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FOREWORD

*...On rainy mornings
I want to be the poet
with a lover
in my arms,
and a poem
on my lips...*

The above lines from Fatima Shahzad's poem, "Musings", is one of the multiple reasons I can't deny myself the ever-longing, ever-belonging and the ever-growing exuberance in this Issue Nine of Lunariss Review.

Gathering muscles and skins out of dried and wet tongues, Lunariss Review has since its inception set itself apart in terms of how a journal's artistic and aesthetic bountifulness should be stared at in binoculars of magic and splendour – leaving the cosmos of the literatures longing for more.

What we cannot deny every writer in this present globalized acquiescence of flair is that uniqueness a particular voice and style comes with. And this vanguard is what Lunariss Review as a body of literature encompasses its conscience with.

From the star-like spark in the work of Ogochukwu Nwafor downstream to the pilomotor reflex in the work of Eniola Cole, there is a slice of glee and quizzing introspection in every work that firms its soul in Lunariss Review's Issue Nine.

Dear reader, this issue is for you and yours only; it was with this transporting readership that this has come into bearing with harmony and publication.

Abeiku Arhin Tsiwah

University of Cape Coast,
Ghana.

Dancing in the Jungle Maze

by

Ugochukwu P. Nwafor

What enchants my ear the most is not the chattering of children frolicking around our street in their unrestrained circles of delight. It is neither the blaring of distant automobile horns nor the usual raucous voice of mobs lynching a heist culprit. “*Naso! No mercy for am o!*” Not even the incandescent roar of thunderclaps on rainy nights. It's the forgotten waves. The vibrations of minute worlds, and what they stand for in the castle of my ever pliant psyche.

“TicK-tocK...ticK-tocK,” the dining clock indicates time. But not for me. Not from my seat in the balcony, and certainly not when all I see is a marching band in costume, gyrating to a beat of sequence. “TicK-tocK...ticK-tocK”.

A sharp flutter of wings by my window at dawn usually spells awakening as though the universe, like a dying fire, is being fanned back to life. Incessant chirps at dusk may woo a female cricket into enticing chambers, but for me, it's prophecy—announcing an approaching darkness. Nightfall. It's the sound of raindrops, which unites my surviving senses in blissful harmony as it plunges into a puddle.

Grandmother often told me: “The world you were born into was not good enough for you to see, you must create a colourful world for yourself Ugonwanne, and that is your task”. Although, I so much wished to, I never saw her face and could never have, but her grey voice still resonates the message across worlds into my dreams. “A-fricayuhnite!” appealed Bob Marley from the woofers of a costermonger of audio tapes passing through our street. “When will God the father remember motherland?” despaired Dad inaudibly in his room. “Now!” I screamed hilariously from my old cane armchair in the balcony, “I think He even lives in motherland as all over the world, maybe it is Africa that needs to find him.”

—go, go, go—

by

Henneh Kyereh Kwaku

I built a home for you
around my home
I know you love tree houses
—I let the weeds grow
into a comfy house for you
I know you love to water ski
—there is a big pool in the house too

I have danced to your melodies
and clapped along
have I burnt enough calories?
I'm sweating already
My body is on fire and vibrating
to your beats—but my soul is icy



Aquatic Testament

by

Ladipo Ademola

Viscous reflection of divine,
Washing my tears away.
Water!
To life, you lubricate my way.
Will you still wash my temple to grave?
First created creating creations.
And the first shall come the last.
Flowing ancient of days,
In your rumble is the voice of God.

Zygote?
Here was once my shade:
Semen, sweat, spit
Mucus, tears, blood.
Vocal aquarium I am.
Colourless?
She tickle the greens to grin.

Sacred fleet of stairs.
Through you, dust ascend to man.
Through you, man descend to dust.

Mixed Fruit

by

Ian C. Smith

I hold time in memory with these scenes, sounds, words.
A sadist slams on my old door, hears no reply from me.
Unafraid in a misfit's clothes that no longer fit
I cross a rail yard, bluestone screenings, see
pigeons on the tiles, a line-up murmuring Who's guilty?
A perspective of power poles march into the future
piloting a freed boy into the rest of his story,
betrayal, bad beginnings, sad wasted days, behind.

On foot I home in on a girl who writes letters of love,
a litany of words aching on creased paper, as good
as breathing this petrol redolent movie scene morning.
Embarrassed by a haircut I buy fruit watched as if
I were an escapee, true from my fresh point of view
lingering among abundance, colours and scents,
until sidelong glances propel me on my quest.
A steeped throb, dewdrop of longing, a dazzle. Young.

Slow, silvery, I walk, a grace of swans, sky, gods,
impatient with worrying about death in the distance,
weathered, weighted by a clamorous past,
from the pits of freedom denied to wind on my face.

I would claw back up time's frozen chute, burst free
to oxygen-packed inkings, horizons, today and tomorrow.
I breathe in a banana from a bowl of mixed fruit,
words on paper, young hearts crying, miles of road ahead.

Makurdi, the Unfortunate Ones

by

Lyambee Sade Aorabee

When you think of Makurdi, think first of fruiting palm kernel trees, frothing palm wine, and ochre burnt bricks. Or think of the *Mai-Runa* pushing his water merchandise through the corrugated nooks of Wurukum. You, my friend, must also think of the Idoma women limping from the pains of cracked soles as they cross Naka Road under slumping sacks of rice to the threshing mill in Mobile Barracks.

