

Nnoko



*The
13th
Month*
An anthology series

*December
2023*

Nnọkọ Stories presents the 13th Month anthology series, put together to celebrate the voices that have embraced our platform.

We'd like to give a special shoutout and thank you to those whose works appear here.

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From The Nnọkọ Team

"Where I come from, the air is sea salt and fish. The sounds are loud road noises, trucks vrooming past, their fumes leaking into the air.."

-Dzifianu Afi.

It has been three years of nurturing and catering to the emerging voices of African writers from Africa and around the world. In those three years, we have come to read some of the finest poems, short stories, essays, and plays, and we have also had the pleasure of publishing some. In the last six months, we took some time away from publishing because it was important and inevitable for us at the time to evaluate what we stand for.

Nnọkọ was born out of the need to create a safe space for writers to experiment. We wanted a place where it was okay to write outside the norm, somewhere you could send your stories and have no fear of being misunderstood. After taking some time to look at the beautiful voices we have published, we realized that we have achieved our initial goal. Our writers and the stories we have published fall outside the norm, and we are very proud of that.

This 13th-month anthology is our inaugural anthology and comprises some of the finest voices we have published. Ranging from short stories, poetry, essays, and plays. This collection captures the very essence of Nnọkọ, and we want you to see the world through Nnọkọ's eyes, to taste the salt of our flesh, to hear the rhythm of our writers' voices. We want you to experience the beauty that is experimental fiction.

In this anthology, you will experience the natural and supernatural, you will be sucked into the world of the Old Man, into the beauty of romance in Lilea, and the world of Politics in Nation For A Day. By the end, you will emerge a different person, and the experiences of the characters in the stories and poems will stay with you for a very, very long time.

Going forward, we will announce a new structure for our submissions. This new structure will allow us to publish more anthologies, at least twice every year, but more updates on that in January. In the meantime, please enjoy the anthology.

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A Taste of Sin

At first, you had no intention of attending the ceremony. Mama, your mother, had said it was a bad omen for the old to bury the young. Kasham was just 15 years old. But it was, after all, an accident and she was family, so you reluctantly dragged yourself from Kakuri in Kaduna where you reside to Madakiya, your hometown.

You are sitting under one of the many canopies Uncle Zasan, your eldest brother, rented for the funeral, watching as people move here and there, some of the women wailing artistically in turns with each woman trying hard to make her voice the loudest.

You grunt, crinkle your nose, and look away.

The people sitting here with you are quite unfamiliar and undramatic. They act as if you don't exist, craning their necks left to right as though expecting something. It was the reason you chose to sit there. You hate the condolences. They irk you because condolences are all they can offer. Will their pathetic *sorry* or *take heart* stop Kasham's face from coming to you when you close your eyes?

You can still recall how Reverend Yakussak moved the congregation from the church to where Kasham would be laid behind your family home. How Uncle Zasan was the first to pour a handful of sand into the open grave, then his wife and his other children. How other members of your family did the same.

But you, you remained behind the kukah tree, watching.

Now, you sit watching Uncle Zasan and his family; his wife and two surviving daughters in white. Mama and your cousins cluster behind them, their heads sagging low, their eyes watching but not seeing.

You continue to stare at them until three women come with sacks filled with plastic food containers with rice, and soon hands dart at them. Some even rise to meet them.

'I never get food o!'

'Aunty, you never give me!'

'Ba mi kinya. Give me food.'

The women tell them to sit, that the food would get to everybody, but the hands don't go down. They remain that way, open and urging until a container of rice and meat is placed in it.

When it gets to your turn, you wave the women away. Two elderly women sitting close to you look at you as if you have gone crazy. They focus on their food after a shrug, noticing how bougie you look.

“What even killed her?” you hear one of the women ask. You flint glances at them immediately.

“They said she fell in the bathroom and broke her neck,” the other woman replies, the fried rice in her mouth threatening to pour out.

“Eyah. Fine girl like that.” The first readjusts her chair and begins to make digs at her food.

You wish then that Kasham wouldn’t be addressed as just that; a fine girl. Kasham means beauty in Bajju after all. But what do they know? She wasn’t just beautiful with her almond shaped eyes, heart shaped pink lips, oval shaped face, and a skin that glowed—a beauty she took from her mother. She was also intelligent, and came first every term. She was your favourite niece; you connected with her the most just as she did with you. If only you hadn’t visited that Christmas.

A Jehovah’s Witness had once told to you that Christmas was the festivity of pagans; that Mary didn’t give birth to Jesus Christ on the 25th of December. You wish you had listened and stopped visiting your hometown every Christmas break simply because Uncle Zasan always spent his Christmas there. You wish you hadn’t followed Kasham’s mother to do whatever she told you to, like a zombie. But why cry over spilled milk?

Your phone suddenly pings and you look at it. It’s a message from Kasham’s mother.

Where are you?

You look up at the canopy where she was just sitting with your Uncle Zasan and their children, but she is no longer there. Your phone pings again. Another message.

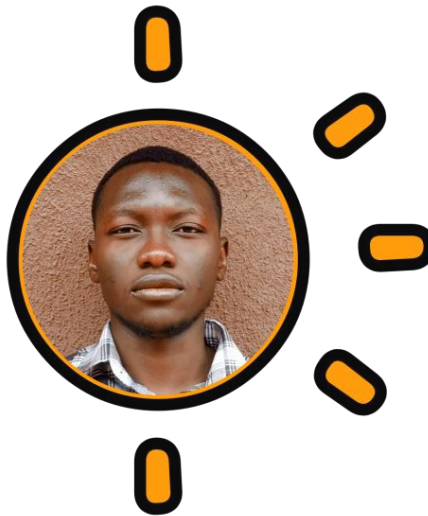
I am at our usual spot. Meet me there.

You quickly delete the message and root your legs to the ground. This time you are ready to fight the devil. If you had this courage earlier, you wouldn’t be seated here. No. You would be in Kaduna cuddling with Agnes, your girlfriend. Your niece wouldn’t have died on Christmas day— what Mama had called another bad omen, for someone to die on a day of celebration.

You wish that Kasham hadn’t been sick and made to stay at home with you and her mother that day while Uncle Zasan took every member of your family to Kafanchan to celebrate. You wish you had the courage to walk up to Uncle Zasan and let him know what happened on 25th of December two weeks ago. How Kasham, whom you thought was asleep, walked unexpectedly into your room—the usual spot—and caught you pants down with her mother beneath you, stark naked. How you followed her pleading and pleading, and didn’t know how or why you pushed her and she fell, hitting her head on the tiled floor.

But as you get up and begin to walk to your room, you know you won't be telling Uncle Zasan the truth. You also know one thing for sure; Kasham's face the day she died will never stop haunting you.

Meet The Author



Solomon T. Hamza is a Nigerian writer. He writes about the intricacies of life especially ones that keeps him awake at night and musing during the day. His works have been published on Brittle Paper, Nnọkọ Stories, Shallow Tales Review, RoadRunner Review, Agbowó, Isele Magazine, Salamander Ink Magazine, Afritondo and elsewhere.

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The Old Man

I know of an old man who lived the life of a Nigerian comedy script; he smelled like wet tobacco drying under a hot sun. His teeth, like the thatched roofing of his wife's kitchen, were shades of black and brown. He lived in an obscure village in the rural areas of south-east Nigeria which he claimed was a G.R.A because of its calmness and serenity. The old man hardly complained of a difficult village life. He rarely complained at all. He believed that life was to be enjoyed despite all odds. So, every day, he looked forward to tapping his palm trees, playing coupon and making love to his wife.

I once read a book by Ernest Hemingway titled *The Old Man and The Sea*, and I compared the two. Hemingway's old man was tenacious but the old man I know would not even try. His old man conquered, creating a powerful self, but the old man I know would rather tell such stories than live them.

So, he lived in his home, a yellow and red bungalow his son erected for him in a large compound that seemed to be swallowed by trees. Every morning, after he had woken up, he would take a long chewing stick, a tobacco cup, a raffia climbing rope, a cutlass, and a keg to go tap his wine. He would climb his palm trees in a stealthy way so he could savour the sights of unaware naked women bathing. When he was satisfied, he would begin humming his Biafran war songs as he watched the women cover themselves with wrappers and shame.

After working on the palm, he'd sit in his obi*, humming by a bucket of water, a basin with palm wine, and a red cup. He would take a sip, smacking his lips delightfully, and then call her; his blood and dear to his heart.

"Nyerenwa, come and drink!"

A chubby girl of ten years appeared, smiling. She drank from a full cup and asked for more.

"Ada nkwu elu*, won't you get drunk?" he asked smiling as he gave her another full cup.

Her mother's voice rang from outside; she was warning her not to drink too much.

"Our people can't get drunk, that's why we're called Umuañuo," she replied to the old man, licking her lips. "Besides," she continued with a bit more emphasis, "Papa I am the only one that makes wine for you."

The old man smiled. "Bring the water," he requested.

She handed him the bucket, whose content he poured into the basin. He dipped the cup and stirred. He drank it and then looked at her. From the look, she quickly knew.

“Papa, it is ruined, isn’t it?”

He smiled and said, “Go and bring the basket!” as he scratched his nose.

She hurried out and reappeared with a basket full of black nylons. She dropped it down and busied herself searching, her eyes as busy as her hands. She handed the needed nylon to him. He untied it and emptied the content into the basin while she stirred the wine with the cup. She took a sip and frowned. Her eyes became wide. He took the cup and confirmed. The wine was still tasteless because the sugar was not enough.

He gave her a hundred Naira note without uttering a word and she left his obi. When she returned, she held a bag that hid two bottles of Sprite. They emptied the liquid, stirred and drank. This time she didn’t frown.

“Papa, do we add small white powder to enhance the colour?” she asked.

“No nwam*, this will do.” He loved her cleverness and the powder trick was her invention.

They filled the kegs with the wine, and she carried them to his bicycle. A great secret for a great sale on a great market day. A secret and duty they both shared. A secret she would always remember.

“Ahia oma*, good luck.” She added, “Buy bananas for me.”

He smiled as he peddled away. He always bought bananas. She was so much a child to keep reminding him.

The old man was anything but good-looking. Much worse, he was bald. The villagers often compared his head to the egg of a bush fowl and his ears to that of a wild deer. He was literate and intelligent nonetheless, claiming to have gotten his intelligence from reading books and eating fish brain. He was the secretary of his village council. In his language, it was called a book writer. His main duty was writing minutes of every meeting as well as sitting beside Nna Jonathan; the council president. It gave him and other executives the privilege to have the biggest share of food and money during wedding and burial ceremonies including other popular Owu* festival.

He was among the few literate old men in Umuañuo, though he was more outspoken than the others. During council meetings, he wrote the minutes in plain English and

didn't spell some words correctly. When the gathering flared up with boiling tempers and he lost track of what he was writing, he wrote in his large brown papered notebook the following:

Hyginus: harsh, harsh, he is shouting at Igbozurike.

Nna Jonathan: kalming everybody down.

Amadi Ekemma: sitting still like a slender poisonous snake. Tufia!*

This old man cursed a lot in his language; no one was spared from his diseased tongue as his wife called it, not even Nyerenwa. Not even his goats nor his wife's fowls.

"May Iyafor* strike your stomach. May Ezeala* twist your neck. May Amadioha* blow ashes into your eyes."

He prayed to God to forgive him his sins every night. The old man prayed like a child reciting the same news report to God. It took him several hours.

"God our Father," he would say, somewhere in the middle of his prayers, "Remember chief Akubatas son that left for Spain 12 years ago, nobody has heard from him."

He would pause, grind his teeth, making a symphony with the crickets outside in the dark.

"May we hear from him. Amen."

Eventually, he prayed for all.

"All the boys, girls, men and women in Umuanuo, in Ifakala, in Imo state, in Nigeria, in Africa. In fact, uwa niile* ... Ave Maria." Then he would bow his head chanting amen.

After his prayers, he hit the cemented floor with his slippers.

"Gbooa... Gbooa..." he shouted as well. Perhaps so thieves would think that he still had his Biafran rifle.

As nature remains an undefeated force that fosters change, the old man became weak several years later. There was no delight in his former pleasures. He no longer tapped

nor drank wine. His hands weren't strong enough, but his voice was. He couldn't sniff tobacco as well. The doctors strictly advised against it. Indeed, when you grow old, you understand the journey as the Igbos say. At times, Nyerenwa would secretly buy tobacco and bring to him. He wouldn't know what he would have done without her. She became a constant companion who could sit all day listening to his unending stories and adventures.

"Mount Everest is in Nepal, Papa!" She shouted one evening beside him on his bed of rusty iron bunk.

"Which one is Nepal?" he hissed, "Come this child, I was taught in standard six that mountain Everest is in America."

"Let me teach you!" he continued, "Listen to me carefully."

"Teacher, don't teach me nonsense!" she sang, rolling her eyes.

