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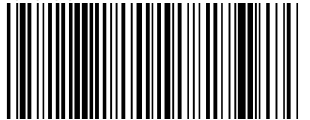
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(Malawi)

The Father I Loved

Onwubiko Okem
(Nigeria)

RESOLUTION

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- Poetry
- Essays
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N Editor's Note

Reconciliation

root word: *reconcile*

definition (Merriam-Webster):

1a: to restore to friendship or harmony

b: settle, resolve

2 : to make consistent or congruous

3 : to cause to submit to or accept something unpleasant

To speak to the first definition listed above would surely come off as singing to the choir; we are too well acquainted with that face of reconciliation to learn anything that is truly new; as such, I leave it to you to think on the things many have said of living together in harmony.

In moving on to the second definition, I am provoked to consider that for any individual to make it in their journey of life, that person is expect to reconcile their expectations with their reality. This act of reconciling is one that we are destined to repeat many times before the end. The one who can master this is one who is true to themselves and has been able to understand half of what life is about – What is the other half of life? If I had the answer to that, life would lose its mystery and would no longer be worth living.

As for number three, who ever wants to submit to or accept anything unpleasant or difficult in this thing called life? Show me such a person and I shall concede that we are closer to discovering that other half than I first imagined.

Always remember, *Ubuntu*.

Warm regards,

Nabilah.

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I woke up with a start. There was that sound again, the creaking of a poorly serviced wheel, filtering in through the door to my room. Looking up from my bed I could see the vague outlines of moving shapes through the translucent window that made up the top quarter of the door; some people were pushing a gurney.

I quickly scanned my surroundings. There were a number of machines connected to me in some way, beeping steadily, fed by the tangle of tubes and wires that radiated out of my skeletal body. There was a table beside my bed, buried under a heap of rosaries, bibles and get-well-soon cards.

Damn it. I'm back.

It all came rushing back, waves of realization battering the shores of my consciousness. I had been alive, but life felt like death, so I took matters into my own hands. I

Redemption

**Ohanyere Ugoada
(Nigeria)**

could remember the pills, the pain. I could remember the pull into darkness, the display of memories, the joy at the fact that it was finally over and then, THE BLACK. That was what I liked to call it. The destination I had chosen over being damned for a lifetime. But here I was, pulled back into the light. I hated it. And every time I was brought back, I hated it more. It wasn't worth it. No matter how many times they pulled me out, treated me, counselled me, I would always crave THE BLACK. I would always run back. I would always be, in medical terms, “psychotic and depressed”.

In the search for a “cure”, I had been forced by the woman I was supposed to call “Mother” to attend prayer sessions, midnight services, fellowships. She was the reason why I went for morning and evening mass *every day*; the reason why I went from Catholic churches in the morning, to

Mountain of Fire parishes by night; only to pop up at the Overcomers Chapel the next day. She was the reason why I went to churches where I – or better still my money – was welcomed by the faces of greedy pastors. Why I had demons and witches cast out of me. Why I was pushed and shoved in the name of deliverance. *She* was the reason why I kept my mouth closed when I was told that it was my mother's brother who had cast a spell on me, even though my mother had been an only child. I just wanted her to be content before I passed on.

I hated this. All of this. Life, myself, people. I wanted it to end. This never-ending pain that I couldn't explain to anyone else. These were my last thoughts before I drifted off to sleep once again.

*

It was like a flash. I woke up with a start, wondering where I was. A heart monitor was beeping frantically somewhere in the room. There were doctors all around me, shouting out medical terms and issuing commands that sounded like gibberish. I was still in the hospital. I had never heard the heart monitor beep so fast,

and yet I felt so calm and relaxed. My heart was beating out of my chest, but I felt so serene, tranquil. There was no pain. For a time – seconds – I could feel nothing at all, and then I was engulfed by The Black.

*

My eyes opened once more. This time, to my utmost surprise, I was in my room in my house. Not in my foster mum's house where I lived in now, but in my childhood home where I had lived with my *real* parents before their demise. The demise that I had caused. How was I here? This house was no more. But now the room was exactly how it had been ten years ago. Nothing had changed. My toys were still piled in the “play corner”. My silly childhood drawings gazed down in that corner from the places on the walls. I looked at my bedside table, and saw the picture frame that held the picture of my little family on a vacation to one of the Disney World parks. That should be the one in California. I remembered it clearly because it had been our last one.

I walked to the door, treading carefully. I hesitated before I reached out to open it. I braced myself and turned the knob,

causing the door to open with a creak. I walked cautiously to the only place I could think of. The kitchen. Once I got there I stopped in my tracks, too shocked by the sight before me. Standing at the sink, bathed in the sunlight that poured in from the windows, was my mum, my *real* mum. Her chocolate coloured skin gleamed in the sunlight. She seemed to feel my presence as she stopped what she was doing to turn towards me. For a moment, she seemed shocked to see me too but she quickly composed herself and flashed me that wide smile I remembered so well. I could feel my eyes tearing up. She walked towards me as I stood still, too shocked to move and enveloped me in an embrace that I hoped would last forever. But she pulled out from the embrace and wiped away my tears.

