not only want to knit a whole tapestry of my past, but I am forced to find words to describe the present and shape my connections with my loved ones, friends, and everyone I have the privilege of meeting. An ancient Chinese saying speaks of an invisible yet unbreakable thread connecting those who are destined to meet regardless of time, place, or

circumstances. Perhaps that is why I write. I write so I can capture the marvel at the coincidences surrounding people's entry into my life. People are intrigued to discover that I "met" my husband in jail. This revelation invariably elicits a cascade of questions, and I delight in stringing the words together to tell an intriguing story of destiny. The love story goes as follows: It is apartheid years in South Africa and the regime seeks to imprison anyone who employs words such as "justice," "equality," "non-racism," "viva," and "Free Mandela." Even stringing these innocuous words in melodious verses and voices is banned. In 1985, my not-yet husband and the cohort of anti-apartheid activists relentlessly championed these words and inspired others to also include them in their lexicon. The regime's response was to suppress these words by imprisoning him and thousands of other activists. My best friend, Edgar, and I, both in Grade 12, knee-deep in the 1985 State of Emergency, we too mainstream words like "freedom in our lifetime," "equality for all," "pansi," "down with apartheid," and so forth. He, unlike me, does not suffer from stage fright and public speaking angst and is brave and strings these words on stage and the listeners are inspired and join the cause. The apartheid regime decides that he must be silenced and confines him to apartheid prison. As destiny aligns, my not-as-yet husband, Ebrahim, and Edgar, land in the same prison and find themselves allocated adjacent prison cells and forge a friendship. Edgar would ever so often tell my not-as-yet husband, "When we're released, you must

meet Rosieda and recruit her for your organisation."

As destiny unfolds, Ebrahim and Edgar are eventually released from jail, and as fate sets in, Ebrahim treks to my side of the hood since they are looking to recruit activists who can speak words of freedom. The narrative of a love unfurled could probably be told on a single page. However, just before Ebrahim and I commit to words that speak about forever love, the apartheid regime intervenes, trying to silence him again. A year and a bit later, he is released again, and we finally say "Yes" to destiny. Yes, to continue singing words of freedom and love. It is now 35 years later, and he and I are still connected by an invisible but unbreakable thread.

Now some might argue the way we met is coincidence or chance, but words such as coincidence or chance, fall short. Thus, I write to search for distinctive words to explain destiny-bound events. Sometimes the words I find do not suffice. So, instead of turning to a dictionary, I choose to listen to my heart which serenades me with made-up words—it sings exquisite words such as "magic-ness." Naturally, my brain protests; it is fully aware this term doesn't really exist, certainly not in any dictionary I've consulted. However, that's the essence of writing. It is in my writing world where magic-ness is alive and well since it allows me to reshape and recall memories by illuminating the dark recesses of my mind and unearthing perfect words to unshackle my mind and shape my future.



JADED

Alex Tamei
Kenya

I'm fresh from watching a video where, in an unfortunate sequence of events, a lady jumped off a roof. A rather morbid way to start a story, I know, but who am I if not your cultured purveyor of emotions; and it would seem that, after avoiding it for so long and plodding through literally every other emotion, it's finally time for sorrow. (Or in this case, lack thereof?) The expected reaction, one would think, would be for my blood vessels to constrict, for me to recoil as if I were the sidewalk, she'd just had a rather abrupt meeting with. One would think...

As circumstances would have it, I felt all of an over-

whelming wave of nothing. I had, in fact, the presence of mind to calmly brew a cup of tea, the one I'm drinking right now as I sit here, pondering my evident disregard for life and questioning my normality (and my sanity?). This situation, as it is, is stirring up a very beautiful cocktail of existential angst and loops upon loops of uncertainty in a mojito glass, and what sort of host would I be if I didn't invite you all to partake? Welcome to happy hour!

I have a running theory that the world really did end in 2012, that God took away all the lovely, nice human beings. The ones who run rescue shelters for puppies,



the ones who lend you pens when yours stops working during an exam, and the ones who whisper the answer to you when the lecturer ambushes you with a question and you are just standing there, like a deer in headlights. The rest of us, the wretched of the earth, were plugged into machines like in the Matrix movies to eke out an ignoble existence, cursed to never feel joy, or anything else really, for the rest of our lives. That would explain why life tastes like week-old bread and over-diluted juice cola, right?

Death, death, death, if you say it three times, it sounds either like a very vigorous prayer by a Nigerian pas-

tor or a curse from a third-rate Bollywood movie. Either way, it leaves a rather bad taste in your mouth. In as much as I would love to pawn off my ingrained compassion fatigue to the rapture having already happened and us being in the matrix, I doubt even Olympic gymnasts can stretch that much. The truth, in all its unappealing glory, is that we have been in contact with death so much for so long, we hardly care anymore.

When I was a kid, which honestly isn't that long ago, I adored computer lessons in school. The teacher would ramble on for some minutes and then leave us, she believed, to exercise our fin-

gers on typing master. Immediately she left the lab, we would employ our freshly taught computer savvy to explore the most exhilarating use of those old machines, killing things without guilt! (Madam Goretti, if you are reading this, I'm so very sorry)

In hindsight, discovering that there are endless ways to kill everything at the age of eleven couldn't have been very good for my mental development. To an eleven-year-old me though, there was nothing more satisfying than running over a GTA vice city hooker and some cops before Mrs. Goretti came back in. After every holiday (this was boarding

school, you see), we would sneak in copies of video games and then shove them in our pants before the first computer lesson so we could install them on the old machines and play, oh what bliss! The romance with video game murder continued for years. That was, of course, until we discovered porn, but that's a story for another day.

Fast forward, fourteen-year-old me and my little friends, in a flash flood of hormones called adolescence, discovered interesting new uses for our little friends (cough cough). What ensued was the scramble and partition of the feminine population and discovering new ways to exploit our newfound resources (cough, hem! damn this cold). Smart Alek discovered that horror movies tended to have girls jumping into the closest available pair of arms. As you can imagine, movies were sought from the depths of hell itself, and bones, I mean arms, were jumped into. And thus continued our romance with the morbid and the fatal.

The result of our continued entanglement (cough! seriously, this cold!) with death is, of course, that we have become jaded, and numb. I'm genuinely surprised that compassion fatigue hasn't been added to the list of mental illnesses. Maybe because they can't design a drug for it? It's a bigger problem than it seems on the surface. For example, we've had a war ongoing, one that is still continuing, and one that we were all righteously indignant about at the beginning, but now, it isn't even worth the meme space in our heads. Unfortunately, I don't think I have enough pages, or enough tea to talk

about everything wrong with the world, and Mututho would probably astral project and haunt me if I extended happy hour, and thus, we run off to ponder, brood, and brew (tea), until next time.





Flash Fiction



BRISK AND BRUSQUE

Celestine Seyon Reuben
Nigeria

The first time I knew you had changed shone from your response to the teacher's question: Why is the reproductive system the most interesting topic in Biology? Why are both Intelligence and Stupidity hereditary? You hadn't questioned a question in class.

You, although, were mildly famous at the Junior level when you said, on the assembly that you found football interesting because of the swinging limp cocoon and phallic prints of the players.