"Me? Nonsense?" he inquired, with his hands on his chest.

She laughed, "Papa, tell me about Christopher Columbus again."

He launched into the story. He told her about the Biafran war, about his life in Kalabari, his youth, his exuberance, his women, and his mistresses.

"Diana? Kai! She is a mermaid."

"Why didn't you marry her?"

"She ran off with a Nigerian soldier, I never saw her again," he replied wistfully.

"Good for her," she snapped her fingers. "Thank God you married mama."

"Yes, but I don't think your grandma feels the same way," he whispered to her ear. They both laughed.

Nyerenwa went to a boarding school. The old man only saw her during the school holidays. Seasons became hot yet he couldn't find warmth in them. Life was now a repeating process. One time, she came home with a friend from school and the old man's eyes came alive at the sight of the girl.

“Nwam, you are slender and sagacity. Not like Nyerenwa your friend who is no different from a pot of water.”

The girl laughed while Nyerenwa rolled her eyes.

“Papa, what is sagacity?”

“He meant to say sexy, this village man,” Nyerenwa replied, hissed and walked out.

The old man muttered to the girl about a pot of water that lives in a school and has the body of someone that stays at home.

Years passed by, like seasons of roasted corns and ash painted pears. The old man remembered the days of palm wines, council meetings and coupon papers turned to one of eye drops, tablets and hospital appointment. He had a stroke.

“Papa, you can’t die,” she blurted after feeding him.

“Not yet,” he smiled then continued, “I must see my in-laws at least. I must drink their wine.”

The old man died two years later. Two weeks after her eighteenth birthday, Nyerenwa came home from her workplace. The house was flooded with people. She became tensed but kept her cool, greeted those nearby and headed inside. There were more people inside. Immediately, she flung her bag and headed towards his room. A hand restrained her by the shoulder, but she pushed free and went in. He was there like always, on his bed, only that he was completely wrapped, a large cement block on each of his leg. The room reeked of kerosene.

“Come out, the ambulance will soon be here!” someone said.

She ran out, straight to her room. Someone followed her.

“Nyerenwa, hold your heart.”

“Go away!” she fired at that the person.

“O sorry,” the person replied with sarcasm.

She squeezed her pillow. She hated to cry. She hated him. He should have waited for her to come back. She fed him before she left and told him to stay strong till she returned.

“You said you won’t... till they come... You said. You said you would wait!” She was sobbing now. Her throat itched painfully.

“They are chanting Oro!” came a voice from outside.

She stood up, wiping her eyes.

“Who gave birth? What child was born?” came another voice.

Nyerenwa went out to listen. She needed to listen. The house was gravely silent.

Omuru gini o?

Omuru nwoke o

Anyi na azu, Anyi na anu o

Anyi na mmanya nkwa elu o

Her eyes welled up. He kept his promise. He never left her.

“Ojah has reincarnated. Adaku gave birth to a boy!” said a woman arriving.

The crowd cheered.

Away from them, alone in her thoughts, staring at nothing, Nyerenwa stood still. After a while, she smiled.

“Thank you, papa,” she whispered, “for keeping your promise. For coming back as a kinsman to drink my wine. Thank you nwannam*.”

Glossary

Ahia oma	- Good luck with your sales
Nwam	- My child
Owu	- Masquerade dance
Tufia	- A curse to express anger or irritation
Uwa niile	- The whole world.
Nwannam	- My kinsman
Ada nkwu elu	- Daughter of palm trees
Obi	- Sitting room
Iyafor, Ezeala, Amdioha	- Traditional gods

Meet the Author



Venus Chinonyerem Asoka is a poet and a short writer from the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. She is in her late teens and is currently studying Genetics and Biotechnology at the University of Calabar.

Her works have been published in an online journal, blogs and several anthologies. She enjoys her own company by reading, writing and listening to music. She is aspiring to be a renowned prolific African writer.

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Nation for a Day

1.

“What would you do if you were made the leader of this land for a day?”

I've always heard that question go around, and boy have I heard different answers to it. People always talking about how they'd change the economic system or upgrade the country's tech... make the healthcare system a lot better, all that noble stuff. To an average person in this fair country of mine, the question is nothing more than a moment to dream. But to the oligarchs who rule the nation... it was a question worth putting on your thinking cap for.

I'd also hoped no one would ask me that question and expect an honest answer; with the answers the other nobles my age give I'd no doubt be thought absolutely insane. But even my insanity comes from a place of sanity—one that might be a bit askew maybe but still sanity.

You see, I don't believe that this system can be fixed or that system can be upgraded... there's no way the ones at the apex would allow that to happen. So, if I were to be made the leader of this land for a day?

Honest to God?

I'd burn everything to the ground.

Quite shocking to hear from someone whose privileges in life are thanks to noble blood, right? You won't catch me telling that to anyone. Not especially when I was surprisingly asked the question and truly, truly, *truly* given the chance to lead the nation for a day.

“What would you do if you were made the leader of this land for a day?”

Oh I gave them some cock and bull rubbish that made them smile while twirling moustaches and brushing fingers through beards. And while they made their preparations on how to install me for the day and further their agendas, I began to make preparations on how to spread some fuel and light a really big match.

Hmm... I was going to need a flamethrower.

2.

"...Citizens of this great nation..."

The streets are littered with the blackened corpses of burned cars, burned tyres, and burned bodies. Gunshots, the maniacal shrieks of havoc being wrecked and the frightened screams of the wrecked fill the air as the Leader's message blares over the nationwide PA system; the message on an indefinite loop.

"It is my pleasant duty to let you know that as from this day forth, you are free to target, maim, steal, beat, destroy..."

Around the corner, the windows of a store shatter at the hands of a scraggly gang. The one in front steps through the broken glass gallantly and is greeted instantly by a loud blast and a smack to the chest so hard it sends him flying backwards past his comrades. An elderly lady steps out with a shotgun and immediately fires into the group, downing three of the five standing.

"...and all round obliterate anything and anyone that you deem is worthy of your wrath..."

One makes a run for it, and the elderly lady switches her attention to him, giving the last hooligan standing the chance to use his pipe and smash the lady's head in. He hits her dead on, but not before she pulls the trigger and manages to blow off the runner's legs. The last man standing lands a few more hits with the pipe, the bloodlust evident in his eyes. The whimpering sound of his mate steals his attention, and in short time he takes the shotgun off of the dead woman's hands and pumps the downed runner one in the chest. His laughter is short-lived as a machete slices through his neck and his head drops unceremoniously to the ground.

"This is to bring about a new age for our beautiful land..."

On the other side of town, a teenage girl runs out the back door of a home and barricades it behind her, giggling uncontrollably as she proceeds to do the same with the front door while thinking of the gas burner she left on, the nails cooking in the microwave, and the mouth-watering fruit it would bear soon.

"...Because let's face it, if nothing burns, nothing changes..."

She just about gets a safe distance away when there's a loud boom that sends her sprawling. She scrambles away and turns around to see the house post-explosion; the fire leaping up in such glory that all she can do is stare at it in awe. Inside, the screams of

those burning bring the girl out of her reverie. The sounds awaken something in her so primal, she's amazed can contain such a force inside of her.

"But if EVERYTHING burns, then everything CHANGES!"

The fire from the house spreads to neighbouring homes, and soon both frantic and painful screams fill the air, all the while the girl claps and dances before running off to create more havoc. Along the way, she sees a pair of shears and decides that it might just be what she needs for her next performance.

"No one will stop you, my beloved Citizens! And on that note, no one will help you..."

3.

The camera moves slowly through the streets, seeing nothing but destruction as everything is either burning, has been burned, or is about to get burned. People scamper around looking for safety that does not exist, and those with the inner beast to perform so well flourish in a lawless environment. The sound of chaos fills the air, and the camera begins to fade away until a different sound is heard; faint, at first.

The camera shifts its gaze, taking up into the skies to better search for this different sound. It rotates slowly for a bit, before it focuses on a direction and begins to pursue. The view leaves the major city and enters the quieter regions; though these too had also fallen to the Leader's call to arms. The camera finally reaches the place of the elite, still guarded from most of the land's chaos.

Without pause, the camera moves, focusing on a big estate with several houses. The weird sound, which is discernible as that of bubbly laughter, comes from a small structure in the estate's compound. The camera, as if unsure—or if possible, nervous—slowly zooms in on the shed. The laughter becomes more audible, and it comes to sound like that of a little boy handed his heart's desires on a gold platter.

Still, the camera presses on, zooming into the shed through a crack. It's dark inside, but the outline of a man can be seen as his body vibrates from the bubbly laughter while he patiently straps something to his person.

Done in moments, the man opens the shed's door, and the camera switches view to show him, all smiles, guffaws, and childish glee as he walks to one of the estate's mansions, the flamethrower strapped to him ready to fire.

Meet the Author



An avid reader and lover of fiction, Phylis Chika enjoys using his wild imagination to create awe-inspiring worlds. When he's not writing or reading, he's neck deep in web dev, anime, comics, or a videogame.

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Mother's Whip

The clock on the wall of the yellow-painted room you own chimes. You take a glance and it is 6 pm. The time when your faith would drown again. Peppermint soaked in cold water runs through your bones down your feet. Soon, she will be here and you'll never be able to speak up. You scamper from the bed, awaiting the brightening red noise that will come from the gate—the sound that reminds you of danger looming. You stare into the window expecting the siren of the police van. You had called the police station earlier and they promised to get there on time. You peep through the window when the honking of a vehicle winds into your ears. Your fears are confirmed. Here she is, taking a halt and pulling up the black Mercedes Benz that she owns and drives to work daily; and yet, the police is not here yet.

Mrs Johnson is your mother; she works as a nurse at General Muritala Hospital, Lagos. While Jacob Johnson, your father, is the Head of Service at Waterworks. Father has no time. He usually gets called up for meetings at any time. And most times he made travels.

You take a deep breath to dampen your fears, but the knock of her heels as they hit the tiles in the walkway awakens them again and you feel nothing but your heart in your neck. The air around you is not the one you breathe out. It feels as though she is in your room already, pulling your ears and scolding you never to tell anyone what usually transpires; but she isn't here, yet. Tension is already building up in you. If only your prayers got answers. If only father could walk in, proclaiming that he is back from his trip, the weekend for all of you to spend together.

If only wishes were horses.

You are still wishing when the twist of a door handle alerts you. You imagine she is entering her room, divesting her dress to rid herself of the smell of the hospital. But a knock startles you. It seems to be far away because she is knocking really hard. She is here as now you can see the handle turning like someone running out of patience.

There is nothing you can do. If you let out a shrill, she'll scold you and throw you out. You trust her sweet mouth; she'll give Dad a different story. He'll believe her when she tells him she couldn't possibly do it. How will you open your mouth to tell Him that this is what Mother does every time he leaves for work? If ever he believes you, he'll never do anything other than warn her. Dad cannot afford to lose Mother. He loves her so much. She means everything to him.

"Oh dear, dear. How are you today?" she says as she walks in.

She is here now and smiling with her full teeth, drawing you near for a hug. You wish to rush to her arms and let her give you a warm hug, but you see the lust in her eyes. She is about to savour you. She begins to undress. And now she is approaching your direction.

You keep mute.

"Mother..." you force the word from your mouth.

Get out of my room. Get out! is all you want to say but your trembling mouth won't say that... your weakening knees want to drop but you hold on.

"I had a long day today, and I need the usual, baby. How much do you crave for me?" she blurts out, her sensual tone sending shivers through you. Her words are like fire in your bones. You feel choked but you can't cough out.

She stares at you, grabs you and throws you on the bed, ready for the usual fling. You want to say 'no!' but this is your pain. The one you want to end.

She cuddles your arm and urges you to undress. You stare into space as you do so.

You have not gone far when you feel movement and hear a thump. You keep staring, waiting for mother to do the lustful desires of her heart. But you do not feel anything except for her body on top of you. Motionless.

You quiver when you sight blood oozing from a gash on mother's head, but that's not the only thing you see. You see eyes that resemble Father's, a suit that looks like one that Father owns. And now you see clearly, Father stands with shaking hands, an iron rod stained with blood in them.

Father killed Mother!

You feel your veins burbling in fear. Father's trembling hands too. Then you hear the banshee screams of a siren coming closer. The blue lights of the police van appear in the street of the almost dark night as you peep through the window. You hear their footsteps up the staircase and now already trotting your room. You watch them clutch father's hand with silvery handcuffs and lead him downstairs to their van.

"I will come and save you!" you say, wiping the tears flowing down your cheeks.

"I will become the lawyer that you've always wanted me to be. I'll be your Savior!" you scream into the night as you watch Father get taken away.

Meet the Author



Olubukola Alabi is a Contemporary Nigerian Writer. She loves to write about sciences, literature, love and faith. She enjoys reading crime, thriller and Christian novels. Olubukola enjoys reading, singing, baking and volunteering when she is not writing. Her works are forthcoming or have appeared in Spillwords, Kahalari Review, Nnọkọ Stories and elsewhere.