I found, when I first came to this town, that the beggars and *almajiris* here are brash and bold. They snort at measly alms and hurl invectives when denied leftovers. They are violent sometimes. In the Benue Links motor park and Wadata Market which they frequent, these filthy child beggars throw themselves at alighting passengers and passersby. Sometimes – they pick things from the ground, like sugarcane stumps and iron fillings, gon-goni tomatoes or Geisha.

Wadata Market is like a multi-coloured collage. Or a paper montage. Too many things merged in one piece, yet writhing with life: a sea of bobbing heads,

mounds of second-hand clothes in colourful heaps, and rude motorcycles weaving through the throng of traders. Years and years of economic osmosis; scrambling masses in clusters jam-packed inside the few *molues*, hoping on and off the moving beast, tous calling: Northbank! Northbank! BSU Gates! Ostrich! The university undergraduates flirt with Bajaj motorcycles and C1. They ride these metallic beasts standing, their testicles swinging and beating against trouser and wind.

In Makurdi, I usually urinate from the window of my room because of what happened one day. I woke up one night needing to pee badly and ran to the yard, into the cluster of stunted palm kernel trees. As I squatted, loosening the rope of my trousers, someone almost knocked me down and scampered over the fence. I tried to run away but I was right in the middle of peeing and could not stop it. I shove in my half-erect penis into a trouser leg, and the pee trickled down my thighs, wetting my trousers. I was already in the room when I noticed this: that I have not only peed on myself, but have also pinched a little flesh off my penis as I zipped the fly of my trousers. It hurt badly.

In the morning, I noticed that when the thieves could not move the desired object of theft, they tried to spoil it before going. Like my goat, Bambi. Out of exasperation, the wretched thieves who couldn't haul the stalwart beast over the fence blinded its eye with a nail; two quick jabs to the eyeball. The goat gave a shout of joy, and managed a vicious bite. Startled, the thieves bolted, hacking off both rear mirrors of my Uncle's Peugeot parked in the compound. They were hopeless those thieves.

In this nervous city, waiting to be provoked by the slightest tic, the cult boys are like a gumboil to be caressed with the tip of the tongue. These marijuana-addled bums in the neighbourhood of Northbank have taken monopoly of some dress colour codes; so it has become a norm that terrible violence awaits any sassy passer-by who by chance wears a dress with as much as a red, yellow strip. Unless you are zooming off on a motorcycle or a car, *you will suffer for their hand o*, you will suffer very well, I tell you. But then, the victims of this terrorism are university undergrads, loafers who are perceived as rivalry cult boys. However, one cannot fathom the extent to which cheap weed has muddled the hollow skulls of these miscreants. So, my friend, to preserve life and limb, it is best to avoid such areas if you happen to be wearing a yellow or red clothing at that intersection of the street.

II

Makurdi is quiet some times, and it is easy to breathe here. The minutes merge seamlessly into hours like a loop, especially during the heat waves. In rainy weather, the streets turn to red slop and grass grow in small clumps.

First, the waters flow solemnly; streamlets trickling in from creeks and swamps. Then the deluges: two successive showers, and the rice shoots are tugged from their roots. The bamboo stalks, tall as they are, sway and crumble. The day dawns with the cries of a woman whose baby has been drowned. Or lost belongings buried in the rubble. In the rice plains, a disheartened farmer walks, hands folded at the back, surveying the extent of damage. He picks a shoot and stares long at it, stoops to replant it, but on second thought flings it away.

The Fulani herdsmen would shift north, into Taraba, their cows mooning for greener pastures. Homeless peasants would start trickling into the granite corridors of International Market for shelter.

Enthusiastic photographers invade the camp, clicking away at glum faces, and consequently, horrid images start to flood the media. First, it is the picture of a toothless old woman flanked by two relatives who carry her to the camp on the back. In another, a vivid Polaroid, an emaciated child raises skinny hands to grab a pitcher of water.

Then the government would come to their aid: beans and bread, soap and rice, mosquito nets and *wrappas* for all. Naira for every pockets, shelter and aid. Political aspirants too would weasel their way into the hearts of gullible people, with bags of Premium Parboiled Rice and cartons of Indomie Instant Noodles, making sure to rear their head and smile elegantly into the camera lens. Hon. Kpojime J.P for the people!

Musings

by

Fatima Shahzad

Some autumn evenings
I wish to walk
with a poet
through yellowed woods
and orange leaves,
and sync with his sighs
my heartbeats;

On rainy mornings
I want to be the poet
with a lover
in my arms,
and a poem
on my lips.



ART
2016

Clouds

by

DJ Tyrer

Grey-black clouds bruise the horizon
A rain-cheque that's never cashed
A hollow threat to a weather eye
A promise repeatedly broken
Day ends as dry as it began

The Call

by

Gen KingPin

Because of the sheer serenity and calmness here at the garden today, we had stayed longer than usual. The radiation from the empyreal ball was thwarted by the uneven, mildly-saturated grey clouds that laced the blue sky, and as every second went by, I enjoyed nothing less than the usual satisfaction with my wife's company.

She was six months out – with our first pregnancy. And soon, the patter of little feet would be complimenting the sound of toys in our home. I returned from the north-east last week, after several successful counter-attack operations against the terrorists. My superior officers had ensured that I'd be off-duty for the next nine months.