As if on cue, my father strolled in. He too seemed quite shocked to see me, but like mother, he quickly composed himself. He rushed to give me a hug. But suddenly he pulled back. With a questioning look, he asked, “Kammy love, what are you doing here?”

My mum concurred, “You're not meant to be here. Your time hasn't

come. You have a lot of things to achieve and fulfil. Carrying our name on, making us proud, things to do for the world, feats to achieve; we are waiting, watching and smiling”.

I suddenly felt guilty. Mum continued, her tone getting angrier by the second, “So, tell me Kammy, why are you here?” Now, she was shouting and screaming. “Tell me Kammy, why are you here?”. I had never seen her like this before. My calm and collected mother. Even in the face of death, never was she this *mad*. My dad looked up from her and at me with an expression of pain, of sadness. “Why? Why would you do this to us Kammy? Why would you take away our last chance at life?”

I mustered a little bit of courage and muttered meekly, “I missed you people”.

“And...And...I killed you. I couldn't live with the knowledge that I was the reason you guys were *here*. I missed you. I missed you people dearly”, I cried. Now my father looked truly angry as he said, “What do you mean by you killed us? How? When? Because I sure as hell don't remember it like that.”



Suddenly, I was pulled back to that day. My seven-year-old self, whining about how I couldn't get ice cream. My dad driving with my heavily pregnant mum right beside him in the passenger's seat. My mum and dad turning back to me to warn me. The drunk driver appearing out of nowhere. My mum's scream. The impact of metal on metal. Then, THE BLACK.

I opened my eyes and saw my dad and now composed mum looking at me intensely. My father spoke up first, "Now, Kamsisochukwu Jessica Onyemaechi, tell me how you killed me".

I spoke up, "I made you lose attention". And then they laughed.

"Kammy," Mum now, "We wouldn't have been able to swerve in time, he was way too fast. And he came from the side, we still wouldn't have seen him early enough. Our time had come, but yours hasn't", she ended with a scowl. My dad continued, "And you seem to have forgotten that you are the reason why we cherish the years we spent on earth. You made it all worth it. You're the reason why we aren't miserable souls because anytime we looked

down, we saw our little angel. And through your eyes we saw, by your life we lived. If you ever thought you killed us, then you just did it now, by killing yourself." I was shocked. I was too busy gaining revenge for people who were at peace. And in that quest, I had done more damage.

"We miss you too darling, more than you could ever imagine. But the world needs you more, to fulfil the destiny Almighty God has apportioned to you."

"Goodbye my love, until we meet again," my mum said, and my dad chirped in: "At the right time".

We all chuckled lightly and then I was pulled into a hug. When they pulled away, I looked into my left palm to see her favourite hairpin which I used to admire when I was younger before they both engulfed me into a bone crushing hug. Once again, the black blotches returned, and once again THE BLACK engulfed me.

*

There was a knock. My eyes shot open and I recognized the hospital room. I looked towards the door and there stood my *other* mother holding the door ajar. "Hi mum", I said to her with a smile.

With all sincerity I told her, "I am sorry, mummy". She stared at me in a loss for words, too shocked to form a coherent sentence. I wasn't sure what had surprised her more. The fact that I called her mummy or the fact that I had used the words "I am sorry". So, I continued, "I am so sorry, mummy. For everything. The worry I caused you, the pain, the money, the stress, the emotional trauma, everything. I am sorry, mummy. You deserved so much better, mummy. Now I promise you, mummy, with each passing day, I'll be striving harder to be a better daughter to you". I didn't even know I was crying until I felt the moisture on my lips and tasted the salty liquid. Before I knew it, I was engulfed in a tight bear hug by my mother. But this time unlike other times I didn't lie stiff, I hugged her back so tight with strength I never knew I was capable of. I suddenly felt something pricking my left palm. I opened it to see my mother's favourite hairpin.

Smiling in the drought

**Thatho Katiso
(Lesotho)**



Resolution

By all appearances, things were bleak in the savanna. The grass had become dry and brittle while the ground hardened to the point where it had begun to crack as it gave way to the smoldering heat of the overhead sun. The dry season had tightened its grip on the veld for much longer than expected, and with each day, it took a little more life out of the savanna. Even the animals had grown sluggish. None of the usual flurry of beasts galloping across the veld could be seen. It was indeed a time of great despair for the savanna and her inhabitants. Well, most of them at least, save for a young lion cub named Thokozile. She seemed rather cheerful considering the circumstances. It wasn't because she found joy in the desolation brought about by the drought as most would've expected of a predator like herself. Her joy was the result of

a promise, a promise that her mother had regretted making ever since they had set off on their journey to the great lake. It was this promise that caused her to hop and skip around her exhausted mother's feet throughout the whole journey. The promise that she would get to play with all the animals of the savanna.