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Midnight Race

That field over there has harboured more dry bones than the feet of those who go to rest their loved ones. Grasses like well-spread butter on slices of bread grace the terrain. Headstones at a few intervals peeked out from the ground like little billboards. The air over that dead yard has always been thick and gloomy, the smell of dirt and dampness, and evil hung in the air. Even the sun threaded this ground with caution; its rays, while bouncing off on some headstones, carefully avoid others, leaving the latter shrouded in darkness all day. Rumour has it that those tombstones that refuse even a single ray of sun belong to witches who even on their deathbeds had refused to renounce their craft.

It rarely rains on that field, even when there are heavy downpours all over the village, but whenever it does rain on that field, parts of human skeletons flow into the streets and drainages. Anyone who comes in direct eye contact with these bones was rumoured to experience devastating misfortunes. Nwunye Gerald had a miscarriage on getting home the evening she claimed to have seen a femur while urinating near a drainage. Chude's father fell ill the night he returned from his in-laws' place. He remembered taking the footpath near that field but wasn't sure if he met any skeleton part on his way. Still, he met his death later that night.

"Mba! This can't continue! Something must be done!" Nna anyị Okiri lamented on the day we gathered at the village square to discuss the matter. "If it was in the days of my father, Ezemuo would have put an end to all this rubbish! But no! You Christians have spoilt everything! Everything!" Nna anyị Okiri remains one of the few titled men in our village who still believe that Christianity is too weak to confront our dark realities.

After long deliberation, the community decided to write to a distant Reverend, whose news of Holy ghost powers and miracles have spread all over the neighbouring towns. Many women say whenever he sings and claps, demons confess their names and apologize for inhabiting their hosts, yet Reverend Bernard won't cast them out, not until he has dealt them several lashes with his anointing oil; a spectacular process which leaves the host body writhing and sprawling on the floor like a wounded snake.

Father Bernard's visit is in two days, and everyone was getting ready. Many women prayer groups have taken to dry fasting to prepare the grounds of our community, Ụmụọji, for the holy legs of Father Bernard.

"The days of those skeletons are numbered..." One of those women tells my mother.

"Only but a while they will feel the power from above."

I couldn't help but wonder how these skeletons will feel the power from above. Will they wriggle and writhe in pain, on the swampy soil of the cemetery? Or perhaps confess their names and apologize for disturbing our peace?

Two days, for my village, is a long time to wait, but father Bernard kept his promise, and he arrived. He gave a condition; the prayers and consecration of the burial ground can only be at midnight when the demons will be present to be battled face-to-face. He also said about 50% of the community members must be present to witness the power of God.

Later that evening, the community gathered to select volunteers which almost ended in fistfights.

"Chukwu aju! God forbid! At midnight? We will all be dead before we enter that field!" A young man protested.

"Please count me out, I'm the only son of my family," Chude said politely. It was obvious he wasn't done mourning his father.

The women prayer groups, when asked to provide volunteers, said they are not afraid to battle demons at midnight, but they won't join because virtuous women don't keep late nights.

"The Reverend should go alone. He is a man of God, we don't have holy water to take with us, in case of emergency but he does," Nna anyị Okiri said, trying not to laugh.

Finally, it was decided that every family must provide one person to join the prayers. My father came home looking worried, his shoulders drooped as though a heavy load had been dropped on them.

"Nna m," He called me, in a very suspicious politeness. "You will go for the family."

"Me kwa!" I screamed. "Me kwa! Papa, but I'm still young!"

With tears dropping freely, I imagined the skeletons digging into my flesh, licking up the smallest drops of my blood. I refused, threatening to run away from the house before midnight. Father eventually changed his mind; he would go instead.

An hour to midnight, the Reverend was already at the community square, muttering inaudible words, as he walked around gently in circles, with prayer beads in his right hand, a big black bible and a bottle of holy water in his left hand. His cassock shone brightly in the moonlight, as he waited for the villagers to convene.

When the community youth leaders came to our house to pick our representative, father asked me to open the door. The door squeaked, revealing many nervous faces. Most of the young men had on them weapons of all sorts, cutlasses, sticks, dagger knives to fight the skeleton demons. Father was standing behind me fully prepared, he wore his usual baggy shorts, with an old shirt my mother's father had given him. He had with him the only torchlight in the house. I wondered how useful that torchlight will be to him in case of emergency since the light only comes on after about four to five knock-and-start sessions.

There was a sudden push from behind and I found myself outside. The door was immediately closed, and I could hear my mum's voice screaming and begging my father to open the door. It took a while before I realised what had just happened.

"Jesus! Papa abeg open the door!" I cried, banging on the door.

"Okay open let me change my clothes!"

I had only my singlet and a pair of shorts on, with no slippers to shield my feet from the midnight cold. The youth leaders were impatient, they grabbed my arm and dragged me to the village square where we met up with Reverend Bernard.

It was a few minutes to midnight, the Reverend stood in front with a reasonable distance between him and the first person in the crowd, and we followed suit. I squeezed my way to the middle; a strategy to afford me the opportunity to run home in case the demons start attacking from the left, right, front, or back, I will certainly have enough opportunity to escape. In a short while, we got to the field and were welcomed by the pungent smell of dirt and dampness, the whistling sounds of a strong wind, and the eerie sound of rustling leaves.

"Blood of Jesus! They are awake!" A man nearly screamed.

"Abeg shut up and man up!" a young girl barely my age retorted from behind with no trace of fear in her voice.

Father Bernard began praying, binding and casting, sprinkling holy water to the left, right, and front. It was pitch dark; even the few that had torchlights were too scared to switch them on.

"Close your eyes! Focus! Allow no distractions!" the Reverend thundered. No one obviously listened to him, as I could see open eyes darting from side to side, tightening their grip on their many weapons.

I felt a quick tap on my shoulder. I looked behind, it was the same young girl that had snapped at the other man earlier.

“O boy look!” she whispered in fear.

“Where?”

“Over there!” she said in a frenzy, almost screaming.

I strained my sight in the direction she was pointing. As the dark cloud shifted gently, a shaft of moonlight dropped on six figures, reflecting them in grey-white. They moved towards us in a coordinated formation with their feet barely touching the ground, their empty black sockets fixed on us. Their hair stood up in long grey spikes, with fingers like talons floating in the air.

“Hei!” I screamed to the limits of my lungs. I took to my heels, the others following suit. I thought I was fast enough, not until I was far behind Father Bernard.

Meet the Author



Chidi Iheanacho is a creative writer, a literature teacher, an Amazon publisher, and a literary blogger. A final year student of Education and English Language in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A member of Goodreads book club, Oprah Book club and The Writers Community UNN.

Dorime

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance).

Henry	(Yahoo boy)
Nnamdi	(Henry's bosom friend)
Mama Henry	(Henry's mother)
Papa Henry	(Henry's father)
Ruby	(Henry's younger sister)

ACT 1 SCENE I

Henry tosses his iPhone on the bed and sighs as he moves, discouraged, to his wardrobe to throw on a shirt...

(His phone starts ringing.)

Henry: (sighs, taking the call) Where you de keep phone, guy? I don de call-call you.

Friend: Bro, abeg, no vex. I go drop that my Calabar olosho for airport now. As I come back house now, I see say I leave phone for here. No vex, abeg.

Henry: (sighing again) No wahala. Do quick de come my side na. All man dey house now. You know say your presence go be beta morale support for that shit wey I bin reason you.

Friend: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I de come, de come. 10 minutes tops. I'll be driving.

Henry: No shaking. (Hangs up.)

25 minutes later, Henry's friend arrives Henry's parents' flat...

SCENE II

Mama Henry: (making the door open) Ah, ah, ah, who am I seeing? Is this Nnamdi? Ha. Come in, my dear.

Nnamdi: (smiling and walking in) Good day, ma.

Mama Henry: (shutting the door) Nnaa, how nau? Otegekwa aka obere. It's been a little while.

Nnamdi: (chuckling) I agree, ma. I'm fine, ma.

Mama Henry: (smiles and nods) I can see that. Let me, eh, let your friend know that you're here. Biko, make yourself comfortable, oh? This is also your house, mm?

Nnamdi: (smiling) Alright, ma. Thank you, ma.

(Henry's mother strolls out of the living room and in a minute or two, returns with Henry, and enters the kitchen to rustle up something.)

Henry: (smiling) Omo, hafa na?

Nnamdi: I dey, man. (Stands to shake hands with Henry.)

Henry: Was almost thinking you'd bail on my ass, last minute.

Nnamdi: (laughing) Haba nau. You're family, bro. How I go litter you like that?

Henry: (smiles) My G. Make I quick call momsi and popsi. Time no dey. Work choke.

Nnamdi: I de tell you, guy. No time.

5 minutes later, after being summoned, Henry's parents join the boys in the living room...

Nnamdi: Good day, sir. (Curtseying.)

Papa Henry: Ehen, my son. You're welcome.

Henry: Mummy, daddy, I thank you both for being here. There is something I would love to talk about. Something I've kept hidden and, eh, coded, if you may, for quite some time now.

Mama Henry: Sorry o, nnaa, before you continue, let me at least offer your friend some kola nau, eh?

Nnamdi: (snickers) Ah-ah, awuzi m onye ohuru? I'm no stranger nau. It's fine, really. I'm OK. Thank you, ma.

Papa Henry: No, no, no, I insist. Ruby! Ruby!!

(Henry's younger sister dashes out of the bedroom and into the living room.)

Ruby: (Glances at Nnamdi and greets, hiding a smile) Y-Yes, dad?

Papa Henry: Go and buy something for your brother's guest, mm? (Reaches into his trouser's pocket and gives Ruby some naira notes.)

(Ruby collects the money and exits the house.)

Henry: Thank you, sir. Right. So, yes, to the reason why I called this impromptu meeting. Eh, I know how this may sound, but believe me, I have also thought about it. Please hear me out. For all my life I have watched us as a family suffer, feeding from hand to mouth. We have borrowed so much and are still in debt. This has kept me up for nights, so I made a decision. That decision is G, or "Yahoo-Yahoo" like everybody calls it.

Mama Henry: (stands in anger) What?? Does Ruby know about this? Nnamdi, you know about this, too? Ah! My enemies. My enemies o! (Throws herself on the floor and continues lamenting.)

Papa Henry: Wait, what is this rubbish you are saying? Did I just hear what I think I heard? (Struggling to keep himself composed.)

Nnamdi: (standing up) Sir, ma, I know how this sounds and how it might look, but you'll love what he is about to say next. I promise you that.

Ruby: (opening the door and walking in) Whoa, whoa, what is going on? (Hurriedly shutting the door behind her.)

Papa Henry: Keep those things and come here.

Ruby: (confusedly) O...K. (Does as instructed.)

Papa Henry: (turns back to Henry) Ehen? We're all listening.

Henry: (exhales and rises to his feet) Thank you. (Turns to his mother) Mommy, I understand the way you f...

Mama Henry: (cutting him short) Don't you dare "mommy" me! Look, ma ichoghi ka Chineke kpoo gi oku, you better start talking!

Henry: (a bit nervously) Right. Like I said, it, uh, was the condition of the family and the hardship in the land that made this crayfish (points at himself) bend.

Papa Henry: (barking) You think this is funny?!

Henry: N-N-No, sir. I'll just get to the point. My friend here, and myself, partnered on a deal or should I say, transaction, and it paid off in a lot of zeroes. So, I thought to myself, why not move your family out of this shoebox? Ruby, could you please get me my tab in the room. I'd like to show them something.

(Ruby smiles and quickly exits the living room.)

Mama Henry: Wait, wait, wait, Ruby knows about this? As in, she has always known? Hay! Chukwu nna, are my sins the worst?? (Hands on her head as she stares up to the ceiling.)

(Ruby returns with the device and hands it over to Henry.)

Mama Henry: (turning to glare at her husband) Papa Henry, you will not talk now, abi? Abi??! Ah!

Papa Henry: Nwanyi, let us wait till he is done talking! Don't bug me! Please!

Henry: (swallows as he gives the device to his father) So, erm, daddy, that's the small house I was able to buy. The Livingstone Estate managers said it was the only available house in the estate at the time. Daddy, it's all paid for and is now officially ours!

(Papa Henry takes his time to go through and zoom into different angles of the swanky building's photographs while his wife continues to lose her voice to wailing and lamenting.)

Papa Henry: (turns to his wife) Won't you take a look?

Mama Henry: Take a look?! Are you kidding me, Ossai? I should take a bloody look?!! Wait, you're not considering what I think you're considering, right? Right?!

Papa Henry: Anita, can you try holding it together for once?? Which do you love exactly? This stuffy, rubbish one-bedroom apartment or the face-me-I-face-you setting of the yard?