“I am glad,” she murmured, running her palm across my head, back and forth, “I won't be alone during her birth.”

“Not as glad as I am. I want to see my baby immediately he breathes his first.”

“I prayed against your absence,” away from me, she stared at the dancing branches of the kernel trees as the breeze took its toll. “I guess my prayer was answered,” she returned her gaze. “I never knew you'd be released so soon.”

“Nothing compares to being with you,” I said. “You do know how much I cherish us.”

With smiles broadening her cheeks, she murmured: “I know,” and paused, looking directly into my eyes “as hell”.

I was basking in her pristine beauty, as her lips danced in chitchat with me. She would always keep gists for me whenever I was on call, and pour them down on my arrival. Who else could have been her better gist mate? Placing my right palm on her protruding belly: “She just kicked”, she said with a chuckle.

“He kicked?” I asked with a tinge of sarcasm.

She jacked my hand backward and huffed: “She!” her mien was laced with peevishness, “It's a she! A female! We talked about this, right? You'd not argue.”

“Right!” I said, raising my right hand up half-way in a mild majestic salute.

She giggled, and placed her head on my 900 millimeter-wide chest: “You are still as naughty as I met you two years ago, boy.”

“And you are still as pretty as I met you two years and two months ago, small mum.”

She smiled coyly; she appreciated, not the 'pretty' part, but the 'small mum' part, and that would always earn me an extra kiss, with the length of lips-lock to be

determined by her. She raised her head now and galloped her upper body closer; I was almost kissing her when I noticed the sudden change on her face.

“Honey?” she called with a sharper tempo, fixing her sight directly above my shoulders, and looking directly ahead. “What could be the trouble?”

I glanced back over my left shoulder and saw two army sergeants approaching in quick rhythmic pace. I could recognise them; they were both in my platoon and as junior officers, they had no rights to follow my —

“Major Sir!” called the first, as both saluted.

“Are you guys following me around?” I said, rising on my feet.

As much as I loved the army, I never mixed work with home. She was my home, and I was with her. This was a kind of disturbance I would make anyone guilty slurp a dog's urine for.

They stood there, looking like dumb nitwits. “I need answers sergeants,” with the veins on my forehead depicting the level of my annoyance.

“It's not their fault son,” said a voice, “they are just following orders.”

That was a familiar voice which had ordered me on several occasions. I looked eastward and: “Colonel?” I called with a pinch of surprise; he was the least of my expectations. This wasn't good, I knew: What could he be looking for?

“Son! The bastards we disbanded a couple of weeks ago have started regrouping in the north, marching towards the central,” he said with a high note of

firmness, “We are up for it. Chief wants us to finish what we started. We need to end them before they blink.”

“Sir...” I made to protest.

“I know, Major! You are supposed to be off for nine. Yes! But this is a matter of National Security, and you know how resourceful you are to the team. We leave at dawn tomorrow!”

“Yes sir,” I saluted, though my mind was far away. And he reciprocated.

“Alright. Major! Do your country proud once again,” he said, patting my left shoulder with his right hand. “A beautiful wife you've got yourself here Major,” he added, looking at my wife.

He turned and made to leave: “Roll it boys,” he said. And the two sergeants turned and walked off.

The order had been given. I had to follow it. My wife was here listening and watching the whole drama. If I had got this order alone and later relay it to her, she might take it for a joke. She had believed I'd be here when the baby ____

I stood there, silent – like a man who is afraid to break to his wife the news of a new born baby by his concubine. I couldn't come to terms with me leaving her in this state.

“You have to go,” she said, with a shaky voice. That wasn't a consolation, of course, I had to go. She was just trying to be strong. I turned now; her cheeks were already flooded with tears. “I'll miss you, honey,” she said, crying. I

grabbed her thighs as I bent on my knees: “Listen to me carefully,” I said looking stolid. “If I don't return...”

“You'll return!” she screamed.

“If at all, I do not return, you must...” she slapped me hard, and the weight she threw behind it was enough to turn my head sideways.

My grip was tighter now, her emotions had usurped me. And what I saw in her eyes was something I couldn't define – it was more than what I could call love or pity or fright.

She drew me close and said; “You will return to me,” she paused, “before the birth of your child. You'll be here for me.” Her voice was as strong as that of a queen who wouldn't shift grounds for her subjects. “Promise me...”, she sobbed.

Two weeks on: Two army sergeants knocked at our door; their eyeballs reddened with glitters of tears. They brought his rank tag and ____

I accepted my fate.

Fleas in the Market

by

Mark J. Mitchell

Three cloth ships arrived today
with prize crews and cargoes
of silk from China and Indian cotton.

Gianni and Guido and I met them
at the wharves. It's a hot day.
It's no wonder we started sweating.

We tossed bales off listing caravels.
They were carted to the square.
People hunger for silk, for cotton.

Gianni's scratching at his pits.
Guido's coughing and looking pale.
I feel fine, but frightened.

Plague doesn't sleep for long.

Scent Leaf

by

Adanna Ogbonna

Too wrinkled and dry, I thought, examining the scent leaf. It had lost its freshness but was still useful. Mother used to say it was better this way, that it added a different flavor to the soup, one only time can create.

