

ISSUE TWELVE

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# LUNARIS REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ART AND THE LITERARY



# LUNARIS REVIEW

*A JOURNAL OF ART AND THE LITERARY*

## ISSUE 12

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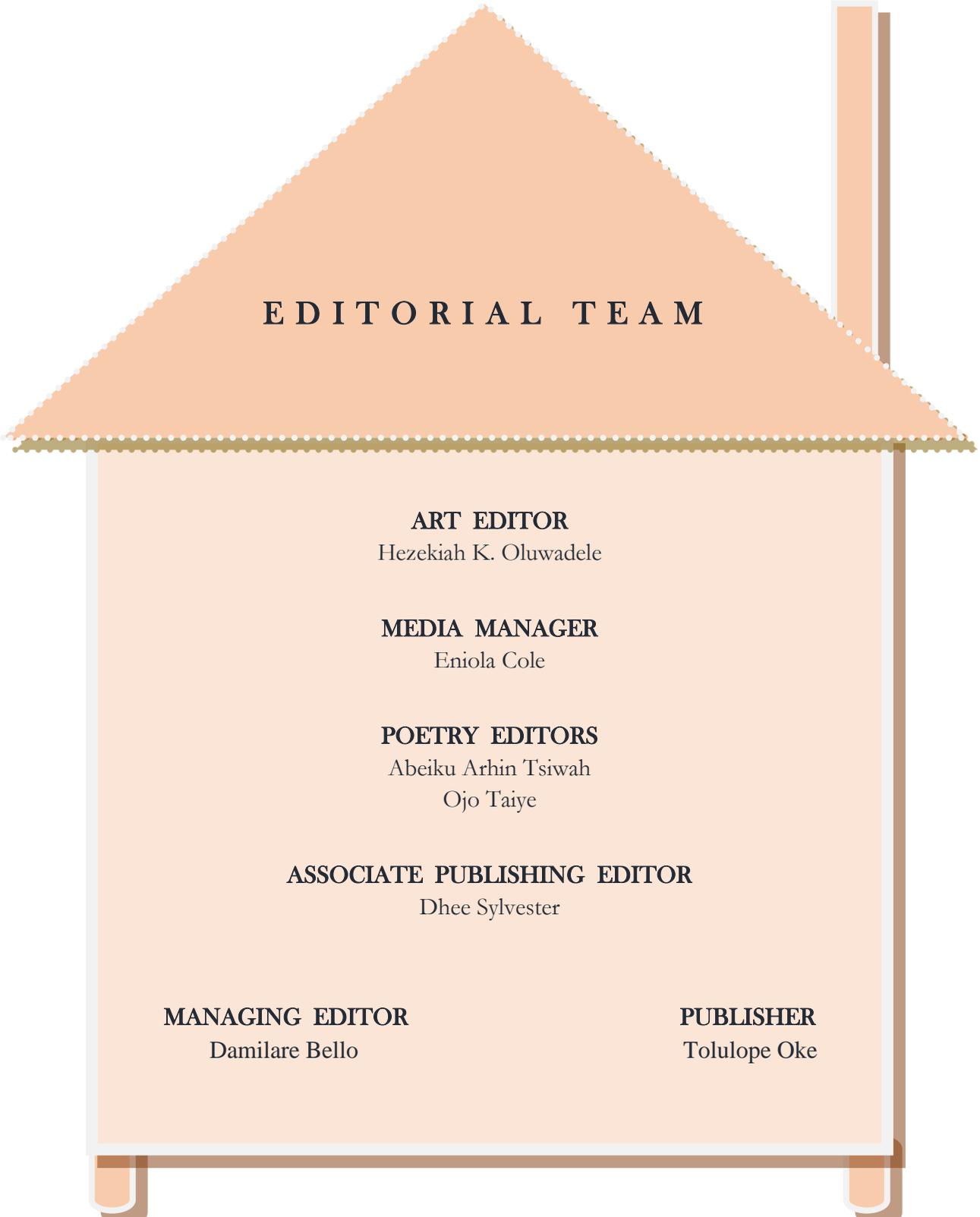
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## Foreword

Like we've never experienced, the feelings of confinement the year 2020 has caused and the abrupt changes it has brought with it are unprecedented. Yet, paradoxically, it has created a much-needed space and compelled us to make use of this space for long over-due re-evaluations of our actions and beliefs as humans. Regardless of the disruptions across board caused by the pandemic, we are delighted with the irruption of imagination at this present moment. Now in its fifth year, *Lunaris Review* remains unwavering in its commitment to curating creativity and the narratives that advance us as a progressive species integral to planetary evolution.

Steeped in emotions of loss and love, grief and happiness, hope and despair, pain and healing, confessions and confictions, in no particular order like life itself, the narratives in this Issue 12 take one gently through the panic and pain that have engulfed much of everything as it used to be; they highlight how defamiliarized our realities now are and how unsuspecting we can be of the futures or circumstances that can upend the plots of our existence till we learn to navigate or get distracted from our “new-found reality.” As Pamilerin Jacob reminds us, “This world [is] a fractured shin/ unable to bear its own weight.”

The pandemic and the thrusts of the narratives in this issue reveal the susceptibility of humanism, humanity and humanness, reminding us that we are nothing but—and not beyond—humans, if not fallen short of it. We are neither supreme nor the centrality of all consciousness. Put simply, we are just another manifestation of the cosmos, and should learn to treat others equal and fairly so, for to love and to be loved remains vital to our collective existence.

Therefore, while we are learning to put the fragments of these moments together, let's stay safe and care for others!

**Tolulope Oke,**  
Publisher, *Lunaris Review*

## Window

*Kharys Ateh Laue*

MRS PARK, THE KOREAN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE teacher who told Leah, used the word *fell*. As if it had been a mistake. As if the act were not self-chosen but stumbled upon, the outcome of momentary thoughtlessness. *A student fell out of her apartment window this morning.* It was the girl from class 3-1, Mrs Park said, that not-normal one with the short leg. She had climbed onto the ledge of her fourteenth-floor apartment window and let her body fall out, just like that. Mrs Park explained that, as the student's homeroom teacher, she was expected at the funeral on Monday and so would not be able to attend their classes that day. She apologised for the inconvenience.

Afterwards Leah taught three classes back-to-back. She taught them mechanically, with a kind of careful rigor, and in the fourth period phoned Damien.

Leah, he said when he heard her breathing, you okay?

The most hectic thing happened, she said.

What?

One of my students, she said. A student committed suicide.

Ah, Leah, no.

My co-teacher just told me. Early this morning.

Jesus, that's horrible. He took a long breath. Did she say what happened?

In the background she could hear his students. She imagined them careening down corridors, twisting their little bodies around corners and crashing through classroom doors. The students she taught were older, quieter. They were beginning to grasp the terrible weight of what was expected of them.

She fell out her apartment window, Leah said.

Fell?

Ja, fell. Mrs Park said fell.

Fuck man, he said. How's the school handling it?

As if nothing's happened, she said. I promise you, it's as if nothing's happened, Damien. Everything's on schedule. Mrs Park's going to the funeral on Monday, but other than that, everyone's acting normal. There's been no mention of a memorial or anything.

But Leah, you don't know that.

What do you mean, I don't know? I'm right here. I'm right here at the fucking school and I'm telling you—

I know, he said. I know you're there and I know it might look like everyone's pretending nothing's happened. I'm just saying you can't be sure what's actually going on. You don't speak Korean, so how would you know if there was a memorial?

Ja, okay. So, you'd be in a better position to know, hey, what with your Korean classes and language exchanges and after-school dinners with the teachers?

Ah, come on, man. That's not what I'm saying. All I'm suggesting is that you've got to be careful when you're an outsider to the language and culture. There are different ways of processing shock and Koreans don't do it through a big display of emotion. It's not insensitivity.

He waited, listening to her breathe.

Yoh, she said at last. It's noisy that side, hey.

Damien let out a breath. Ja, he said, they're pretty hectic today. In a lower voice he added, I'm not attacking you, Leah. I just think we have to remember our position as foreigners. She was silent. After a pause, Damien said, are you still planning on coming over tonight?

Ja, she said.

All right, he said. He cleared his throat. The bell's about to go, Leah.

I'll bring wine, she said. I'll bring a bottle of wine.

Okay, he said. That'd be nice.

## II

LEAH ARRIVED at ten o'clock that night. She keyed in his code at the door and went in. Damien rose from his chair as if to go to her and then changed his mind and stood. Without looking at him, she removed her shoes in the entryway and stepped inside. The single-room apartment functioned as a bedroom, kitchen, dining-room, laundry, and office. Above the kitchen sink was a window. Aside from a small glass

vent in the bathroom, the kitchen window was the only window in the apartment. It looked out over a landscape of concrete and asphalt.

Damien watched her shrug off her backpack. How was the trip? he said.

She unzipped her bag and got out a bottle of wine and set it on the table. Shitty, she said. She sat down and looked at him. You got cigarettes? I meant to buy on the way.

From his pocket he got out a pack of Marlboros. He thumbed the box open and whacked it against his palm and, drawing two cigarettes, came over to the table. He gave one to her and slid the other behind his ear and pocketed the box. Then he went into the kitchen and half-filled a glass with water. When he came back with the glass, she was examining her cigarette. She had it held up in front of her eyes as if it were a curio.

We're still smoking, she said, turning the cigarette between her fingers.

He put the cup on the table and sat down. Yes, we are, he said.

She placed the cigarette between her lips and lit it, her eyes narrowing against the smoke. He leaned back in his chair.

You want something to eat?

I'm all right.

A line of smoke rose from her cigarette. Reaching, she tapped it on the rim of the glass. The ash hissed as it hit the water.

Okay, he said. Well there's food in the fridge if you get hungry later.

Together they watched the ash drift and fracture, slow shattering.

### III

THEY SAT IN SILENCE. Somewhere in the building a man was shouting the same word over and over again. The word was muffled and indistinct, but Leah believed she heard in its syllables one of the few Korean expressions she knew. *Byeongshin*. The word spoke to her: she wanted to sing it along with the man, to feel the burden of it on her tongue. *Byeongshin*, she wanted to shout. She wanted to shout it and see what Damien would do.

All at once the man fell silent. Leah dropped her cigarette into the glass of water and stood up. Crossing to the kitchen, she slid open the window. A draft of fatty hot air blew into the room. It rose textured by the streets below, bearing in it human voices and the low strum of traffic and smells of sewerage and burning oil and meat frying over charcoal. She stood there thinking of the girl. She remembered the drag of her leg and her long fingers and the straight line of her long hair. She wondered how it must have felt to stand on a ledge so high up, all that empty space below. Fourteen floors of falling. Wind in her ears.

When Leah turned, Damien was watching her.

Leah, can we speak about what's going on here, he said. Can we please just try sort this out.

Men's laughter came in through the window. She imagined them squatting on the sidewalk below, drinking *soju* and smoking, hawking excess saliva into fleshy globules and spewing them out between their parted thighs. She wondered what they would have to say about a body falling from the sky and exploding at their feet. Did they have a word for the throat-thud of a life going out?

Leah touched her mouth and looked at Damien.

That was the word they used with her, she said. What that guy was saying just now.

He stared at her. Guy, he said. What guy?

The man who was shouting earlier. He was saying that word.

What word, Leah? Jesus, man. I don't know what you're talking about.

I'm telling you, she said. Fucking hell. I'm trying to tell you and you, and you just—

He closed his eyes. Okay, he said. Okay. He opened his eyes and looked at her. I'm sorry. I'm listening. What word?

Her eyes were pale and blank, hooded by shadow. She watched him closely as she spoke.

Byeongshin, she said.

What?

Byeongshin, she said. Surely you know the word, Damien. Byeongshin. Or don't they teach you the shitty words in your Korean class? *Byeong-shin*. Am I mispronouncing it or something?

He stood up. No, Leah, this—*this* is fucking ridiculous. What are you doing, mocking me because I don't know a word? Jesus. I mean, shit, you haven't even bothered to learn the language, so what the fuck is this actually about? He ran his hand through his hair and stared around the room. I don't know about this, he said. I need to get out for a bit, okay. I need to get out of here.

His face was white. He picked up the lighter from the table and pocketed it and left the apartment. She watched him go in silence.

#### IV

FOR A LONG TIME, Leah sat without moving. Then she held up her hands and studied them. In them she saw the hands of the girl. Pale and long and thin, beautiful as the hands of a home-crafted puppet, gripping the pleats of her school skirt. She could not remember her face. Lowering her hands into her lap, Leah slept.

Later, she woke to the snarl of the door opening. She sat up in her chair but did not turn to look. Damien stepped inside, closing the door behind him. He paused briefly, as if to orientate himself to the room, and then came over and sat down across from her. He took a breath.

I'm feeling calmer now, he said. This is hard. It's fucking hard, but I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry, Leah. I know it's been an intense day for you. I just felt like you were taking it out on me earlier and I lost it. I'm sorry. He broke off and rubbed his face. She sat motionless; her gaze fixed on the empty window behind his shoulder. All at once, he dropped his hands and leaned towards her. Leah, he said, I miss you, man. I miss the way you used to look at me. Remember how you used to look at me?

She turned her face aside. He waited, watching her profile. He noticed a muscle ticking in her eyelid. Finally, he exhaled and got up and went into the kitchen. He retrieved the cigarette from behind his ear and lit it and looked out at the building across the way. Its windows glittered against the emerald skyglow. As he stood smoking, a woman appeared naked in one of the apartments opposite. Her skin was pale wet, faintly steaming in the night air, and a white towel was coiled around her head. He watched her pause and bend over. She loosened the towel and, casting it aside, began drawing her fingers through her ink black hair. Standing framed in the soft rich light of the window, her back bowed and her fingers reaching up into the long-wet strands, she seemed a figure in a painting. She seemed crafted out of brushstrokes, a being whose existence belonged not to him at all but to herself alone.

Behind him a chair scraped. Damien flinched and stood still. When Leah spoke, her voice was low and unsteady. He did not recognise it. It was the voice of a stranger, a person with whom he shared no past, nor had a future.

Do I not look at you like that anymore, she said.

No, he said. He finished his cigarette and put it out in the kitchen sink. I don't think I do either, he said.

Don't what?

Don't look at you how I used to.

The woman had gone. Her apartment stood empty, flooded with light. He turned and saw Leah standing in the centre of the room. She was holding the unopened bottle of wine.

I was telling you, she shouted. I was trying to tell you earlier. It means retard. *Byeongshin, byeongshin, byeongshin.* That's what they'd taunt her with. I was trying to tell you.

This is crazy, he said. This is absolutely crazy, Leah.

She did not move. Then in one swift movement she reached back her arm and brought it forward again, with force.

V

SHE WOKE EARLY on Saturday morning. It was still dark outside. The sheets were damp with sweat and her skin was hot and sticky. The loud masculine scent of wine permeated the room. She crawled out of bed and stood naked in the cool air, working out a path between the broken shards of glass and the spilled wine, and then she crossed to the toilet, her bare feet slapping wet like against the vinyl floor. She

urinated crouched over her breasts, her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands. A sour odour rose from the drain in the floor. When she was done, she straightened and wiped herself. She did not flush the toilet.

On her way out she caught sight of herself in the bathroom mirror. She turned in the doorway and stared at her reflection in the half-light. It seemed to her she was gazing into a window, not a mirror. A stranger stood behind the glass. The girl. Her eyes the colour of wet ash. Hands, long fingered and smooth, hanging uneven from the slant in her shoulders. Black hair the length of her spine. Flat boyish breasts, the nipples tight and inflamed as insect bites, and faint shadow between her legs. She stood on the windowsill and looked out. Ribs folded like wings under her waxpale skin. Bare space at the tips of her toes. A damp wind blowing off the streets. The intermittent crash of morning traffic. Dawn.

All it would take was one small movement. A quiet forward-tilt of the body. A calm inclination. That done, there would be nothing more to do.

The girl watched Leah, awaiting her decision.

## VI

LEAH HELD THE DOOR FRAME and leaned. For a long time, she stood in that position, breathing carefully through her mouth, and then she stepped away from the bathroom threshold and made her way to the kitchen. At the sink she filled a glass of water and drank.

A line of radiance was gathering along the horizon. She set the empty glass on the counter and stood looking out at the steel dark sky and the apartments peopled with invisible life and the electric wires strung from pole-to-pole through the empty streets like cords of long wet hair tied up for the night. She saw these things and pictured the vast wide-open landscape of her home country. The stiff gold grass and the red earth and the flat-topped koppies of the veld. Aloes, white-thorned acacias, fynbos. The smell of wet soil after rainfall and the tapestries of birdsong at dawn. Air rinsed clean, blue as water.