When she wasn't frolicking around her mother, she hurled an endless barrage of questions her way, which proved to be equally exhausting. She tried her best to dismiss them with a growl or simply ignore them but her actions were in vain. Most of the questions revolved around the size of the lake and the kinds of animals they'd get to see once they got there.

All the other animals looked at her rather curiously. She didn't really care for it,

especially since all of attempted to interact promise may not have way and one she intended them were quick to avert with. Although she had been the best idea. In an to pass down to her their eyes whenever she become accustomed to attempt to console her cub, she playfully nudged them. She didn't mind especially since she could her with her nose and tickled her belly with her that either - it was fear. not understand why. All whiskers. Seeing fear in those the other animals were "I will always be your best friend." she followed by flight. still had a few months left For a moment she managed to make Thokozile smile once Typically, but not that before she could start again, but as much as she appreciated the gesture; day. That's how dire the learning how to hunt so she was yet to become it just wasn't the same Death by predator or aware of the pecking coming from her mother - a lion. She was a bit death from thirst, neither order in the savanna. more composed for the final stretch of the option seemed desirable The journey was nearing its conclusion with the destination almost within journey, which came as a big relief for her mother. to any of the animals its conclusion with the view and she was yet to make a single friend like As much as she hated seeing her daughter mostly peaceful, with a to say, the journey was not at all what she had unhappy, she knew it was only a matter of time there as a caravan began hoped it would be. Even other predators were before she discovered to form. quick to hide their cubs what it truly meant to be a lioness in the savanna. It was the most beautiful t h e m o m e n t s h e She too had once been young and idealistic, but part of the reason behind she cursed being a lion She nature isn't something that can be easily swayed by the whims of a naive her jubilation. The only moment. Her mother could see the sorrow in little cub. It was a lesson of all those she perhaps making that she had learned the hard

animals that had traveled off. Packs of hyenas with them as well as those cackled maniacally as they found already there, they lorded over several not to mention the scores puddles. The leopards that kept pouring in after and cheetahs were almost them; she couldn't indistinguishable as they fathom how they would shared a drink side by all be able to drink their side. Birds of different fill, or even drink at all. species fluttered joyfully She then noticed that as over the lake and would soon as her mother occasionally land to take entered the lake, all the a sip. Others perched other animals cleared a themselves on the backs path for her and none of the majestic elephants would dare drink from as they dipped their the same puddle. Though trunks into the water and an unspoken truce had hosed it into their been formed, it was also mouths. The young an uneasy one and many lioness found it rather still chose to err on the amusing to watch the side of caution lest they giraffes as they spread get killed by the their long legs and bent predators. But of course, their slightly longer necks the fear of dying of thirst to drink from the shallow was still much greater. waters. She was in awe of

all the variety of life in front of her but at the same time she felt as if a barrier stood between her and this exciting new world. It was a barrier that repelled everything and everyone around her save for other lions as it turned out. other animals even set

Resolution



As her mother reunited with the rest of the pride and drank alongside them, Thokozile ventured off on her own to find some other place to drink. She would've loved to join any of the other animals but at that point she was certain they'd flee at the sight of her. She found a small unoccupied puddle shortly after her departure. It wasn't before long that she discovered why it had been unoccupied. Of all the puddles in the lake, it was by far the smallest with most of it consisting of dirt and tiny little tadpoles. Despite all of that, Thokozile thought it a better option than drinking with the pride, who were constantly looked upon with fear by the other animals. She sipped the water slowly, all the while keeping her teeth clenched in an attempt to filter out the dirt and tadpoles. Over the slurping sounds she made while drinking, the young lioness heard the pitter-patter of footsteps approaching her from behind. She simply assumed they were her mother's - she always made sure they weren't too far apart. She continued to drink from her tadpole infested water until the sound of footsteps ceased, prompting her to turn and confirm if they did indeed belong to her mother. Much to her surprise, they belonged to a tiny elephant calf. Of course, tiny by elephant standards was still much larger than she was. He dipped his trunk into the puddle but unlike his lion counterpart was unable to filter out the tadpoles. It was only after feeling them swim around inside his trunk that he blew out all of the water in a panic. Thokozile, who had been watching the calf in silence, suddenly burst into laughter over the incident. The embarrassed calf took another swig but this time aimed his trunk at Thokozile and gave her a good hosing. Now it was his turn to have a laugh at her expense. Much to his surprise however, she broke into laughter as well. She then began to splash the water on him with her paws and thus,



I must have been fifteen years old when I walked out of the door on a sunny Saturday afternoon without sparing a glance backwards to see how my actions were breaking my mother's heart. How could I? I knew that if I ventured to turn, even if it was only for a second, that I would lose what little nerve it was that I had.

Father was a difficult man to live with but I would admit that it wasn't any excuse to justify how I was inadvertently making Mother feel by my actions. I was an intelligent chap albeit a young and inexperienced one and Father thought that he could control my actions but I refused to be a tool in someone else's grasp merely existing for their amusement and self-absorbent desires. Father fancied himself my self-acclaimed mentor and thus, he thought it within his purview to decide what course it was the ship of my life took. I would not stand for it which was why we were fighting again.