I stirred the soup a few more steamy bubbles and it'll be ready. After a while, I dished it onto a small bowl, wrapped the *akpu* in cellophane just the way she liked it and hurried into her room. It was dark and stuffy with the scent of urine. I dragged the shut curtains apart. Her eyelids flung open, exposing bleak eyeballs; she hissed.

"Anurika!" she yelled in a strained voice. "Leave my husband's house for me o hmm." I stared at her with pity, and yet a part of me felt intense hatred. Pity and hate were spices in this dish of acrimony we've cooked over the years.

"Mma get up, my name is not Anurika," I replied angrily. I'd grown weary of reminding her. At first, I had been confused and scared. Her voice had sounded

distant and strange, and she had looked through me, not at me, like she was in a different world.

“Get up and eat your food,” I mumbled. “Every time, Anurika! I wonder how I look like that dead old woman to you.” I share no semblance with the woman except that *Mma* hated us both. She must have really relished hating her; even after the old woman’s death, she still saw her through me. Anurika had been her co-wife. “*Si ebe a pu a osisiso!*” she spat out in a voice that meant to scream with contempt, cataract swimming in her rheumy eyes.

“Old age has made *Mma* bitter,” Nzube, my twin sister, once said. But age is not to blame; she had always been bitter and cranky. Anurika’s moments in this house were doused in squabbles and memorable fights. One of such happened eight years ago, it jolted me up from dream of a twirling cotton and white dress flounced around the waistline; I was just about to step into it when the piercing bleat of Anurika’s goat sliced through my momentary feeling of bliss. I stared open-mouthed as *Mma* firmly fettered Anurika’s goat while she set fire for a roast. She had earlier complained that the goat took her precious vegetables as fodder and trampled the tendrils.

Anurika who had just returned from the stream that evening crashed into her like a bull while the duo thrashed around the kitchen. The fire burnt down the Uha tree at which foot it was set. The goat bleated itself to exhaustion, all the while eyeing the knife in helpless despair. Anurika lost a part of her ear that day while *Mma*’s lips tasted blood and loved it.

My grandfather had married Anurika in the twilight of her years. She had been mourning the absence of her son who left the village to learn a trade in Lagos

but got so absorbed in the bustling city that he grew impassive to his mother's needs. The story is that my grandfather married her against mma's wish after saving her from a suicidal mission in the *Ikwu* stream. Anurika died ten years after my grandfather without seeing her son. The son returned and built a bungalow where her hut had been and sprayed naira notes like a lunatic at her burial.

Mma once uprooted the neighbour's yam seedling for not telling her what brand of fertilizer's he used for his plants; no one knew who did it but I saw remnants of the severed greenness clinging to her muddy hoe at the back of the yard. Nzube wouldn't know this, she is the lucky daughter extricated by the bind of marriage and alas! never saw the acrid side of our grandmother.

Nzube is the pretty twin sister; the better part of the split egg, our school mates once teased. She was wooed and chased by every man we knew: Ikem the village tailor sold his motorcycle to replace the school fees she squandered with her friends. He was wiled by the coyness of her frequent smile, hexed with the fullness of her lips and bewitched by the sway of her curvy hips. He wasn't the last. The carpenter built her shelves and tables while she paid with a teasing smile that fanned the ambers of his flattened ego.

Everyone doubted I was her sister let alone her twin. I was the girl who her friends called ugly under their breaths while she tapped them lightly and said "stop that, she has fine nails". Each time she said that, she glanced at her own nails, and in her eyes, I saw a flitting tinge of regret, or maybe I imagined that. She got married immediately after secondary school. No one was surprised. That was seventeen years ago, and I haven't been as lucky.

As a result, Nzube wasn't there when *Mma* drowned Nkem. She had grizzly fur with sprinkles of black that tickled when she curled around my legs, and sparkly eyes that pried kindness out of the stoniest of hearts. She was Udemé's kitten, a souvenir of a broken heart, and a broken man that had once grappled the tender edges of my beating heart.

It started with the cat's feces *Mma* saw at her door in July that year. She sputtered invectives at me as if I was a stranger and not the first fruit of her son. This hassle tarried a few weeks until I found Nkem's lifeless form circling the surface of the well. I stayed thirsty for days as I couldn't bring myself to guzzle down the vestiges of my truest friend.

I was growing impatient with *Mma* lying down and cursing at me. Dementia was what the doctor called it; at least that explained the constant irritability and loss of memory. Papa thought the doctor was the one with dementia. "That is an illness for crazy people not my mother, God forbids! We don't have madness in my lineage, stupid diagnoses," he had blurted out on our way back from the hospital three years ago. "Okay, papa if you think the doctor is mad, what do you think is wrong with *Mma*?" I asked, laughter teasing the corners of my mouth. "Ah, she simply communicates more with our ancestors now," he answered with self-assurance. "She is closer to them than to us now," he added.

Papa never got a real education, but prided himself on reading more books than those who had degrees. He would drop each book with scorn, claiming the writers needed to go back to school. Papa agreed with nothing except what mother and *mama* thought was worth it. The two women were of opposing

ideologies, so he was in a constant battle of wills. Find a way to bring in the mother before mentioning her in the next paragraph.