Leah was still at the kitchen window when Damien awoke. Sunlight filled the apartment. He lay on his side studying her, the dark rumpled skin at her elbows, the knurled sequence of her spine, the curve of her buttocks, and then he got onto his elbow and called her name. Her body tightened, poised on the edge of movement. He called again, lifting his voice towards her, and this time she broke her immobility and turned. She turned and stood; her skin hot with light. Brown hair cropped short. Nipples soft and pink as marshmallows. Shoulders freckled by the sun.

She stood looking at him in silence, a stranger.

## **Kisingani and other Virgins**

*Mbizo Chirasha*

**A** zania, you sing silent *mbaqanga* in your sleep  
.....Xenophobia

Your children eating apartheid tripe and samp

I see the wildfire of Somaliland that everyone sees and  
pretend to be blind. Let Samora's spoken word caress  
wounded palms of Mozambique.

I hear drumbeats of hope coming from Tumbuku.

Kisingani, your weeping silence reaches the throne of God.

Nyangani, you cry silent dreams in your sleep, of children  
harvesting paradoxes of history and metaphors of identity.

## Sunset Acoustics

**S**ing *Bamako*, sing of spiders blighting freedom tomatoes  
Sing of our pimped heritage  
*Somalia*, the dramatic irony of Africa  
*Ethiopia*, bring back the oil of our anthems and the clay of our identity  
*Ivory Coast*, your hands are hardened by hard years of madness  
Cockroaches are walking over sleeping *Zambezi*  
*Gugulethu*, tired of scathy tongues and marijuana  
Egypt bulletins drenched by Arab spring urine  
Abuja, how long are you going to walk in shadows?

## **...Because it is Easier to Write About a Dead Father**

*Bryan Okwesili*

**M**y head rests on her hairless thighs  
smooth as peeled garlic cloves. My  
nostrils seal the talcum I inhale. I recall  
harmattan and what she does to mother's  
lips; emotions cracked open, spilling dry  
dust. Mother's eyes are patched and sullen  
and just eyes. It is what one becomes when one  
drinks one's tears and combs one's hair  
with one's rib cage. Today, she longs for father's  
voice; yesterday, she ate the sand on his  
grave; tomorrow, she will be sickly from grief- a  
kind of penance. I spread talcum on her  
back, loosening the thing around her neck;  
breathe. More talcum. Breathe! Because it is  
easier to write about a dead father, easiest  
to eat the sand on his grave.

## **Old Folks in an 89'**

*Ebuka Prince Okoroafor*

*Life in its dynamism will one day roll back to where we met it.  
And like me, you may wonder how we all got there...*

**I**F ONE COULD GET LUCKY WITH LOVE again at sixty-nine, Nenenwa wouldn't have believed until it found her. At this time, in her summarily eventful life, it seemed like she was the lead actor in a scene out of the blues, something entirely off the story line that the director decides to squeeze in at the last minute, to the bewilderment of his crew. At first, she had been unsettled by this new feeling of affection, but as time progressed, she adapted, becoming so enveloped by it that it almost became utterly spellbinding.

She had thought that as physical attraction faded with age, so did love. She thought too that with time love became an obese responsibility; that it became survival or existence, even memories. But everything had changed the day she met Mr. David Ijedinukwu.

David was like the display of ostensible eighteenth-century chinaware atop her mahogany bookshelf in the dining hall that appealed to her innermost sense of perception each time she sighted them. Seeing the breakables with casts of gold at the rims always eased her mind, mostly because there lay the history of her family passed down three generations or even more. He was like the sublime beauty of an old

abandoned artwork, and it was because of him she began relating life events to inanimate things.

Tonight, she sat on the edge of her bed, going through an array of clothes laid out, clothes suitable without being overly dreamy for a first date— first in over thirty-five years— with a man other than her late husband. She wouldn't have done this were she not in love again; usually, she didn't enjoy spending so much time thinking of what to wear, especially after Johnson's death, so tonight was different— it was obvious. "It shines in your eyes, Momma!" her granddaughter had quipped a few days back, and Nenenwa had mock-pursued her out of the bedroom. But when she sat down and thought of this man, something in her gut flipped, and her heart raced. This newfound love was magical; it was refreshing like the cleanness of air after an evening rain; and she felt it wrap her up gently the way a winter coat folds you in during the cold season. The way it snuggles you warm.

She jostled through her emotions back to reality and turned this intense feeling of affection into questions of doubt, a little disconcerted with the way her thoughts these days drifted and roosted around him. *it is all too sudden and way too early!* she told herself and began to pack the clothes back to the closet. *Tonight will sure determine anyways,* she hoped. Then she un-hung a pleated, sleeveless, blue gown, spotted with flowers the color of gold—a 1992 fashion vogue— and slid into it. Regardless of the evening's outcome, she planned to look just perfect.

Their meeting had been an accident. It was a week ago at a grocery store in town that their shopping trollies bumped into each other. When Nenenwa looked up, he was about five foot six, a black man probably in his early seventies with well-kept grey beards and a chequered shirt. His cowboy hat which sat loosely on his head, with warm smell, was suggestive of country life, and this was buttressed by his boots that left muddy prints at its wake. The only thing she may not have fancied was his spade-shaped nose, but that slid almost unnoticed when their eyes locked, and a tenderness she had forgotten its existence after the death of her husband was re-ignited. That evening, it erupted like a volcano; it ripped through her body and for a moment she had thought she was having a heart attack. She didn't; they proffered quick apologies, introduced and exchanged pleasantries, joked about how sometimes age meddles with people's alertness and eyesight so much these encounters became unavoidable. Then David said the fault was entirely his and Nenenwa laughed.

Later that evening, he dropped her off at home in a polished Jaguar XJS, and when she had asked about the antique wonder, he told her it was acquired in the fall of 1989, a year after he voluntarily retired from civil service at the age of forty, and decided to own a jewellery store. She had reluctantly admitted to herself that she enjoyed the ride home; it was as though suddenly, life was giving her another shot at youth and in that short encounter, she was ready to grasp it. When they spoke over the phone two days after, his voice made her feel like she was a seventeen-year-old in

the arms of a prom king. His voice was densely masculine and eccentric. It was like Johnson's.

She sat down in front of her dressing mirror and dusted her face over with a thin layer of brown powder, then coloured her lips with a red lip stick, rubbing them against each other. In the gaily lit room, they glinted like rubies and she wondered if David Ijedinukwu would like it, the floridness of it. The last time she did this, it was the night her husband was run over by a drunk teenage driver in uptown Pennsylvania. She was in the kitchen making a meal of macaroni when the telephone buzzed. At the hospital, he looked like Neil Armstrong, with a nose mask clinging to his face, and a multitude of tubes surrounding his limp body. Nenenwa remembered he gave up living at about 21:00 GMT. The cardiac monitor maintained a steady shrill and while a crowd of white coats hovered around his lifeless body, she remembered she had slipped out and walked under the rain that night to the community church, she laid at the feet of the big crucifix in the alter and cried herself to sleep. Then she woke up a little after midnight and trashed her body about the alter until the resident priest came and took her away. He prayed for her and sprinkled holy water on her face, but she knew none of these could bring him back. She knew too that she needed the psychotherapy the ritual offered to keep her faith and her mind sane in her state of distress. She remembers now that night was their second wedding anniversary and she had made her husband's favourite for dinner: peppered macaroni with fried eggs. The food remained untouched for three weeks,

and each night, she sat at her balcony, hoping to hear him call out to her: “Nene, please throw down the keys.” He never did. After his funeral, she dipped into a stage of denial and engaged in the illicit use of amphetamine injections for a month, before she surrendered her junkie self to be weaned off the drug by the state’s rehab centre.

When the stage of anger came, she broke things in the kitchen, mostly flung them against the wall. It didn’t last long though, but by the time it was done, half her kitchen breakables were gone. Then she missed her period. At the hospital, the doctor had said she was two months gone, said it was a miracle too how the steady injection of amphetamine did not abort the baby. Nenenwa’s mood lipped to the stage of acceptance after that day, and when her only child was born seven months later, she named her Chimamanda.

She wiped the tears that she did not notice had streamed down her face and started to re-apply the powder. *Johnson is gone now and has been gone for thirty-five years!* She scolded herself, and then took a deep breath, exhaling lightly. As soon as she was done powdering up, she air-kissed her image in the mirror and giggled like a girl. Then she applied light blue shades on her upper lids and dragged her lower eyelids down, one after the other, drawing long, thin lines at the edges with an eye liner. It was her granddaughter that taught her how to do this, and she was grateful to spend holidays with the teenager.

Back to her closet, Nenenwa searched for a matching top. She flipped through the row of clothes in hangers and stopped to consider the blue flannel blouse

with a chiffon collar. She sighed and shook her head. Continued. A horn blared outside. She looked at the time; it was 7:30pm. She went back the row for the crimson jacket her daughter had gotten from Nigeria on one of her visits home. *This will do* she thought. Her neighbour's dog began to bark outside and soon other dogs in the neighbourhood joined in. She thought they must have been unsettled by the car horn. Once she slipped her feet into a pair of flat, black shoes, the honking came again, longer this time, like a trailer with failed brakes warning unsuspecting motorists to stay off the road. She knew it was David, *her* David so she hurried up. Just before she left the room, she turned to look at the framed picture of Johnson on the wall. The way he smiled back at her always reassured her, and tonight, more than ever, it did. She picked up her handbag and locked the door.

\* \* \*

*Age is a number,  
True Love is an eraser*

DAVID PICKED HIS WAY THROUGH the side streets because the major roads were blocked. They were so chocked up the cars nearly kissed each other. He hated being held up in the traffic and for a moment wished he didn't have to go through all of this, especially with his advancing age. At seventy-five, he had planned to buy acres of land at his hometown back in Nigeria, build a decent farmhouse and retire to it. He would acquire a recliner and each morning, as the sun rose, would get up, make a cup of warm coffee, and relax at the veranda to go through the previous day's dailies. Later, he would walk into this bustling town of Akure, buy bean cakes and pap, and

have a nice breakfast. He would make his workers his friends. On some evening's, he would walk down with them to Mama Ijebu's Bar for some plates of hot goat meat pepper-soup and pammy, laughing and jeering at money-driven pastors and talking about the government like he had better ideas. Of course, he knew he wouldn't do all these without money. He had money. For thirty years he had sent money home to his trusted cousin for safe keep, that way he had evaded paying heavy taxes.

He had it all planned out, but there was one major detail missing. He knew his kinsmen would ask him, *our son, where is your Americana wife?* He did not know what to tell them. He did not wish to tell them she had left him for a twenty-year-old boy from California ten years back either. It would sound absurd, and behind his back, they will say things like: *dah one na vegetable e be! Oyibo small boy carry im Iyawo go! Or Oyibo don use im brain do experiment fa! Im think say na to de speak sibri-sibri-sibri Like them!* He didn't want that, and that is what has kept him in this America. That was what he was thinking of when he bumped into Nenenwa at the grocery store. At that moment, his breath had ceased momentarily and then restarted like a faulty air conditioner. Nenenwa instantly rewired his emotions. She carried with her the aura of someone who could make loving so effortless, so *NYPD*-less, so nagging-less; all the problems he had encountered with his last lover. He knew it was too early to conclude, but he had always presumed that when culture met culture, things tallied fine— though in some cases they just didn't.

He angled into the parking lot of a supermarket and minutes later, he emerged with a bunch of lilies. She had told him she loved flowers and he wanted to begin her evening with some. Tonight, he would take her to a nice diner, and tell her she could call him *Biggie* if she didn't prefer the former name. He imagined her laughing when he told her it was his nickname at youth, and that back then, he had been so fat an X-ray couldn't detect his bones! He knew that would probably make her laugh some more and imagined the lovely picture her face would make, the way the contour lines under her cheeks would fold in and spread as her teeth bared, the way her eyes would gloss over with excitement, and her laughter would ring out although she would try to keep it low. Then he wondered how on their first encounter, he'd already memorized all these details about her. Perhaps, he was truly loving again. Soon he flanked into her street, confident.

Her place was a descent home, a white bungalow, with a well-kept lawn and clusters of flowery shrubs lining both sides of a wide concrete entrance. He thought it reminded him of the teachers' quarters back in Nigeria, where he had lived with his parents who were teachers in a missionary school. He wondered if kids played on the lawn the way he and other kids did back home and wondered too if Nenenwa would sneak up on them and sprinkle water to chase them away, the way his father usually did. Then he parked across the building and honked. There was no sign of life, only the neighbour's dog barking from a distance. This place was not near in comparison to the environment where he lived. He came from sprawling green lands ringed in

with low wooden fences, small houses with large ranches perched atop sloping lands and neighbours who were either farmers, or ranchers, or down right lovers of country life like he was. Here, everything was neater, the hedges were prim and there was no mud. The houses were not so many, and they were aligned orderly. The streetlamps when they came on illuminated the place as though it was still day. It was a serene atmosphere.

Someone walked across and ducked to look into his vehicle. He turned to see who the stranger was and their eyes met; the distant look in the lady's glare made him realize he was the actual stranger. This place looked bourgeois that he had not thought of it until it dawned on him: the flashy cars, the more-than-properly kept lawns with sprinklers, the quiet atmosphere. It was as though they didn't want to be disturbed. He alighted from the vehicle and waved at the stranger, just to ease off any undue suspicion. She didn't wave back; instead she turned around and started walking briskly, as though she sensed imminent danger. Soon other dogs joined in the barking and it became a cacophony that unnerved him. He climbed back into his car and hit the horn again. When still she didn't emerge, his heart began to sink like it sank the day his wife left him, broken, and childless. It hurt like a stab wound. He looked through his rear mirror and saw that the woman was at the end of the street now. She was talking with two men and pointing at his direction, soon they began walking down towards him. The woman stayed back. His heart drummed loud in his chest because at this point, he didn't know what to believe anymore. Perhaps, it was

all a set-up, a stranger looking at him like he was the stranger, and then reporting him to two men who would then walk up to him and dispossess him of his belongings at gun point. It had once happened to his friend in Lagos. He turned on the ignition and let the car steam as they approached. They looked rather too casual to be criminals, but that too could be a strategy. Fear welled up in his head and his body shivered.

Just as he was about to jam his foot on the accelerator, Nenenwa's front door swung open and he saw her step out in her elegance, immediately his confidence raced to life like an old die-hard engine. She walked towards him and he pushed his door open and stepped out to warn her of the impending danger. But she smiled at the men, and they walked past her as though they had nothing up their sleeves. He watched them until they disappeared into the darkness and all the while, Nenenwa smelled the lilies and kept smiling like her face was carved out of the moon, it shone.

\* \* \*

*It's too cold outside  
For Angels to fly. - Ed Sheeran*

NANA WORKED AS A HOOKER by night, hanging around the premises of most nightclubs in town until she was picked up, and by day, she passed as a photo enthusiast, taking pictures of everyday life and putting them up on her Instagram page, *Homing Bird*. That name sounded off, and she had not known what prompted it, since what it exhibited was almost the exact opposite of home. She knew this place

was not like Owerri, no busy suya joints, no bush bars with music blasting from element beaten speakers stationed outside. This place lacked all the African-ness that home promised, and perhaps she had named the page *Homing bird* because like the other girls here, she too missed home.

On the streets of this America, its either you eat or be eaten up by life. This was the first thing Madam had said to her before she was handed over to the sex traffickers who'd paid some wholesome amount in exchange. She had thought coming to America was coming to a banquet of fulfilled dreams, but everything changed when she got here. There was no big company waiting to employ her as Madam had promised; there was no luxurious flat too or company car. Rather, there were cruel men. There were nights they plundered her body and stole her essence; days they made her starve until she looked like a lean meat. There were other girls too: three from Kenya, one from Togo, and another from Ghana. They were the lucky ones, the ones who sneaked through the borders of their countries and made it to America alive. The unlucky ones were either rotting in shallow graves, with their feet sticking out through the hot desert sand, or they lay at the bottom of the Mediterranean, hauled overboard to ease the load, so as to prevent the boat from capsizing. There were a third group of the unlucky ones that she did not want to remember; the ones who died of starvation on their journey to this place, and were used as meat to keep the company fed.