You participated in the end-of-the-year debate competition at the senior level on the topic, *Gentle Act or Fierce Fling: Parenting in the current Twenty-first Century*. Your conclusion occluded the panel's larynx to comment. You nagged on PUSHING BACK. The Principal was befuddled. The head boy thought you read more than enough and your neck could no longer hold your head.

"A lot is infuriating to me," you rashed, emotionally. "We need to push back for transfor-

mation. Enough of the dismissiveness. I am tired of reciting the National Pledge of this bloody country."

After graduation, although our external examination results were not out. Yet, your brother said that from grade three, people refused your hand. A Muslim classmate at the computer institute you trained, said you would attract a demon as wife if you dine with it. He said the stigma vandalized your penmanship. If not for Mrs. Olorunleke, the Physics teacher, I wouldn't know that you had to write a personal note on the vertical DO NOT WRITE margin of the answer booklet on every subject.

'Please consider my handwriting,' you wrote. '*My father and some teachers destroyed my handwriting. I was never this. Thank you.*' But if you didn't write that, would you have failed? I guess not; you were rational.



SNOW

Pelekani Lwenje
zambia

Life under the bridge was all he had known. He could not recall when he had lived like this. He would ask himself. *How did I get here? My children want to see snow. Why isn't there snow? When did I get here?* This was life under the bridge. The only thing that sustained his troubled mind was the thought of snow.

He hadn't always been like this. Once everything had made sense, and then life had manifested into long talons and snatched everything into nonexistence. His entire family had answered the inevitable call of death. That was when madness had crept in and consumed his soul. He had run off into the night with a deep desire to see snow.

He woke up in the morning. The cold was hitting him hard. It was colder than it usually was. He crawled out from under the bridge, and thought his eyes were playing tricks on him. *Is that snow? Am I dreaming? I can see snow.* He dropped to his knees and

gently touched it. It was so cold. This sensation elated him. He burst into laughter. Tears streamed down to his cheeks. He ran around like an ecstatic child. He dived constantly into the white powdery ice, whilst laughing at the miracle that had been given to him. Who else was it for if not him? Then he heard the sounds of small bells jingling in the sky. He looked up at the pouring snow flakes, and thought he had seen an angel. An angel bathed in red and driven by creatures with horns. He stared at the snow, and saw his family urging him on. His children giggling and diving into the snow. He lost himself to the warm embrace of love.



SCREWDRIVER

Oluseyi Onabanjo
Nigeria

The sun peered over his shoulder as he shuffled downhill toward me. I jogged in place, frowning as my sweat cooled. He'd slap one foot down, then drag the other after it, and filled the shrinking gap between us with the smell of beery vomit. A filthy palm rose in a sluggish high-five, but I ducked underneath it and was gone.

On my return lap, a crowd blocked the path, clustered around a face-down figure. I tried to push through but was slowed by the bright orange smell of fresh hangover piss.

Then I saw the screwdriver handle sticking out of his back.



Creative
SPOTLIGHT

Marial Matueny Awendit





In this session, Lise Nova Berwadushime (Rwanda) engaged in a conversation with Marial Matueny Awendit from South Sudan. He is the winner of the 2023 African Writers Award for poetry.

Lise: Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

Marial Matueny Awendit: I'm Marial Awendit, a South Sudanese poet, songwriter, and essayist. I authored the chapbook poetry collection, 'The Night Does Not Drown Us', along with poetry collections titled 'Keeping the Sun Secret' and 'Whispers over a Brewing Dawn'. I'm honored to have won the 2023 African Writers Award for Poetry, the 2018 Babishai Niwe Poetry Award, and the 2016 South Sudan Youth Talent Award.

Lise: Wow! Such diverse talents. How did you get into writing?

Marial Matueny Awendit:

I started writing songs for friends and myself in 2009 and 2010. Though I wrote a few poems from 2010 to 2013, it wasn't until 2014, after experiencing personal tragedies—a brother's murder in March and my father's subsequent death in November—that I committed myself to writing against injustices & vices in South Sudanese society.

Lise: Someone said that writing turns tragedy into beauty. I've read your work, particularly "A Possible Induction with My Creator" and "Flowers"; were they also inspired by injustice?

Marial Matueny Awendit: Yes, both were inspired by

the same events I mentioned earlier.

Lise: Those were profound. They resonated deeply with me.

Marial Matueny Awendit: I'm grateful as a writer to be heard and to touch others with my words.

Lise: Moving on to the African Writers Award, were you confident about winning?

Marial Matueny Awendit: I wasn't certain; there's incredible talent among African writers. However, having won two previous competitions boosted my confidence.

Lise: Were you nervous?

Marial Matueny Awendit: I had a strong desire to win. Winning the Babishai Niwe Poetry Award in 2018 was incredibly healing for me, and I hoped for a similar experience with the 2023 African Writers Award for Poetry.

Lise: Congratulations once again! Besides writing, what else do you do?

Marial Matueny Awendit: I've been involved in humanitarian aid work with three organizations since 2016. Currently, I'm a School Feeding Supervisor at Plan International South Sudan and the CEO of Kush Poetics, an organization I founded in 2016 to promote poetry & art in South Sudan.

Lise: Tell me more about Kush Poetics.

Marial Matueny Awendit: Kush Poetics publishes two poetry journals yearly, conducts writing lessons, and advocates for the arts.

Lise: How do you manage your humanitarian responsibilities alongside writing?

Marial Matueny Awendit: I write on weekends and dedicate weekdays to my humanitarian work.

Lise: Balancing modern-day responsibilities can be exhausting.

Marial Matueny Awendit: Absolutely, and there are times I take breaks from writing.

Lise: Looking ahead, where do you envision African and Sudanese literature heading?

Marial Matueny Awendit: African literature is thriving, with many writers making notable achievements globally. However, the South Sudanese literary community faces challenges like poor reading culture and limited publishing resources.

Lise: The scarcity of publishing resources is indeed a widespread issue.

Marial Matueny Awendit: Yes, it's been a challenge; all my books are published outside South Sudan. The future of African literature relies on the current generation of writers.

Lise: There's much work to be done. What are your hobbies, Marial?

Marial Matueny Awendit: I play football, watch movies—my favorite being 'The Walking Dead'—and my top book is 'Anthills of the Savannah' by Chinua Achebe. As for teams, I support Arsenal FC in the EPL and Rainbow FC, based in my hometown, Nyang in Yirol East.

Lise: Our conversation's come to an end. Thank you for your time. Wishing you more success in the future!

Marial Matueny Awendit: Thank you too.



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Poetry



SOLIDARITY OF THE **FORGOTTEN**

Owólolá Àjúlékún
Nigeria

Far from the bustling city's throngs,
Where progress stalks in suits and ties
Lies a space where hope radiates;
Where kindness illumines like a light.

There, we toil and breathe a spark
Of hope, anchored on one leg,
To the downtrodden,
To flood their eyes with torrents.

Moved by the spell of kindness,
We embrace the seed of solidarity
That blooms like flowers,
Glow like stars—
We kindle new life.

In a world of shadow and shine,
Where hurt and heart collide,
Kindness becomes a healing balm—
A fire that rekindles our hope.