Our mother got sick when I was twelve. She spent months in the hospital; there was no space or time for our needs, so *Mma* thought it was worth it for us to live in the village with her. Mother's illness wasn't contagious, but the gloom it brought was. So, deep down, a part of me was glad when we left Enugu for the village, leaving my father to battle with the fiendish shadow of cancer that clenched its stony fists around our mother's neck. She died two years later; father leased the house and joined us.

"*Mma biko*, please stand up and eat, I need to go somewhere," I said, glancing at my wrist watch.

He would be there now; the thought alone thrilled me, I have learnt to look forward to our furtive meetings; they had a pinch of youthfulness to them. I looked at *Mma's* frail, almost helpless, form and anger surged through me. Her pale crinkled lips were slightly parted, and my first instinct was to shove the entire rap of *akpu* down her throat. No one but Papa would blame me if I did. I still remember her words with poignant clarity: "Find yourself a husband, look at Nzube she is happily married but all you do is lie around the house and finish my son's money, go and marry." That was five years ago.

"Papa!" I called, "come o, *Mma* does not want to eat her food." I left the room with the food on the floor and walked away. Papa met me half way. "What are you calling me for, so if I am not around you cannot feed your grandmother eh?" he asked. "Her food is on the floor," I let out slowly, inching towards the gate, leaving the house. "Where are you going?" he called after me, "to meet

that small boy eh...may God deliver you.” “Amen,” I muttered softly, not breaking my stride.

Papa knew I was seeing him. He had seen us once behind the fence where Mama had planted her favourite scent leaves. My mother cherished scent leaves and planted it everywhere she could; she had one in the backyard of our house in Enugu. She put them in almost every meal she made: in her stew, it added a unique taste while the sizzle on the hot pan made our bellies rumble and our mouths watery. In her room, she burnt the stem of the leaves, and let the smoky aroma fill her lungs. In her words: they chase mosquitoes *kpata kpata*. “Why do you think they are called *Nchuanwu*?” she would ask with an amused look on her face.

Fresh, green and beautiful they were that day, an exact symbol of how I felt deep inside. Udo’s hands were expertly kneading my buttocks when Papa walked in. The look on Papa’s face that day still haunts my private thoughts. “You are a disgrace to this family, marry you won’t marry, but you go messing around with children you can bear *tujiakwa!*” He had screamed it as if Udo was a baby, and not a man of twenty two. I was only thirteen years older than him, but Papa made it sound like I was fifty and unmarried. “You are too old for this Eberechi, *agadi n’emweghi ibere*. Shameless...”

I hated that word *agadi*. Even in the most innocent conversations, it made me feel guilty, like the whole world could see the agedness beneath my petite form and expensive makeup.

I spent my meager salary as a local government typist on dresses and makeup. I walked with measured steps and swayed my non-existent hips. I kept up with

recent trends and told anyone who cared that I was twenty five, so each time that stupid driver in front of the office called me Da Ebere with a slight bow of respect I hiss while he laughs loudly and breaks into the song *Agadi ekwe nka*; an aged who refuses to age. My blood boils and new wrinkles form. He was permanently stationed so it was a constant inconvenience.

Papa didn't speak to me for a month after that; he made his own meals and went on his own errands. It was as if I didn't exist. I yearned for the huskiness of the voice that called for tea every morning, but Papa didn't stop until a crevice so wide was dug between us that even *egusi* and *okuko* couldn't bridge. In those days, I heard a silence so loud it threatened to awaken a stream of remorse and self-consciousness, so I shot my thoughts away and focused on the essentiality of the forbidden tryst.

Papa spoke eventually, when he tired of the silence or the bad taste of his own tea; I'm yet to decide. "Eberechi, there is no justification anywhere for what you have done." I didn't respond so the statement hung thick in the air and hovered around us with a tension that didn't quite break even after our seeming reconciliation. I wanted to tell him that for me justification was for those whose actions begged for it. So, he was right; there was no justification for loving a man a decade and some years younger, neither was there any justification for a heart battered into bits by men of appropriate age to a point that not just the heart but its proprietor felt torn apart limb by limb.

I hastened my pace, taking a wide turn down the road away from home, away from *Mma's* lunatic accusations and Papa's captious gaze. It felt liberating like gulping in a breath of fresh air after inhaling the acrid stench of fart.

I greeted everyone I came across. “Good evening,” I kept mouthing, trying hard to smile, trying hard not to come off bitter or sad. I did this daily, the smile and good-natured greetings was a mask I learnt to wear a long time ago; a mask that hid my true feelings of failure and self-loath. A mask that elicited statements like, “it’s a wonder you aren’t married, men are blind since they can’t see the angel in you” instead of “no wonder she is not married, bitter old hag.”

I caught sight of Njide from secondary school. From a distance, I took in the lingering traces of the years spent. Her slightly drooped jaw and slackened stomach hung out by the sides of her clinging dress, it gave away that she was a mother of three. One of the perks of having stayed unmarried is that I didn’t look anything like Njide, except for the settled skin in my arm that had lost it tautness. I smiled to myself, and walked faster to meet up with her. My gladness was cut short when a toddler emerged from the stall tugging her hands. I turned around immediately and took the longer route so our paths wouldn’t cross. Unshed tears burnt my eyes while I fought hard not to blink. I loved children but I didn’t have any.