My results had just come in from the West African Examination Council and as expected, I had excelled admirably, scoring top marks in almost every subject that I had sat for. My parents were avid intellectuals and thus my results were a source of pride and joy to them and that was when my troubles started with Father. It was not so strange that I was embroiled in conflict with Father as that seemed to be somewhat of the norm since I hit puberty. I think it was something in my DNA that just refused to be told what to do, then again I didn't really have any problems following Mother's instructions without questioning so I assume that it was just a matter of Father's directives rubbing me the wrong way.

Father wanted me to apply to study Engineering at the premier University of Engineering in the state,

The Father I Loved

Onwubiko Okem
(Nigeria)

Crutech. I was okay with studying Engineering, truthfully I had never given much thought to what I wanted to study after graduating from high school and I was fairly confident that I would excel regardless of what my choice was, but there was no way that I was going to Crutech. Crutech was a stone-throw from where I lived and schooling there would almost certainly ensure that Father would try to manage my life (like he tried to manage every other thing about me and failed). I wanted to go off to the far west and study at U.I., miles away from Father's reach, and because in my mind Crutech and Engineering were indelibly linked together, I was also fighting him on studying Engineering, rebellious as I was at such an age - I did say that I was inexperienced. The dilemma that I invariably faced was that Father had been my sole sponsor for as long as I could remember and I had no way to pay my way through school if I decided to go off on my own. We didn't exactly live in a country that encouraged self-sustenance until you were at least twenty-five and had a degree firmly under your belt or at least that was what I was raised to believe and so Father had always had a medium to control me and make me do

his bidding. But I was slowly getting fed up and the day I left marked a point of no return.

I had just returned from playing soccer with some of the guys from our street and I was feeling downright jovial having scored three times. There was nothing that could ruin my mood - or so I thought. The moment I stepped through the door of our modest three-bedroom bungalow, Father launched into one of his diatribes, berating me rather forcefully. It was a speech that I had heard a hundred times before and it mostly consisted of him rebuking me and calling my paternity into question. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't that he suspected Mother of foul play - some would go as far as to say that I was Father's spitting image - it was just that he didn't approve of some of my choices in life - in this case, my decision to go out and play soccer rather than stay at home to study for the upcoming post University Tertiary Matriculation Exams being the bone of contention. You couldn't fault me for wanting to loosen up a little and blow off some steam. In my defense, I had been cooped up indoors for weeks studying intensively and I needed the break that the physical exertion would afford me. You know what they say, "all work and no play makes Ikenna a dullard", I think. And so I had gone out to play a little and Father seemed undoubtedly miffed. Hearing him rant about how I was wasting my life and potential, I could feel something snap on the inside of me and I just knew that I couldn't do it anymore. I had decided to go along with his plans and attend Crutech, not because he had changed my mind but because I knew how much our fighting affected Mother, but something had to give. I couldn't live my life in fear of following my own path just because I was scared that Daddy wouldn't be there to protect me anymore and so after taking a

long hot shower, I walked out of the bathroom, packed what little belongings it was that I had and walked out of his house without a backwards glance.