Mama Henry: I am terribly disappointed in you, Ossai. (Stands and quietly enters the bedroom.)

Papa Henry: Look, don't mind your mom. Agu anaghi amu nwa ujo! I'm proud of you, son! You've done that which I wouldn't have imagined in my wildest dreams!

Henry: Wow. Daddy, thank you so much. It's all God's blessings. But I'm a little worried about mommy and how she's taking the whole thing.

Papa Henry: Leave your mom to me, inu? Don't let that worry you, o, nwoke oma? So you actually mean we own this fine house now? Wow. (Goes back to staring at the pictures on the tab in his grasp.)

Henry: (chuckles) It's all ours. The keys are with me as we speak. Whenever you feel up to it, we can go see the place.

Papa Henry: O, nna m.

Henry: (sits and shakes Nnamdi's hand) Omo, thanks a lot for coming through for the boy. Sheesh, man.

(They both share a laugh.)

Nnamdi: Nah, you ma dawg 4L.

Henry: (turns to Ruby) Keep sitting there, smiling like an òdè, inu? Don't come and serve our guest his kola.

Ruby: Oh, shit, yeah. That. (Leaps to her feet and scurries toward the dining area.)

Nnamdi: E say na "oh, shit, yeah." (Laughing.)

Henry: (laughing) Nwanne, hapu that stubborn chinch.

(Ruby returns to the living room with a bottle of beer and a glass cup resting in a fancy tray.)

Henry: (noticing Ruby's stylish winking at Nnamdi's smiling face) Come, boy, you and Ruby de run package?

Nnamdi: (laughs) The hell are you talking about, man?

(Papa Henry, distracted by the raised voices, raises his head from the tablet's screen to really observe what is going on.)

Henry: Nnamdi, you don't fuck my sister?! (Shouting.)

Ruby: Jesus, brother! Why would your mind even go there?!

(Nnamdi keeps mum.)

Henry: (angrily standing) Nnamdi, I swear to God, if you don't answer me this min...

Nnamdi: Yes! Yes! Happy now?! (Heart pounding) Bro, I wasn't going to let things get that far, I swear. Bro, I can explain. I swear to God, bro.

(Papa Henry's jaw drops as he stares in pure, undiluted disbelief, taking in the new, wild information in small, processable bits, totally speechless.)

Henry: Why, man? Why? Fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck!!!

Ruby: (scratching her head, shyly) Brother, I think you're over-reacting a little.

Henry: (sombrely) Tell that to the womb you no longer have.

Ruby: Uh, what?

Henry: (slumps down to the cushion and sighs deeply) We sleep with any girl and her womb is exchanged for more wealth. That was the pact we both entered last year. You're fucked is what.

(Ruby shits herself and faints, closely-followed by Papa Henry who sends the device in his loose grip crashing to the floor. Henry, embittered by the situation, picks a brutal fight with Nnamdi, turning the living room upside-down as he punches Nnamdi's face and teeth into his head.)

SCENE III

Mama Henry: (in the bedroom, smiling to herself) I knew you would show me a sign when it is time for me to come home. Thank you, Lord.

She quietly walks to her makeup bag, takes out her eye-pencil's sharpener, and slits both her wrists. With a smile she sits on the floor, singing praises as she bleeds out fast.

Meet the Author



Ikay is a man born of a woman, a biochemist, and a really, really cool playwright whose mind is a game reserve where wild and tamed thoughts find a way to coexist. How they do that, however, is something Ikay has not been able to comprehend so far.

Twitter: [@ikauchimera](https://twitter.com/ikauchimera) | Check out his book: [The More You Look](#)

Where the Flowers Bloom

“Hello? Hellooooo? I think you should wake up now. Don’t you think so?”

Petunia groggily opened her eyes to find the source of the voice. It wasn’t a familiar one, and when her blurry vision managed to settle on an image, what she saw was definitely not familiar.

“Uh... what kind of dream is this?” was Petunia’s first loud thought.

“Oh, no. This isn’t a dream, Petunia. You really should wake up.”

“Wait... I said that loud? Damn my potty mouth,” Petunia yawned as she stretched and sat up on her bed, the covers moving to just above her knees. One hand rubbing her eyes, and the other scratching an itch on the side, Petunia shook herself out of her drowsiness. On full alert (or close enough) the sight in front of her made her freeze.

She was looking at a smiling sunflower.

“Uh... are you sure that I’m not dreaming at this moment? Because the thought of a flower that’s over 5-feet tall smiling at me by my bedside is not the kind of thing I would see when I’m awake.”

The sunflower moved a leaf to rub the base of its flower, like it was scratching its chin. Petunia found it rather odd that the flower would use such a human gesture. Then she thought that if that’s what she found odd about the present situation, then maybe she was dreaming.

“No, you aren’t dreaming. I understand that this may be strange to you, and I’m sorry about that. I don’t want you feeling down about this. I was told that I should approach you with honesty,” the sunflower smiled. “And I being honest is coming to you in my true form. You would be upset if I came to you differently, and I wouldn’t want you to be upset.”

“True that. I wouldn’t want to be upset either,” Petunia answered conversationally to the 5-foot plus talking flower beside her bed. “So, eh... you said ‘they’. Who is this ‘they’ you mentioned?”

“Hah oh, that’s right! I’m so sorry!” the flower gave a nervous chuckle. “It’s my first time as an emissary, so I’m sort of bumbling things around. Don’t be upset about that, okay?”

“It’s okay, I’m not. So... you were saying?”

“Right! They! I was sent to bring you to the other side of the world. I think they would like you to be an ambassador or something...”

“Chineke...” Petunia whispered. “Other side of the world? You mean like Hong Kong?”

“Um... it’s not called Hong Kong. Now that I think about it... I’m not really sure what it’s called,” the flower hummed and hahed and shrugged the way only a walking flower could. “I bet they’ll tell you all about it!”

“You still haven’t said who they are, flower,” Petunia insisted.

“I haven’t? Oh, I haven’t! They are the elders of my place, and they say that they would be very honoured to have you come along with me to meet them, Petunia Anyanwu!” The flower spread its leaves wide and beamed a bright smile.

Petunia opened her mouth to reply, but then closed it. And opened it. Then closed it. Took a deep breath, then tried one more time.

“What is your name?”

“My name? My name! Nice to meet you, I’m Fye!”

Petunia took another deep breath. “You’re a flower.”

“Uh huh!”

“That has come to take me... to the other side of the world?”

“Yeeeeeeep!” That same beaming smile.

Petunia just stared at the flower for what felt like minutes on end.

“Please come. It would be really great to have you. It’s my first time as an emissary, and I’d like to make a good impression that I can do the job!”

Every fibre in her body was telling her to use the covers over her head and go back to sleep. It even sounded like a wonderful idea. She’d been having a dream about winning a 3-month supply of free pizza. She’d rather much try to revisit that dream and try a barbecue chicken pizza, than go to the other side of the world with a talking sunflower.

Instead, she said;

“I think I’m going to need a coat. And some boots.” Then she looked down at her Adventure Time pyjamas and realized something. “I think I might have to change my entire outfit.”

“I absolutely have no idea what to make of all this...” Petunia said. She was in utter awe of her present surroundings. “What is this place?”

“Oh uh... well... I like to call it The Track,” Fye answered as it walked ahead. “I dunno if it has an official name. I never really asked.”

After Petunia had changed her outfit and gotten ready to follow Fye to wherever it was Fye wanted to take her to (which, Petunia thought, was probably still suicidal to follow a walking, talking sunflower anywhere) they had stepped through a shimmering fold of space Fye had called a Passage. This Passage was on the sidewalk right in front of Petunia’s house, and that made part of her wonder how Fye had gotten into her house in the first place. Her fascination with the Passage prevented her from asking the question, though.

As soon as they had stepped through, everything literally changed. No longer were there sidewalks and houses; Petunia’s eyes widened when she was greeted with the sight of flying dolphins and what looked like giant prawns playing cards. The few humans she saw turned out to not be humans when she saw whiskers on one of them and a tail on another. She and Fye walked on a paved road, and on either side, she was reminded of a park’s surroundings.

Up in the sky there was no sun, and yet everywhere was well illuminated. Fye must’ve been talking because in her awestruck moment it took a few tries before she felt the flower’s leaf poking her side.

“Um... are you okay? You sort of zoned out and I kept walking without knowing you had stopped,” the flower asked, clearly concerned.

Petunia managed, by sheer strength of will, to divert her gaze from the phantasmagoria in front of her and direct it on Fye.

“Am I okay?” she repeated, to which Fye nodded. “Am I okay...” Petunia parroted. And again, “Am I okay...”

“Yes... are you okay? I’m worried. Oh! Don’t tell me you’re upset. Please, oh no. Are you? You are, aren’t you?”

Petunia blinked a few times before the weight of Fye’s words sunk in. “Look at all this! It’s magnificent!” Petunia exclaimed as she beheld the sight before her. “Where’s the sun? How’s there light here? How is that dolphin flying? And ohmigosh is that a zebra riding a BIKE???” Petunia returned her gaze to Fye. “What is this place?”

“Like I said before, I call it The Track. It’s the place where people on the other side of worlds meet to get to another other side of the world.”

Petunia goggled, and then narrowed her eyes. “Other side of the world... This is not Hong Kong,” she whispered as Fye took her hand and carried her along the paved path. “Where are we, Fye flower?”

“Aaaah. Fye Flower. I think I like that name!” Fye giggled. “And as for where you are, let me take you to the embassy. They’ll explain it there better than I can.”

Petunia only nodded in response, still in awe of the way the grass rippled like water and the whole place seemed to have a nice tint of yellow to it. As they walked on, Petunia realized in the back of her mind that what she was looking at resembled a very suped up marijuana-laced LSD trip with ‘shrooms on the side.

At the end of the paved path was another shimmering fold of space like the one that was in front of Petunia’s house. This one glowed a soft green, and without hesitation Fye dragged her through. Like with the first Passage there was a cool feeling when Petunia crossed through, and what she met on the other side dazzled her beyond what she could imagine.

She had walked into what she could only imagine was a dome, with dandelion puffs lazily rising and falling in the air. Petunia stood transfixed for a moment and realized that none of the puffs touched the ground before they rose back up into the air. There were nicely manicured brushes and ferns interspersed around, and different things she couldn’t make out seemed to either crawl or fly around the vegetation.

All around, the walls were a dark brown, and placing her hand on it made Petunia realize it was firm bark.

She was inside a tree.

A tree with an ecosystem inside it.

Petunia noticed Fye no longer by her side, and saw the flower take some steps leading down. It was then that she realized what she was looking at; the other things she didn’t quite make out were other flowers like Fye.

“Petunia! Aren’t you coming? Everyone’s waiting to meet you!” Fye called out. And on cue, all the flowers turned and stared at her. Petunia was surprised at how self-conscious she felt, especially considering flowers, and not people, were all looking at her.

“Ridiculous,” she muttered to herself, and strode down to meet the others. When she was on the bottom level, Fye was beaming widely as a seemingly older flower commended her on the job well done. That older flower took over and walked towards Petunia. This one was a bellflower.

“Welcome, Petunia Anyanwu. We’re so grateful that you accepted our invitation and came,” the bellflower, that was over a head taller than Petunia (making her bend a bit at the neck), said. “My name is Marloe. How are you?”

“I eh... I... huh...” Petunia stammered. She looked around and saw other flowers; irises, hibiscuses, balloon flowers, carnations, all looking at her. She shook her head at this. “Nope... none of this is real. I’m on a very very VERY bad trip.” She spun around, regarding the spectacular visage before her. “Very BAD trip! But... it is so beautiful...”

Marloe only smiled, her petals moving in a mesmerizing manner, making Petunia forget her initial trepidation.

“No trip. We aren’t hallucinogenic flowers. We don’t give off that vibe. We soothe,” Marloe’s smile got even more mesmerizing. “But... I have an answer to the question I asked earlier.”

“Where are—wait what question?”

“How are you?” That’s what I asked. You’re perplexed. I’ll do my best to soothe that.” Marloe led Petunia to a group of stumps not too far away from the stairs she descended from. When they both sat down, Marloe began. “I imagine you have so many questions,” to which Petunia nodded feebly, “so I will try to answer them as best as I can.

“To start with, yes, we are all flowers here. Different kinds, different shades, all together. And this is one of the central hubs of our world, a place we welcome visitors from far and wide.”

“What is this place?” Petunia asked.

“Oh,” said Marloe. “We call it The Bloom.”

“The Bloom...” Petunia repeated, gazing all around her. She had to admit, it was a most befitting name for the place. She couldn’t imagine it having any other name. “How is this all real? I mean... talking flowers? A world in a tree... how?”

Marloe’s petals shifted in what could only be described as her screwing her mouth in the way that a person trying to remember the taste of pancakes would.

“How is anything possible? We have lived as we have for hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of years, and then we discover that there are complex beings called humans in another place. You can imagine that would be a surprise to us as well.”