Right now, a grumpy old man lay wasted atop her. He reeked of cheap perfume, fermented wine, and cigarette smoke. She shoved him off, hurried into her clothes, and grabbed the wad of notes on the bed. On nights like this, she could swear she hated living a bifurcated life, and wished it could all just come to an end. But then she was also scared of what lay beyond it. The night was still young, and the receptionist had ringed in to inform her other customers were waiting. But she felt like being alone, so instead, she unlatched the window opening into the backyard of the brothel and climbed out, landing softly on a cluster of overgrown grass. Outside, it was chilly and the cold bit into her skin like she was rolling on tiny pins. Scaling the low fence, she entered the street which was lit with overhead lights and neon bulbs from stall signposts. People roamed, the traffic was thick, and cars honked, their pissed drivers exchanging lots of curse words. She lit a cigarette, took long drags and puffed noisily; then she walked down the paseo.

Tonight, just like every other night, she hoped to be found, to be loved, or saved, or both, and be free like most of these people. But then, as always, the reality of fate jeered at her fantasy. She sucked hard at the cigarette as though she was sucking hard at life too.

Turning at the end of the block, she sighted an aged couple in an antique Jaguar parked in front of a diner. Something about them tickled her fancy, and for a moment she stood transfixed, lost in the thought of how long their union had lasted, and how yet they looked as though they were still basking in the fervour of youth.

Instinctively, she reached for her camera, pulling it out from its waist pouch and aiming a shot. The woman smelled the flowers in her hand and laughed at something the man had said, and Nana took another shot, then another. Soon, the car nosed out of the parking lot and zoomed off into the night, and out there, alone in the cold, Nana hummed her favourite Ed Sheeran: *The A team*, raising her camera to the night sky, and clicking away at the stars.

## **Sand**

*S. Asamoah*

**S**and must go where sand belongs—  
Maybe in a man, maybe in a castle

Or desert, or beach  
Never sky.

To give a castle to sky's palm  
Is to build it for air.

The king has lost his face  
And his sand torso gallops away with desert.

Let Exodus mourn its Pharaoh,  
Who will conquer Ramesses' titan?

The emperor forges sand to look into heaven,  
Let Exodus mourn ruin.

King of kings, O Ozymandias,  
If they forget thy reign, let them remember ruin.

Sand must go where sand belongs—  
Maybe into eternity, maybe beneath our feet.

## The Marriage of Anansewa

(After *Kwesi Brew, Ama Ata Aidoo with a nod to Efua Sutherland*)

I woke up.  
The Coast didn't.  
Taken, suckled with shackles—  
*Poison tits are tits still.*  
I hide my fire in the caves of my nose and hold my breath.  
A candle separating into light and tallow  
And this is translation.  
From salt to sea. From twi to Brofo  
From Ga to pidgin when *I gbele ma mof.*  
Ananse warned me: don't ask how wood walked on water,  
  
What austere alien stepped off the wood;  
Only the Coast knows.  
  
Where the Coasters went,  
Only the Atlantic goes.  
  
Ode to Ananse's Coast;  
You married more than salt water.  
  
You inherited its blood.

## Kluane

*Patrick Kelling*

**M**Y GRANDMOTHER TOLD A STORY. Would you like to hear it? My grandmother's story? It is the story of her birth, but not physically, a body emerging from another. Men would rather think of the gore of war to the gore of birth. She told me when I was maybe seven, said that her mother told her when she was about the same age. Now I am telling you because to understand me, you have to understand my grandmother, but understanding isn't the right word here, perhaps. You'll listen nonetheless, won't you? Of course, you will. Our stories rarely start with us, so let me tell you about my grandmother's parents, my great-grandmother, Ellie, and my great-grandfather, who never met his daughter.

Ellie was a waitress in a place like this, probably called a serving girl back then. Speaking of which, thank you for the drink. [Her eyes drift towards the ceiling as she stirs her Rum and Coke with a finger.] She first liked my great-grandfather for his clean chin and his Scandinavian accent, one of which was a novelty in the Northwest Territories in the thirties. He had a way of catching his sentences between his teeth for whole heartbeats, long enough for him to chart his course, long enough for a nineteen-year old to fall in love. She brought him a free whiskey, about all

anyone drank in Aklavik, which is north, north, north in the Northwest Territories, a hundred kilometres from Fort McPherson.

Anyway, the following month he gave her a pair of beaver moccasins. She spent that night in her room, running the pads of her fingers along the cording, the soles, the inside of the tongue. She thought about his fingers cutting and folding the hide. She thought about what such a present meant, what such a present meant when given to her. She thought about what wearing them would mean, to him, to her, to her family. The moccasins were the beginning of something, and while she tasted that in the back of her mouth, she was peering as far as she could into the future. Potential is a beautiful thing, but actualization is the body's gravity. No. That's not the right word. [She swings her drink towards the bar.] The third day she slipped them on, because things are meant to be used, and by the following evening, their bottoms had blackened. The next time Ellie saw her Scandinavian, she leaned on his arm and breathed him in, rawhide and smoke and pine.

Ellie wanted to learn him the way she'd learned to see moose through a thicket, to bake bannock, to carve ice caves in the Peel Channel's pressure ridges. She tried to make him talk, but his words were as sparse as warmth on a winter tundra. This didn't stop her from charting him like an explorer looking for the Northwest Passage. He was a trapper, but so was nearly everyone else in Aklavik during the Depression. The town was full of men who'd escaped debts that weren't worth paying, kinship that wasn't worth keeping. This trapper, the one Ellie loved,

called himself Albert Johnson, might have named himself that too, but this comes later. He arrived in the Northwest Territories late enough that regulations preceded him. Trappers were required to obtain a trapping license, which he never did, but again, this comes later.

This trapper, this Albert Johnson, offered to take my great-grandmother to his cabin along Rat River, show her the things he hadn't shown anyone: sand frozen mid-ripple, the Northern Lights over the Richardson Mountains, the emptiness of it all. He asked this by shrugging his shoulders to the south, which apparently Ellie always said was the direction of desire, so she looked at him out of the corner of her eye long enough to twist under his words, tell him without opening her mouth that she knew what he was asking and that she was turning him down this time, but only this time. Johnson laughed at this, laughed and laughed, showed his big teeth and his pink, dog tongue. He put his arm around her, pulled her close, and Ellie felt the warmth coming from him, the kind of warmth that melts ice, forces you to open a cabin door during a whiteout, the kind of warmth that, bottled up, will eventually burn a forest. [She takes too long a drink.]

He returned to his traps for the winter then, and Ellie waited for the sun to do more than grey the world from behind the Franklin Mountains. It was one of those winters that if you felt warm, you feared you'd suffered frost bite, so she waited for the snow to settle into the earth and for birds to sing. She waited for him because this is what you do when you're in love.

Johnson showed back up before spring, when the drifts were still as tall as whatever they'd blown against, and the only trail town was the one he broke himself. He said it took him two days to make the eighty-kilometre trek, which Ellie thought was a boast, but knowing what we know now, it might not have been. He said he'd come for supplies, but Ellie knew this was a lie too. The north is full of stories about lonely winters and the efforts men made for no more than a shared cup of tea. This time, Johnson got more than that.

When Ellie slept with him, it was because the way the moonlight dispersed among the forest's last hoarfrost of the season. Such light is meant to be savoured, meant to see and be seen. If you live outside, you might find this light once or twice in a lifetime. [She glances towards the bar's TV.] Everything melts in it, melds into the palest sharpness you've ever seen, which is why she pulled him onto a bison hide, pressed her hands against his smooth cheeks, wrapped herself in his heat. He had a body meant for the north, strong but soft enough to pull close. This wasn't the only time they were together, but she knew this was the time they settled my grandmother in Ellie's belly.

I told you that my grandmother's story wasn't about a literal birth, but it does include her wailing a hymn as she was born. This was February of thirty-two, and as she came into the world, her father was going out. Ellie knew about it in what must have seemed like real-time. The radios carried updates world-wide, but we aren't there yet.

It started small enough, the trouble I mean, the reports of tampered traps. A disgruntled trapper guessing, guessing mind you—this is important—that my great-grandmother’s sweetheart had done it. But when two Mounties trekked the thirty kilometres from Fort McPherson to my great-grandfather’s cabin to ask, they became part of one of the most awkward social situations in the history of the Great White North. Despite clearly being home in his one room cabin, not only did Johnson not answer, he continued about his business without acknowledging the Mounties knocking on his door. When they peeped him through the window, my great-grandfather responded by covering it with a potato sack. Could you imagine? [She laughs, drink sloshing.] Now I don’t pretend to have an inkling about what Johnson was thinking, but I’d like to think it followed that infant logic that says if you don’t see them, they can’t see you. So, you know what happened next? Do you? [She elbows at you for this part.] They had to sled to Fort McPherson get a warrant, so that they could turn around and head back to Johnson’s cabin, and then they hoped to finally have a conversation about some sprung traps.

This time the Mounties brought four men because they sensed something brewing, so five days after their first visit, the Mounties knocked on the door again, and the same awkward situation played out. Except this time, they pushed the warrant against the window, tried to let themselves in, and that was when Johnson shot one of ‘em through the door. Sure, the Mounties shot back, but there wasn’t much too it. Each side blasted at the door, the wall. Maybe someone edged toward the window

but decided no one likes a dead hero and retreated. You know what they did next? Yeah. They had to trek to Aklavik, dragging their wounded comrade with ‘em.

When Ellie heard what happened, she wrote a letter, tore it up, wrote another, tore that one up too, not because she didn’t know what to say but because Johnson’s mailbox was located in Aklavik’s post office, and she doubted he’d be coming to town any time soon. She could have given it to the Mounties themselves, I guess. They sure as shit were heading back, but what kind of way is that to send a love note? Instead, she hummed to her belly and fretted and listened to the radio. News programs had picked up the story, and rumours were blooming. Johnson was an escaped killer from Europe. Sharpers had cheated Johnson of his money, and now he was bitter towards society. Johnson was mad. Ellie didn’t understand any of it, and neither did anyone else, including Johnson himself. Because Johnson never answered the door, he didn’t know why the Mounties were there or what they wanted to discuss. He shot on instinct or a hunch, or maybe he had a raging guilty conscious.

I know. I know. You’re going to say he must have done something, and this might be true, but think of the type of person who’d live in a cabin alone in the upper Northwest Territories in the thirties. Those people weren’t exactly social. I’m not saying that social awkwardness explains why Johnson did what he did, but I am saying that it wasn’t a sprung trap that caused it neither. And that’s the crux of the whole matter. There wasn’t any reason for anything that happened, which is why people named Johnson the Mad Trapper of Rat River. They said he must have been insane,

who would do so much with so little reason? But people only resort to this label when they can't find another explanation, and they're tired of looking. Don't look for reason in what I'm about to tell you.

The third time, the Mounties sent an army: 9 men, nearly fifty sled dogs, and ten kilos of dynamite. When they arrived, they knew Johnson was home because of the smoke coming out of the chimney. They took their time finding good cover behind some trees, then they called out, and just like last time, or the first time for that matter, he didn't answer. It was -40 degrees, cold enough it doesn't matter if you're keeping track in Fahrenheit or Celsius, cold enough that the Mounties had to thaw the dynamite under their coats before they threw it on the roof. They figured that would do him in or flush him out. The cabin exploded, walls collapsed this way and that, the door, rag-plugged bullet holes and all, careened across the snow, and that's when the Mounties discovered that Johnson was using World War I tactics, had dug a two-meter-deep trench in the floor. Of course, there was another shootout, but no one was risking much. Getting slapped in weather that cold feels like you're shattering. Imagine being shot. [She pushes a finger hard against your sternum, let's it linger.]

The only thing to do when it's that cold is warm some tea and stamp your feet for a fourteen-hour standoff, and that's when my grandfather performed his first magic trick. Despite being surrounded, he somehow slipped past the Mounties in the dark. They didn't notice until the sun greyed the horizon that he wasn't in that trench

anymore. This is when what might have been a one- or two-day event spawned into a month and a half-long ordeal. Back in Aklavik, Ellie wouldn't leave her radio, listened for weeks to CNR news updates, holding her stomach with one hand and the volume knob with the other, ready to turn it down so that she had to press her ear against the speaker's grill. Whispers are the best way to listen to news of a loved one being hunted. She wore her moccasins and prayed for blizzards because her trapper was heading the only way you can go when pursued: west to the Yukon.

A few days later, Ellie was still listening except that now she was a mother, and my grandmother was a ball of blankets as all Canadian babies are that time of year. Sadie spent the first month of her life laying in her crib next to the radio, hearing news anchors speak words she might not have understood yet, but the meaning must have infused her dreams, coloured her first thoughts. How could being told the story of your father's death not seep into your deepest organs? Whenever the news anchor said Johnson's name, she would suckle harder, close her eyes with the effort, as though she was gathering energy for him.

For over six weeks, Johnson was something more than human. When the Mounties blockaded the only two passes, he could take through the Richardson Mountains, he summited the two-thousand-meter peak between them in the dark. When the Mounties had him cornered against a cliff, unable to advance only because of a blizzard that dumped a meter of snow and sent the windchill to -70, he kept enough feeling in his fingers and toes to climb to freedom. When the Mounties

found his tracks again, they should have been able to run him down. The Mounties had dog sleds, which are about a million times faster than breaking trail on foot, but he was moving so fast that he was outrunning the Mounties' dog sleds.

Both mother and child cried with each radio update, because each might be the one that announced his death.

Then during another blizzard, Johnson performed his last great trick. He [She snaps.] vanished. For a week, two, the Mounties couldn't locate him. Sure, there wasn't anywhere to vanish to but another two hundred kilometres of wilderness, but he did it anyway. Admitting they were outmatched they hired a plane, the first time one was used in a Canadian manhunt. The pilot was the one who finally found Johnson's trick, the one that had disappeared him so completely. Do you know much about caribou? No, you look like more of an elk hunter. Do you know that in the winter Caribou walk along the centre of frozen streams? Do you know why they do this? To put themselves as far as they can from the forest on either side, to more easily keep watch for predators. Johnson had been removing his snowshoes and lengthening his stride to a bound, so he could match these caribou tracks. This way he avoided leaving his own trail, which was why the Mounties couldn't find him. Course, the flaw with this system, what the pilot eventually saw, was that Johnson couldn't stay in the centre of the stream as long as a caribou. Eventually, he'd needed to retreat the forest to melt some snow, dry his sweat-damp shirt. He left tracks when he did this. Human tracks.

They caught him. Of course, they did. You can't outrun everyone and everything when it wants to find you. [She nods her head too far forward and not far enough back.] When they found him, he was in the middle of Eagle River, and the thing that had been keeping him alive was the thing that killed him. Because he wasn't wearing his snowshoes, he couldn't run for cover, so he did the only thing he could, plop on his belly and start shooting, but even that didn't last. He tagged another Mountie, killed this one, but he was an easy target. Do you know how many times they shot him? How many bullets it took to end his life? Seventeen. I like to think that as he bled out, his fingers might have curled into fists, not out of anger, he'd gone too far for that, but in one last attempt to find warmth. [She takes a drink. Another. She is silent long enough that you draw her close. Then she sighs.]

My great-grandfather ran them as long as he could, burned his body up doing it. In thirty-three days, he went over a hundred thirty kilometres, and if this doesn't seem miraculous to you, remember that the average temperature in February is eight degrees Fahrenheit, that the average amount of snowpack is a meter. That's a meter of snow you have to fight with every step. That time of year most living things are either buried or hibernating, so good luck trying to find something to eat. People have estimated Johnson burned 10,000 calories a day to do what he did, which means that the body the Mounties buried wasn't much more than gristle and determination. In fact—keep this in mind—nearly fifty years later, we still don't know why Johnson did what he did because he never spoke to the Mounties. Not once.

Throughout everything that happened, he never said a word. I admire that, the lack of explanation. He did what he needed to and couldn't spare the energy to move his lips or mouth.

But [She waggles her glass for a refill.] this is the type of glory stuff that men are so attracted to. This story is about my grandmother, remember? See, you need to understand my great-grandfather's life to understand my grandmother's. Genetics like his don't fade.