I strived to contain my thoughts as I galloped towards Udo, but it wasn’t hard to take in the overt changes the road had seen in many years. I couldn’t remember the last time I treaded that path; the short cut to Kaduna Street was eked out so many years ago, so there has been justifiably no need for the long route. I noticed that the giant gate to late Prof. Idemili’s house had become a rusty shade of brown instead of the bright red colour it used to have. I could still see traces of red, but that is what they had become, traces.

The corn plants by the road side effloresced in healthy greenness, it was hard to imagine that they would wither away someday and become fibrous fuel to burning firewood. The thought of withering corn stalks reminded me of *Mma*, she was withering away. She had lived her full life and, just like the blooming corn, she had also bloomed in her youth. I still remember her in her mid-life; despite the constant combat with wrinkles, her beauty was never hidden. The rumour was that she used to be smeared with charcoal and given a walking stick during the war to mask her true beauty so she wouldn't be whisked away by the Nigerian soldiers.

The walk appeared longer than I remember it to be, but soon I was standing face to face with Udo, the man that had touched my ageing soul with his youthful palms. I took a minute to look at him. I did that all the time, but the novelty never seemed to wear off. This time his bushy brows knitted into a frown when he saw me, his full lips paused and no smile broke from them. He must be sad about something I thought. "*Anty* Ebere," he said, avoiding my eyes, "this thing we are doing, I'm no longer comfortable with it. I just gained admission, and I am going back to school. I need to focus." *Anty*, it felt vile coming from him. He stopped calling me *Anty* when his palms and fingers learnt every corner and inch of my skin.

Rage burnt through me, and I hit him hard on the face. I felt a sting in my palm, and almost immediately I began to rub his face repentantly. He stared at me in disbelief; did nothing but stare. I swallowed hard, fighting to hold back willful tears but they cascaded in salty torrents. I wondered if he understood the desire for a twirling white dress and sparkling tiara that sat regally every Saturday on

the neatly coifed hair of women I knew from the days they played with childish glee.

Did he hear the frantic beat of my heart, when I first saw him scoop buckets of turbid water at the stream? Did he think I fell in because I couldn't swim, or that I asked for swimming lessons because I couldn't? Did he know he had picked and mended the pieces of a shattered heart?

I turned around quickly, and a flood of nausea washed through me. I staggered; he steadied me, all the while staring at me with a look I knew too well: astonishment. I let my hands linger while he stared wondering why I was distraught. Just like the others he had assumed it was mutual exploitation. He dallied and stared torn between an urge to walk away and a responsibility to dry my eyes. He chose the former. I watched his back just like I've watched many men before him, but then my mother's voice chimed in my ears like the ancient clock in *Mma's* room. "I want you girls to grow up fulfilled and happy, man or no man but how can you." she uttered those words when Nzube failed her primary six exams just before the illness levelled her to a shadow of herself.

I wanted to call him back and tell him that school wouldn't stand between us, that I could visit and cook for him, but I knew he wouldn't want his mates to see him with me, and then I loathed the youngish school girl he'd touch with those magic palms of his. On my way home, I made a decision.

I got home to find Papa and *Mma* sitting in the verandah. "Are you not tired of seeing that child?" Papa queried again, peeking through the wire rimmed glasses perching on the bridge of his nose." "Eberechi, growing older comes with a lot

of wisdom but in your case the reverse is the case,” he said. “I’m not seeing him anymore,” I yielded with no fight left in me.

Mma had her hands in her lap. She stared into space, muttering and smiling to herself like a little girl with outrageous wrinkles.

“Your sister has given birth to a baby girl,” Papa said, “Ekele was here when you were away. He brought the news.” He rose gradually, holding his waist; he did that more often now. “You would go and help your sister.” “I’m going to Lagos next week,” I blurted abruptly. He opened his mouth to say something but thought better of it. “Do you know anyone in Lagos?” he asked quietly. “No,” I exhaled. “What about your job here?” I shrugged, staring him in the face. I knew my decision was rash and unfounded but there has to be something out there for me, something this small town has failed to offer.

I turned away and headed straight to my room. I caught a glimpse of my face in the blurry wooden mirror, and I saw the seemingly deep line beside my nose, a doleful reminder of the rapid recession of youth. Beside the wooden mirror lay a mildly shrunken scent leaf, patterned in sallow ageing streaks. I stared at it for a while and looked into the mirror, there was a quiet semblance and yet a huge difference.

That night, sleep eluded me, I tossed and turned warring against anger and hate staunch enough to keep my thoughts roving. Udo’s breakup and many others played out rapidly in my head until it became a jumbled mixture of thoughts. Finally, sleep rested on my brows; soon, their faces merged and they became one man. In his eyes, I saw a person in a long tiring search for validation, a person looking for happiness in the wrong places, a person battered with

lifelong revilement, a person in a constant combat with societal expectations. And then, I felt that this person unknowingly gave himself up for a contest with fate measured by the achievements and approval of others. In that face, I saw my reflection.

My eyes flung open, and I felt a wave of heat. I sat up, opened a drawer and searched. I retrieved a stack of pictures and with my fingers I traced the images like a person savouring a moment. I lit a candle, and in the same manner I brought the candle slowly for a soft kiss with the photo. Gradually, the kiss consumed them all and soon they became gray ashes of a spinster's past.

I lay down quietly and my father's footsteps resounded down the hall, "Ebere, Ogini?"