“Wh... wh... huh.”

Marloe giggled. It sounded like the warm sounds of a mother enjoying her child’s antics. “You think that because you’ve been at the game of existence, you’re the only ones in it? Heavens no. You’re just one part of it!”

Petunia exhaled slowly, her oft calm mind taking a big hit. “Other side of the world...” she whispered.

“So to speak. A better phrase would be another dimension. I’ve heard you humans use that word before. I quite like it.”

“You’ve heard? How?”

Marloe scoffed, but playfully. “Please. This isn’t our first human contact.”

Rationale took over Petunia’s mind. “You know... I don’t find that surprising. But what I do find surprising is this; why me?”

“Well, why not you? You have wished for a ‘magical experience’ before, haven’t you?”

“I—well yeah I have. But... so have hundreds of other people!”

Marloe nodded and did something Petunia didn’t expect. She shrugged, as much as a possibly 6-foot talking bellflower could shrug. Odd, Petunia thought, how natural the gesture looked.

“What can I say? Fortune smiled on you.”

A light bulb turned on in Petunia’s head. “Speaking of... when Fye and I were walking through the Track,” Marloe seemed to frown, so Petunia tried to explain, “the place with the paved road and all the other... eh... ‘beings,’ what is that place?”

“That’s The Stem. At least, we call it that. Others would possibly have different names for it. But as you can imagine, it’s the place that connects us all together. Would you like to go visit it again?”

Petunia realized that she did in fact want to visit it again, and made her wish known. To which Marloe smiled, as well and as beautiful as a flower could smile, and led her back towards the Passage.

If Petunia thought the surprises were done, she was mistaken.

The Stem had changed. Not just changed like a day changes from noon to evening, but changed like they went from a shopping mall into a family restaurant. Though, frankly, that analogy isn't quite right, but it more or less gets the picture across.

The whole place was tinted in blue. Not the normal blue of the sky, but a blue that bordered on the verge of purple. Petunia's first instinct was to allow her eyes pop out, but then she realized she quite in fact liked where they were. She looked down and noticed, with more amazement, that while the grass still rippled like water it was no longer green.

It was orange.

"If I were to guess, you're awed and overwhelmed," the soothing and peaceful voice of Marloe floated towards Petunia's ears.

Petunia nodded, and swept her gaze all over the place. There were different other beings to behold unlike the last time. The humanoids and dolphins were still present, but also in the fray was something Petunia never expected (even though, quite honestly, there's nothing she could expect at this point); a couple of Minotaurs sipping drinks and reading magazines around a table. Marloe led Petunia down the path and branched off on another road, which to her surprise led to the Minotaurs.

"Hello gentlemen," Marloe called out when they were close enough.

The Minotaurs all dropped their magazines—one of them even took off its glasses—and gave a gentle bow to Marloe.

"Hey Marloe, so nice to see you again," said the one that removed its glasses. The voice was quite composed, and completely different from the aggro roar the shows on Earth had made Petunia believe Minotaurs in general possessed. "Looks like we have another guest this time. How splendid."

"Oh yes splendid indeed," said one Minotaur.

"Most indubitably," said another. Petunia could not remember the last time she heard that word.

"That's a'ight, I dig it," said the third, or fourth, depending on how they were counted.

“She seems to be terribly confused,” the one with the glasses said, referring to Petunia. “I’m Maistroe.”

“I’m Arnid,” said the next.

“I’m Dube,” indubitably man answered.

“Greg, sup?” said the last.

“Eh... hi. I’m Petunia. It’s,” Petunia struggled for a word, and found it, “exhilarating meeting you all. Nothing, and I mean nothing could ever beat my experience here!” Petunia felt rather giddy.

Maistroe smiled. “Why don’t you join us, then? You’re the new human ambassador to the Florae, right?”

“Well, not yet. She’s still quite overwhelmed with everything,” Marloe answered for her as she (Marloe) took a seat. It was like watching a flower glide slowly before hitting the ground. Petunia took her seat in what she hoped was as graceful a manner as Marloe’s, but it was rather far from it. Plus side, Petunia didn’t fall on her behind. That would have been terribly embarrassing.

“Florae? Ambassador? How would I do that? Wait... do I have to move here?”

Everyone but the bewildered Petunia laughed good-naturedly. So, while she felt a tad embarrassed, she wasn’t hot in the face. The purple tint of The Stem shifted slowly into pink, and Petunia couldn’t help but admire how it made her dark skin look. It’s not so possible to describe in words, but it was quite pleasant.

“Heavens no, Petunia. You don’t have to move anywhere. Should you choose to be an ambassador, it means that you agree to be hosted here now and then, maybe even voice opinions on certain matters concerning us beings on the other side of the world. It also means you’d be willing to host us, should we require a visit to your other side of the world.”

Petunia’s wide eyes as of that moment was definitely out of wonderment. She could only imagine hosting the Minotaurs in her little abode. It would be life changing! It would be amazing! It would be... say, did she have enough space for them? They seemed quite mild mannered, but she couldn’t help imagine if they would break her china and mugs. She might have to switch to plastics if that were the case.

Petunia could not deny the bubbling child-like glee she felt with the procession of events. In the lizard (read: deep, primal, inner) part of her brain, she told herself these were things that she had no idea about. The ferret (read: not so deep, soft, more accommodating)

part of her brain told her that if she did end up dying or getting killed, then it'd be because she had been doing business with inter-dimensional beings that existed on the other side of the world.

She concluded that was a hell of a tombstone engraving to have.

Petunia smiled bright and happy. "Where do I sign up to be ambassador?"

Her candour and complete willingness caught her company by complete surprise, and that surprise was quickly overcome with celebration. And for the first time ever, Petunia had the kind of drinks that the Norse Gods liked to call mead; it completely threw her off her game, and at one point she vaguely remembered being rocked like a baby by Dube.

Months had passed, and the wonderful day of seeing The Stem and The Bloom had not quite faded from memory, but it was difficult to recollect. And whenever Petunia tried, she looked like a child that was trying to recite the alphabets and was wondering if it was L-M-N-O or 'elemeno.' She, for some time, blamed the mead. And then later blamed her overactive imagination, and possibly a strong mixture of something a friend may have slipped her, which she couldn't remember either.

(And she wasn't going to ask her friends, oh no. They'd think she had a problem. She didn't have a problem, goodness no.)

It just so happened that one day coming back from work Petunia had parked her car in the garage and took meaningful steps towards the house, going as far as climbing the 3 short steps leading to the front door before her brain registered what her peripheral vision had seen.

Going back down the steps she saw, resting rather comfortably on the hedges, a purple tinted envelope. She picked it up and suddenly felt at ease. Taking out the paper with a very neat handwriting, what she read made her heart leap with joy and her mind race with excitement. She was in for a wonderful time yet again.

The letter read;

HELLO PETUNIA,

YOU HAVE BEEN DOING WELL, I'M SURE. LOVELY TO KNOW THAT THINGS ARE GOING WELL.

WE WOULD NEED TO BE IN YOUR OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD IN THE NEXT 54 HOURS, AND I HOPE THAT THIS DOESN'T PUT YOUR PLANS IN DISORDER.

IF IT WOULD, JUST WRITE SO ON THIS LETTER AND LEAVE IT ON YOUR HEDGES. IF NOT, KEEP THE LETTER IN YOUR HOUSE.

LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN.

MARLOE

P.S: BY 'WE' I MEAN MAISTROE AND I. HE SENDS HIS BEST REGARDS, AND HOPES YOU WOULDN'T MIND MORE MEAD.

Meet the Author



An avid reader and lover of fiction, Phylis Chika enjoys using his wild imagination to create awe-inspiring worlds. When he's not writing or reading, he's neck deep in web dev, anime, comics, or a videogame.

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Lilea

Lilea didn't know what the universe said to lovers. A tiny shrug, a blank expression, she spits them out from her dark corners and struts away. And to cupid? Her middle finger shot up in the air, an imp smile spreading across her face.

Lilea met Obinna in her second year. It was one of the usual evenings when she went for the meetings of the writers' club. Those evenings when she would sit and interact with the non-conformist members of the club.

"The minds of writers are warped," they would say as the basis to support their unusual views about contemporary issues. Everyone held their intellectualism so dear, the 'woke' embers in a blind world. Lilea was loud in those meetings, reaching forth into her wealth of knowledge and spilling words like spring water; sharing opinions, supporting views.

"Patriarchal norms should be wiped out of our society."

"Queer rights should be upheld to the utmost."

It was in the club that she learnt to use 'bourgeoisie' after a dreadlocked dark girl with transparent glasses kept repeating it while talking about the effect of capitalism in the country. Lilea would look up the new words she learnt after every meeting and arm herself with them in the next meeting.

Obinna awed her though. The first day he came for the meeting, he was quiet. Not the quietness of one who didn't know what to say but that of an adult who watched two children bickering. He didn't contribute to the conversations they had about plagiarism in writing. When she said something about occasional coincidences, he smiled. She saw his teeth, held together by braces, and his lips, the way they parted and stretched like pink elastic bands. He nodded at intervals. Two boys read their poems aloud later and he typed on his phone as they read. She watched him.

"Obinna Ikezuruonye," he said while shaking hands with her after the meeting. He had called her 'Lilac' when she wrote her name on a paper for him. It was a game she loved, watching people try and fail always at pronouncing her name. He was different. He said her 'e' and 'a' looked like 'a' and 'c' and so she was at fault. He smiled at his lame excuse but still refused to throw away Lilac and embrace Lilea. She let it slide. They walked back together that evening because they found out they lived in the same street asof the Lecturer's Quarters behind the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine.

“Goodbye Lilac,” he said as she took the turn that led to her own house. She knew she would be Lilac. For him. For something she couldn’t quite place her fingers on.

Obinna wore his sophistication like a pair of cufflinks, seemingly insignificant but the very piece that held his whole appearance together. He never wore trousers, only shorts—that displayed his lean, smooth legs, t-shirts, and face caps like he was shielding his face from the sun and everything else that was unworthy. He had slender fingers and supple flesh, a delicateness that spread like butter on bread from his almost transparent skin to his pedicured toenails that peeked through his sandals. He quickly passed for gay, especially because his gestures were sometimes effeminate and his overall body type just wouldn’t fit into the skin of male stereotypes. It was a gentle defiance, one that unnerved Lilea.

There was an eerie stillness about him. In the days when he invited Lilea to hang out with him or when they went together for the meetings of the writers’ club, he held her hands and just walked; no sound, too much air. The air engulfed all the questions she had in her mind. It took her to a place of bliss where it was just his supple palm in hers and his eyes, mesmerizing. On other days, he would stop under a shade or in a park and read his poems out loud for her. He always memorized them and they sounded lyrical, like songs he had composed while sculpting her, a part of her soul. She was fascinated by his poems, his metaphors, the cling clang of his alliterations as he flicked his tongue, the fluidity of his lines as they rolled into each other. One line stood out to her, like ripe mango fruits:

“Love is the sequin on threadbare hearts.”

She tasted the words later, painted them on the walls of her eyelids; they would send her to sleep with a grin.

In those moments, Lilea felt inconsequential. Her poems tasted like bland liquor and so she never poured them out for him to gulp down, to lick up the contents and belch his satisfaction. She hid her poems in her heart and groomed them, bathed them and fattened them up for the appointed time when she was going to amaze him with her literal prowess.

Lilea visited him just before the second semester ended. The Faculty of Arts was hosting a dinner party and she wanted to ask him out. Something she wondered how she would do.

“Writers have warped minds,” she reminded herself. It wasn’t going to seem weird.

His room was small and almost empty. There were just two chairs, a table, a big bed, and then space. There was a beautiful artwork that hung on one part of his Lilac walls. She

wondered why a boy would like Lilac for his walls. She smiled. Lilac made her smile. Just like his texts that always ended with 'For Lilac'.

Let's hangout, your soul is magic...
For Lilac

There were no photos of him or any other person. There was a desktop on the table competing for space with several books that were left unarranged. His wardrobe was locked, with no clothes lying around. Everything was arranged except for his books. The books were littered on the table as if he was frantically searching for something in them, something he could never find. There was just one window; large enough to let in air to breathe but too small to fill up the void his silence created and to engulf her questions. She asked freely then as if a bit had been removed from her mouth. It was the first time he really talked to her.

Obinna was a computer science student in his final year. He was obsessed with codes. Java, Python, and Ruby, creating apps, and hacking systems. He said he had learned them from his mum when he lived with her in Georgia for three years. She worked as a data analyst for a secret service agency in Georgia. He had gone to visit her when he was ten years old and had learnt the basics of coding then. He was the only child of his parents, living in Abuja with his Dad who had divorced his mum when he was two. After his mum moved to Georgia, he went there to visit her every summer.