Ellie and Sadie moved to the Yukon in 1941. A romantic might say she was finishing what her beau had started, but she came here for a job because in '42 the Americans constructed the Alaska Highway in eight months. The two followed the troops to Destruction Bay where Ellie worked as a cook, launderer, waitress, and nurse. The Yukon: land of few heads and many hats. Sadie witnessed the greatest construction project the world has ever seen. The creation of the Alcan was a tectonic event for the region and its people. Suddenly, areas that had never been connected were. The nomadic First Nations settled along its route, changed the course of their lives and culture overnight. Think of it this way, the whole region had existed since [She uses a wide gesture.] without the idea of the combustion engine, then suddenly, an army of people and equipment tear a road, another new concept, right through everything. There's a story about a First Nation boy who saw his first American driving a bulldozer, and years later he later joked because the first white man he ever saw was a black man. [She laughs.] Once the "highway" was "completed" [She waves

her bottle and two fingers on the other hand, northern air-quotes.] the Americans had to make the “highway” usable. What they’d originally created was a gash of mud, logs, nearly un-drivable ascents from British Columbia to Alaska. They spent the next year making it drivable for general vehicles.

While Ellie worked, Sadie roamed the camp, bored as only a nine-year-old can be, wrestling stray dogs and the occasional child. Eventually, Ellie enrolled her in the newly built Destruction Bay primary school, which had a founding class of six. Sadie didn’t win everyone, but by the time the first spelling test came around, she’d fought each of her classmates. Ellie blamed Johnson for Sadie’s violence, not because there was a meanness to it, but because she had so much energy that she had no choice but to tuck her thumbs against her curled fingers, measure herself against those around her. To save herself from having to tissue another bloody nose, the teacher had Sadie tote thermoses of coffee and deer meat sandwiches to the soldiers who’d built an ice fishing cabin about a kilometre out on Kluane Lake’s ice. The walk there was filled with pressure ridges and unblocked winds, just the thing for an aggressive attitude.

This is when it happened. One February afternoon, loaded down with four kilos of lunch, Sadie was following the same trail that men three-times her size had walked so many times, when she felt the ice soften beneath her mukluks, which I’ve heard is the worst sensation any living thing can feel, sinking through ice, hearing it

pop like Rice Krispies, then something lower, deeper, the groan of the universe waking. The lake did the impossible, it opened for her, opened as a mouth.

The soldiers saw her go under, the whiteness of the lake suddenly swallow her small, dark shape, and they came running, crawled on their bellies like it was basic training to as close to the hole as they could, but they only saw shards of ice and new born waves. One hero went in himself, sure she was just a meter or two under the surface, but when he opened his eyes, he felt the pale green light steal away the warmth of the world. Later, he said how fragile it was, the glow, because it faded so quickly into an infinite dark, said he knew anything that touched those depths wouldn't ever return, said he saw my grandmother reaching from there—from death—reaching, not so he could pull her up, but so she could drag him down. When he came to the surface, only able to control some of his muscles, he screamed, not because of the cold, but because Sadie had moons for eyes, because she took a breath—like that was still a thing she could do—because he'd watched her dive into that void, her mukluks and anemone skirts leaving the light like they never belonged there anyway.

By the time the soldiers carried their comrade to the hospital tent, he was blue mostly, head slipping this way and that, ice-chunk drool mixing with his partially frozen clothes. They drew lots to see who would tell Ellie, explain to her that they'd tried. She took it like they expected, threatened them with a knife, then herself. She wailed and threw herself on the stones of Kluane's shore, wailed at the lake to return

what did not belong to it. My great-grandmother stayed there so long that the rocks bruised her knees, the cold blistered her lips, and the air stole her voice, but these sacrifices must have been enough, because by the time a soldier helped, then carried Ellie to her bunk, my grandmother wasn't far behind, ice beaded through her hair, frost patterns decorating her cheeks, eyes a pale turquoise. But she was breathing, blinking, alive enough to crawl into her bed without help, survive the hypothermia that lowered her temperature so much that an army doctor whistled when he read the thermometer.

Someone checked the hole Sadie had made on her way down, but it was sealed over, solid enough that they'd walked right over it, meaning that this wasn't how she returned. She never said either. I don't think Ellie asked, as though my grandmother's return was a mirage, to question it would be to call it out of existence. Afterward, nurses said that the cold had killed part of Sadie's tongue, and she'd speak with a lisp. But this wasn't right. They said the cold had damaged her sight, that the world would be glazed for her, but this wasn't right either. Afterward, things changed, but in none of the ways the nurses said they would. Sadie became an extension of the lake, for which the world was nothing but depth, currents, and crystal formation. She stopped wearing coats, slept without clothes or blankets year-round, ate her meals at room temperature, only washed in the runoff of the Kaskawulsh Glacier.

But these were small things compared to the first time the lake froze each year. My grandmother wouldn't need to see it to know that those waters were ice

coated. When she wandered out of Burwash for five days, returning covered in blood that wasn't her own and dangling a broken arm, she said it was because the shallows told her to. When she spent a winter digging—hacking is the better term—a trench along the south side of Burwash, she said it was because you never knew which way the wind would blow a fire. When she let feral dogs lick her face, she said she needed their company. I think those waters soaked into my grandmother, soaked deep down and mixed with all the rage that she'd been born to, made something new, something I know she passed along to my mother, but that's not what we're talking about here.

Once, when I was old enough to form the questions, but not old enough to know better, I asked my grandmother why she went into the lake, but she didn't answer. I asked her why she returned, and my grandmother, in a wheel chair by then, suffering from dementia and liver cancer, said she'd never left, that all this—and she waved her hands to make sure I understood—was in the wake of the last heat leaving her body, the last breath bubbling past her lips, the last motion of her eyelashes against the drift that hadn't ever stopped pulling her downward.

[She finishes her drink, hold out the glass for another.]

I wonder what it means to have those echoes rattling around my skull, knowing that we're all the remnants of a dying consciousness. And she's been dead a year now. What happens to a dream after the dreamer has died?

I often ask my skin, mostly when I'm in the shower, feeling the suds slide down my body, how I fit into this, what does it mean to come after such events?

What voice do I have in this chorus? When I hike, I ask my legs if they're ready to break trail, to outrun sled dogs. When I swim in that same lake, I ask my lungs, this is cold, how much colder could it get? My body always answers the same, that hot water feels nice and that it is good to move in ways that make us gasp.

## **Labyrinths of Lost Souls**

*Okenyi Sunday Chinweike*

**H**ow does the drum I hear  
From *Ugulogo's* hill before my father's house  
Slap through the wind and rest in all walls of this room?  
I heard prayers and I heard the pounding legs of warriors  
Slandering with tongues of fire wheeling their legs like hungry talon of horror  
Dancing to the misfortune

Why do they want to pull this soul apart?  
Why do they call these battered legs to join them in the inferno?  
Where are the gods?  
Where are they who the priest speaks of?  
Can I sleep today while the voice I hear is mine alone  
Shackled with chains of guilt, guilt of the world's strife?  
Yes, I can hear the vultures' sorrowful merry cry  
But alone mine grow wild

I prayed yesterday; I prayed a night before it  
I saw tears evenly wail alone to comfort  
But today my voices let alone and have me all  
In the world alone, I'm left to mourn the world's pain  
I ask, will you pray for me?

## Addict

*Daniel Asamoah Yeboah*

Every morning when I wake up,  
I pray my desires won't win over  
My attempts at sobriety  
But by nightfall  
I am stripped naked and ashamed

The weight of my sins crushes me  
There's no salvation  
In what I keep turning to  
I seek comfort yet I am left empty

Several vows of abstinence  
But still I have no peace  
Before the world I'm brave  
Behind closed doors I'm broken  
My addiction suffocates me  
I buckle at the knee

This morning too I prayed  
And then I went back again  
To the old stomping grounds  
Where by moonlight last night,  
I buried my unholy addiction  
This struggle never ends.

## The Taste of Silence

*Torkwase Igbana*

**O**CHE STARED AT THE PAINTING of the woman that hung in his sitting room. The tears that trailed down her lips gave her a glint that made her eyes dance with light. He was not an admirer of paintings or artwork; he found them too removed from the briskness of human pain and happiness. He had found the owner of the painting when he attended an art exhibition, which Eniola, his girlfriend, had invited him to. He had wandered through the whole event with his bushy brows knotted in boredom till he stumbled on the painting in a deserted section. Eniola noticed him staring at it with eyes unblinking. She placed her hand on his shoulder, whispered into his ears, and bought the painting.

His phone's ringtone distracted him, and he tore his eyes from the painting, pausing before finally picking the call. It was a client who wanted him to design a shopping mall for her company. He had already started with sketches of the building, his floor littered with crumpled papers of stillborn designs. He resumed his sketch after hanging up, his concentration glitched by Eniola's words until he finally stopped. He took a glass of water and walked to the balcony, dazed by the stream of the evening sun over the rocks that surrounded the neighbourhood. He was still not used to the sight, even after living there for five years. He downed the glass of water in a gulp, resisting Eniola's voice in his head. *You're not too different from her, you see.*

*No matter how much light your eyes hold, the sadness always cleaves to you somehow.*

\* \* \*

WHEN HE WOKE UP, the room smelt of tears. He remembered that he had been crying in his dream. He heard the sound of rushing water in the bathroom and for a second he was back in his hometown, back in a cold room where his eyes were blurred and the bathroom was filled with the sound of water and a deep voice.

‘Oche, you have that look again, the one you carry like a treasured pain.’ Eniola was wrapped in a white towel, her afro kinks damp and running with water. She leaned against the bathroom door; a sad tinge stained the small smile that curved her lips.

Oche brushed aside the confusion that clung to his mind until remembrance sifted through his dense thoughts. Eniola had come over the previous evening with a small bag. She had declared she was staying for the weekend. He remembered taking his earmuffs and walking into the cool evening to stifle the feeling of dread that crept up on him. When he returned, she was fast asleep in his bed and in his shirt. He looked at her long slender body, thighs partly revealed, lips full and pursed. He knew they felt like velvet and tasted like flowers dipped in liquid fire. The first time he kissed her, he had slowly melted on her tongue, tasted her deeply and allowed the tears to stream from his face. She had looked at him, eyes shocked and lips,

quivering. He stroked her hair then and whispered that she tasted of burning innocence.

‘Now, you have your vacant look.’ Eniola sat on the edge of the bed, cupping his face in her hands. Oche leaned into her and buried his face in her bosom. She was warm and smelt of old chocolates.

‘I’m fine,’ his voice came out in a husky drawl.

‘You were crying in your sleep.’

‘Maybe they were tears of joy.’

‘You were crying and begging someone.’

‘Maybe I was crying and begging you to love me better.’

‘I’m serious Oche. You sounded scared and I’m worried. You never talk to me, not to anyone actually. You carry so much pain in your eyes, and you carry it alone. I could help, but that’s only possible if you would talk to me.’ Eniola’s voice came in soft caresses as she gently stroked his hair.

‘Just hold me.’ He closed his eyes and allowed the scent of her skin lure him to sleep.

\* \* \*

‘THESE DESIGNS WERE SUPPOSED to have been delivered since yesterday. That woman hasn’t let my blasted phone stay quiet since morning. I never understand these folks, they have no sense of civility.’

Oche sat in the air-conditioned office and thought of the stray pair of stockings he had hurriedly left on the bedroom floor. He had spent well over thirty minutes coaxing Eniola to go home. Her stay had spilled into the week and Oche felt himself suffocate with her presence. When she had eventually left, he knew he would be late. Sitting in the stiff chair, he tried to picture his room: straight-spine books neatly arranged on a shelf, crisp-ironed shirts that lined the wardrobe drawers, reading glasses on the bedside drawers, shoes kept under the wardrobe, and the carelessly tossed pair of stockings that stood out like a sore thumb. Oche felt the urge to go home and throw them in the laundry basket that was in the bathroom. Instead, he sat a little straighter in the chair that faced his boss. He was stuck in a cool room full of hot angry words with his boss, who spoke English like he owned it.

‘...and your lapses in performing your assignments are quite baffling these days. You always deliver behind schedule and I wonder whether your competence is slowly deserting you. Mr Odeh, I believe you are following the thread of this conversation.’

Oche wondered whether the talk was a rehearsed speech that would lead to his dismissal. In spite of himself, he inwardly smiled at the comical fluster it left on his boss’ face.

‘I am sorry sir, I was a bit distracted, that’s the reason I couldn’t meet up with the target. I’m sorry for any inconvenience the client might have caused you as a result of my negligence. It won’t repeat itself again.’

Oche was surprised at how sincere he sounded, at how he nearly believed the gentle edge of his voice to be remorse. He kept his face straight and watched his boss fiddle with his tie. He did that often, especially when he was uncomfortable.

‘I’ll let you off easily this time but don’t get used to my good graces. I won’t hesitate to let you go if you continue with this despairing attitude.’

Oche knew that his boss was done with him. He also knew that he was pleased with the designs with the way he gently ran his fingers over his tie as he went through them. He was a man of habit, this English-owning boss of his.

The rest of the day crawled in a familiar rhythm; his colleague’s continuous flirting with him and his practised oblivion to her advances, the occasional cups of bland office coffee, Eniola’s sudden but expected texts, and the constant phone calls that assailed the intercom.

Oche left the office at 5pm with the uncertainty of where he was going. He did not want to go home yet. He thought of going to the beach and walking on the shore. He remembered the day he met Eniola at the beach. A gloomy Sunday and the clouds were grey. He knew it would rain but he had gone out regardless. He had just woken from another nightmare and was shaking uncontrollably. He needed air, needed to allow the rain to wash the tears that were smarting his eyes and choking him. He had stood under the rain for over thirty minutes and tried to forget the drowning laughter in his nightmare. He stood there and watched the shore being washed clean by the waves, and then he started moving closer to the water. He

needed to be washed; he felt filthy and needed to be clean. The water reached his knees when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to find a pair of startled brown eyes looking at him and holding an umbrella. He had allowed himself to be led by her to the bar where she dried his hair and face and asked questions that he had forgotten the answers to. When he found his voice, he asked her name and she said it was Eniola. He wondered whether the innocence that whirled in her eyes would cleanse him. He decided to live and find out.

Oche resolved not to go the beach. He turned towards the direction of the Catholic Church close by. He did not believe in God, but he often went there after work. He entered the church and soon blended with the congregation that came for the evening mass. He sat at the back seat where he watched people and felt less stifled by their demeanour of holiness. He watched them kneel and rise with a uniform solemnity. A particular man next to him stayed on his knees throughout the mass. Oche wondered whether his God was different and more demanding. In between the man's silent prayers, he gave Oche disapproving glances for sitting when everyone else was kneeling. Oche was amused by the man's passion. He wanted to tell him of the many years he had knelt in front of his uncle. He wanted to tell him why he detested kneeling and why he thought they were all wasting their time praying to a God who didn't even bother. He remembered all the nights he had cried to God, had prayed till his voice was hoarse so that God would rescue him from his

suffering. Nothing ever happened, no God ever rescued him. He stood up and left, wondering whether God saw the emptiness that was slowly consuming him.

\* \* \*

‘YOU STILL REMEMBER that my paintings are to be exhibited next weekend, right?’

Eniola cut the cake and placed two big slices on the plate in front of Oche. She had insisted on baking the cake for his birthday despite his refusal. Oche never celebrated his birthdays. He turned twenty-eight but felt like he had lived long. Too long.

‘Of course, I remember. I’ll come and finally see those paintings you have been hiding from me. I don’t even understand why you’ve been so secretive about them anyways.’

Oche spoke between bites of the chocolate cake. He always relished Eniola’s cakes, especially the chocolate ones. They reminded him of the faint scent of chocolates that always clung to her skin.

‘It’s a surprise Oche, that’s why you haven’t seen them yet. I’m glad you’ll be coming. I know how you particularly get uncomfortable with people, especially unfamiliar ones. Here, let me help you with that.’

Eniola bent across the low table that separated them and kissed a smear of chocolate off the corner of his mouth. She slowly covered the space between them and covered his lips with hers. A shiver went through Oche’s body and he found

breathing difficult. He felt her fingers on his skin, felt them snake through the mass of hair on his chest. He felt her tongue on his earlobe, slowly grazing, slowly teasing with lingering kisses. He whimpered then, his skin hot and flaming. He sought for her lips and kissed her deeply, his heartbeat drumming in his ears. His fingers found the buttons on her blouse and started unbuttoning them. Her skin was soft and warm to his touch. He ran his fingers over her abdomen, imprinting himself on her skin. When his hands found the clasp of her bra, he sought her eyes then. They were filmy and hooded with mist. Oche's body went silent.

'I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that. I was out of line.' Oche started buttoning up Eniola's blouse with unsteady hands.

'Stop this Oche. I want this. I want you. Why do you always shut me out? You have to talk to me about this today.'