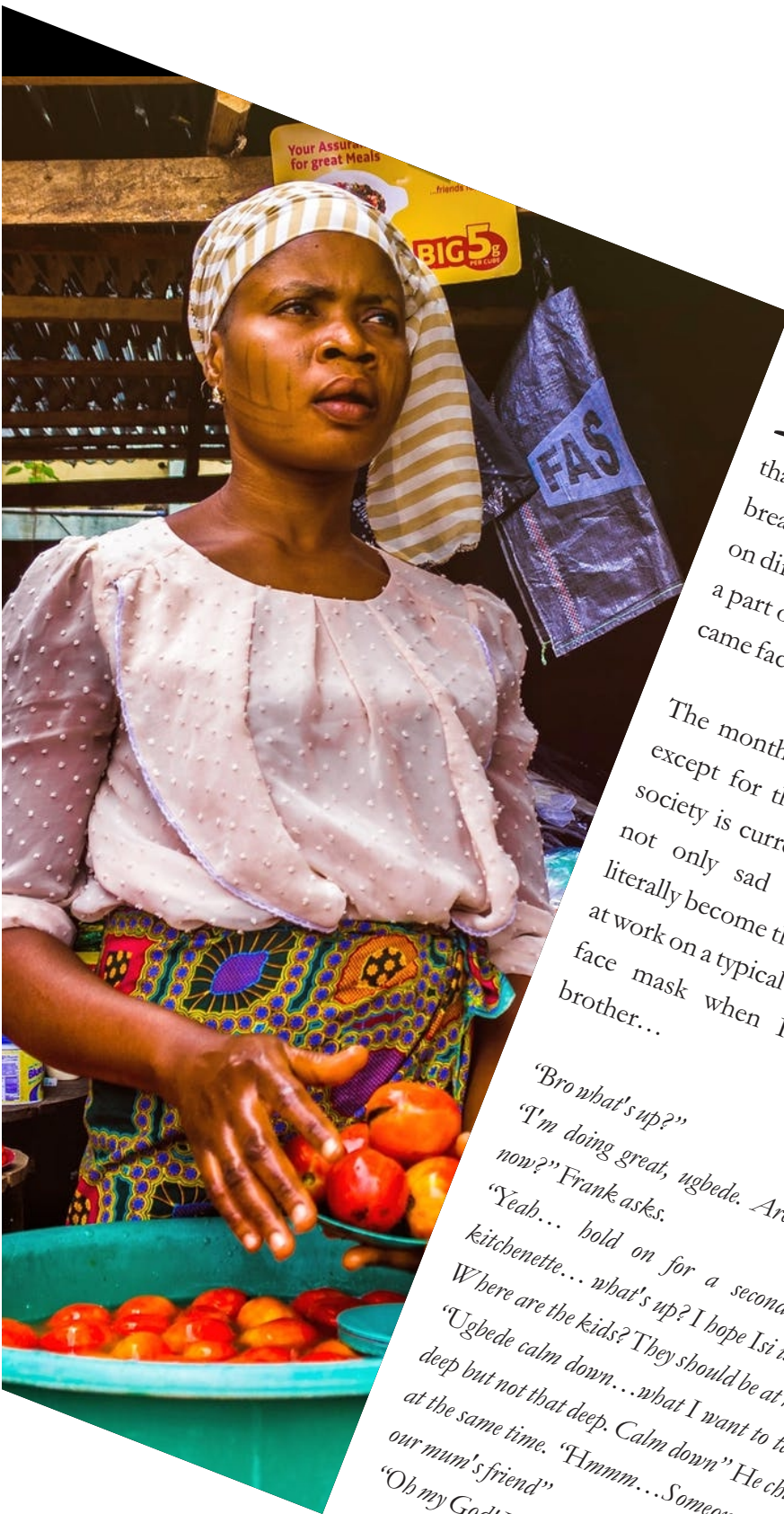
I knew that my actions were breaking Mother's heart but I could not turn back, not even for an instant or else my resolve would falter.

I was twenty-five with a great job, a fiancée that adored me and a more than comfortable lifestyle but my actions on that day still haunted me and so I was back home to fix things before it was too late. I raised my hand to knock on the door but it flew open and I could scarcely breathe as I saw Mother standing there. Without a word she took me to where Father lay on the bed, dying. There was no time. Father had been sick for a while. I felt responsible. I was an only child and the strain of my departure must have been too great on his heart. He would never admit it because of his pride but that didn't matter in this instant. All that mattered were the unspoken words that we had between us and the feelings that we had never admitted to each other. I was young, foolish and impulsive. Father was old, stubborn and controlling. We had lost so much time to our prides and ego and we had both paid dearly for our mistakes. Father must have noticed the presence of a newcomer in the room because his eyes flew open and he glanced in my direction. He broke out in a thin wispy smile that did nothing to hide the strength that he must have once possessed in his youth.

"Son" he said.

"Father" I replied.

The prodigal son had returned home.



Many of us have unsettled issues from our past, while some of us have existing issues we have to live with that may remain unsettled till we draw our last breaths. This month has been super crazy for me on different levels because I came face to face with a part of my life I cautiously avoided for so long. I came face to face with my mother.

The month started out like every other month, except for the silent presence of Covid-19 our society is currently learning to live with which is not only sad but unfortunate; Covid-19 has literally become the Elephant in every room. I was at work on a typical Monday morning adjusting my face mask when I received a call from my brother...

"Bro what's up?"

"I'm doing great, *ugbade*. Are you busy? Can you talk now?" Frank asks.

"Yeab... hold on for a second so I can go to the kitchenette... what's up? I hope Isi is fine? Is daddy okay?"

"Ugbede calm down... what I want to talk to you about is deep but not that deep. Calm down" He chides and chuckles at the same time. "Hmmm... Someone called claiming to be our mum's friend"

"Ob my God! Is she dead?" I wail.

"Ob my God! Is she dead?" I wail.

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Ugede Ataboh
(Nigeria)

"Ugbede! Calm down, she is not dead! Just keep quiet and listen to me okay?"

"Okay, my bad...carry on" I respond. Feeling rather pensive below her standard. Do you know how bad I felt? Anyway, you stopped trying to get her attention a long time ago so I'm pretty sure you can't imagine how I felt. This is a woman who left us when you were just a year old and showed up 19 years later only to disappear and resurface intermittently. We never even for once called her out on the way she let her fight with dad affect her relationship with us!"

"...okay, so the lady who called introduced herself as Jumai and said our mum is in a state of depression because a major consignment she was expecting from abroad got lost in transit because of the Covid-19 unrest. She seems to have gone off the deep end. The Jumai lady also said our mum is of the opinion that her children have abandoned her and don't want to have anything to do with her"

"Bro, I honestly feel bad about the downturn in her business, but I don't think it is nice of her to give a random lady your number. The last time I checked, she had your number...why didn't she just call you directly?"