"Something is burning," his voice was hoarse from sleep, it's nothing Papa, just a few papers.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Hmm," he grunted, and I heard his retracing steps.

I remembered the dream, and I knew I needed a clean start, a new environment, with an ambience not choked with so much hate and anger, and I was convinced that I had to make the trip to Lagos.



Omoo Criel

Omoo Criel
2016

A Cycle of Futility

by

Uduak Uwah

A tread mill occupation
A roller coaster marathon

The future of gas
The history of ice

The fate of poultry
From the hatchery to cutlery

The necessity of money
The utility of honey

The zeal of the dung beetle
The appeal of sheer evil

The agony of penury
The allure of luxury

The prodigy of birth
The ego of death

The fury of hostility
The burden of sanity

A cycle of futility

Gas Line

by

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

I serve pissed-off storm victims. I pump gas, ten thousand gallons. My nose and lips bleed from the fumes like they never did in middle school when my pals and I huffed it in my garage. My old lady warned me that I was killing off brain cells. That was the point.

Fuck pot. Petrol was our gateway drug. We prayed to the red, plastic 2.5-gallon container my old man left behind.

God dragged his carbon hand over the Earth, heated it up. The Superdude sent a super storm that brought me back to my juvey days in spades.

I bleed, stigmata of the nose and mouth. My hands? Covered by fingerless gloves.

God didn't do this because he hates Atlantic City gamblers or fags or reality TV from the Jersey Shore. God hates all of us. He's an equal opportunity hater.

He's as weary of us as we are of Him. We're like an old married couple, whose breakfast is disgust and supper disdain.

My old man was a fuck, but at least he knew to get out, twenty, thirty or forty years before his marriage became nothing but a sour smell.

God used up the subtle touches long ago, like turning a headstrong bitch into a pillar of salt. That's way too much trouble for him now. Now, it's nothing but broad brush strokes. *Kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out.* My old man used to say that a lot.

I wipe my bloody face on a rag, and get back out to the pump. All these pissed off people, who waited in line for hours, pause a moment when the zombie sticks the nozzle in.

My old lady was right. I feel my brain cells leaking out my ears, the ones newly poisoned and the ones poisoned way back in middle school, waiting all these years to die.

Your Heart Trembles

by

Bisi Abiola

I

Your heart trembles, Billiri
It quivers for fear of the unknown:
What wind will blow before twilight?

I feel the throbbing terror
I see the riddle refusing to break:
What breeze will announce the next dawn?

I see a blur, blunt crescent
Against a still, dull night-sky:
What sound will open the new day-cloud?

II

And I remember Sofia;

Her dusty heels abound with stories
Her silence that speaks volume

The blaring blobs lining her plait
Driving down steaming scenes made
By these vampires in our desert

She knows Shekau by body odour...

III

Cheerful gardener of the desert's flowers

Those blasting sirens of hearses
Throw the noble Aloma outside her memory

Regular haggler in Monday Market,

Famous footprint in Baban Lai
Through Mairi Kuwa, Lagos Street
To Shehu Palace and Baga Road,

That smoke from shrapnel-hewn torsos
Tortures her sight of sand-dune funs
And travels on the comfort of humps

IV

Blood,

The diluted thickness...
The mutilated ties...

Those familiar guts hosting a thousand vultures
Turn her tongue against tuwo chinkafa

Yet stubbornly, she chooses life...

V

Your heart trembles;
I remember Sofia

And see hope

I see lullaby ousting dirge
Serenade, with eulogy,
hurling elegy

I see the moon; full and fair

I see man overcome
these turbulent times



How Did You Die?

by

Eniola Cole

They said you died in your sleep
You went there again
And never came back
But the linger that bores a hole in me
Every time I open my heart to think
How did you die?
Did you sleep only to wake
On the other side of the life lane
Or did someone call your name?
Feeble
Broken
Lost
Maybe you yielded
Grasping for air
Or was it the time set
Tick tocks ringing funeral bells?
Tell me how you left
And if peace reigns when you
Closed your eyes?
Stop teasing me with your presence
So long a reckless abandon
And absence
Diluted with misery
I ponder I suck
How did you die?
Did they stab you?
Of worries and little fries

Or pinches from the back side
Who came knocking on your door
When you barely can crawl
Who is the fellow
Shinning dark teeth
And sunken cheeks
Did she tell you to come?
Or did you give your life for one
But how did you die?
Tell me
Were you alone?
Did you sing tears
Or mourn in joyful rants?
Did you fall sick?
Or at you pain came in fame
I saw you three days ago
And you went away three days after
But whom did you tell?
Long tales, fragile bliss
Darkness looms at every corner.
Words that you owe
Who will tell them now
Shall I know?
And now that you are gone
I recall
Last sighs, hands dry
Why did they let you alone!
Let someone stone me with stone
For letting you go alone
How did your heart give up?
In your sleep thumping
Rising no more to slumping
See the tears welling up
In my eyes
Come back and tell me
The words that you owe
But who are all those people
Gathered over you

Where did they come from?
Do they know how you died?
Shall I ask them?
This thing that you fought
Was it what killed you?
How did you survive
All these years
With such an heavy burden?
Why didn't you tell?
Is that how you died?
But who told you to go?
Weary, weary, you are weary
Tell me so I can know
Would you have talked with me
One last dying breath of words
One part, two parts
What's the other part?
I am in an abyss
Of unspoken whispers
And lingering thoughts
Pain on empty slots
Fire dwelling in teary drops
Do tell me I beg thee
Who told you to go?
How did you die?