Eniola's voice was full of tears and Oche knew that she was making a great effort not to cry. He avoided her eyes, those orbs that dripped with innocence and desire.

'I don't want to hurt you. You're too special...'

'But you hurt me when you turn me away. Look at me,' she cradled his face in her hands, 'I'm in love with you and I need you to understand this. There's nowhere else I'd rather be.'

Oche gently pried her fingers off his face and stood up, grabbing his red sweatshirt on the couch.

'I'm going for a walk.' He stepped into the cool evening and allowed the air to soak him. *There's nowhere else I'd rather be.* Eniola's words found him as he began walking in slow measured steps. The street was alive and the sound of people's voices and lives wafted through his sizzling thoughts. He saw a little boy of ten riding a bicycle with a bell. Behind him, a puppy yelped and ran after him, making futile efforts to grab the tyres with its tiny paws. The boy laughed and continued cycling, slowing down to allow the yelping puppy launch at the tyres with its paws before he finally cycled away, leaving behind the ghost of his laughter and a disappointed puppy.

Oche remembered himself at ten. He never owned a bicycle and laughter was alien to him. He remembered loss. He lost his laughter, his childhood, and his parents the day they died in an accident. He vaguely remembered moving in with his uncle. His uncle, Dan had tried to comfort him. He would get him candy and take him to the park to play with other kids. Uncle Dan, a bachelor with little responsibility, had devoted his attention and time to little Oche. After two months of staying with him, Oche began to see colour in the world again. The thoughts about his parents became less and his affection for his uncle began to grow. He would spend his time after school drawing and watching TV while waiting for his uncle to come back from work. When he came back, Oche would tell him about his day at school, especially of how the other kids bullied him and asked him whether he buried his voice together with his parents. His uncle would pat his curly hair and tell

him to be strong and not get bothered by the dumb kids. He would smile and eat with him before he slept.

In his fifth month in his uncle's house, Oche stopped speaking. It happened gradually; his voice had first reduced to whispers and tremors until it finally faded. His teachers probed and the kids at school teased even harder until they could no longer look at his vacant eyes. Oche remained withdrawn and carried his silence like a companion about him. He had first experienced the tremors the day his uncle came home with roaming eyes and a defeated stoop. He had not answered Oche's greeting and had slumped down on the couch and soon fell asleep. Oche sat cross-legged on the rug and watched him whimper and talk in his sleep. He would later learn from a phone conversation between his uncle and his friend that his uncle had caught the woman he wanted to marry with another man in bed that day. When the electric power failed and the air conditioner stopped working, Oche unbuttoned his uncle's shirt that was rapidly soaking with sweat. He pulled his shoes off afterwards, cringing at the smell that hit him when he pulled off his socks. His uncle woke up then and grabbed his hands. His words were incoherent and Oche struggled to understand them. His uncle's eyes had become glassy and took Oche's trembling hand and rubbed it gently against his crotch. His uncle's eyes lit up and he increased the pressure on Oche's hand. He then opened his fly and brought out his hardened penis and placed Oche's hand on it. He guided the rhythm of Oche's hand and told him to continue at that pace. Oche had been too stunned and confused for his hand

to work on its own. His hesitation had earned him a resounding slap. He swallowed his sobs and the tears flowed with a mind of their own. He continued rubbing until his hands had felt the white-hot fluid that run onto his hands and to the floor. His uncle let him go at the moment, trailing his way to the bathroom and running the shower after he drew out a trembling promise from him to keep the incident to himself. Oche felt filthy and later scrubbed himself thoroughly in the bathroom. He couldn't bring himself to use that hand to eat the next day; he felt condemned and knew that he would never be the same again.

The next time his uncle unzipped his trousers before him, he told him to kneel down and suck instead of rub. More slaps followed his hesitations and his whispered pleas were buried under the sobs that raged his body. He sucked, the rhythm changing when his uncle's urgent voice sifted through gritted teeth, ordering him to increase the pace. When the white fluid came, he was ordered to swallow. He continued kneeling and sucking for the five years that found him in his uncle's house. He continued sucking and swallowing while his voice faded, and his mind became numb. When his mother's sister eased him off his uncle's hands for further training in school, Oche had become known as the quiet boy who never recovered from the shock of his parents' death. He eventually recovered his voice but his laughter never reached his eyes again.

The puppy's renewed yelps brought Oche's attention to it. It was struggling to catch a ginger cat that was equally struggling to get away from it. Oche smiled at them,

thinking of how happy Eniola would be if he bought a puppy for her. He imagined her eyes glowing and melting in smiles. He decided to tell her about his past, to tell her how he loved her and would also love to be with her. *There's nowhere else I'd rather be.* He smiled to himself and decided to go home. The night had wrapped up the street but he had been too lost in thought to notice. He pulled his hood over his head to keep the night chill away. His fingers felt cold and he rubbed them as he began crossing the street. He saw the truck only when it hit him. His ears buzzed and his face felt warm as he lay on the road. He felt a chill running up his body and tried to remember the warmth of Eniola's body. He tried to remember her eyes, big and startled orbs that had made him understand love. The pain came in a sudden wave and spun in his head before everything became quiet.

Later, a woman selling maize at the roadside would tell Eniola of how Oche would have survived if the driver had remembered to fix his headlights. Eniola would clutch Oche's cold hands and wonder if he had felt cold as he lay dying on the road.

## Hell as a First Aid for Burns

*Nnadi Samuel*

a pologies for the heat i carry,  
for hurting tiny miracles that architects the world's dumpsite in me.  
i burn myself into the moon's bare skin & sifts into the x-ray of a bruised town clawed  
with brimstones.

& yes, my mother is a black praying woman begging God for a kidney transplant--  
wishing she could urinate us without messing up her thighs.  
i am a man today, unlearning the anxiety that cums with standing at ease.

my body is a minaret chewed recklessly & unkept,  
like the universe owned up the knowledge of her ribcage on my sleeves.  
nested to every pigeonhole-- i grow a garden of cobweb pouting for breath,  
God sneezes out, & the cackle in his pulse unfriends my imagination.  
i am a little disturbed-- this has been his only friend request this year.

it is full moon now & my shadow stands akimbo, a tape rule prized to her hand,  
like she hopes to ascertain if i had enough body to carry this hell--fierce as a chimney  
glazed with bloodshot bitumen.

sometimes a boy starves his skin from growing further: he becomes a gorgeous mist  
in the midst of a dying lantern.

his flames do not bake into a new loin, it stays afloat like darkness God pours into  
this world after scrubbing the sky clean.  
he destroys his whole body on the lantern's jaw & mocks the world for doing the  
dishes.

## Jesus in the Shadows

*Ernie Brill*

**Y**ou transformed the world, turned it inside out.  
What would you do now as the wounded, armed,\*  
Stand in shadows of your homeless first breaths  
In the nearby stables of Bethlehem?

Would you, again, thunder from the mount,  
Turn the other cheek, perform miracles  
In the hospital's nearby parking lot,  
Come help bury bodies decomposing  
Since war's curtailed the morgue's electrical power?

Will you, change-maker, re-tissue the dead  
So the bereaved can fully mourn choked respects  
Past bulldozed graves gouging expedient pits, like  
Mass graves where Nazis stacked machine-gunned Jews?

*\*During the 2002 "Intifada" in Palestine/Israel, armed Palestinians sought refuge in a church in Bethlehem while the Israeli army had begun bulldozing entire buildings and Blocks of the major city of Jenin.*

## **Towards Healing Passovers**

**W**e wanted a home. I understand: centuries  
Of smashed doors, unparalleled wanderings.  
Yet what's the limit when we arrive home  
At the price of another's eviction?  
Do we not possess enough turbulent ghosts  
Without creating new living exiled ones?  
Is it only Elijah\*, and not Mohammed  
For whom we set a plate and hold the door open?

*\* Every Passover, Jewish families around the world set a plate for Elijah, welcoming any stranger who does not have a meal or shelter.*

## Home

*Tolulope Oke*

**H**ome is the raucous laughter of a friend  
or the memory of things they said or left unsaid;  
home is the bustling gyre of a city  
or another treasured for its profound placidity.  
Home is the bosom of a mother  
or the warm embrace of a distant lover;  
home are the mounds and hills of a town  
or the luscious deeps and valleys of another.

## **Bye Bye Black Birds**

*(In the words of Nina Simone)*

*Nenyi Ato Buntum*

Sleep tight black knights  
Fathers who walked with hands aback  
Home was not home

It's all right black lights  
Mothers who left with their breasts  
Full of milk going sour  
Home was not home

Walk right black giants  
Born children outside the basket of home  
Home was far away

Bye bye black bellied birds  
Folk recounts your  
Departure like the *Anlo* COMRADES

*\* Anlo is a tribe among the Ewe people in Ghana who walked backwards to escape from their cruel leader called King Agorkoli.*

## **The Enemy Within**

*Nicksha T. Mwanandimayi*

**F**OR SOMEONE WHO IS LOCATED in excess of 13,000km away from the United States of America, my life and politics are intertwined with American politics. After all, the USA is the archetype of an elder brother to my humble abode of Namibia. The elder brother will forever be older, faster, the superior athlete, and try as one may the shoes are daunting to fill. An elusive pursuit in which the younger brother never scales the heights of his predecessor. On 5 January 2020, I was up as early as 2am for an epic showdown between Tom Brady and Ryan Tannehill in the NFL playoff game. Days before, I had brushed aside the fluke loss to the Dolphins, and I was adamant "TB12" would pull off a comeback tantamount to the revenge tour of the infamous Deflate Gate.

If you are an NFL fan or have access to your computer, you will know that The Patriots lost the drab of a match to the Titans 20-13 despite Ryan Tannehill's meagre 72 passing yards! Why is this important? Well, for me, the Patriots loss was the worst part of my festive season, or so I thought. My wife, our three children, and I were due to leave for the coast for one final tide before the resumption of business and the Patriots had put a slight dent to my mood. All season I had watched Bill

Belichick's tottering offence for three hours after midnight in Africa! I had made every excuse for them each time Shannon Sharpe spoke in the critical superlatives he attested were passed down by his granddad. I was always in agreement with Skip Bayless that the Great Bill Belichick had one up his sleeve, but on this fateful dawn in Sub-Saharan Africa, Coach Belichick had let me down. He disappointed possibly the most loyal NFL fan in this part of the hemisphere and that was as bad as my day could get. However, perception is subjective to each and every individual, and time as the great equaliser that it is would tell if this would be the lowest point of my festive season.

Whilst to me the worst thing that had transpired on 5 January 2020 was The Patriots loss to the Titan's subsequently elevating Ryan Tannehill's comeback, 9,000km across the ocean in Singapore a couple were reeling from the devastating news that their three year-old girl was the first suspected case of the "mystery Wuhan virus" in Singapore. What I would have given for Tom Brady to produce a legendary 4th quarter game winning drive, could it be compared to what these parents would have given to get answers and closure concerning their little girl? Hindsight is a greater mentor and I believe had I known what fate waited the three-year-old and the world in the coming days, I would have gladly conceded the Super Bowl to Mahomeboy easily.

However, in this existence of ours no form of ignorance and folly goes unnoticed and the grand reaper is always lurking in the shadows to execute or

exercise his form of crude justice if not revenge. On a fine Friday morning, just five days after the Patriots defeat, oblivious to the impending fate of the world and the precarious nature of the turn of events the world over, enjoying my little slice of nirvana on the Namib Desert sand dunes whilst camel riding with my wife and our three children, I would have my fair share of tragedy. A day I will never forget for as long as I breathe, a day in which a part of me was lost and never to be found again, forsaken and shattered. Whilst some events shock, only a few can paralyse the very fibre of our being. Having not been able to answer my phone whilst camel riding, when I dismounted, I saw that I had missed a few phone calls from my mother. A few text messages were unread. What followed was the worst news a person could get, possibly the same news the parents in Singapore would also be told in days to come.

"Uncle Tatenda, mom is dead!" That was my niece's voice in a voice message as she tried to contain her grief. A mere teenager, 15 years old, delivering the shocking news to me. They had tried to reach me whilst I was mounted on a camel like an Arab Sheikh; my sister had been involved in a fatal car accident and perished without a trace. Just like a vapour, here one moment and gone the next. At my lowest moment, on 10 January 2020, in China Li Wenliang an ophthalmologist and corona virus whistle-blower had also started developing symptoms of a dry cough which subsequently led to his death on 7 February 2020 after testing positive for corona virus. Just a few days later on 13th January 2020 I was laying my only sister to rest

oblivious of the fact that on the same day in Thailand the first confirmed case of 2019-nCoV had stricken a 61-year-old Chinese woman who had travelled to Bangkok. Enduring massive blackouts every evening in Zimbabwe as I sought to comfort my mother, I knew nothing of this virus and the impending cloud of uncertainty that was engulfing the world. A few days after laying my sister to rest, on 15 January 2020 I was catching up on the sports news, distracting myself from my new found reality by marvelling at the Australian Men's Cricket Team that had chased down a target of 255 runs in 37 overs by pummelling an unbeaten 258 for the loss of no wicket against the mighty men in blue, India. Whilst distracting myself from my new reality, the fact of the matter is on this same day unbeknown to me and most people in the world 2019-nCoV had claimed its second victim in China.

Call me ignorant or whatever you will, but as I went about my daily motions with my mother, the only form of distraction I found apart from Robin Sharma's books was sport. On 4 February 2020, all I wanted to find out as I woke was whether Jimmy "G" did the unthinkable against the Kansas City Chiefs. I was enduring blackouts in Harare daily and being away from Windhoek, Namibia, I could not get access to the Super bowl. I was willing to forgive Jimmy "G" (if you are a New England Patriots fan you will understand) and let him have a ring as long as it came at the expense of Mahomeboy. I had a feeling that once Mahomes had a ring (which he now has) it will be a matter of time before he has three or more, and I would gladly support anyone who can keep him at bay to preserve Tom Brady's legacy. As we all

know, Mahomes did what he does best, and the rest is history. After watching the highlights on my phone, I was still insulated in my own cocoon ignorant of the fact that Li Wenliang and thousands more were fighting for their lives. On the 7th of February, I hugged my mother, it was time for me to return to Windhoek, Namibia and for the first time on 8 February 2020 when I was given a health questionnaire to complete as I entered Namibia I became aware of COVID-19.

Being in Sub-Saharan Africa, I can plead ignorance to what was happening elsewhere. By the time I had assimilated back into my normal routine in the last couple of weeks of February 2020, the devastating reality of what the virus had done had become apparent but not without coming across some disturbing, albeit plausible farfetched conspiracy theories that were creeping up. We were initially quarantined in Namibia on 19th of March 2020, and this is what I could term as *the day of my epiphany*. I scrolled through the canonical news channels to find out how devastating this COVID-19 virus really was. I must say I have come to detest mainstream media due to the partisan nature of some of the reporting, hence, I hardly watched the news which explains part of my ignorance. To be honest, I only signed up for Instagram in April 2020 during lockdown.

I remember an influx of emotions early morning as I saw military vehicles transporting corpses in Italy amidst deserted streets void of life. The atmosphere was so haunting and chilling that I spent a dozen hours watching the news without flinching. My heart swelled with emotions and I could not keep my tears at bay. As a

father of three; two girls aged five and seven respectively, and a boy aged seven, I remember thinking to myself, "Lord this isn't the reality I envisage for my children." A couple of days later it was raining, and my nose were snotty, and I began fighting my own diabolic vices. Worry and anxiety gripped me as my allergies exacerbated the situation resulting in me getting multi-vitamins and my regular hay fever medication. I was gripped by immense anxiety as I thought I could have contracted the COVID-19 on my travels a couple of weeks before on my road trip from Zimbabwe. What a start to a new decade it would be for my mother, losing both her children in the space of two months. How would she cope with that? Were my insurances in place? Maybe I needed to call Michael (my financial planner), but I know mandatory blood tests would be the pre-requirement before upgrading the insurance.

The media exacerbated my fears as they sold the COVID-19 as a ruthless reaper akin to the Spanish flu of 1918. The only knowledge I had of this flu was from my fuzzy memory of World War 1 history and, at this time, it was all jumbled up with the Arch-Duke Ferdinand. Thus there was need for more research on this. Besides, how could I not when our two weeks lockdown was extended by another four weeks. "They are hiding something from us," was the chatter amongst my neighbours. Another third world annihilation and eugenics conspiracy were some of the talk. For those of you reading this article and you aren't from Sub-Saharan Africa, welcome to our world. A world where there are no natural disasters or pandemics let alone accidents. Every hurricane and tsunami is a detonation of a nuclear weapon in

the Pacific, Atlantic or Indian Ocean by possibly Uncle Sam. Every car accident is a political assassination and why stop there? Ebola is part of a eugenics experiment and HIV is a grander plot to exterminate the ethnical Africans.