DETERIORATING WOMB

Meckson Kaboga
Tanzania

When the sky divorced its grave,
The sky's womb was embryonic
Carrying away fear of motherless infants
Detaching the nerves of unpatriotic
Whose hearts pushed the blood of tyrants
With blood veins connected to hypodermic,
Their stretched muscles pinching minorities
Made everything remain stagnant and concave.

The sky's laws were not pathetic;
They allowed someone scratch your back
Even of those infants,
Whose family names were like flowers,
Abundantly blossomed in clusters!
But outstanding weeds had grown,
Bravely exposed enormous pollens with yeast smell
That inflamed sky's womb.
Like ruptured red rose petals,
The blood flowing with equality
Had clotted and weakened the womb of liberty.



LEGACY

Oreoluwa Lasisi
Nigeria

In the depth of shadow
I stumbled and erred
Unseen, unnoticed like a whisper in the air.

I sought a road,
But hollow they roll.

Alone I stood
In the redemption of my foot,
Lost in the echoes of a ghostly whisper.

Time passes by, but nothing ever changes.

The ecstasy fades to a mere memory,
Slowly, becoming insignificant in places that were once priorities.

What is left of me?
What legacy is there to bestow on those yet to come?

For I traverse the world without a trace,
Like a statute; existing without living
Even if I become history, it will still be empty.

No, I refuse to be forgotten like this!

Even in death, let it be said that I gave my best: creating a path that can never be erased.

Impacting my strength on generations to come,
As I dive into my embrace

Let it be known that I fought and thrived,
That I resurrected from the dead to live an immortal life.

Even in my grave,
Let the testimonies of people sing my praise.



DISSIMULATING SKELETONS

Carmi Philander
South Africa

A garden in my ribcage
Spilling beautiful blossoms
That smell of sweet graves
And dirt-infused coffins

A skull draped in roses
A wreath of velvet red
Heartbeats frozen
Bedridden breaths

Perfume poured
Onto a corpse
I can't resume
I'm in the morgue

Cranium concealed
In cloying life
What seems real
Is really a lie

Because the edges of those petals
Lose colour and curl
Befriended by beetles
And burrowing worms

A crown of fragrant flowers
Bone buried in bouquets
My skeleton devoured
In death and deceit and decay



PAPERCUTS

Sed Austin Maverick
Ghana

My heart is bleeding,
Bleeding words and agony.
My ears are ringing with rhymes so corny
These words in my heart, oh gosh! they are too heavy.

In the back of my head, I have dreams to activate,
But these hands are tied and buried without a casket.
In a world where people are brimming with talents,
All I have is words, words not so moving, so lifeless and dimming.

When they live in my head, I believe in them,
And so, my pulse is always vibrating, trying to move my hands for a release,
My vocal cords are always bellowing, but all that comes out is empty echoing.
They've become little voices in my head with their own opinions now,
We don't want to be picture perfect, we don't want to be gold-standard worthy
We just want to be words, worthy only in meaning.

I can feel my heart beat rapidly and I'm almost scared to the point of breaking,
Because now my body is failing,
This ship that is my mind and heart is no more sailing.
I can feel the mutiny, I can hear their war chants as they begin to fall out
My fingertips are bleeding with black paper trails of disconnected words
My skin, slashed from all sides with all that I'm afraid to share.

Somewhere on my wrist I see: "Too bland but we want to live"
In my ears, more ink blots struggling for clarity
This time they're screaming: "Rhythmless but we were born to be",
Like the angry tiny men of Lilliput, they've brought me down to my knees.



THE REAL LOVE

Ekwueme Amblessed
Nigeria

I thought it was love
being worn like a glove
Cherished like a dove,
and suddenly dumped like a dirty stove.

It looked so real
with the obvious zeal
until everything was made plain,
after I was slain.

Loneliness drew the curtain
because he couldn't press the button
in the presence of witnesses,
with fierce righteousness.

Depression lost its ground
with the new love I found
who healed my wound,
and made me sound.

Then it made more sense
scraping off the nonsense
that physical presence,
remains the only essence.

But with great assurance
I cherished His fragrance
which gave me utterance,
To maintain His ordinance.



PSALMS OF YOUTH

Odirile Aubrey
Botswana

Hold me in your embrace
In the depths of your warmth
Jovially caress my soul daily
Kiss my aches away with your magnificence

Let me lay in your bosom
Make my heart rejoice within me
Null all my worries and cares
Open my eyes to your winsomeness

Put me close to your clasp
Quell all that impede your will
Restore me to yourself daily
Satisfy my being with your brilliance

Tuck me in under your wings
Undo all knots from the fowler's snare
Void all the mindless madness of my youth
Water my mind with fresh grace of excellence.



Short Stories



THE BANDITS OF **KIIRKOU**

Lino Arop
South Sudan



Alor Biong moved stealthily along the shores of the river Kiir, ducking low from time to time. It was his turn to watch for danger that might surprise the crew. It had been

weeks since his arrival from Abyei town and he didn't miss it. He loved it here in Kiirkou, if only because he was almost beyond Arab humiliation. Almost because

the Messirya still brought their cows as far as the river kiir, accompanied by their heavily armed mobile force. Alor was on the lookout for them now.

It was early morning. Dew dripped from the tree leaves and birds twittered, excited for the new day. Thick fog hang on the river banks, and Alor moved as quietly as he could. He carried no gun; they hadn't taught him how to use it yet. The few guns available were for those who knew how to use them. So, Alor only carried a machete. His clothes were damp and soaked in dew, but he felt surprisingly good. The knowledge that he was doing something the Arabs didn't want him doing was good. He wanted to hurt them too. They acted like they were immortal in Abyei town. Alor intended to show them that in Kiirkou, all men are mortal.

A lone Messirya rider suddenly appeared on the banks of the river, and Alor almost jumped. Such an abrupt appearances implied that the very people you spied on could also easily spy on you. Alor looked around nervously. His young eyes did not spot a second rider. A scout then. The crew commander had promised to get him a gun if he could spot a lone armed Arab. Alor had

been on the lookout every time he was on sentry duty. And his chance had come today. He ducked low and executed a prearranged signal. A hooting like that of an owl. Owls were rare in the forests of Kiirkou, but they trusted that the Arabs wouldn't know this.

Alor cupped his hands and brought them to his mouth. He produced a perfect hooting sound; even a hunter wouldn't have been able to tell that the sound had come from a man and not from the bird. He made the sound twice and waited, restless, fearing that the lone raider would disappear, and this becomes another lost opportunity. Come on. The reply was taking longer than usual. Alor peeped out from the undergrowth where he hid. The lone rider was still there, glancing around nervously while his horse drank from the river. The reply came in two bursts, perfect. Only the leader of the crew could do this. Alor was glad he had not sent anyone but came to do the task himself. He was the sharpest shooter they had.

There was a little disturbance

in the undergrowth under one of the trees nearby, and Alor hid, just a precaution in case another Messirya scout should turn up this way. It was Captain Kuol who surfaced from the undergrowth. He made gestures to Alor to show him where the enemy he had spotted was. Alor pointed with his hand without leaving his hiding place. Captain Kuol fell into position and aimed at the unsuspecting Arab scout. Alor watched him, praying silently that he didn't miss, even though Alor knew well that the captain was a sharp shooter.