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Adanna Ogbonna was born and raised in Abia, she is a graduate student of Literature in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan. She chose to write to stay busy, but now writes to find life's meaning. She blogs at www.litbrainsite.wordpress.com. Adanna loves the appellation writer but doesn't feel she's earned it yet.

Bisi Abiola is the penname of Ibrahim Odugbemi, a University Scholar at the University of Ibadan where he graduated with a First Class B.A degree in English and recently completed his M.A. degree in Literature. He teaches general studies courses in Use of English and Effective Writing and Communication Skills in the same University.

DJ Tyrer is the person behind *Atlanteen Publishing*, was placed second in the 2015 *Data Dump Award* for Genre Poetry, and has been published in *The Rhysling Anthology 2016*, issues of *Cyaegha*, *Carillon*, *Frostfire Works*, *Illumen*, *The Pen*, *Scifaeckuelst*, *Sirens Call*, *Tigershark* and *California Quarterly*, and online at *Makata*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Bindweed*, *Poetry Paicific*, *Scarlet Leaf Review* and *The Muse*, as well as releasing several chapbooks, including the critically acclaimed *Our Story*.

Eniola Cole is trapped in a spinning mind with a craving for creative finesse. She is a creative content writer, blogger and a learning enthusiast. She writes at

ennycole.com, her forte for the book of her mind. She is the Media Manager of *Lunaris Review*.

Fatima Shahzad is a recent graduate in Gender Studies from SOAS University of London. She studies History at the undergraduate level from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University. With little literary grounding, she is nevertheless drawn to the realm of poetry through the works of authors like Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson and Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Though she usually writes poetry in English, she is beginning to experiment with Urdu poetry as well.

Francis Sanzaro (PhD) is Editor of Rock and Ice Magazine, and a contributing writer for numerous national publications. Some of the recent good stuff includes *The Infantile Grotesque: Pathology, Sexuality and a Theory of Religion* (2016) and *The Boulder: A Philosophy for Boulderizing* (2013). Francis' articles, essays and fictions have appeared in *Happy Hipocrite*, *Greyrock Review*, *Counter Culture*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *U.K. Climbing*, *The Baltimore Post Examiner* and *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*. More at Fsanzaro.com

Gen KingPin is an aspiring scriptwriter/filmmaker. He holds a BSc in Building from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. If he is not reading articles on construction, then he is reading/writing fictions. His works have featured on *ISWOT* and *Booksie.com*

Henneh Kyereh Kwaku is a Bachelor of Public Health, Disease Control student of the University of Health and Allied Sciences. He writes from wherever there is enough oxygen to breathe and enough emotions to inspire a revolution. He says “man needs redemption and the power rests in the hand of the poet.”

Ian C. Smith's work has appeared in, *Antipodes*, *Australian Book Review*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *The Brasilia Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Stony Thursday Book* & *Two-Third North*. His seventh book is *Wonder Sadness Madness Joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He lives in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, Australia.

Ladipo Ademola is a graduate of the Polytechnic Ibadan, a web and graphics designer. Second in the family of seven, he is a product of a polygamous home where he draws ranges of his firsthand life experiences. Change cannot come from the top but from the bottom; he strongly believes a problematic society is the collective consciousness of a problematic individual psyche, which is why he holds the vision of changing the world through his writings.

Lyambee Sade Aorabee is a record producer and creative nonfiction writer from Jalingo, Nigeria.

Mitchell Krockmalnik Gabois has had over twelve-hundred of his poems and fictions appear in literary magazines in the U.S and abroad. He recently has had work accepted by SANKOFA, a Nigerian magazine. He has been nominated for numerous prizes. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital is available on Kindle and Nook, or as a print edition. To see more of his work, google Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois. He lives in Denver.

Omoniye Gabriel Gilbert was born in Ibadan, Oyo State. He studied Fine and Applied Art at Federal College of Education, Abeokuta under the tutelage of late Kola Anidugbe and won the Best Student Prize in 2008. Omoniye Gabriel is a graduate of Fine Arts (majoring in Painting) at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. He is currently using Gouache, Ink, Oil and

Acrylic combined with thick strokes and mélange of vivid colours with simplicity of forms and expressive lines.

Uduak Uwah is an emerging Nigerian poet, lyricist, and songwriter. Based in Calabar, Nigeria's first capital and its number one tourist destination, Uduak, also known as Whill, employs gripping rhythm and rhyme to convey truths pertaining to various aspects of everyday living in stirring poetic language. He has an ever expanding archive of song demos and lyrics to his credit. And you can find him at www.facebook.com/whilltree.

Ugochukwu Nwafor is a recent law graduate of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. He was born in Anambra state Nigeria. Ugochukwu is a young fervent mind driven towards the expression of his art through letters of kaleidoscopic tones. He is not published at the moment but has a reasonable stock of literary works ready for publishing including his debut collection of short stories and some works of prose. Currently, his works in progress includes the first draft of his debut novel and some essays on Odinani themes. Outside the serious business of literature, he is passionate about travelling, cross-cultural heritage, and most vitally, learning novel things.

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

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

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