"Sis, you and I know I stopped picking her calls since she returned the set of wrappers I gave her on her birthday 5 years ago." He replies.

"Wow! Time flies...5 years already? Feels like yesterday. She never really liked me much but she was always all over you being her first and only son. I didn't even know you stopped picking her calls...that's a bit harsh bro"

"Ugbede please! I went out of my way to get her a set of wrappers and she tossed them back at me saying they were you guys had gotten over that wrapper episode and made up so I should have told her how you felt about the way she treated you...you always get so wrapped up in your cute little world and forget you have a family. Stop wishing uncomfortable circumstances away Sis, face them" He scolds.

"I didn't know I gave off that kind of vibe, I'm so sorry. I just kept silent on some issues for the sake of peace but I guess some issues are better off trashed than stashed away."

"Yeab...no wahala. I told the Jumai lady we would reach out to mum, but Sis, I'm honestly not ready for drama right now; I have a family and a very busy work schedule. I need only good vibes right now, not "mama drama"." He complains.

"So what do you suggest we do? I'm honestly not ready to have my heart broken by her again. Few years ago, I silently made peace with the fact that mum will remain a missing piece of my life's puzzle. I don't really think that was a rational decision, but it helped me emotionally and psychologically...I think." I chuckle nervously.

"Sis, let's just call her on a group call... we can add Zee when next we call her. Zee has a lot on her plate right now so I do not want to bring this to her now. She is our baby sis so we need to be sure the coast is clear enough for her to deal with. You and I know how unpredictable mum is...some days she is happy and some days she is just...a stranger." He states, sounding so sad and confused.

"Okay erm... let's agree on a date we can call her on a group call. Abi what do you think?"

"Sis abeg let's just call her now and get it over and done with. I don't want this call hanging over my head...Let's just do this abeg. I can't deal."

"No wabala...although, I don't think I am mentally ready for mum right now. I haven't spoken to her in five years and I really don't know what to say to her. At least, she randomly reached out to you but she never bothered checking up on me. Imagine wba.."

"Ugbede! Sometimes you need to let go and let life flow. Are you interested in being right or being in functional relationships?" He scolds softly.

"That's not fair, you and I know I've let a lot of things go where mum is concerned."

"You have obviously not let things go, you just swept them

under the carpet. Sis, I know things are a bit weird in our family, but we also have so much to be thankful for. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding our upbringing, we seemed to have turned out okay. Not perfect, but okay and that is more than enough for me. We cannot undo the past and we cannot discard our mother...the last time I checked, traders do not sell mums in the market." He adds.

"You should have given me time to prepare mentally for this call at least bro" I wail.

"You and I know mum is not one to be prepared for, you just take her as she comes dear. You know this"

"I guess you are right, oya na, let's do this!" I urge in an abnormal high pitched voice. Here we go.

Her end of the line rings for what seems like eternity, I release a sigh of relief but stop midway when she suddenly picks.

"Hello?"

I pause for a second, hoping Frank will respond but he doesn't.

The devious fellow!

"Hi mum! This is Ugbede!"

"Awusubilabi! Baby girl! How are you?"

"I'm fine mum...it's been a while since we spoke. I heard about your goods...I am so sorry."

"Hi mum..." Frank speaks up, finally!

"Awusubilabi! Junior! You are here too? God has answered probably call you tomorrow with Zee. Is that fine by you?"

Frank asks.

"Sure! I will be expecting your call. My babies, I love you guys so much"

"We love you too mum" I respond excitedly.

"Take care mum" Frank responds.

the prayers I offered in the holy month. Who is that person that lied to you people? Who told you I am a witch? My only son refusing to pick my own calls...it will not be well with that person!"

"Mum calm down, no one told me or Ugbede anything. I guess we just needed space...I heard about what happened to your stuffs. Sorry...How are you doing?" He asks.

"I have been depressed for a while but I am fine now that I have heard your voice. Baby girl, How are you? I am so happy to bear from you... the last time I spoke to you, you yelled at me and I decided to leave you alone. That was so wrong of me, I am so sorry. A mother should always be there for her kids no matter what. I haven't been there at all. Please forgive me my baby girl"

"It's fine mum...I love you" I respond in a broken voice.

"I love you too babygirl...What of Zee mama?"

"I will add her to the call next time mum" Frank responds.

"Okay then, Please pick my calls I beg! Please don't lock me out...everything seems to be falling apart in my life right now. I need my children around me please" She pleads.

"It is okay mum, we are both at work right now. We will

probably call you tomorrow with Zee. Is that fine by you?"

Frank asks.

"Sure! I will be expecting your call. My babies, I love you guys so much"

"We love you too mum" I respond excitedly.

"Take care mum" Frank responds.