* * *

Captain Kuol slid down belly first, aiming at the Messirya rider's head. Slowly, he brought his hand to the trigger and fingered it. He hesitated a bit. Taking a man's life still unsettled him, even though he had taken more than a dozen lives already. It just didn't feel right, even though he knew he did it for the greater good. The trigger felt strangely cold. He hesitated for another heartbeat, wishing the Messirya would ride away. Only he didn't. Captain Kuol pulled the trig-

ger and felt the bullet hit the man before the sound of the gunshot spread in the forest, echoing. Not even the murmuring of nature could subdue the sound. The rider fell and his horse ran.

"Get the gun quickly," the captain said.

"Yes, sir!" Alor replied and ran off.

The captain maintained his position, gun readily aimed as cover for Alor, just in case a second rider should have heard the gunshot and come to help. The lad returned carrying the gun clumsily. The captain quickly removed the magazine and emptied the gun of any bullet that might be in muzzle, then handed it back to Alor.

Any gunshot in Kiirkou was always too loud given the dense forest. All their operations thus depended upon haste. They ran for it, making no effort to cover their tracks as it was no good in the wet ground. They wouldn't go to their base yet' it was one of the codes of the bandits of Kiirkou. The Messirya should never know their hideout. Even if it meant the death of the one being pursued, he must run, lead the pursuer in the wrong direction. They kept running. After a while, captain Kuol stopped and put his hand up in a military style gesture, hand rolled into a fist. Alor stopped beside him. The captain seemed attentive. He listened with well-trained ears, sharpened by years of training himself to listen attentively. Survival as an outlaw required a lot of listening. Any little sounds ignored could lead to death. They were always being hunted.

"We are being followed," he said, still listen-

ing, "A rider, possibly two. Even more. So, we run in water now; they are a bit far off. They follow our tracks not the sounds. They can't hear us. "

The two men ran, splashing through water and skipping muddy spots only to step into the next pool of water. The captain put up his right hand again and rolled it into a fist. Alor stopped.

"We climb this tree," the captain said, pointing at a tree that stood in a pool of water, the trunk mostly submerged. Both men climbed up and waited, having hidden themselves securely under the leaves. They heard splashes of water shortly afterwards, and somebody cursed in Arabic.

"Confound the Jenge!" a voice said.

"They grow bolder by each passing day." a second voice said.

"If only they could stop and face us," the first voice said.

"They will do no such thing. They know they only strive with guerrilla tactics given their weaponry."

"You'd wonder who teaches these Jenge such things."

"The Western missionaries of course, pretending to preach religion while in reality they prepare these savages for a revolution."

"We'll have to talk to Colonel Yasin Mohammed into bringing his forces this way - sshhh." The first voice cautioned.

Captain Kuol peered through the leaves and could just make out an outline of what

looked like two riders. The fog still hung thick. They weren't moving in their direction; something had apparently drawn their attention. The two riders turned their horses to the opposite direction and galloped off, chasing whatever had drawn their attention.

The two men waited in their hiding place. They suspected that this abrupt retreat was intended to make them feel secure and be lured out of their hiding place. They waited for a long time after the riders had left, then came out of hiding. Captain Kuol released a sigh of relief. Still alive. He glanced at Alor, who still hugged a branch tight.

"Cheer up, little man," Captain Kuol said. "The worst is yet to come."

They climbed down and began their long meandering journey to the base. Nobody went to the base directly. One had to meander. This involved moving around the base several times until they were sure they weren't being followed.

The two men entered the base an hour later, exhausted to the bone but with something to show for their efforts. A gun. An extra gun was always welcome here. The crew cheered when they saw the gun. Everybody was happy to see their captain back safely. They wanted him to have an escort wherever he went, but the captain would have none of that.

"We'll have enough time for such military shows once in Bilpam," the captain always said.

* * *

The crew stood in a military style parade. Twelve strong, excluding their captain. Most were young men, but old men were there too. The Arabs pushed everybody to the breaking point. Those who broke stayed serving them forever. Those who didn't either escaped to areas beyond their reach or ran to the bush to start a resistance.

"Attention men!" the captain said. "We'll leave the base for a few days. It's time you train to be physically fit, or I won't make it to Bilpam with this sorry lot. "



EJELE

Gracious Osuagwu
Nigeria



A long time ago in the lands of Igbuzo, a man birthed his only daughter before he died in an attack by a neighbouring community. The widowed wife of the man decided to raise her only child – Ejele with all the love in the world. Ejele was never distant from her mother. On the farm, she would rest around

the bushes, waiting for her mother to finish up with the day's work. In the market, she assisted her mother to sell off bountiful harvests to strange faces. Everyone who knew Ejele was aware of the radiant smile on the face of the little girl. She was not only respectful but also cheerful, laughing aloud

to even strangers from the shores of Bini. Until one day. The day the gods of Alusi Amali decided to reveal the face of the next priestess to the Isunambaogu.

In the cloud was the face of the little girl, Ejele. The Isunambaogu knew the story of Ejele, and beseeched the

gods for seven days to spare Ejele and pick another child of Igbuzo. The prayers of the Isu fell on deaf ears, for the gods changed their minds like the moon turning blue in the sky.

When the Isu approached the mother of Ejele to request for the child for the ritual to begin, Ejele and her mother shed tears to the sky, begging, pleading for the gods to change their minds – the gods of Alusi Amali didn't flinch. The Isu took the girl to the shrine after three days, in which council representatives tried their best to convince Ejele and her mother that the will of the gods had to be obeyed. When the little girl left her mother, she passed an amulet to her, begging her to wear the amulet at all times on her neck.

Ejele went to live in the forest as the next diviner of Igbuzo. The life of her mother was cut short by the departure of Ejele, while the Isunambaogu tried to console the little girl every time the moon faded into the sky. For she cried, cried, and cried with no control over her tears. Ejele was nostalgic – mother attached to daughter

so much she let all her crops die off... so much she wore sack clothes for many days... so much she was never seen in the market again.

On a cold dark night when the Isu had gone deep into sleep, the mother of the child snuck into the Amali forests. Her hands felt the base of the amulet on her chest as she invoked her daughter to wake up.

'Ejele! Your mother calls to you! Wake up. Wake up, Ejele. Your mother calls to you!'

Ejele heard the voice of her mother in her dream bidding her to come. The amulet was no ordinary one. Her mother had gone to the witches in the coven on the road to Umuodafe when she first dreamed her child would be taken from her. The amulet was a bond between mother and daughter, sealed in their blood. Ejele left the sleeping bull of the Isu and went into the Amali forests to seek out her mother. An abomination of the highest order for the chosen one of the gods to see the face of her mother... to be tied to the spirits of her ancestry. For the Isu is

no ordinary person. The Isu is the true child of the gods, and the gods are jealous with their love.

When daughter and mother set their eyes on each other, they locked in a sweet embrace. They were willing to steal the nectar of Alusi Amali! Disobey the gods of the land for their emotions. Selfish humans for whom the gods provided everything and asked for one thing in return.