He talked about his days in Georgia, Atlanta. Atlanta of art, Picasso and ****. Atlanta that held his fondest memories: Brunswick stew, cinnamon rolls, chilli cheese dog, funghi fritti. The city that honed his love for food. He talked about Downtown and all its beauties, the high-rise buildings that made him dream about owning a skyscraper casino sometime in the future. The grandeur of the Downtown Olympic Park was surreal.

In primary six, his mother had promised to take him to Busy Bee Café only if he came first in school. As if by a jinx, he came second that term and had cried until his father decided to take him there the next summer if his mother didn't. She did. He was the object of his parents' contention; they fought for his love like a trophy. His days at Atlanta were, therefore, a makeup for lost time with his mum. He wished he would not return to his workaholic, melancholic Dad in those days. He always returned.

"Nigeria is the place to train a child, Ike," His mother would always say to his father when he suggested keeping him with her.

Obinna was not sure if she just did not want him or if she actually thought his Dad would do a good job of raising him.

Lilea talked about herself too, in bits, in the spaces that were left off after he had recounted pleasant memories

Her birth wasn't received with much enthusiasm because she was an unwanted child. Her mother, Priscilla Ume was just eighteen years old when she gave birth to Lilea. 'A punishment for her immoral ways,' people said. She had just finished her senior secondary education when she got pregnant. Lilea's father, Christopher, was a clueless twenty-year-old who ran away as soon as he heard of his girlfriend's pregnancy. He came back, however, after he was reported to have attempted suicide.

Priscilla loved her daughter instantly and then on the eighth day when it was time to name the child, she discovered she hadn't thought of any name yet. It was Priscilla's mother who called the child 'Chibuolileanyam,' which meant that God was her hope. It was an appeal rather than a boast; God was her only hope when it had to do with shouldering the shame her daughter had brought to her. In the days that followed, the child was called Lilea.

After Lilea's birth, Christopher had gone to Lagos to be an apprentice to Mr Oba, a rich Igbo businessman who sold vehicle spare parts at Oshodi market. Priscilla and Lilea, however, lived in a small single room in Umuahia with Priscilla's mother. The house ached of overuse, ridden with cobwebs and slimy walls. Priscilla's father had died two years before and her two brothers sold clothes at a market in Aba.

Lilea was ten years old when she moved to Lagos with her mother. Lagos, the land of broken dreams, the bustling that shook a person to his senses and gave him the will to thrive. Christopher had gotten established as a seller of vehicle spare parts. He had finished his apprenticeship five years earlier and had started his own business with the money his former oga had settled him with. He had rented a two-room apartment in Somolu, a relatively quiet area of Lagos state and he had immediately sent for Lilea and Priscilla. Priscilla had aged much; her hips were large in the skin-hugging red dress she wore. She was still the very beautiful girl he had dated though. Her lower eyelids were darkened, a great contrast to her wide, bright eyes. Lilea looked at her father with uncertain eyes, the father she had only heard and seen motionless pictures of.

"Lee-Lay not Lee-Leh or Lee-Lia." This was the sole reason why Lilea fought with Adejo. Lilea's first year in secondary school was a little short of traumatic. Everyone laughed at her Igbo accent. Times when she was called upon to answer questions were comedy sessions in her class. From a high self-esteeming girl back at Umuahia, Lilea morphed into a shell of herself, a shell that harboured pent up anger; at the world, at everyone. Her relationship with Christopher was strained as he was hardly ever at home. She didn't

have any friends at Salvation Secondary School which she attended. Her only confidante was Priscilla who had become a housewife since they moved to Lagos.

And so, the day Adejo had called her *Lee-Lyah*, she came for his soul. She clawed and scratched and bruised. The boy was a bloody sight when she was separated from him. In the days that followed, everyone looked at Lilea with fear, a silent fear that just made them polite to her.

She learned fast. From pronouncing words correctly, to learning Yoruba slangs and phrases. She would spend her evenings reading books, watching cartoons, and listening to radio presenters pronounce words. Lilea's search for acceptance drove her to places an eleven-year-old would never have gone. Lilea's love for books heightened with every book she read. She discovered later that Kemi, one of her classmates lived on her street and with time they became good friends. They went to school together and after school hours, Lilea would go over to Kemi's house and listen to her talk.

Kemi was a very boisterous girl, a year older than Lilea and so she took pleasure in being Lilea's idol. It was Kemi that told Lilea about Ariana Grande, Meghan Trainor and Justin Bieber and that children were not born the same way people defecated. It was Kemi that taught her to touch herself at night, to stifle orgasms and muffle moans...

Obinna cooked noodles as he listened. Then they talked about God. He talked about God like a fond memory, so pristine, so untainted. He said God was the one person that loved him the most in the world. She cringed because God was her rival now, she was sure her love for him transcended God's love. God was Rosary and ashes for her, and early wakings on Sunday mornings. A chore.

She didn't invite him to the dinner again. She couldn't. He was a prize she shielded from the eyes of the wide-hip girls in her Faculty.

Their love was swift; like a furtive glance or a graze of thighs under a dinner table. It inhabited small spaces, a being that was not planned but still happened and happened quickly. It was silent too. He never told her that he loved her but she knew.

It was in the way he looked at her, the closure, the way his caress lingered like incense. It was in the butterflies he fed her for dessert. His unconventional love that was a telling in itself. He gave her a chapbook he had written titled *For Lilac* on her birthday, together with a pack of hairpins. He didn't say Happy Birthday or sing for her. Instead, he sent her his favourite songs; Nina Simone and Aurora, and slipped his cologne into her handbag. He said he would never be enough but his favourite things would speak volumes of the fact that he was hers. Tears lurked in her eyes for him. She knew that the things left

unsaid were alive, they defied the power that a name gave. It was nameless and still powerful. Their love.

Lilea learnt fellatio the same day her father died. She had gone to Obinna's house that day because her legs were wobbly because she couldn't believe that her father was gone. Obinna's silence was all the comfort she needed. He held her and listened to her sobs, as they rose and fell with her heartbeat, as her world shook and rattled and gave way. He didn't say anything.

He obliged her later that night when her desire toppled over and she needed the pleasure to soothe her. She gasped at the electric currents that found a home beneath her skin, the surge of pleasure as she beheld his tumescence. He let her be the rudder because even if her world was not hers to keep anymore, she had him, she owned him. He was healing.

Lilea learnt to play the guitar in her first year. It was her companion on late nights and sunny afternoons. She would compose songs in her head and thrum the strings of the guitar. All beautiful harmony. That was what Obinna reminded her of.

The exams came like crashing waves, willing everyone to succumb to studying and hibernating. Lilea's roommate had lectured her on "see finish," a term to describe her excessive visits to Obinna.

"He wouldn't like you again. He has seen you too much," she said and rolled her eyes.

"Why? What if we get married? We'd see each other every day then."

"That is different," she said as if exacting her opinion on a deranged child. "You mentally prepare for marriage. marriage is for grownups!"

Lilea dropped the case. She would wait, till his want for her toppled over and tipped. She would wait.

The water pouring ritual had a thrill to it. One that excited Lilea. Final year students were bathed immediately after their final exams. Excited students and friends would splash water on them from corners. They would pour soapy water sometimes, and sign with black markers on their white polos. Names like 'Silencer' and 'HOD' would stand out on their backs. They would sing the famous Styl-Plus "Four years Don waka..." as they danced around the school.

It was amidst the glee that Lilea went to Obinna's room.

Her knock was rapt, excitement bursting her seams. The door was surprisingly unlocked. She went in, head first and it was her eyes that received the sacrifice of still, splayed limbs, shut eyes, and the bottle of tablets. The world was not silent but she was.

His note was quick—like he couldn't wait to be done with the whole ceremony of cold sacrifices. It was a question.

Did the one person who hurt you the most in your life ever apologize?

It was written in crisp handwriting, at the left end of the torn-out front page of his copy of *Things Fall Apart* as if in mock assent. At the end was his customary signature; *For Lilac.*

She knew the answer to his question. No. It was Obinna. Obinna of sunrise and beautiful songs. Obinna of sad stories.

Meet the Author



Martins Favour is a believer in all the beautiful things life affords us. Her works have appeared in Kalahari Review, African writers and elsewhere. When she's not writing, however, she lives out her not-so-big dreams in her head. She loves the Lord, yam and purple hearts.

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Firelighter

15th April 2019

It was midday when Kenny woke with a dreadful hangover. The previous day had been awfully long and wasted with empty bottles of whisky littered around. Although light bulbs glowed, a dark side of emptiness engulfed the entire room. He was lying sprawled in bed, his head throbbing painfully, and a party going on in his stomach. Feelings enveloped him; nausea, grief, emptiness...

His phone beeped. There were two WhatsApp texts.

The first from LEAD man. It read:

Dear Kenny, we have agreed to your request for an anonymous therapy. We forwarded your details to the therapist that will be in charge of you.

“In charge of me? Silly!” He frowned.

We assure you that whatever that will be discussed stays between you and the therapist assigned to you. We believe in you and that you can Live Everyday Above Depression.

The other, from an unnamed number:

Hi. Good day. I am your anonymous therapist. Nice to meet you.

He left the chat background to the person’s profile. No profile picture.

What do you know about me? He typed.

Just your name, Kenny, was the reply.

What’s your name? He typed again.

Call me Firelighter.

“Let’s try this Ikenna,” he said to himself with a pinched ironic smile and held the phone for a while. The room was still, except the whistling sound from the rotating ceiling fan.

26th May 2019

Dajuamobi

I woke up late like I did every Saturday. After some devotion and short prayers, I dragged myself to the kitchen and lit the burner. Yesterday had been hectic and my cluttered room showed scattered files, sheets and clothes on the floor, and Rachel Hogan's *Girl Wash Your Face* with Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages For Singles* laid open on my bed. Within a few minutes, I gave my room a deserved cleaning and busied myself by my desk sipping honeyed lime tea (my sister's weight loss recipe) while writing for a blog on *SIGNS THAT YOU ARE NOT READY TO DATE*. I wondered why I chose the topic. Perhaps to prove something to myself? I kissed my teeth, then reached for my phone and switched on my data connection.

WhatsApp messages flooded in.

Mom: *I have arranged foodstuffs for you and Lemechi. I will waybill yours next week. Hope you are good?*

Me: *Thanks mom 😊. I love you. I got two new jobs as a freelance writer. Tell dad, he'll be proud.*

Nwaelemechi: *Dajuamobi. Add ginger to the lime tea. It hastens the process, especially with your horrible belly fat.*

I turned to my brown mug and the scented steam from it. I wasn't so surprised about my sister's taunts. I didn't reply and never drank lime tea after that day.

Kathy: *Thanks ma'am, I tried it out. I didn't lose out on anything as you said. I'll tell you the details later...*

Me: *Very good Kath 🙌. I'm happy for you. Let's talk later.*

Bestie: *What!! Since when? And you're just telling me. Won't he find out? But really D.J, are you okay with this? I know that you have always loved him.*

I smiled. Light bulbs went on, making my room bask in its brightness. I stood, plugged in my laptop and played Sia's *Unstoppable*. Back to my phone, I replied:

Chii, I know it's crazy, but I'll be fine. Besides, I'm being professional. He won't find out, so I guess all will be fine.

"All will be fine", I whispered. The last message was from him.

Kenny: *I resumed work today to host my program. I missed it. I missed life. Mom and Dad are proceeding with the divorce. They should have done that long ago, perhaps Steph wouldn't have died. I won't keep holding onto the past. How are you doing Firelighter? When are you going to tell me your real name and show me your picture? I shouldn't have requested for anonymity. Have a great day.*

Me: *I'm good Kenny. I'm glad that you're improving. I would tune in to hear your voice on air. Hope you read the book? All the best.*

My eyes moved to my wall planner and spotted a poem I had written months ago. I sent him the poem in his early days of therapy. He was open and it helped. Yet I wanted to do more but couldn't. Kenny was a part of my life that had been untouched for a year now. Chii's words now rang in my head.

I'll be fine. I assured myself.

"You've got this Dajua. You do."

Kenny

By 2pm, I clocked out and headed home. I don't drive, it triggers my PTSD. So, I boarded a cab. I was at the backseat when I got a text from Dad:

We'll be in court on Monday. Your mother blames me for Steph's death. You should come.

The ride was a bumpy one as the rainy season set in, and I wondered, as we rode through cracked roads, how I could ever love two people hell bent on destroying each other after destroying Steph's life. Firelighter had told me to seek love through giving love. To love my parents nonetheless, using their love language, for my peace of mind. I read *The Five Love Languages For Singles* by Gary Chapman she had recommended. I figured out my love language and wanted to know hers, but I couldn't ask. It was inappropriate.

The past five weeks had been awesome and I shouldn't ruin it. I picked my phone from the chair and read her messages.

Thanks ma'am ♥️. I'm still reading the book. I've got news from Dad. They'll be in court tomorrow. Are you busy? Let's talk via WhatsApp call.