Backtracking to my research on the 1918 Spanish flu, I decided to make use of the wisest man alive, since we have immortalised him in Sub-Saharan Africa, I am talking about none other than Dr Google himself the grand sage whose knowledge stretches the multiverse. "Fifty million deaths" was the first thing I saw on the Wikipedia page of the 1918 Spanish Flu. No wonder the evangelicals in the townships were preaching about the rapture. Yes, indeed, in the townships the self-ordained prophets were crying out: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." The Pentecostals had defied the government quarantine regulations and held church services as they believed the rapture was nigh. In Namibia and South Africa, alcohol sales were banned leading to mixed reactions. Not to be the one to take Wikipedia at face value, I did the next best thing; why not go to a trusted source and who better to give the facts than the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention? Whilst the COVID-19 was not akin to the Spanish flu of 1918, it became apparent to me that the fifty million casualties our good doctor had stated was a reliable estimate and if preventative measures were not taken, we could be unleashing the beast.

Armed with newfound knowledge on how to effectively sanitize and protect my family, I embarked on a journey of social distancing and continued research keeping abreast with all the COVID-19 headlines. Piers Morgan rightfully called on

the British government to carry out more tests whilst almost every government official re-iterated the "Stay at home" message. In this era of political correctness and social media, one thing was apparent, someone was bound to slip up and when they did the social police and twitter-verse would be ready with both knives and daggers. In our quaint Namibia on 19 April, the ruling SWAPO Party secretary general Sophia Shaningwa was at odds with the media regarding the alleged contravention of the Covid-19 lockdown regulations in which an event broadcast live on the national broadcaster featured the Swapo Party President Hage Geingob, Namibia's Vice President, Nangolo Mbumba, Swapo Party Vice President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah and top officials celebrating the party's 60th anniversary to the disgruntlement of the masses.

Meanwhile, on the same day as Namibians were distracted due to the media frenzy, it went unreported to most that the enemy was still out there causing terror in many nations. With Namibians distracted on the 19th of April 2020, the WHO released Situation Report 90, in which The Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) reported 55 new deaths that brought Africa's death toll to 1,080. However, it seems that even in troubled times, politics always "trumps" humanity, no pun intended. For the first time in a while, one could literally view the world as a miniscule singular existence because the only news that was being reported was COVID19 and this pandemic seemed to erase all borders, all but one actually. It was the world and China but that's a discussion for another day. In the same month

of April at the same time our quaint country of Namibia was making a mountain out of a mole hill, Dominic Raab was deputising for a frail Boris Johnson in the United Kingdom who had tested positive for COVID-19. I actually said my prayers for the British Prime Minister, and I realised that this pandemic was non-discriminatory.

By now, everyone is aware or should at least be aware of what COVID-19 is, however, if there is one takeaway from this ordeal, it is the realisation that we are such a fallen race. A race to be much pitied I should say. I observed that even when facing a global existential crisis, politics always trumps humanity and there is nothing that currently unites the human race to fight for a unified cause anymore. We now live in a predominantly nihilistic society and of this I am convinced. I watched political leaders in the most powerful nations playing partisan politics with lives hanging by a thread. In a world where most people believe that our help comes from the West, I saw the worst, everyone using the plight of many for partisan gain. I expected a truce amongst media outlets and political parties, but the rifts only widened further with none offering a solution in sight.

With the CDC becoming my daily COVID-19 resource bible, you can understand the horror when I read the tweet, "Fire Fauci" in mid-April 2020. I couldn't trust the CDC as well? Frustration, anger and anxiety were in the air again. By late April 2020, I was entangled in a web of confusion as most people still are today concerning this virus. Home-schooling kids under lock down, multiple extensions and lack of facts can leave a person disillusioned. The twenty million

deaths forecast in early March are nowhere close to what we have. With most of us void of basic essentials, I recall satirical images of political leaders indulging in gourmet ice-cream whilst the media actively engaged daily in verbal wars with arguably the most powerful man in the world but to no avail. No closer to a vaccine than we were, Dr. Fauci is seen testifying before the Senate with the noisy gong of the conspiracy theorists propounding another rhetoric to confuse the people.

The nihilists are protesting every form of preventative measure and they call it totalitarianism. China is now public enemy number one in the West but in Africa it continues to be the saviour. In Namibia Biltong shops were viewed as essential service providers and were not shut down whilst all restaurants and some retailers were initially closed. Domestic violence is on the rise in Africa, yet the *Me Too Movement* is silent? The lack of priority has been appalling. In the British Isles people are more concerned with the conclusion of the English Premier League with certain Merseyside supporters threatening anarchy. In India, the fate of the Indian Premier League seems to take precedence as Chennai Super Kings indicates a boycott if only local players are legible.

There is no one to speak for the voiceless as media and politics converge. A few months after the first confirmed case we have more conspiracy theories than we had at the beginning. Partisan political agendas have caused further rifts and the media has weaponised this. The verdict is still not sanctioned on China; we are neither closer nor further from the truth or to a vaccine than we were. If the current

pandemic cannot unite us, of all eras in modern human history, we are a civilisation to be most pitied. Why worry about an existential threat from an extra-terrestrial enemy when we are the enemy within.

With the world distracted from the systematic prejudices that beguile us on a daily basis because of the COVID19 pandemic, I followed the events that lead to the tragic death of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer, with three other accomplices in uniform, none of them black albeit two being of Asian descent. Pinned down for almost nine minutes unable to breathe, George gasped for air; his nose bled profusely, and he cried out an instinctive phrase in our socio-evolutionary DNA as Africans, “Mama!”

Whenever a black man or an African yells out his mother's name, he is at his wits end and more likely than not he is either telling the truth or very sincere. In contrast, with all due respect though, white folks can use their mothers name as slur “mother.....r!” However, black, and African cultures prevent us from doing so; it's not in our DNA. It's not abominable to hear white folks in the west laughing as they exchange slurs referring to their mothers in jest. In contrast, the mother is the Holy Grail in the black and African communities. People will lie and curse at Jesus before using their mothers name in vain. Why is this relevant in the George Floyd case? It's significant because the moment a black man or an African hears another black man or African in any part of the world calling his “Mama” then we recognize how dire the situation is and the sensitivity thereof.

However, in the case of George Floyd, this mountain and beast of a man was pinned down by three men with one resting all his weight on his neck. Human life is not equal; forget the Declaration of Independence in the United States which famously states that "all men are created equal." On this fateful day, Officer Derek Chauvin clearly highlighted that not all men are created equal.

That Declaration of Independence is actually ironic in itself because having been penned by Thomas Jefferson in 1776, the irony is that whilst the Declaration purported a form of truth the reality was that even Thomas Jefferson himself did not believe this since he was a slave owner and a successful one at that. In fact, in its modern form, slavery was only banned in 1941 when Franklin D Roosevelt signed the infamous Circular 3591 which abolished any form of Convict Leasing. Putting it in perspective, I am not baffled by George Floyd's death at the hands of a white law enforcement officer, in the same way I wasn't surprised when a white lady refused to serve me breakfast in Gobabis, Namibia in 2014 but was willing to serve my half German light-skinned wife.

The reality is that slavery in its most recent form was legally abolished in the United States of America less than eighty years ago (notwithstanding segregation which was abolished a further two decades later) and police officers such as Derek Chauvin are second generation post-slavery white law enforcement officers who, if truth be told (which it rarely is), are probably headed by first generation post-slavery

white law enforcement officers. A myth is perpetuated that slavery and its propulsion of racism are a thing of a distant past and as distant as the dinosaurs.

There is the proverbial elephant in the room which needs to be addressed without prejudice, or as we say in Africa, let's call a spade a spade. It is premature to assume that a total socio-cultural shift of a status quo spanning over 330 years (from 1619 when the first African slavery ship landed in the USA) would be reversed in under a century. The effects of were detrimental to the psyches of both "master" and the enslaved. The effects of slavery are dichotomous; on the one hand you have the African American who has to trust a white man after he had subjected them to inhumane conditions whilst feeding beef brisket to his dog and pampering it.

The fact is in the aftermath of abolition, the average African American would readily and willingly put his trust in a talking serpent than to trust a man who had treated him as nothing less than an animal, animals even got emancipated earlier than the black folks in the United States, at least dogs sat on maser's lap. On the other side of the table you had the white man who had to overnight come to terms with the idea or impending reality that this race of people who were beneath his pet were equals with him and why was that, because Franklin D Roosevelt signed it on a piece of paper? Indeed some could argue that there was an abolishment of slavery earlier in the 19th century in some states and there were some affluent African Americans living in unison with other open minded white folks, however this was all but a handful.

To expect both these mindsets to change or rather radically evolve in such a short period of time is to make a grave misjudgment of the human psyche, especially the effects of the subservient social and psychological construct built up over the centuries. I am not an expert on psychology, and I will stake no such claim. History will however judge Officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd and he will undoubtedly bear the brunt of abuse and of both African and Non-African American's. As an African it's interesting how these atrocities seem to surprise Americans more than they surprise us; yet, we bear the remnants of these scars. Farfetched as this may seem, the likes of George Floyd, Trayvon Martin et al could have been born under different circumstances without the stereotypes that resulted from the unjust mistreatment of their forefathers who were forcefully abducted and shipped across the ocean.

It's a sad reality but chances are similar atrocities will take continue to take place in which the NAACP will continue to champion the rights of the African American, but as a specie we as human beings are far from addressing the wounds perpetrated by The White Lion. Indeed there have been fateful clashes in which white police officers, well-meaning have been killed by African Americans but ponder this, “is it logical to cage an eagle for three centuries and one day release it in the Amazon and expect it to soar?”

Or better yet, “Can you feed your cat goldfish every day for three centuries and one day tell your cat that their prey is now an equal?”

The wounds are still fresh; to put it in perspective, it is less than 85 years since the death of Cudjoe Kazoola Lewis who died in 1935, one of the last survivors of the Atlantic slave trade between Africa and the United States. The society we live in today is the sum manifestation the decisions we have made in our history as a species. As a species we propounded the idea that, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” However, in reality the self-evident truths were the ones propounded by the likes of Richard Weaver who stated in 1948 in his work, *Ideas Have Consequences*, that "no man was ever created free and no two men were ever created equal". It's interesting that Weaver only published these works after Franklin D. Roosevelt's death. Weaver highlights the white elitist view that was and may still to a greater part prevail in the United States that, “The comity of peoples in groups large or small rests not upon this chimerical notion of equality but upon fraternity, a concept which long antedates it in history because it goes immeasurably deeper in human sentiment. The ancient feeling of brotherhood carries obligations of which equality knows nothing. It calls for respect and protection, for brotherhood is status in family, and family is by nature hierarchical.”

I can't help but conclude that this “call for respect” which was abolished less than a century ago thereby usurping the racial hierarchy could be the reason why so many black men and women are systematically, racially profiled, victimized and

killed in the United States of America. Could it be that deep down for some of these white police officers, whether consciously or subconsciously are calling for respect, a respect racial equality knows nothing about? Could this explain why the older people aged 60 and above are now viewed as a fraternity that can be sacrificed during this pandemic and their life is worth less than a millennial's? It is well documented that in most hospitals the world over, ICU beds and ventilators are being allocated based on age highlighting that the worth of an elderly person is miniscule reinforcing Weaver's assertion. It is easier to be ignorant of the realities around us just as I was earlier in January 2020.

In times of adversity, our humanity is either amplified or overshadowed by our flaws and weaknesses. George Floyd's death was the fuse that was needed to ignite this violent flame that lay dormant as an ember the world over. Anarchy descended on the world following his death. Whilst violence can never be condoned, the sad reality is that violence is the voice of the illegitimate. I am sure Officer Derek Chauvin will look at external factors to explain the events leading up to George Floyd's death because as human beings regardless of race there is always an external culprit to blame. I am not innocent in this; I apologise for my initial ignorance pertaining to the plight of many at the onset of the COVID19 pandemic. On 1 March 2020, I was enjoying Ravindra Jadeja's spectacular superman catch of Neil Wagner at Christchurch whilst the rest of the world was enforcing stricter measures to

curb this pandemic. We might not have a solution as yet; we might be a long way off from a vaccine, but it's not farfetched for us to attempt to be human again.

## **—When Everything Becomes A Water-Still**

*Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah*

They say he has hijacked the airplane;  
Tmorphed the sea's boon into a home of loss.

this morn the newspaper headline read: “1000 new cases...”  
—our new catchphrase!

they say it pays to be safe from a virus  
you've no idea when it will shoot your snoot  
& run your temperature agog,  
—so stay home!

our president has become the new poster boy:  
wear face mask,  
wash your hands,  
do not touch your face,  
do not touch your nose,  
sanitize!

& each time the radio has blurted,  
the news was—a quarter-ruin to a half-despair.

i can't count the number of times  
i have seen the word quarantine in books & never bothered to check its meaning.  
i'm hell stoked how it has now become man's only resolve;  
—do not hug  
—practice social distancing!

there is something wrong with this novel equation,  
no one seems to know the way out;  
not the prophets; not the presidents  
not the scientists; nor the medics . . .

& all we do daily is sit in our rooms,  
watch from our miserable futons into the empty streets,  
hoping this virus doesn't devour one of our own.

## **The View from Above**

*John Grey*

Construction workers  
sit and eat lunch  
from their crow's nest  
above the sidewalk,  
ogle and comment on the women  
passing below.

Their expressions speak  
of lust and abhorrence,  
as they whistle  
or bark like dogs.

At ground level,  
they're considerate, respectful to  
the women in their family.  
their girlfriends.  
and the girlfriends of friends.

But they're two hundred feet in the air.  
Some men can't climb that high  
without lowering themselves.

## Morning Fog

The sky is clear somewhere up there  
but the shoreline doesn't know it,  
not with that hugging morning fog,  
puffing like second breath  
inches from my nostrils.

The weather's like an anchor  
that only the sun can lift,  
but it prefers to have us mist-bound,  
wandering the streets like flotsam,  
air unsteadies in all directions.

Nets hang over the sides of boats  
but here is a net of a different kind.  
It's cast upon the human bailiwick.  
It holds assumptions captive.

## Stir It Up

*Clayton Musick*

**I**T WAS SOMETHING LIKE DECEMBER when we moved to New York City. It's been snowing, snowing, and snowing all the way up until now, the Spring!

I grew up in Jamaica. You know what that makes me? Warm blooded. Or maybe it's cold blooded. Hard to remember... well, I don't like the cold. And it's cold in New York City.

My mama says it's cause people here are cold, but I think she's joking around, pretending like I'm still eleven and not twelve like I am. I know things. Places don't get cold 'cause the people there. That's nonsense.

Mama move us to Brooklyn. We move in with our family here. We got a three-story apartment like the ones Brooklyn is known for, and our family, we known for being loud and being crazy. I got cousins on cousins to fill up spaces. Down at the bottom level: cousins, cousins, cousins. Middle, more cousins, and my aunt and uncle. Top level Mama and me alone, which is nice, but the whole building is like a whale snorting and carrying on all night long. You can't get no peace in a building...no a street...with any Jamaicans.

My uncle is mean. He beat me sometimes. My aunt, she ignores me. My cousins, they push me around. Most of my cousins think I'm stupid and this and that stuff. I don't know why. They don't like me. That makes me sad sometimes.

My mama, she's nice to me. We like to dance at night, and in the morning, and at lunch time. She used to dance with daddy but he's dead now. He died long time ago. I didn't know him.

I like to dance so I don't have to think about things. But it's hard dancing through life, when life is hard a lot. I rush upstairs every day after school, to be with Mama. Sometimes I cry, and I feel like a baby, but my mama, she treat me like a baby, so I'm never gonna learn not to be a baby. It's her fault... I'm sorry for saying that. I love my mom. I love you, Mom.

But now it's about to be summer, and it's warm, and there's no school to hurt me every day, so I can play around and draw chalk on the sidewalk and listen to birds and do things that mama say make me beautiful. I like drawing and carrying on. I like listening to music and dancing and carrying on. It's okay when there a song to sing and a pretty picture in the sky, and in my head.