'My daughter. Are you well? Are you feeding in this doomed forest?' her mother interrogated, reeling her hands all over the base of her skin.

'Mother! I cannot be without you. Every night, I cry out my eyes until blood comes out of it. Every time, I dream of you taking me away from this scorned place. Nne! I cannot live without you. Even the gods cannot give me the comfort you give me. Nnem! I beg of you as my mother. Take me away from here. I do not want to spend a minute longer in the Amali Forest. Let us run away. Flee to another town... another village as far as Bini!'

she gasped, sobbing tears to melt the heart of her mother who had abandoned her in the Amali forests with a stranger breathing down her neck whenever she closed her eyes to the ebriety of sleep.

'Listen, my daughter. I have just come to see you, not to take you away from Amali. You must understand this. The gods will curse us wherever we go...'

'Let the curse of the gods be upon us! Let the thunder of Amadioha strike us too...' she swore, tears spiralling out of her eyes.

'Shhhh! Don't bring the curses of the gods upon us. Not in the presence of the Amali. The forest has ears. Negative thoughts must be removed from your mind. I am your mother! I have neither taken food nor gone to the farm since you left. See me! See how sick I have become! I would never leave you in these forests if there was any other route for us,' she cautioned, her voice rising and growing steep with every word.

'Then take me away from here! If you love me, mother. Then take me – away – from here,' Ejele sobbed, her hands tightening the grip on her mother. She could hear the uneasiness in the voice of her mother when she struggled to leave her behind and vanish into the forests. Ejele held on to her with the last ounce of strength inside of her, begging to be taken away from the forests of Amali.

'Let us go to Omambala. I have a friend who can accommodate us there while we work. He is a friend of your father and asked me to come to him whenever his help is required.

I think this is the right time. Omambala will not be easy. You will have to adjust. We will work and till the soil for a day's wage before we can eat,' Mother warned, reluctantly accepting defeat. She knew her spirits wanted to take Ejele away from the forests... from the grasp of the gods.

'I will work, Mother. I will starve if need be. Just take me with you to Omambala. Just take me!' the young girl reiterated, convinced to leave the Amali. All she wanted was to be close to her mother. All she wanted was to remain tied to her mother. As long as they were together, they would be fine. Mother pulled her daughter, hands enclosed on each other while they lighted the fire of escape, fresh winds of air sipping into their lungs.

Ahead of them in the forest of Amali, a hungry leopard roamed around to find its prey. The leopard, mother, and daughter accosted on their route out of Amali. Most people in Igbuzo believed the anger of the gods shape-shifted into a hungry beast of the night. The beast pounced on them while they cried in pain as the leopard buried its fang on mother and daughter, tearing their skin until blood dried up from their tissues.

In the morning, the villagers congregated at the gory sight of mother and daughter, skin bitten to shreds by a strange leopard vanished into the forest. For in love, there is death. For in death, there is love – the sacrifice of a mother and child became their end.



ATTORNEY AT "LOW"

Kaluwe Haangala
Zambia



THE LEVITICUS

First, she had to get her sob story straight: "I'm so nervous and I'm struggling to concentrate, yet I need to because, as a lawyer, I want to make a change at the Con-

stitutional Court. This exam determines that."

The not-so-elaborate plan was to get even with this man. The most innocuous way to get his attention was in the exam room. He was

the coordinator of all law school exams. During the third session, he noticed her. She feigned shyness, crossing and uncrossing her legs and readjusting her skirts tactfully.

His first suspicion was that she was cheating. But she led him on a narrow road to her. His bemusement aided her gleeful spirits. Despite the gaming, she was careful not to be fazed because the first rule about human interaction was body language. "Don't give anything away by way of demeanour; what your mind ought to give out as a solid defence, even if you do not have much to go on," rang the advice I gave her for the successful completion of the duplicity to unfold.

She gave him what he thought was a nervous stare, willing him on, and it's said in one African proverb that "the eyes have no in-laws," hence, at some point, she found herself staring blankly at him. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, then moved off. Something about that silent stare told her he was hooked.

Later, he re-assumed his position, his stare laser-sharp. She played an ashen-faced horror that her skirt had ridden up her legs. That had him glued! When he dropped his business card on her desk as he went past her, she smiled triumphantly. "He took the

bait," she texted me.

THE CHRONICLES

Lutanda decided to get in touch with him via text at a time she knew he would be home. He immediately called.

"Hello," she answered.

"You better have a good reason for calling me after hours. Who the hell is this?" came the boomy voice.

"Good evening, sir. My name is Lutanda. Sorry to disturb you at home. You gave me your business card."

"Oh yes. I have a busy morning, but you can pass through my office between ten and eleven tomorrow."

They exchanged pleasantries. After cutting the line, she laughed. "Men, Oh, men!" she said to herself. That weekend, they exchanged a few texts, with her teasing him about his wife and him flirting back that she was younger and better suited to calming his still-fresh heart.

She dutifully went to his office at the agreed-upon time. He seemed chirper, chatting away freely, almost generous to the point of offering to pay

her tuition. He kept asking her why she looked vaguely familiar, but she gave nothing away. It was clear he was enamoured with her, and she could tell he would do as she asked. But she had a better plan. Revenge was the bold title it bore.

Later on, she reflected on their exchange of messages over the next few days and the money he gifted her too. She had to play it so he didn't suspect a thing. His malleability helped to tighten the noose she was winding around his neck.

In one text, he wrote, "Would you be surprised if I told you I have feelings for you? I just don't know how to broach the subject to tell you. You know, with being a dean and all."

Lutanda: "Is that why you talked about my dressing being skimpy the other day?"

"Let's put that behind us. I like you and would like to get to know you better."

Lutanda: "I know you're a married man, so if anything between us develops, it will just be having fun and games. No catching feelings,

nothing serious.”

For some reason, she thought her message was not delivered. She tried again some hours later.

Lutanda: “I thought you were married. Sorry if I’m too blunt.”

Him: “Let me worry about me. You said you were tired when I called. So, what’s it going to be?”

Lutanda decided to squeeze: “But as you get into this with me, bear in mind that I love money. I’ll be expecting you to be giving me.”

Him: “Money is not a problem.” He added a wink emoji.

Lutanda: “I will meet you. But there is no way I am meeting you at a hotel in the city. Maybe the outskirts. And I’m not checking in with you.”

She cringed as she read the final details of their sojourn and rendezvous. She’d be damned if she let him touch her, even with his dirty, ‘matrimonialized’ fingers.

THE LAMENTATIONS

She looked at him, rage burning through her entire body. She imagined stuffing life out of him. His sight congealed her blood with hate. The more he spoke, the more revulsed and nauseated she felt.

“Baby, you know me. You know I could never do this to us or to our children. Not for Three Thousand Kwacha!”

“Not for Three!” She screamed back, clanging her hands against the bars of the tiny jail cell.

He looked at her startled, an anger he had never seen.

“How much does what you have in your trousers go for? How much to throw away our vows? Tell me!”