She was online.

F: *Sorry Kenny, we can't do calls. Hope you're good? Will you attend the court hearing?*

K: *Why can't we? I am good, thanks. I'll go only if you come with me as a support system.*

F: *This therapy session is anonymous, remember? And I have a program to attend on Monday. It's a charity event at the Marian Convection Centre.*

K: *Does it exclude calls? I heard about the program on air, I will come to see you.*

No answer.

K: *Firelighter? Are you there?*

She went offline.

K: *Take care.*

Dajuamobi

"So, he still doesn't know?" Chii asked by the kitchen counter, her hands over the utensil's cupboard.

"No," I replied.

"How long do you intend to hide this?" She was opening the fridge now. "Bia don't you have food here?"

"I ran out of food. I could meet him tomorrow at the convention centre."

"What did you eat this morning?" she asked, looking at me now.

"Bread with akara and a cup of Cowbell coffee." I reached out to a plastic container on the counter and kept it in a dish rack.

She smiled. “Look Daj, I’m not against you helping Kenny. Just don’t get your hopes up about him, he never loved you, Dajua; not as you wanted,” she said, full of concern.

“I know.” I fought back the tears. “I won’t.”

Chii nodded while I remembered how I would cry on her shoulder whenever Kenny chose other girls over me. I was young back then. So young and naïve.

On Monday, I left early with my crew to conduct an interview with the founders of the charity organization. After that, we stayed behind to take more pictures during the event. I saw Kenny enter the hall just as the chairman was about to give the opening address. He stood tall and firmly built, wearing jeans trousers with a black turtleneck sweater that clung to his body like a second skin. It made him look irresistibly handsome.

He was looking around, turning his well-sculptured face around the entire hall while I stood afar, watching, missing, and hating him altogether. He sent a text.

Hey where are you? I’m at the event. Please, let’s meet up.

I wanted to reply, ‘*Stop stretching your neck, I see you*’ but I remembered I wasn’t supposed to know him. He called my number several times but I ignored them, trying to gather contents for the blog post tomorrow. In the past I had always waited for him; a pitiful lovelorn lass, so I made him wait till the event ended. I walked towards him and gently tapped his back. I saw the raw excitement in his eyes, the excitement of seeing an unknown Firelighter; I saw it transform into a pleasant surprise as the bridge of his nose squeezed and his cheeks lifted at the sight of me.

“Daj! Wow, long time!” He leapt forward and gave me a quick and sincere hug. The hall was bustling.

“Kenny, what a pleasant surprise! How have you been?”

“I’m good, How’s Lemechi and your parents?”

“They are good. What brings you here?”

“I’m actually here to see someone, I got to find her now.” His eyes roamed around the hall.

“Oh, okay. It feels good to see you.” My eyes fixed on him.

“What about you?” he turned to me as he asked. “You stay in this city, right?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Gimme your number, we should catch up,” he said.

I sensed trouble. “No, gimme yours,” I shot back, almost interrupting him. He agreed, calling the digits out for me.

“I have to go Daj. I missed you,” he sighed. “I missed everyone; I really did. Call me, okay?” I nodded, he smiled, and walked away.

I watched him. His eyes searched the hall, his phone held firmly to his right ear while mine rang in my hand. A text came after the sixth ring.

K: *Where are you?*

D: *I actually saw you Kenny, but you left too quickly.*

K: *What do you mean? I’m still here. Where are you?*

D: *Did you actually believe that? Hahaha. I’m busy Kenny. There are tons of things left to do. I can’t meet with you. I’m sorry.*

I went offline.

Later that night. He texted.

Let’s talk, I’ll call.

And for a moment I couldn’t think.

Please. He texted again.

The request was simple. Every part of me wanting to oblige, I opened my purse and took out three wraps of bubble-gum. I tore them open and chewed.

“Hello Kenny,” I said to myself. I couldn’t recognize my voice. The voice trick worked.

Okay. I texted back.

Kenny

I spoke with Firelighter for hours and laughed a lot during our conversation. I also got to know about her involvement with LEAD project. I was shocked to know that she wasn't a psychotherapist but an avid volunteer. My time with her online was more of a heart-to-heart conversation than a Q&A session. She knew every right thing to say and she always thought of possibilities, especially with me being able to drive again. I was so intrigued about her and why she had chosen to be called Firelighter.

"Because I'm igniting that fire in you, Kenny. That lost zeal and passion for life," she said at her end. I smiled at her response.

"Are you married?" I asked.

"No. Why do you ask?" I could sense the tension in her voice.

"You're taken? I mean, you have someone?"

Silence.

"Hello?"

She yawned. It had to be a fake yawn.

"Let's call it a night Kenny. I'm tired."

"Okay, but please tell me your name. At least."

"Goodnight Kenny."

She hung up. I sent her a text.

Whatever your name is, you're special. I testify to that. Goodnight.

7th June 2019

Kenny

This dreaded day came. I stared at her pictures. She was so full of life then. I looked at a funny picture of her holding my head tightly when Mom sent a text.

Ikenna. I'll be sending flowers to her grave. You should come. You can't keep running away from everyone.

Steph, my sister, was separated from the love of her life by my parents. As if that wasn't enough, she lost her pregnancy. She became so depressed and suicidal. So, one day, I took her on a drive downtown.

"Put your foot down Kenny," she said to me.

"Why?" I asked.

"I love the feel of the breeze on my face."

I obliged. In a heartbeat, she flung the car door and jumped out. Before I could react, I could only see pieces of her clothes from the side mirror and a gathering crowd.

Feelings flooded now. Guilt was paramount. I texted Firelighter.

Steph died on this date last year. It's my fault. I helped her take her own life. I'll be going away. I need distractions.

Will you be fine? She replied immediately.

I don't know.

Kenny. You've got this. Where will you go?

Culture Park by Highway.

I bumped into Dajua at the park. We sat, talked, reminisced, laughed, and cried. She held out her hands for a hug. I rushed into them and she patted my back lovingly.

“You’ve got this Kenny,” she said, and for a moment I wished she was Firelighter. I drew slightly away from the warmth of her embrace, staring into her eyes, remembering how fiercely she had loved me. I regretted turning her down, keeping her in the friend zone. I regretted cutting everyone out. Grief had turned me into an island.

“I’m sorry for losing touch with everyone, I just wanted to be alone back then.”

She smiled, tilting her head sideways.

“I loved you Daj, but I didn’t want to hurt you. Back then I was stupid and a bad boy in good boy clothes. You were just too good for me.”

“What are you now? A good boy in bad boy clothes?” She laughed.

“Why did you come Dajua? Why did you come for me?” I looked at her brown eyes; bemused, trying to find answers. I didn’t give her the chance. I drew her close and kissed her fervently.

12th June 2019

Dajuamobi

“It’s me,” said a voice outside the door. I opened up. It was Kenny, all smiles, holding a white nylon bag in hand. I was done for. After the day we kissed. I called him with my other number and we spoke every day. He asked for my house address and I texted him. I never in the world thought he would show up without a heads up.

“Hey, can I come in? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” I stepped away and he came in. “You’ve got a nice room Daj,” he said, looking around.

“Thanks. The rooms in this neighbourhood are quite comfy,” I said while collecting the bag from him. I was trying to start a conversation, to get his eyes away from something that might remind him of Firelighter.

Kenny

I got attracted to her wall planner. It had colourful postcards with words on it; each held to the wooden frame with a pushpin. I went closer to have a look.

“What do I offer you, Kenny? Hey, where are you going?” she asked, almost shouting.

I was about to respond when something struck me. Something quite familiar.

Where’s your light? When comely days turns to bloody nights...

Firelighter’s poem. I turned to Dajua. She was right behind me.

“This poem?”

“Erm. Erm...” She was tensed and I sensed it. I looked around and saw something else on her bookshelf by the wall. I reached for it. A framed certificate of LEAD project bearing her name. Something wasn’t right.

“So, you know LEAD project?” I asked her. I saw horror in her eyes. She tried calling my name but the words trailed off.

“You know this poem. You’re a member of LEAD project... what else?” It was getting clearer now.” Aha... You were there at the convention... and...” I felt utterly stupid.

“I am Firelighter,” she said, her eyes teary.

“So, it was all a lie? Everything was a joke to you?”

“No,” she reached for my hand but I hesitated. “When you took off after Steph died, I was so worried about you. You had changed your lines and I couldn’t reach you. I didn’t know it was you till I saw Steph’s picture on your profile and I couldn’t tell you because I wanted to be close. I wanted to help. I wanted you to be fine,” she said amidst sobs.

“There’s fish barbecue in the bag... Enjoy,” I said, just before walking out.

Dajuamobi

I prepared for work the following morning. The previous night had been tearful and a busy day awaited me with so much work. I was locking my door when I heard his voice.

“Hello, Firelighter.”

I didn’t know whether to smile or cry. “I’m sorry.”

He came closer. "I'm sorry too. You had to eat the fish all by yourself." I smiled. He was two inches away from me now. "I have been wanting to ask your primary love language," he said, grinning ear to ear.

"Physical touch," I told him.

"Oh yeah?" He squeezed me to himself, tucking my hair behind with his middle finger. "I'm sorry about yesterday. You've always wanted my good Dajua. Always." His arms were still wrapped around me. I smiled, placing my head on his chest. Work could wait. This was where I wanted to be.

"You're sure?" she asked him.

He chuckled. "Didn't you always talk about possibilities?" He reached for her hand. "I plan to make this day memorable, so don't worry." He was kissing her fingers now.

"I'm proud of you Kenny", she said.

"Thank you Daj. Thanks for everything," he said, staring at her. "I love you."

She smiled sweetly.

"Let's go?" he asked, holding out his hand.

"Let's go." She nodded, her hand on his. He led her out of her workplace to a new blue convertible. He opened the door and she muttered a thank you, smiling at him. Within seconds, he kicked the engine to life and the car zoomed off.

Meet the Author



Venus Chinonyerem Asoka is a poet and a short writer from the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. She is in her late teens and is currently studying Genetics and Biotechnology at the University of Calabar.

Her works have been published in an online journal, blogs and several anthologies. She enjoys her own company by reading, writing and listening to music. She is aspiring to be a renowned prolific African writer.

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Shadows of Man

When the cock coughs,
to the stream
have I gone —
treading slippery paths
with nimble feet:
to fill
every man's pot;
To quench the thirst of his needs.

When the sun rises
from his slumber,
to the farm
have I gone —
wobbling through crooked
paths with nimble feet:
to fill every man's baskets;
To fill the throats of his needs.

When the day yawns
and spread its mat,
to the market
have I gone —
salty droplets dripping
from the
branches of my hair:
to carry every man's tubers
of burdens;
To rest the legs of his needs.

When darkness
locks the gate of brightness,
to my home
have I gone —
bones cracking noisily,
like shattered pots at the bank of the stream:
to count the harsh cowries
on my weary hands;
To sleep with cries oozing
like the blood of a ritual goat.

Meet the Author



Olasubomi Samuel is a student at Obafemi Awolowo University. He is a prolific fiction artist, poet, and playwright. He sees writing as a valuable tool to change the world; therefore, most of his works are geared towards impacting the world positively.

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Reopening

To start a poem about bruises
Is to say there's something fleeting in my body,

& I'm a home for cellos plucked off their strings
So, there's no way I can make music from my memories,

To tell where a city's fire met my chin
Holding God's face in a passionate kiss

& telling him there's something repelling grace
Inside me, like how this place called home repels
Peace.

There are days I want to reopen my wound to
The glare of the sun, for which I mean, I've

Always hidden my cries in silent overtures.
Say I am crawling out of this unsafe haven—

My faith phoenix-ing out of a pyre. Oh lord,
I want to banish myself from this room

Of dead music & make my language become
My language & watch my wound become
Daffodils glorifying my body.

Meet the Author



Olowonjoyin Muhammed Sanni (A-Per-Se), he/him, studies Biochemistry at the University of Ilorin. His poems have been published or forthcoming in African Writer Magazine, Words And Whispers, Acropolis Journal, Kreative Diadem, Fiery Scribe Review, Ice Lolly Review, Ngiga Review, Livina Press, Arts Lounge, Poemify, Hey! Young Writer, and elsewhere. He reads poetry for The Dodge Magazine (Ohio). When he's not tracing biochemical pathways, reading, or writing, he's searching for peace.

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Dragonfly

You found love in the twists
and turns
and entanglement
of the trees.

I found freedom
in the flutter of your sparkles.
Reflective blue, like hummingbirds
in the blink of an eye.

This feels good to say.
It all used to roll off the tongue
a lot easier when the city
moved faster than it does now.

Now, time feels at ease,
and that blue
looks so vibrant and true.

Where will you fly to, my new friend?
Will you search for more love
to whisper in your ear?