\* \* \*

I RUN HOME as soon as the bell ring for summer. Down past the corner deli, across the street towards the wall of painted flowers. I pass older American kids with shirts saying "Jordan" on the back, and "O'Neal". They talk like they angry. It's like my cousins talk to me, only in American accents.

I reach home and run fast upstairs. The stairs smell like burnt chicken until I reach our apartment, where it starts smelling like cinnamon and fried plantains. I use the key mamma gave me and open the door. It's dark. She not there. But I look around, trying to find the boombox. I can't find it... dammit! What's that word Mama use? Yeah, that's right, fuck! Fuck!

I search for the chalk. Man, I gonna cry if I can't find that chalk. Ah! Here they are! A box full. I love chalk like I like the boombox, so this works.

I run through the front door of our apartment into the warming sun, and start drawing on the sidewalk out front. I start with pink, then go to green. I'm making a flower, beautiful, like I think of my mom.

I see her, as I'm finishing my drawing, walking home with the boombox I'd been looking for. I hug her, but I say, you've had the boombox all this time? She lets sway her hair in the wind and sets her stone eyes on me, heavy like weights.

"You know I like to walk in the afternoons with the boombox, Benny. You'll get your chance, heaven forbid you be patient." She say. I reach out to her, not for a hug, but for the boombox. She's a kind mother, but she strict too. She slap my hand and stick her lips out like a frog, eyeing me, saying I best not try being smart with her.

"I'm sorry, Mom. Can I... may I use the boombox please, mommy?" she nods her head, and I sing to myself, happy to have my music. She hands the boombox to me.

"What CD in it, mom?" I ask her. She smiles and nods at me, saying simply:

“Marley.” I was hoping she’d say that.

“Thank you, mommy.” she leans in towards me and whispers the word *kiss* like flour flowing over a countertop and spilling, breezy and whirling, and I lay my cheek out bare for her. Our cheeks brush, and she giggles.

“I love you, sweet little Benny Best.” She say, and she walk off into the apartment. She look so sweet in her dress, yellow, like inside of lemon pound cake. The apartment is big and blue, like a wave, a stormy wave coming in to beach beautiful creatures. She too beautiful for this city, and that ugly apartment.

I look out down the street to see if there’s anybody coming. It looks like there’s a boy, there, coming, walking like he’s confident in himself, and he looks like he’s my age. So I get nervous. He’s got milky tea skin and dreadlocks like Bob Marley, but they’re light color like baby lion tails. He looks like he’s out of sand, with all the beach stuck on him cause he’s got skin like that. His eyes, they light like glass got a cocoa flashlight showing on it.

I lower my head and decide that when he gets close, I’m going to say hi. I don’t know why, but I want to say hi.

I keep my eyes to the side, so I see his legs. It takes so long for him to come. Then his voice hits me before I expect it, and it’s a sharp kind of voice:

“I’m walkin’ here, man. You gonna mess up my shoes. What are you doing?” He looks me over, and I look up at him. I stand, and I see he’s a bit shorter than I am, but he acts taller.

“I’m just drawing” The boy makes a face with his milky skin scrunching in rolls, his cheeks little hills.

“I’m JuStDRaWinG... what is you African or something?” He laughs, and it’s like my cousins.

“I’m Jamaican.” I say.

“So, you...” He leans in close to my face, and I don’t know if I should back away or let him get close. I let him get close, to look calm. He smells like sweat and fabric. I don’t mind it, but it’s different than what I think I smell like. “You smoke weed and that shit?” I don’t know what weed is, so I grin and nod.

“Not a lot...”

“Oh shit!” The boy puts his hand to his mouth. “You got some uh that shit, for me?” I say no, but my mama does. “Oh shit! Yo mama do? Ya’ll are not playin around in Jamaica hoo! Oh shit! The only thing my mama give me is a can a whoop ass. Yo mama whoop you?”

“Nah, nah. My mama love me.”

“My mama love me! Whatchootryin’ uh say?” The boy grabs me by the arm. It hurts, cause he’s grabbing me hard. I don’t understand what I did wrong. “Take that shit back!”

“I don’t know! I’m sorry! I don’t know what I said!” The boy pressed his lips together and let go of my arm. “You’re just... are you dumb? You people? You gon’ be dead up in these streets, man. You can’t be singin no songs and smokin weed all

day. This ain't no Jamaica." I rub my arm where it hurts, and it's turning red. The boy seems to notice, and he touches my arm too, this time soft. "Look man that was stupid. I didn't know you were... used to... well you know-- you weren't used to this street shit, man." The boy keeps looking, and I am afraid. "Yo, you wanna go play basketball with me? Come on ain't nobody drawing chalk on the last day of school. Let me show you how Americans do." The boy yanks at my arm, and I nod, though I don't know if I wanna stay with this boy. He scares me.

"Mama, I'm going to play basketball!" I call, but she doesn't answer. She won't mind. She lets me do what I wanna do most of the time.

\* \* \*

I TAKE THE BOOMBOX, and we go to a basketball field. There's a green fence, in a rectangle, and inside is painted lines, and old looking toilets with nets. I've never watched basketball, but I know they shoot balls into toilet looking things and everybody cheers. Why not just play football? Basketball sounds ridiculous.

I set the boombox down, and Michael, cause he told me his name is Michael like some famous basketball guy, takes a ball out of his bag. It looks like a tiger rolled up. Michael starts throwing the ball at the hoop, and I press play on the boombox. I hear the eeeeeewwww of Stir it Up, by Bob Marley, and I get excited. Michael nods his head.

"I like this. This sound like something from pot heads. You guys are getting it with this, man." I smile. Michael tries to show me how to... shoot the basketball. I

never hit the toilet bowl. “It don’t matter, it’s your first day. And you brought a good song. Play it again!” I run fast to the boombox and rewind back to the beginning of Stir it Up. This time Michael swing his dreads back and forth, and I dance.

“Is that how you dance in Jamaica, man?” He’s laughing, but I like the way he moving with his hair, so I let him take another... shot... with the basketball, then I grab him by the arm like he grabbed me earlier.

“Ow! What? Whatchoo want?”

“You dance? Come on!” I show him how to stir it up. You move your hips, swing your head, like he was doin, and you swing your arms. My mama loves to stir it up. Michael laughs at first, but then he starts to stir it up too, and I think he likes it. Then, halfway through, he says:

“Alright I’m done. Can’t nobody be seen dancing out here like this.”

“But you like dancing, Michael. Don’t you?”

“Yeah but... not like that.” I stop dancing and run over to turn off the music. “But hey...what’s your name again?” I don’t look at his face. I’m embarrassed... I thought he was enjoying dancing.

“Benny.”

“Okay. Benny, maybe next time. I like dancing, but... I mean honestly, you’re a great dancer. It’s just me. I gotta work on my steps.”

\* \* \*

WE RUN BACK TO MY APARTMENT as it's getting really dark, darker than I've ever been out without Mama. It feels cold, and I get afraid, cause I don't remember how to get back. Michael tells me he knows the way, and he makes me feel better. We reach my apartment, and my mama looks down from above. She's not angry. She's smiling, and she asks for Micheal's name.

"My name is Michael, ma'am." His accent sounds different when he talks to Mama. It sounds softer.

"Michael. Thank you for taking my son home. He would have been lost--"

"Mom! I would have been fine!"

"No, you wouldn't have, Benny! Thank your friend!" Embarrassed, again.

But I smile as I see Michael smiling at me. I thank him.

\* \* \*

I TRY TO CREEP OUT of the apartment the next morning, but Mama sturs at the wrong moment, and I make a face as she calls out like a bird: "Where are you going, Benny, Benny, Benny? Come here, let me say goodbye." I walk into her bedroom.

"Bye, Mama--"

"Not yet, Benny. Mama wants to ask you something." Oh lord. "You proud to be from where you are?"

"Oh Mama--"

"You're Jamaican. That should make you proud. You're different, but we all are."

“Yes, Mom.” I try to pull away.

“We’re not done, Benny.” Oh Lord, Oh Lord. “Look at me. Look at me, child.” She got that look in her eye. Ooo it’s hard to look her in the eye these moments. It’s like looking at a tiger.

“Yes, Mama...”

“Be proud of who you are. You are Jamaican. You are sensitive. You are sweet, an artist, Benny.”

“Okay, Mom.”

“Bring that to the world.”

“Okay, Mom.” She grins, nodding her soft head. Her hair bobs. Like a bird sitting on water.

“Okay, give me a kiss. You better make it a three or four second one.”

“Oh Mom, I don’t have time--”

“Then you’ll have to finish it off on Michael--”

“Oh Mom!”

“Come on, sweetheart.” She looks so, so amused as she pulls me in towards the bed, and I kiss her. She has a different look in her eye. Like she knows something I don’t. Mama’s always one step ahead. Sometimes I think I hate that. Sometimes... I think I love that about Mamas.

\* \* \*

I'm not sure I'll see Michael at the basketball field, but I hear the ball as I get close-- boom, boom, and then swish! Or boom, boom, bonk! I bet it's Michael. I bet it's him. Oh please, oh please, God... yes! It is him! Yes!

Benny! He says. Come on, man, come shoot with me! I run over, and he passes me the ball. I miss many throws, and then I tell him I'm okay for now, and I pass it back. He laughs and keeps running, jumping and throwing.

"You have a dad, Benny?"

"When I was little. He was eaten by a machine in a factory."

"You mean he's dead?"

"Yes. I used to be so sad, but now I'm okay just with my mama." Michael holds the ball for a long time and doesn't move very much, except the wind leans him and he pushes back to stand.

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I don't want a dad. My uncle tries to be my dad, and he hurts me a lot. Dads are probably just mean." Michael throws the ball hard and it goes over the fence.

"Shit!" He stomps his foot. I say that I'll get it, but he asks me to stay. "No, just leave it for a second." Michael sits down on the ground, and I do too. "I don't know about all dads, Benny. Uncles... I don't know. Some dads... I don't know, man." He picks up a little rock and throws it over the fence.

"Some dads are better off dead."

“Jesus, what are you, a psycho?” I say no, but some dads should be dead, right? Bad dads? Mean dads? “I mean... some dads.”

“You like your dad, Michael?” Michael picks up and drops little rocks. He smooches them with his hand. Seems like he’s hurting himself more than the rocks.

“Yeah. Of course. He’s my dad. I feel bad you don’t have one.”

\* \* \*

IN THE AFTERNOON, we’re walking back to my apartment. I am thinking about how I am going to say goodbye to Michael. I don’t want to. As we get close, I see my uncle standing outside of my apartment, looking dizzy.

He bangs at the door, yelling and saying terrible things. My aunt is shouting from the second floor, and my mother is looking out from the third floor.

“Go walk it off, Leonard! I’m not gonna let you around the children in this rage you’re in--”

“Fuck you! Open the door!” My uncle is screaming so that the whole street can hear.

Mama looks out and sees Michael and me walking up. She shakes her head, and makes her lips say run. Michael puts his hand on my shoulder and pulls me a little bit, making me walk faster, down the street, away from the apartment. I think my uncle sees my mama’s eyes, cause he sees us now.

“Hey!” He screams and screams and screams. Michael pushes me and we start running. I hear my mama screaming at us to run, run away. Uncle says he’s

gonna kill us, and I believe him, I believe him. Michael keeps pushing me, and we turn corners and run and run till my uncle is far behind us. I start crying when we stop. I cry and cry, and I'm so embarrassed. Michael doesn't want a friend who's crying. I am a baby.

I feel an arm brush my back, and then lay on me.

"It's okay Benny. We're okay." It is Michael's softer voice, the one that he used with mama. "I got you." I put my head in his chest and my whole-body tingles and goes hot as I feel the rolling of his muscles, the hard stuff underneath, and the soft stuff on top.

I sniffle. "Thank--you..."

"You can stay with me and my parents tonight, Benny. I don't think your mom will mind."

\* \* \*

MICHAEL WALKS BESIDE ME, putting his arm around me sometimes to help me. I don't need all the help, but I like when he touches me. I feel safe.

His apartment is a white building, with four floors. It's quiet outside, and I wonder if it is as quiet inside. It looks cold... with black shutters and a black roof shiny like clamshell.

When we walk in, it's freezing. And bright. And shiny. It's white everywhere, with black and silver. Like it's the future.

A white woman with black hair stands in a corner of the room, talking on a phone. She nods at Michael, smiles a little bit at me, and her lips say she's talking to someone. She walks to a different room.

A black man is sitting at a table. He's looking at a computer screen with a lot of words. Michael and I walk up to the sitting man. Then the man talks.

"Hey, Mike. There's something in the fridge for dinner. I'm working. Okay? And yeah, your friend can stay for a while too. When your mom's off the phone I bet she'll show you the food. Oh, and keep it down up there, too. Grandma might be sleeping on the third floor... and plus I have a call at eight. Love you." Michael starts a little smile, but it goes away. He opens his mouth too, but he says nothing, and puts his lips back closed.

"Hi, sir." I say. The man talks.

"Hi. Eat whatever you want." The man must not like me, because he doesn't look at me. But he doesn't look at Michael, either. Maybe he doesn't need to look at him to tell him that he loves him.

Michael takes me to his apartment, on the fourth floor. He has his own floor! We go to his bedroom, but I bet there are rooms and rooms and rooms for him to play in. His bedroom has a lot of toys, piled up in boxes next to a big television. He has a bed too. It's got white sheets and a grey sheet on top. There are big windows, and the whole room is as big as the kitchen at home. All the walls are white. This

must be what American money buys here. Michael's family probably has a lot of money.

"I bought this yesterday with some money I found in the kitchen." He shows me a CD. Bob Marley. "I've been listening to it. Listen." He puts the CD in a big boombox, and I hear eeeewww and he plays Stir It Up.

He starts messing with the television. He hands me a controller, like for video games. We start playing a video game for basketball, then we play a game with cars. He keeps changing the game. I'm having a lot of fun, and I'm winning a lot of games. The screen says player two wins! Player two wins! I hope Michael likes that I'm good at this. I am good at some things. I didn't know I was good at these video games, because Mama never got me video games. I just see kids on television playing video games. I win this game, and I win that game, and I keep winning until I make Michael mad, and I wish I hadn't.

"Fuck!" Michael throws the controller against the television. Then he hits me in the stomach, and I'm really surprised. I try to do nothing. But as I wait, sitting there, my belly really, really hurts. I get so angry. I don't know what I'm doing. I hit Michael in the face, and he gets a red spot. He screams and we start fighting. I'm hitting him, but I don't want to. I would hate to hurt him, so I stop fighting very quickly, and let him hit me as much as he wants to not be angry anymore.

"Fight!" He yells at me. I say no, I don't want to fight.

He yells, walks to the wall, and hits it. He does it again, then again. Then he falls to the floor and holds his hand and he starts crying and crying... and crying and crying. Not loud. Soft. Like a baby who's cried all day long. Like a baby who just wants to fall asleep.

“Hey!” A voice is booming from outside the room. It comes closer and closer until I see Michael's dad running in. What did I tell you? He yells. As loud as my uncle. I've never heard a man yell as loud as my uncle. The man grabs Michael, and my body feels so cold. He throws Michael onto the floor. Michael's eyes are so red, but he's not crying. Don't hurt him! Don't hurt him!

“Don't hurt him--”

“Shut up!” The man is angry at me, too. I'm scared, but I crawl over to Michael and I lift my hands out, protecting him, and ask his dad to give us another chance. “You little shits are too loud! Michael--” the man pushes me away harder than I've ever felt someone push me before. I feel so much air come out of my belly it's like an ocean coming out, and all of the sky, from my mouth.

The man yells at Michael, and I watch. I can't see what's going on in his mind, but he looks blank... like this has happened many times before. I don't know what to do. I just watch.

\* \* \*

“CAN YOU TURN OFF THE LIGHT, Benny?” Michael asks me. He's ready to sleep. I think that's the first thing he's said since his dad left the room an hour ago. I

get up from the bed and turn off the light, then return and lay down next to him.

“Thanks.” He rolls over and I think he’s asleep. I stay on my back.

“I’m sorry my dad pushed you, Benny.” I tell him that it’s okay. Michael lays there. Then he jumps out of bed and turns on the light. “Is it okay, Benny?”

“It’s okay, Michael.”

“Is it?” He’s whispering hard, so it’s more breath than his voice. He jumps in bed next to me and stares at me hard. It looks like he’s been crying a little bit this whole time. “You shouldn’t ever want to come over here again...You’re-- you’re the first person to stand up for me against my dad. And him pushing you was so off... so uncalled for so... so wrong! I shoulda known that he would do something stupid. It’s my fault. I’m so sorry, Benny....” Michael looks really hurt. He’s trying to look at me but he’s having trouble.