He stepped back to protect himself, as if she could reach him. He just couldn’t fathom how he, a respected dean at the famed Chelston University, could be accused of soliciting bribes and sexual gratification from a student to tinker with their marks in final exams.

One of the cops called out. A lawyer had come to see him. He was led out to an anteroom.

THE REVELATIONS

Lutanda parked the rented car with fake plates outside the secluded chalet, whose location he had shared fifteen minutes prior. Covering herself up to look inconspicuous was easy with the hijab. Her handbag had everything she needed. She got out of the car and went to the door. He opened it before she could knock.

She smiled, and he drooled. Stepping into the room, she brought out a bottle of wine. A little research had shown the specific chemicals to ingest that would neutralise the effects of the drugs laced with the wine. She gave him a glass like a baby, and he gulped obediently.

Pretending to be a student had been the easy part of the scheming. Revenge for me, her mother, was a thrill.

THE GENESIS

This all started when a university student came seeking legal advice regarding a lecturer who preyed on her vulnerability. He sought sexual favour in return for good grades. She knew others were doing it, and because of her moral code, she couldn't. But to unravel it all, I knew we needed a tight case to put him away.

I called up a friend who had had a similar experience with a lecturer. Discussing the issue brought back some bad, unsettled scores. The overwhelming aspect of the case was that most sexual harassment cases were mostly tossed when victims shirked testifying.

"We need to make this as tight a case as we can. And one thing I know from the issues at that university is that most lecturers get away with this."

"I am sensing we need to be wolves in sheepskin to plot this properly," I said, a plan forming in my mind and even involving deceit of the foamy kind.

Knowing the target lecturer made my blood boil. The same man who had gotten away with raping me in my younger days as a student. Insufficient evidence had been the verdict in the case against him. I vowed that he would pay. And I had just the secret weapon to get him back.

THE APOCALYPSE

As he walked into the anteroom, I smiled. He was transfixed, and I savoured the shock, defeat, and regret that dripped from him.

"Hi, Moses. I know you remember me," I began, "Lutanda is your daughter." Oh! He wished the earth would swallow him.

"Lutanda," he mumbled to himself, the student who had drugged him and planted evidence of his impropriety. The case that would cost him everything he had worked for was his daughter.

He now knew how diabolical and meticulously planned this whole takedown was. How his loins led him to his destruction. He had yet to figure out how his blood work came back negative for drugs. This case would stick. He was going to jail. All because of a rape case he had dodged twenty years earlier.



THE GOOD DEED

Thabi Moeketsi
Zimbabwe

Edith who?

There must be a mistake.

No. No. No.

The news set tongues wagging in Highfields.

She was the perfect wife and mother. Definitely any man's dream wife. Any child's mother. Edith Ramoke had played her cards right as a mother and wife. No one could say anything bad about the Ramoke girls, her teenage twins, their father's dream come true. They were a replica of their mother. Dressed in the finest at all times, their hair neatly done. They never roamed around the Location or behaved in unmannerly ways. Edith's girls as they were

known were exemplary. *Like mother like daughters.* To the outside world, Edith lived a perfect life in the comfort of her perfectly built home surrounded by blooming flowers year-round. Lucky Edith!

Love

Loyalty

A life so serene in the eyes of many.

Edith, the darling of the community was often the first one to visit a home struck by tragedy. Her car on standby to ferry the ill or bereaved. Edith's home, open to anyone in need except her Simon was never there. Many didn't even know him. Sundays, Edith drove to church with the girls after making sure that Simon would not

be inconvenienced in any way. She left him his favourite Sunday meal, sweet potato pie.

At St Johns Church of England, Father Zambezi and his wife Dora relied on Edith. For with her any assignment would be perfectly done. Edith helped Mrs Zambezi run the mother's union. For the provincial meetings in Harare and Bulawayo, she had several reliable ex-Japanese cars to take the mothers there and she never asked for a cent from the church coffers. One Saturday a month, she hosted the church youth at her home where she played mentor in between drinks and food. The youths loved these meetings, the food and Mama Edith! Everyone then wondered what

had happened to Edith in between all this.

Her marriage seemed intact. Simon's absence could be explained. He had businesses and they kept him busy and money flowing into the family bank accounts. The money afforded Edith luxury including the seven ex-Japanese vehicles, one for each day, in their driveway. Edith could buy whatever she wanted whenever but she was no spendthrift.

"Why Edith? Why?" Everyone in Highfields asked.

If it obviously wasn't about Edith wanting money and Simon having secret sexcapades as many first assumed, what then was it all about?

"Simon only thought about spinning money and his family. The twins were his main concern. He wanted them to have a hassle-free life." Edith revealed.

Turns out the girls had come after years of visiting one fertility clinic after another. When all else had failed and Edith and Simon had settled for the status quo, the twins arrived. A big surprise! Simon was overjoyed. He

worked harder, for his girls, Surprise and Joy. To Simon, life was about being wholly devoted to his family; he would die for them if need be.

Neighbours said Edith lived a simple life and did not galivant from one kitchen party to the next like the local ladies. She only went out to Mbare once or twice a week to buy vegetables and the sweet potatoes for Simon's pie.

"You make the best sweet potato pie in town!" Simon would tell his wife much to her pleasure. Their home was full of love and laughter. Edith in charge and on top of her game.

When Simon woke up one day unable to walk, Highfields was left in shock. Many concluded it was the devil's doing.

When her work load more than doubled after Simon became wheelchair bound, Edith did not change. She washed, dressed and fed him. She took him to the park and shopping mall now and then. Many saw this and said, "Amazing Edith is a blessing to the world."

Clever Simon had life and disability cover running into millions so Edith didn't struggle for money. Life went on except Simon now had people running his businesses, an arrangement which did not appeal to Edith.

"Let us sell and concentrate on you," she said to Simon. "Money isn't everything."

Good wife. Good moral values. Everything Edith said made sense. And, she did concentrate on Simon and his favourite: Sweet potato pie. Everything under her control.

Despite having a driver, Edith drove herself to Mbare so she could buy the potatoes, hand picking each one of them for Simon's special pie. Sometimes she took hours in Mbare but always came back home and prepared the sweet potato pie right away.

I will love your sweet potato pie until the day I die," Simon joked.

Whenever Simon said this,

goose bumps grew all over Edith's body. She however never hinted that his jokes were not as funny as he assumed. She laughed instead and teased him too.

Be careful of what you wish for young man!"

Despite that the pie was only for Simon, Edith never got tired of making it. The twins hated sweet potatoes. Edith preferred yams.

Yum. Yum. Lucky me! All the pie is mine until the day I die!"

Simon continued with his jokes until one afternoon the twins found him dead with the Herald he was reading in his hand. Edith was in Mbare buying sweet potatoes. What was supposed to be a normal school holiday for the twins turned into a nightmare as they mourned their father.

"Very sad indeed," the community said.

A year down the line, on 14 August, Simon's birthday, another story emerged. It was not just about Simon's sweet potato pie, Mr Ramushu had divulged.

"I can't keep the secret anymore!" Edith confessed right away. In between buckets of tears, she said the secret was about the twins, Simon and her.

"Our life is ruined. Everything upside down because of *that Eric Ramushu,*"

she sobbed as she confessed to the police that all her life, she had loved Simon too much.