Both ends go dead and I am left alone staring at the microwave in my office kitchenette. Surprisingly, I feel warm inside. Sometimes, we just need to let go of the past and move on; we also need to make peace with our reality to stay sane. I do not see my mum and I ever becoming best friends or even going on a vacation together, but I believe we can call a truce “to live, and let live”. My mum may not be a “perfect mum”, but she is my mother. The moment I heard her voice, all past grievances washed away and I now know for a fact that I was wrong to have stayed away from her. She may never be the warm and affectionate mother I expect her to be, but she will always be my mother. I cannot wish her away, neither can I throw her away. I choose to make peace with our past, I choose to make peace with her and I choose to accept her for who she is.



Reconciling Reconciliation in Africa

Leo Muzivoreva
(Zimbabwe)

1994 was a significant year for Africa. South Africa made a peaceful transition to democracy. But on a darker note, Rwanda experienced a tragic and violent genocide. Both countries initiated national reconciliation processes that captured the world's attention. South Africa had the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Rwanda set up the Gacaca Community Courts.

The TRC was tasked with bearing witness to, recording – and in some cases granting amnesty to – the perpetrators of crimes related to human rights violations during apartheid. The Gacaca Community Courts, based on a pre-colonial Rwandan approach to justice, were asked to establish what happened to the Tutsi during the genocide. Their job was to expedite the cases of those accused of genocide-related crimes. Both processes were meant to contribute to interpersonal and national reconciliation. But in both countries it's become clear that the road to reconciliation doesn't begin or end with commissions or trials. It is much more complex. Reconciliation goes hand in hand with many other factors and generates many difficult questions. Who needs to be reconciled with whom? Who should initiate the process? Who should facilitate it? What should it look like? How do national and interpersonal movements towards reconciliation intersect, if at all? Can you reconcile when there's no freedom? Justice? Equality? Redress?

On one hand, post-Apartheid South Africa's reconciliation process began with an unusual generosity of spirit on the part of those who could rightly have been classified as victims. Telling the story of what happened as truthfully as possible was the central tenet at the start of South Africa's post-1994 reconciliation journey. But early on, concern was expressed that the country was trading justice for truth. In response to those criticisms the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, an organisation that grew out of the work of the TRC, began focusing on equity and fairness as a central component to reconciliation. Through its annual “reconciliation barometer”, the organisation found that economic justice has become increasingly important to South Africans. You only have to pay attention to current affairs to see the truth in this finding. The Economic Freedom Fighters - an opposition

political party - are calling genocide crimes. Many quickly as possible - with evidence was lacking, it for land and resources to were unsettled by this the relationships became one person's be redistributed. rigorous quest. There between individual Students have also were calls for Rwanda to perpetrators and protested about equal mimic South Africa and survivors within their access to education. take the route of amnesty communities. What seems to be in exchange for truth. The Gacaca trials took coming out clearly is that That would have place in every truth-telling is just not assumed the wounds of community across the enough. Social justice the violent massacre of country and were and equity must remain possibly a million people presided over by judges front and centre of the in three months were from the communities. reconciliation agenda. identical to the wounds Perpetrators were The TRC was very of apartheid. It does not identified and important, but very little sit well to suggest for a community members follow up work was done moment that wounds left could speak out about by the government. And by Rwanda's genocide the crimes that had been the policies it pursued left were harder to heal than committed. Perpetrators many South Africans those left by apartheid. then had to do feeling cheated. It has But it is critical to community service been argued, however, understand that they left which involved that a rigorous land behind different kinds of rebuilding roads and redistribution will see devastations. homes, among other South Africa falling into things. This allowed the same economic In Rwanda, once the some healing to begin. cesspit which genocide ended, the These trials have been neighbouring Zimbabwe entire country had been heavily criticised by is yet to come out of 20 stripped of all of its international observers, years after land resources. Dead bodies researchers and redistribution. littered the streets. academics for not On the other hand, survivors had to start following due process Rwanda took a different rebuilding their lives and being vulnerable to path. It focused on side-by-side. The manipulation. Some establishing individual compulsion for revenge people were accused of perpetrators' was strong, and there was crimes they never accountability for an urgent need to deal-as committed: when

At grassroots level, one begins or ends with the challenges every commissions or trials. It is reconciliation initiative requires change and faces is the struggle to transformation at the understand where and systemic level. Parallels how national and can be drawn with the interpersonal interests Zimbabwean genocide, intersect. Reconciliation Gukurahundi, which is is about restoring still a delicate issue in relationships between Zimbabwe as it was never wounded people and given the redress that its communities. It also victims and survivors extends to the healing of need.

entire nations. Almost thirty years after After all has been said apartheid ended in South and done, governments Africa and Rwanda was must commit to policies torn apart by genocide, it and strategies that bring is clear there has been about greater freedom some healing. Often, this and equality. And is most visible in the individuals and interpersonal communities must relationships between commit to the hard work victim and perpetrator. of building and rebuilding relationships

In Rwandan context, this every day.

is evident in the way in which widows from both sides of the genocide divide work together on entrepreneurial projects or in self-help cooperatives to build a shared livelihood. In these glimpses, we are reminded that reconciliation does not

Let's Teach for Change

Immaculate Ajiambo
(Nigeria)

My name is Madge and this is my story. One chilly evening, Mum had just returned from work when she heard sobs coming from the house. She could not tell which of her three daughters it was. Hurriedly, she opened the door and went in the direction of where the noise came from.