“I’m sorry, Michael... I’m sorry your daddy is mean to you sometimes. I mean... I don’t get how he could be mean to you--”

“It’s cause he doesn’t like me--”

“He’s stupid.” Hmmm... I don’t think I should say that because the man is still Michael’s dad. “But he’s a good dad...”

“No, he’s not, Benny. Yeah? What makes him stupid?” I make a face like I’m thinking, but Michael says again and again, tell me, tell me.

“He wears stupid clothes.” I say, and Michael laughs. I’m so happy to see him laugh. “He has a weird haircut. I don’t like his shoes. He looks weird when he yells,

and his eyes look like he's a fish. He's too loud, and I don't like the way he walks. He runs like he's a pig. I bet he crawls up the stairs so you don't hear him. He tried to sneak up on us. He's a little shit." Michael starts laughing really hard and I do too. We're smiling at each other and having a good time. Then I think that I want to say something else. I feel like I haven't told him everything... the biggest reason that his daddy is stupid. More than cause of his clothes and his shoes and his run and all....

"And, you know... he's stupid because he can't see that he can't treat you like that. He can treat me like that, but he should love you, so much. If I were your dad, you would know. You would know how much I love you. I don't understand why-- stupid old shit face-- doesn't love you so much more...." I've gone way too far. Oh boy have I gone way too far.

Michael doesn't say anything, and it feels like I'm dying inside. I'm more embarrassed than when Mom says I don't know my way home. I know my goddamned way home, Mom. And now, I'm humiliated. Michael probably thinks I'm a freak or a weirdo or something. He stays quiet for so long. I think about walking out of the room cause I bet he thinks I'm weirder than any person he's ever met, but finally he says something.

"Is it hot in here? My God it's like I'm in a bucket of fried chicken." He pushes on my shoulder and grins at me like he's doing something naughty. "You wanna go sleep over there? In the seat thing in front of the window? There's probably a breeze." He gets out of bed and pulls me with him. There is room in

front of the window with space to fit three or four people, sitting up. He sits on one side, feeling the wind, and I sit on the other side. It's true. There's a warm breeze coming in, and you can hear the cars and the birds and people walking by talking and smoking cigarettes and coughing and getting into cars and all that.

"Benny, can you come over here with me?" I feel a tingle in my stomach and then I feel hot. I nod my head, and I sit next to him. I have to brush up against him cause we're taking up a lot of space in the corner. He puts his arm around me, then I feel his head touch mine. He breathes out deep like a lion going to sleep for a while. I still hear the people outside and feel the breeze from the summer sky.

\* \* \*

I CAN GIVE LONG KISSES to anybody. Because Mama likes long kisses. If I don't give her three or four seconds, I gotta pass on some kissing to someone else. Mama got two seconds today cause I was hurrying to see Michael. So, it seems fair for Michael to pay me back for that... doesn't it?

So, I kiss him. I give him a second. Now he's paid back. Then I give him another second. Then another. I'm giving him all my kisses for tomorrow. Then the next day. Then maybe the next day too...? I can't stop. I thought kisses were terrible... but this is amazing. Shit, if these are all kisses, I have to make up to Mama, I'm gonna be kissing her all night! Hopefully she'll never find out. And then this is just between me and Michael. Lord, I hope so. And if not... well... maybe she'll

understand. Maybe she'll think it's funny... or maybe she'll think it's sad... or maybe she'll think it's... something that makes me beautiful.

## The Promise of Sunlight

*Ifesinachi Nwadike*

**M**y body is a mobile mortuary  
My flesh is but a masking tape  
On the rotten carcass of my inside

The scars on my body  
Are incisions; calligraphies of pain  
Each, a label of anguish

The lines on my palms  
Are cartographies; the lane sorrow took  
Into my veins & blood cells

My eyes are black mirrors  
In them are dim lights of insanity  
Dancing on the debris of dead dreams

II

**M**any times, I have swallowed fire  
But Job's sperm breeds in me still

Tomorrow, I shall catch the sun  
And hide it in the backyard of my palms  
For I am indifferent to pains

I, in the vestiges of pitch darkness  
Waiting, the promise of sunlight, respite

## Cuckoos

*Pamilerin Jacob*

Ever since the deaths started  
I have been learning to build silence  
the way one builds a house—fragments  
of the world laid atop another, until  
thick enough to resist the cold. And  
though my refuge is in the triple jewel,  
I am not insulated from ululations

pouring in from around the globe —Ecuador,  
Kano, Italy, Lagos.

This world, a fractured shin  
unable to bear its own weight.

But there is no end to hope,  
the cuckoos tell me. Annihilation

precedes grace. Look, my bones  
are blooming already, flowers at each end  
like Aaron's rod. We are swelling  
into accomplishment. At the root

of our anguish, a nest of birds  
ready to infect the air with  
delight.

## Story of the Well

*Nyamwa*

It often seems sacred- the well  
face upon face has it seen  
desire, hatred, pain  
sadness, hurt, vengeance  
jealousy, anger, fear  
greed, evil  
Good

Love, peace, calm  
joy, happiness  
all  
on the faces  
looking down on it  
yet  
looks the same  
aging with all  
memories and mysteries  
Good

The well knows  
but it won't tell  
at least not  
in our tongue.

**L**OOKED DOWN. There seemed to be another looking at me. As if they were trying to call to me, reach to me, without saying a single word. There was a serene silence and yet a voice speaking to me. It was queer. I pulled back slightly and steadied my grip on the concrete. I was afraid a force would pull me in. Mama said I

should never support myself on the round log that sat on the two opposite Y-shaped wooden posts. On the log was a near brown thick rope with one end tied to the metal handle of a plastic bucket. They tell of the incidence of the woman who had held onto the rope for support when she tripped on a stone. The rope unwound itself from the log with the force exerted by the weight of her body and she dropped into the distant stillness of the hollow. The rotating handle at one end had in turn hit her husband's head unconscious. The children playing in the fields nearby had called out for help. The villagers lowered the strongest man to pull her out. When they got her to the surface, she was unresponsive and were it not for Mila, Mzee Hekima's daughter, the woman would have died.

Mila had been visiting from the city. I still do not know why it is called visiting when she grew up here. It should rather be *had return home for a while*. Yet, this was not home for her anymore. Before that fateful day, Mila was one thing to everyone - she was the girl who liked other women. I had heard Mama speak about her with her friends; they wondered how she would marry another woman. What would Mzee Hekima do with her? When they found out that Mila had been cast out of her family, they were happy. They said that their children would no longer be in danger. I asked Mama if Mila's liking women was contagious; she said yes. Since then, I became afraid of liking Ichi my neighbour so much. Ichi is a girl I grew up with. We went to school together, played together and went to church together. Now that we were older, we debated about things together as well. Ichi likes a boy called Bima.

She had told me this at dawn when we met at the well. I do not like him, but I did not tell her.

Mzee Hekima is not a church elder. He does not go from house to house praying for people. I am certain that it is because no one has invited him to their house yet. All the same, he attends all the prayer meetings. He is often called upon to share a testimony during these gatherings. The leaders at my local church choose specific people to give testimonies. They are afraid that some people might shake the beliefs of people. On one particular Sunday, a woman had been called upon. She talked about how her father had struggled with an illness and died. This was despite her long fasting and praying. She did not conclude with phrases such as, “he is better off in heaven without pain” or “the timing of one greater than us all is the best.” A week later, a significant number of people had gathered at the woman’s house; others busy in their farms, leaving the church to mostly children – they make porridge and ‘andazi’ for the children at the church. It took intervention from the church leaders to get the members back to church.

A couple of days after Mila’s graduation at the university, there were prayers at Mzee Hekima’s home. Mama made sure I attended. Ichi was there too. Mzee Hekima used half the time to talk about Mila’s experience at university. How he had sold pieces of land he had inherited to pay her school fees. Mama said Mzee Hekima came from a family that did not own any land. She also said the whole village would have known if he had come across any large amounts of money. I shrugged it off. I

thought a parent was capable of saying anything in their moment of pride. Mzee Hekima said Hakiba was not a viable candidate for marrying Mila. People laughed haughtily at the joke. I wondered what the joke was. “He is marking territories,” Ichi whispered into my ear after she saw the utter disbelief on my face. There was no difference: just like my grandmother's husband was chosen for her, so was Mila's. He was being vetted on this day and on many more to come. He had to be educated, living in the city, earning more than Mila was expected to and above all be of the same tribe. Hakiba did not fit any of those traits, Mzee Hekima had said.

Hakiba is Bima's elder brother. I like him. He is a hardworking artist. He is a carpenter - the only one in our village. Hakiba's workshop is south of the well and next to the cattle dip. His mother is my role model. We do not talk about role models at home. I said that at school one day and the teacher asked me why Mama Hakiba was my role model. I did not have an answer. She had raised her children without a husband. Mama said that it was bad for a woman to live without a husband, especially if it was by choice. Mama Hakiba does not go to church. She is my role model because everything that I thought could not be done, she does. She is a happy woman. Women do not gather around her house like they do often at my home. Hakiba is much like her. He has even built a house for his family. I envy his ability to create with his hands. I do not know if Hakiba knows what Mzee Hekima said about him.

People in my village are different but we all go to the well. We go there every morning to get water. We go there when we are frustrated to talk to the nothing. Hakiba used to go to the well at noon to meet Mila before she went off to University. They do not do that anymore. I go to the well in the evening with Mama. She says it will save time and avoid gossip. Mzee Hekima comes in the afternoon to get water for his cattle. Mama Hakiba and her sons are always the first at the well.

I do not notice that she has walked up to and reached me. She holds my arm and I jerk away, putting out my hand towards the round log. The thick brown rope does not unwind. Mama is holding me firmly. “I thought I told you to never sit there again. Even the sane ones falter,” she says calmly.

“Mama,” I say still a little startled, “how many faces has the well seen?”

“I don’t know,” she says.

“Do you think it has seen all of ours?” I ask.

“All I know is that the well knows.”

## ABOUT CONTRIBUTORS

**Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah** is a Ghanaian Technology/Smartphone Habitué, an Award-Winning Poet and a Creative. Tsiwah reads and edits Poetry for *Lunaris Review*. His works have appeared in respected creative journals/magazines across the globe. Abeiku protracts his imaginations via creative voodooism in Cape Coast - his fatherland.

**Bryan Joe Okwesili** is a chocolate loving realist. A poet and storyteller keen on telling diverse African stories. His stories have appeared on *Brittle paper*, *Expound*, *KalahariReview*, *African Writers* and elsewhere. He is currently a student of law at the University of Calabar, Calabar. You can follow him on twitter @meet\_bryan\_ or Instagram @meet\_bryan

**Clayton Musick** was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He is class of [2020](#) at Miami University in Ohio, with a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and a minor in European Area Studies. He was a radio talk show host during college, as well as a study abroad student in Luxembourg, where he took classes at the Château de Differdange. He's sung and played piano and guitar for nine years. As a writer, he writes to bring hope. He writes to show love and acceptance. He writes to show the beauty of difference, and the power of unity.

**Daniel Asamoah Yeboah** (a.k.a. Coby Daniels) a Ghanaian poet and spoken word artiste, and a graduate of the University of Cape Coast where he was also president of the Creative Writers Club. He has performed severally on University of Cape Coast Theatre stage as well as at Moonlight Cafe, Verbz Cafe, Indigenious Minds. His writings have featured in online literary magazines including issue one and two of *Lunaris Review* as well as *From the Motherland* and very recently in *Tampered*

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**Ebuka Prince Okoroafor** is a Nigerian Medical Student. His work has appeared in *Litro USA*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Afreada*, *African Writer* and elsewhere. He has been awarded the Green Author Prize for poetry 2017, The 2019 Sevhave Short Story Prize, and his work will be included in the 2020 Best Small Fictions Anthology. Find him on IG @show\_fantastic

**Ernie Brill** earned his BA and MA in English at San Francisco State College. His collection *I Looked Over Jordan and Other Stories* (Boston: South End Press, 1980), explores race and class in city hospitals. Ruby Dee performed one story, “Crazy Hattie Enters the Ice Age” for PBS TV. He received a New York Arts Council Fiction Grant. Brill publishes fiction and poetry in America and Canada (River Styx, Other Voices, Ice Floe Press (Toronto) and others. He’s writing a novel about the San Francisco State Strike Against Racism that won the world’s first School of Ethnic Studies.

**Ifesinachi Nwadike** is a rapper, essayist, poet and playwright whose works have appeared in *Ake Review*, *ANA Review*, *The Sun Review*, *Praxis Magazine*, *Ngiga Review*, *Black Boy Review*, *African Writer* and a host of other credible magazines. A 2018 Ebedi International Writer's Residency Alumni, he's the author of *How Morning Remembers the Night*, a collection of poems on memory and grief. He is the Founding Editor of *Ngiga Review* and the Co-Facilitator of Ngiga Book Club. He lives and works in Lagos.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Sim Fronteras*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Qwerty* with works upcoming in *Blueline*, *Willard and Maple*, and *Red Coyote*.

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**Nenyi Ato Bentum** is an art admirer who writes poetry – for its aesthetic essence and cultural values. The language of poetry – metaphors – attracts him to get closer to this genre of art.

**Nicksha T. Mwanandimayi** was born in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1985, a recipient of the Junior Budding Writers Association Award, he was featured in local magazines and was editor of *The Johnian Echo*. He published *Epitah: Memoirs of a Cymbal*, which was ranked 16th in the Poetry genre on Amazon on 6 January 2020.

**Nnadi Samuel** is a 20year old graduate of English & literature from the University of Benin. His works have previously published in *Libretto Magazine*, *Artifact magazine*, *Inverse Journal*, *Awakening Review*, *The Collidescope*, *Jams & Sand magazine*, and elsewhere. He got shortlisted in the annual Poet's Choice writing & was the 2nd prize winner of the EOPP [2019](#) contest. If he is not writing, you find him reading out memes on Facebook @Samuel Samba.

**Nyamwa** is an art enthusiast. A firm believer in the power of words. She writes and reads to keep sane in this rowdy world. Her lifetime goal is to ensure that stories are told so that they never die.

**Mbizo Chirasha** is the Poet in Residence at the Fictional Café. 2019 Sotambe Festival Live Literature Hub and Poetry Café Curator. 2019 African Fellow for the International Human Rights Art Festival, Essays

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**Okenyi Sunday Chinweike** is a 300level law student of the University of Ibadan, Oyo State. Chinweike is an essayist, social critic, a researcher, and an avid reader. While in secondary school, Chinweike developed an uncommon interest in reading historical books. His current interest however, cuts across politics, culture, international law and human rights law. He believes that art can be brought to life when it reflects people's experiences. It is on this belief that he found all his writings. Some of Chinweike's works have been published in some online blogs and journals.

**Pamilerin Jacob** is a Nigerian poet whose poems have appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *Agbowó*, *Poetry Potion*, *Ghost City Press*, *Elsieisy*, *Rattle&* elsewhere. He was the second runner-up for *Sevhage Poetry Prize 2019*. Author of the chapbook, *Gospels of Depression*; he is a staunch believer in the powers of critical thinking, Khalil Gibran's poetry & chocolate ice-cream. Reach him on Twitter @pamilerinjacob.

**Patrick Kelling** received his doctorate in Creative Writing from the University of Denver. He currently lives and works in Longmont, Colorado. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and to Best New American Voices.

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**Torkwase Igbana** is a young Nigerian writer who is infinitely intrigued by words. She loves the magic of storytelling and chocolates. She draws her light from laughter and people's stories. She represents the nuanced stories of people in her art. Her works have appeared in the 2017 edition of *Association of Nigerian Authors Anthology*, 2019 *Bodies and Scars Anthology* and *Praxis Magazine*.

## CALL FOR SUBMISSION

Art is sudden, almost forceful in creation; its offerings are subtle, but never transient.

- Dami Lare

*Lunaris Review: a journal of Art and the Literary* is open for submissions for its Thirteenth Issue. It seeks unpublished works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and visual art. Kindly visit our submissions page at <http://review.lunaris.com.ng/submission-guidelines/> for guidelines and our Facebook page *Lunaris Review* for further details. All submissions should be sent to [submit@lunaris.com.ng](mailto:submit@lunaris.com.ng)

Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing. - Benjamin Franklin