There was a moment you inched
closer to me, that I thought
we might touch.
Your blue, may be scented.
You might be ecstasy
sent from the presence of every other color
that I am capable of seeing.

Meet the Author



Tina Meeks is a Bay Area born poet and event coordinator. In 2018, she self-published her first book, Adolescence. Tina has other published work with Rigorous Mag, Nnọkọ Stories and UMOJA, and more, with plans to keep sharing. You may also find her juggling, adventuring, and goofing around with various things that pique interest and strike her fancies.

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All The Stories That Go Untold

Until the lion has his historian, the hunter will always be a hero.

This is the power of a single story; this is the danger of a single story; that vital fragments of the narrative are eliminated and covered over. Most of history is fallacy, because most of history is one man's story, *his-story*. And unfortunately, most of history is the white man's story.

It would be funny, if it wasn't so stupidly sad, the perspective of Africa that my friends, my very Caucasian friends from college had. When I told them I was going back home for the holidays, they told me how sad they were they wouldn't have any access to me.

I said, "We have Wi-Fi where I'm from."

They told me to take a picture of me riding on my lion.

I said, "We have cars where I'm from."

They laughed and asked me what would happen to my coffee addiction in Africa?

I said, "We have coffee where I'm from."

And then they told me to send my greetings to someone's cousin's college friend's family that lived in Zimbabwe.

I sighed, a heavy sigh. The burden of being the only black friend in this circle, a perpetual weight on my shoulder; it was that heavy thing around my neck that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie had tried to warn me about in her book. I said, "Yes, of course I will." Even though I lived in Ghana, even though Zimbabwe is at the far opposite of the continent. I said, "I used to ride my tiger there all the time when I was younger."

They laughed, their blue, green, grey eyes shining with awe. How adventurous, they thought. How risky, how primitive. My sarcasm was lost on them, but the thing around my neck was heavy, too tight, squeezing the breath from my throat the longer I sat in that bar with them and heard them say, "Africa" when I said "Ghana." It was futile, trying to tell them that Africa is not a monolith, that there are more countries in the continent than there are states in the great U.S. of A. They knew what they knew, they were the writers of history, after all. I finished my beer and said my hurried goodbyes, I couldn't get out of there quick enough.

Where I come from, the air is sea salt and fish. The sounds are loud road noises, trucks vrooming past, their fumes leaking into the air and mixing with the smell of the fish that they were transporting to some other town which didn't have the privilege to be by the sea. The sights are brown and blue. The brown earth, the brown skinned people milling about, the blue sky above, the blue sea visible from almost any point.

Keta. A town that is alive, a town that is moving, is raging, the sea itself a personification of the town. If Keta were a person, she would be the loud life of the party. She would be the person who never slowed down for a minute during the day, hustling and jostling, grinding. She would be all business with a loud obnoxious laugh and a loud everything. And in the night, she would come even more alive; she was the one that never slept.

Keta never sleeps. Upon my return, I stayed in my family house. I drank coconut water from a coconut and played ludu* with my grandmother—who was quickly losing her sight—under the large shady mango tree. The hens that provided us eggs all year long and would themselves provide a feast for Christmas ran around, clucking and scratching the brown earth. The little children, my cousins and nephews and nieces, they would come back from the local school and drop their bags on the ground and start chasing the hens around.

In Keta, in the town that was alive and never slept, I slowed down. I didn't get caught up in the hustle and bustle like I had before, when I was younger. I walked the streets as the day bled into nightfall, watching the fishermen repair their nets, watching the school children playing, the hawkers selling everything from underwear to electric gadgets on the streets. And I thought, *"I too."*

I too had run around and rolled in the dirt, reckless and free of all care, knowing that Mama would reprimand me and box my ears but that she would wash my one school uniform and it would be good as new by the next morning for school. I too had scurried down to the shore of the river, to tease Papa and laugh till he gave me fish to carry home to Mama for the night's dinner. I too had bargained with hawkers and gotten sweets for half the price. And I too, had shrieked with my friends, running eagerly into the ocean.

And yet, two weeks of my stay had passed, and I had not visited the ocean. I told myself that it was because the place looked different, that the sea defense that they had built with towering rocks and boulders was too much for me to climb just to get to the sea. But the truth was, my relationship with the sea had changed. I, who had learnt to swim before I could talk, could not brave the waves anymore. When you go across that same ocean, when you learn, like I learnt, the number of people who look just like you that made a tragic journey in boats packed like sardines across the raging sea, when you learn, that more than those who survived the horrific journey, there are those who were

cast overboard, considered too weak to make the journey, you cannot look at the sea the same.

The sea of ghosts.

And it would be funny if it weren't so stupidly sad, that I'd had to go across that ocean myself, to find out our story. And this was the history that they dared to write down. If they dared to write 12.8 million slaves, if this is the white man's history, then God only knows what the real story is.

I am back home, and yet I don't know that this is my home anymore. I am detached from my life back across the ocean, tired of the weight of being some sort of international ambassador, teaching the people around me what "African" is. And when did that happen? When did it become my responsibility to teach them? And who made me the poster child for Africanness? There it goes again, the danger of a single story, my singular story, as a generalization for the African experience.

I am detached from my life here as well, there is the family house but there is no Mama, there is no Papa, and though Grandma loves me, she cannot see me, and so when we play ludu and tears stream down my face out of nowhere, she cannot see. And though she loves me, though my Ewe* is not fading, it is taking up an accent that means I have to say things twice before she understands me, and if I need to repeat myself, I'd rather not speak at all.

And one day, on my walk, I go somewhere I never have before. I walk along the sea defense, and I get closer to the sea than I have been in years. I do this because today is no regular day, today is my father's birthday. A day we never really celebrated when he was alive because Papa was more about giving others joy than receiving joy, because he was always on the ocean, even on his birthday. But I would always rush to him after school, on this special day, and he'd carry me on his shoulders, his body slick with sweat, his muscles rippling with every movement and the smell of fish and bait clinging to him, I'd stick around and give him some of my toffee, and then we'd go home. Mama, would be upset at how late I'd stayed out, but every year I did the same thing, and so she got used to it.

So here I am, walking over the sea defense, slowly. Breathing in the sea salt air and the smell of fish, slowly. The sounds of the town fade behind me as I walk toward a part of this beach stretch I've never been to. It's some sort of fort. I try to think back to what I've heard about it, and realize I haven't heard much, that this story isn't told. What is this fort, what is this place? How have I seen it off in the distance for so many years and neglected it? My feet make their way to the entrance, and I inhale, slowly, surveying the

sight before me. Standing there, I can almost see what it looked like, before. Before the winds and the sea raged against it and crumbled it.

Keta is the place that the great Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor wrote about in his poem, "The Sea Eats the Land at Home". The ocean here is angry, as it should be, eating at everything, destroying settlements, and eroding whatever this building is.

I walk over to the back, and there it is, "Fort Prinzenstein. Built by the Danes in 1784."

Google is my best friend, and all of a sudden, I am overtaken with curiosity. Filled with a thirst, I must know this place and I must know its story. I do not step in, past the arched and crumbling doorway. I take out my phone and google this place. And Google, this version of history, tells me that the Danes built this fort as a defense against the Ewes in the Sagbadre war. My mind spirals. What war? When? How did my people fight a war that I have never heard of?

I read on. The fort was used later in the slave trade. My stomach turns. And after the slave trade, it was a trade harbor. And now....

I look up from my phone and at this building that is turning into a pile of rubble, and I know that I will never know its entire story, I feel the questions humming in the air. Who were the people here? Who lived here? Who died here? What were their stories and what were their songs? What kept them alive and what made them want to die?

I step in.

On Google, Fort Prinzenstein is listed as a tourist site, but there is no tour guide here to romanticize the treachery that occurred here. There is no souvenir shop right outside selling pleasant little trinkets I could take back to college with me and show my friends that look, this is my history. Fort Prinzenstein is no Elmina Castle; it is no Cape Coast Castle. In our limited knowledge of the effects of the slave trade here on Ghanaian soil, it is the stories of the Ashantis and the Akans* that are shouted loud and proud, if these stories are told at all. It is just me, walking through this hollow dungeon, watching my step, crumbling rock and stone all around me, bird feces and God knows what else permeating the air, and the walls... Dear God, the walls, tally marks.

I place my fingers tentatively on the wall, aware of the filth and germs but more curious. The stone is cool under my touch, the lines etched into them. *Who were you? What were you counting down for? Why did you stop?* The walls have stains on them, I do not know what. Blood? Feces? Something worse? And what could be worse? These people, Ewe slaves? Is it not the same blood that runs in my veins now? I feel my heart thump louder than ever, I hear it thudding in my ears and I feel my pulse at my very fingertip. There

are names and words scrawled into the stone; some I can make out and some in a language I do not understand.

And up, written in bold and plain English, is this.

UNTIL THE LION HAS HIS HISTORIAN, THE HUNTER WILL ALWAYS BE A HERO.

Behind me, the sea is still raging. If I strain my ear enough, I can make out a few shouting fishermen, hear a few cars whizz by on the road. If I follow the sea defense, I can find me way back home. If I were to cross this ocean, I would go back to Austin. And yet I stay here, frozen, feeling everything and nothing at once. I fall to my knees. I do something I haven't done in forever.

I pray.

It is not a lengthy prayer, and I have long lost my religion so I do not know who or what I am praying to. Maybe all I am doing is speaking to the ghosts that haunt the air here. I say a word of gratitude, for whoever it was that wrote this on the wall, certain that it was for me; I was meant to find this. And then I weep.

I weep for the war, I weep for all the stories that I was never told, all the stories that will remain trapped in this squalid dungeon and never see the light of day. I weep for this crumbling pile of rock; I weep because it is just a matter of time before it is nothing at all. I weep for the ghosts in here and the ghosts in the ocean and the ghosts that follow me everywhere I go. I weep for Mama and Papa, who gave everything so their only daughter would have a better life, a better story to tell. I weep because while I was out there writing my own story, they were both ripped from this world suddenly, before I could say goodbye. I weep for the homes and the settlements that lie in the belly of the ocean. I weep for my class six textbook, that told me about the Sagrenti war and the Yaa Asantewaa war* but never about the Sagbadre war. I weep for the stories that go untold. I weep, I weep, I weep.

My people say, "ati deka me wo na ave o." A single tree cannot make a forest. And a single story, a single perspective, does not a comprehensive inclusive history make. For now, I am weeping on the ground of a decaying fort, I am grieving for generations. Who will I be, what stories will I tell when I get the courage to get up from here? I do not know. For now, I weep.

Glossary

*ludu – a traditional African board game

*Ewe – A Ghanaian dialect spoken mainly by the people of the Volta and Oti regions of Ghana. The clans here bear the name Ewe as well.

*Ashantis and Akans – Ghanaian ethnic groups mainly in the Central and Ashanti regions of the nation.

*Sagrenti war and Yaa Asantewaa war – wars fought by the Akans and Ashantis against the white man, during colonialism in Ghana, formerly known as The Gold Coast.

Meet the Author



Dzifianu Afi Edoh-Torgah believes “I live to write; I write to live”. She’s a 19-year-old final-year student at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana (where she was born and raised), studying Biomedical Science. Dzifianu loves to combine her love for the Arts and Science. When she’s not obsessively researching something in the library, she’s reading and falling in love with fictional characters, or writing her own characters for others to fall in love with. She’s a chronic story teller, poet, content creator and Girl-child education activist. Yes, she wears many hats, but Dzifianu believes that she can, and she will, have it all.

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Breathing in with Patience: A New Year

As the pages of this anthology close before you, we stand at the threshold of a new epoch, having traversed the grand symphony of this literary journey.

We at Nnọkọ believe in the peculiarity of unique voices, and strive to amplify and weave them into the tapestry of African art. We often ask ourselves, “How can we bottle the roaring melodies of the African rivers, the whispers of the wild winds, or the bustling symphony of the savannah in mere pages?” This is what gets us doing—the need to widen the reach of *our* tales and the hands that write them.

To those seeking treasures in the depths of themselves and wishing to unearth stories yet untold, we hope this has been an inspiration to hold on and keep searching. Sometimes, the tales that rest six feet beneath the surface of our minds crave sparks to ignite them. In due time, when you share them, you will realise that your periods of anticipation fortified your grip, honed your creativity, and stretched the limits of your imagination.

We hope that between the lines and within the margins of our stories, you have been able to connect to the dance of the timeless seasons and experience the 13th month magic of nostalgia. Even in our humble endeavours at Nnọkọ, we believe that every story, no matter how small or cast, contributes to the art that celebrates the brilliance of African storytelling.

As we stand on the cusp of another year, an exciting horizon awaits, teeming with the promise of a myriad of stories that shape our identities and the singular moments that etch themselves into the fabric of our existence.

With boundless gratitude and soaring aspirations,

The Nnọkọ Editorial Team



AFRICAN LITERATURE AND LIFESTYLE
IN ONE POT