That is why I gave him the twins. Simon loved me too much and he trusted me too, too much. The twins loved their father. They

all looked up to me. What was I to tell them?"

"But why Mrs Ramoke?" The police asked.

Turns out Eric Ramushu had written about mercury in Simon Ramoke's sweet potato pie. He mentioned the more than a decade old secret and lots more. I will not waste your time," Edith said after learning about Eric Ramushu's statement.

She explained the frequent trips to Mbare for a fling with Eric Ramushu who had been her boyfriend since high school.

"We never stopped our affair. He got more possessive and made more demands. He wanted me to leave Simon and move in with him."

Ramushu out of frustration wrote a note with explicit details about:

The outings

His girls.

The plan to end Simon Ramoke's life gradually.

Deceit, deceit and more deceit!

When Psychiatrists checked Edith's mental state tests proved she was ok upstairs. *No sign of depression. No anguish.*

"I meant no harm. I did Simon a favour! He would have died from heartbreak anyway," Edith shouted as she left the room in chains.



Liza Express
Nigeria

HOW DO WE FIND YOU?

The problem is not whether writers write but whether they publish what they write.

For a lot of writers, publishing happens only when an established publishing company thinks their work is worthy - while that is something you should aspire to, it is not the only form of publishing.

Micro-publishing is a term that connotes sharing your work in bits with the aim of orienting the crowd about you such that you build an audience for your major publishing. At least, this is what it is supposed to be.

For a lot of people, the biggest stressor around micro-publishing is plagiarism and

theft. Legally speaking, if you can prove that you published your work with your name on any platform before someone else replicated it, you will have a strong case.

Now that we have dealt with your fear, why are you not publishing your work?

Every few months, I get the privilege to speak to fellow writers about the business of writing and I always begin with a pretty simple question - if I am not your friend, family or classmate, where can I accidentally bump into your work?

In the business world, the most qualified businesses do not necessarily get the

crowd (they could over a long time); the most visible and accessible businesses do.

During some social interactions, it was discovered that people would eat crappy street food when hungry as long as it is nearby than go to a faraway restaurant or exclusive restaurant where they might need reservations.

People know what is quality, but many times they are easily convinced by accessibility.

It does not matter how amazing your work is. If we cannot find it, we will read another's. Mind you, professional writing is no longer as

scarce as it used to be, now that social media is making micro-publishing a norm and creative journals are multiplying on a daily basis.

Quick experiment;

Go on Google and search "why does my back ache?"

You will realize three major categories of content are likely to fill the first one page

- content from hospitals and medical organizations that are considered trustworthy

- content from creators who have that title (books, YouTube, podcasts)

- businesses that sell you pain relief.

This is applicable to any search you make.

Let us say you write wedding vows as a business. Where can we search for wedding vows and you'll show up?

Understand that being seen consistently makes it easy to be remembered.

I am sure you have bought a product from a brand simply because you had seen their advert so frequently that you instantly remembered their name when you wanted something they had

previously advertised.

You want to create that same effect? I know there are a lot of options of places where you could be so, while now I will attempt to help you streamline.

1. To know where to show up, you need to know where your audience is.

If you write and perform spoken word pieces and you are looking to be a household name in your state or country, it is only natural that

A. You begin to attend those types of events and apply to perform there.

B. Document your presentations and create a digital portfolio that you can use to apply for subsequent opportunities

C. Create a digital presence that showcases that side of you.

You could argue and say "I only perform in my state so why do I need a digital presence?"

Well...

A. Everyone in your state was not physically present during your last presenta-

tion

B. All events hosted in your state are not by indigenous people

C. You cannot sit around and wait for word of mouth

D. You want to make sure you are creating in a way that when you decide to expand, you do have a track record.

Back to the question that started this piece - If I was not your friend, family or classmate, where would I accidentally bump into your work?

Do not just strive to only be an excellent writer but also, an accessible writer.

Imagine what could happen if those roadside eaters realize a particular road side vendor (who is easily accessible) also makes great meals in a clean environment?

You want to be that writer who is easily accessible and yet delivers impeccable work whether it's poetry, articles, stories or any other genre you have chosen.

2. To know where to show up, you need to know what people are looking for.

It is possible that people are looking for spoken word artists. But how do they phrase their words when they ask search engines? How do they phrase their words if they were to input in a directory?

You should do some research about your specific niche but another low-cost way to do that research is to ask yourself - how do I phrase my words when I search? For example, I would usually search for spoken word performance in Farsi.

Why? I accidentally heard one in a movie then I will find some people and discover a multilingual performer and now, I'm searching for multilingual spoken word performances.

I could even search for spoken word pieces with a full orchestra in the background. why? Because I imagined it after hearing a spoken word piece that used violin for an accomplice.

If you understand that you are also searching out other people and your friends are searching people and content types, you will begin to realize you have been missing out on being the subject

of someone else's search.

How can you word your titles and content so strategically that search engines would recommend you? How can you title your business cards so strategically that people can remember you easily? How can you phrase your writings so that people would remember to quote them?

3. You need to know where they are looking for it.

In order for people to find you deliberately or accidentally, you need to be in the radar of where they are looking.

If I need a spoken word artist in Abuja, Nigeria, I would definitely add the word Abuja in my searches. Why? Because I do not want someone outside that geographical location recommended.

I am sure you have seen magazines and journals that have 'African' in their titles. That is strategically used so when you are looking for predominant African creatives, they are likely to show up first.

Another example you might know well is the Poetic Africa Magazine. People are likely

to search for poetry on the Internet and they are likely to search for poetry by Africans on the internet. Therefore, Poetic Africa Magazine is better as a digital magazine than as a physical one because we cannot distribute it to the entire Africa in record time.

If you are an Editor, where are people likely to be searching for editors?

Well consider the audience you want to serve. If you want to serve as an editor for academic content then, you know you need physical presence on university campuses, you need partnerships or contacts at academic journals, you need to run your online adverts to groups and platforms that speak to academia.

For us to love your work, we need to first discover it, but for us to discover you, you need to be accessible. If you will actively prioritize using this information over the next few months, your visibility and profitability will increase exponentially.

Until next month when I bring you another article on the business of writing, stay accessible.

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December 2023 Edition



THE ELDER'S THIEF

A Children's Literature by Favour Edet, Nigeria

Reviewer

Benita Magopane
(Botswana)



This poem speaks of the comforts and joys of night time. A time to rest and to be cuddled. At nightfall, children can also anticipate bedtime stories, stars up in the sky and sounds of critters they wouldn't normally hear during daytime. While the little ones go to sleep, the moon and stars lie awake to chase away the darkness.

It's lovely how the poet, describes night features like the moon and stars and their duties, which are to twinkle

and shine. This means they provide the night with beauty and light. The moon also has the duty to call on sleep to assist mother while she reads old sweet tales. Mother couldn't possibly lay the children to sleep on her own could she? And to end this lovely poem, "heavy eyelids worry not for tomorrow," for in sleep, all the day's worries or those of the next, fade away. This makes night time and sleep a beautiful thing to look forward to.

REST AND MENTAL HEALTH

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

A Creative Nonfiction by Sorayah Nair, South Africa

Reviewer

Mathew Daniel
(Nigeria)

A consistent repetitive reference to the near axiomatic doctrine that 'the devil finds work for an idle hand,' and through house chores created specifically for her siblings and her, as Sorayah Nair narrates, reinforced in them the belief that resting creates a loophole for the devil to invade one's life with mischief. Unknown to them, this had subtly created a fallow ground for the root of depression and other mental and emotional complications to take hold.

From the beginning of her essay, the writer shows that rest was considered an unaffordable luxury in her home. Growing up with the notion that resting from work might be synonymous to laziness and being forced to seek a form of self-approval from eccentric parentage did nothing but compound the situation around the writer and their siblings.

Having consistently been fed with such precepts, Sorayah would go on to show us the effects that allied themselves with the imbalanced teaching that resulted in their lack of physical rest, although this was largely attributed to ignorance. But of course, this essay isn't merely about ignorance and

imbalance, as Sorayah put it, it is about the detriments that would manifest themselves from unhealthy maxims suffused into cultural teachings either as means to discourage deviant behaviours or laziness.

Sorayah would go on to show the longer but satisfying process of unlearning and relearning in order to cultivate the art of resting for healthy mental and emotional living. In this way, the writer is saying that 'what is made can be unmade'; and that 'to seek for professional medical help is worth every shot'--otherwise, how else could the siblings and Sorayah break free from the fetters of overworking until breaking point, until they've utterly burned themselves out?

This is an essay devoid of complexities in language. The writer employed a simplified narrative form to show us her long walk in ignorance and a long one to enlightenment as a way of revealing the infallible importance of resting and why it should be deliberately infused in our schedules. Indeed, Sorayah's essay is not only one that should interest readers but one that is beneficial to us and our mental health.

SWING SET

A Flash Fiction by Steve Otieno, Kenya

Reviewer

Taiwo David Olamide
(Nigeria)

“Swing set” is an emotional and piquant evocative masterful piece that underscores the fleeting nature of life and importance of cherishing every experience and life connection. It also foregrounds the ideal nature of love and loss.

Steve Otieno, through the use of stark imageries and metaphors, portrays the life of Kelvin, a young man with “cerebral palsy” who is robbed of speech and movement. He is subjected to a dreadful illness which almost takes his life. He does not only experience the usual two ways of having a heavy body, but is also a victim of another death-like one. This resonates a powerful imagery throughout the story.

The story continues as the writer conveys the unwavering love and cares of a mother to child. Lily, Kelvin’s mother showers her son with love, despite the bridge in their communication. She often sings and speaks to him, regardless his lethargic responses. This portrays the significant roles of a mother in a child’s life.

However, there is a shift in tone when Kevin passes away. His death is described as a relief as he eventually escapes the dreadful pains of his disability. His last response is described not through his speech, but

through his eyes. The relief he feels from the burden of his disability in his final moments is a purgation of bittersweet realization. This sensitive atmosphere provides an end for both Kevin and Lilly, as they both experience a sense of relief and peace.

Steve grossly employs piquant imageries, particularly the metaphor of spreading wings and touching moments, to underscore the depth and plot of the story. It foregrounds the fleeting nature of life and the crucial reason of cherishing every experience and connection.

Symbolism is also a treasure in the story. This is seen when Lily flings dirt onto the casket of her son. This is a symbolism of the natural death ritual and the emotional and psychological relief felt by Lily. Also, her mention of a “well-deserved rest” in her “memories” shows that Kelvin’s pains and discomforts have come to an end.

Finally, this debut critically explores the themes of love, loss, and the fleeting nature of existence. The language usage is simple and creative.

COLOUR ME BLUE

A Poem by Nicole Grandaho, Benin Republic

Reviewer

Akuei M. Adol
(South Sudan)

Healing is a journey of embracing wounds, mending brokenness, and discovering resilience within our own narratives. The poem 'Colour Me Blue' by Nicole Grandaho captures this reality by expressing a yearning for comfort through various artistic expressions. Nicole beckons the reader to envision a realm where music, nature, and art converge as mediums of healing.

The subject matter revolves around emotional distress and the quest for liberation. Each stanza explores a different avenue for redemption: music serves as a catalyst for joyous release, nature as a source of rejuvenation, and art as a means of catharsis. The repetition of 'maybe then' underscores the longing for resolution, implying uncertainty in the pursuit of alleviating anguish.

Structured as free verse with 19 lines, the poem maintains a relatively uniform shape, divided into stanzas of similar length. However, the progression from one artistic medium to another reflects a deliberate shift in approach, reinforcing the persona's desperation for transformation.

Grandaho profoundly addresses the theme of rest, not merely as physical repose but as an elusive haven from inner turmoil. Through conditional statements, Nicole navigates a path towards this rest, exploring

music, nature, and art as potential sources of comfort. This quest for emotional respite reflects the universal human longing for respite from agony.

Nicole employs vivid imagery and metaphorical language to convey desired outcomes, evoking a sense of yearning and desperation for relief. The language is evocative, using metaphors such as 'soulful lyrics,' 'bend with the weight of their essence,' and 'drown me in blinding hues of ecstasy,' enhancing emotional depth and creating vivid imagery.

The tone oscillates between hopefulness and desperation, highlighting the persona's plea for deliverance from inner chaos. The mood is a blend of longing, vulnerability, and a fervent desire for emotional restoration.

In conclusion, this piece teaches us about the resilience found in seeking comfort through artistic expression, even amidst uncertainty and despair. Reading 'Colour Me Blue' reminds me of my dad's experiences especially after finishing a tough busy day; he sits on his chair and sings songs that calm his mind, bringing him peace. This poem is a compelling read.

THE END IS THE BEGINNING

A Short Story by Sam Shae, Zimbabwe

Reviewer

Bohlokoa Lephoi
(Lesotho)

“The End is the Beginning,” a gripping story, exhibits an expressive writing style that transports readers to the turbulent world of the protagonist. From the stormy night with open windows to the aftermath of a violent encounter, with the icy floor and the smell of bleach in the hospital blanket, the author skillfully creates a sensory experience through the use of vivid imagery.

The storyline moves smoothly along, revealing the intricacies of an abusive relationship little by little. It deftly moves between recollections of the past and the current situation, naturally tension. The turning point occurs at the climax, when outside involvement turns into a crucial moment. The protagonist’s fortitude in ending the abusive cycle is highlighted by the plot, which is both painful and hopeful.

The issue of domestic violence and its severe effects on individuals and fam-

ilies is central to the story. The narrative explores issues such as financial dependency, societal expectations, and the difficulties involved in facing an abusive partner. In addition, the protagonist’s struggle to regain agency and defend her kids is highlighted by the recurring themes of resilience and the desire of freedom.

The author has two goals in mind. First and foremost, there’s a clear intention to spread knowledge about the complexities of domestic abuse, debunking myths and showing how violence escalates gradually. Second, by highlighting the significance of community support and intervention, the story aims to foster empathy and compassion for those who are imprisoned in abusive situations. The story prompts reflection on societal norms and the need for a collective response to break the cycle of abuse.

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