The dining room was dark; the curtains were already drawn making the room pitch black. In the corner sat someone with her face buried between her thighs. She must have been there for some time.

“Oh no! Madge!”

Concerned, Mum pat me on the back startling me from my sorrowful moment. I increased my crying voice as I gulped for air in between. We tightly hugged.

In a low voice Mum whispered to my ear, “It is okay dear. I am here.”

All I could say was “mmmh mmmh.”

Mum sat down and allowed me to rest my head on her laps.

“Darling, you know I will always be your sunshine during the day, your moon through the night and your warm blanket...”she paused to allow me to finish her everyday kind of you-know-I-am-your-mother-you-can-always-talk-to-me statement.

We said in unison, “during storms.”

I went first, “So mum they are now making fun of my body. Today during the science lesson on respiratory system, the

teacher brought balloons to demonstrate how the lungs work. Then I heard someone at the back of the class shout

“That is how Madge works, one day she is piggy inflated, the next day she is slimy deflated.”

“That was mean of them. I am sorry Madge.”

“Can you imagine the class resounded with laughter and jeers?” I said. “Mum why do they have to make fun of my body even when the teacher canes them?” I emphasized how sad it made me feel.

Going to school felt like punishment. My confidence was at their mercy. I wanted to transfer schools but my sisters did not want us to be separated. I always cried every night and had a lot of wish diaries where I wrote my wishes.

There was a long silence. I am sure Mum was searching for the best words to comfort me. In a minute, she smiled at me sending my mind into 'so what next?' thought.

“I have an idea. Do your classmates know about anorexia?”

“No. I have not told anyone about it.”

“I suggest we teach your fellow students about anorexia because it could affect anyone.”

“Yes mum. In fact, I will tell them that I developed the eating disorder because they teased me about my big body size.”

“Good. But remember that we are not fault finding but creating awareness on anorexia. It is the fear of getting fat. Its results are devastating too.”

That evening was the beginning of the end. I had long desired to be at peace, healthy and have friends. I reconciled with my mind to start over again with my schoolmates.

Duchau

**Charles Duncan
(Malawi)**

I now know what Dachau was like:

A parallel war waged on a wretched race.

Masses of mangled remains marring grisly gas
chambers.

A plethora of ill-fated souls butchered
and smouldered to evaporative ashes.

They perpetrated a holocaust more savage than the
much minified Kigali genocide.

A callous bunch as merciless as killer robots.

Yet, even them, the Lord forgave without trial.

His wings gathering them safely back to his flock.

Even I, though my heart had hardened with your betrayal;

Even when hatred filled me with a vengeance

That far out-matched the cold bloodied Dachau butchers.

Unlike in Dachau, where pure madness ignited the massacre;

Your treachery set alight a loathing my heart has never felt

Yet, who am I to remain hardened on this path!

Come my sweet dumpling, come again to papa;

Dust yourself, call the Priest and let's renew our vows.

Love and Reason

Akinfolami Oluwafisayo
(Nigeria)

The mother's eye holds something;
The sunrise, the night sky?
Perhaps the stories that held my nights.
Her eyes; they speak to me of reason
Something I yearn and miss
Maybe a time, left behind.
I find myself in the reflections of time;
in the walls of my father's name
and in the fragrance of my mother's prayer
When the existence of my individuality persisted.
So I wear these moments as a pendant;
an emblem of my love, a state I dwell.
A time when our dreams were different .
when everything was alive and nothing dead,
And the child was a child.

Things we didn't say

Abigail-Tydale Bassey
(Nigeria)

If
Tonight
You sit up
With memories
We had together;
Tears rushing down your eyes,
Quickly breaking you apart,
I hope you know the time is come
To let go of the deep hurting past
'Cause the things we didn't say hurt me too.
But I'm sorry about everything now;
The thoughts, words and imaginations,
Hopes aborted from yesterday,
Decisions turned round about,
Wounds of the body and soul,
Things we didn't say_
Please, come to me
I'm sorry,
I need
You.

To my Dear Child

**Victoria Edidi
(Nigeria)**

Child,
why have you chosen
to linger in the past
and lose sight
of a love that's yours?

Don't you think
it's time
to melt your frozen heart
and allow it
love once more?

Not a day passes by
that you're not missed.
Father longs for you
he hopes
that you'll look
past your anger
to see his love
and forgive him

Dear child,
shake off the anger
that seeks to consume you
and open your heart
to love once more.

When the wave meets the Shore

Anthony Yormesor
(Ghana)

When the waves meet the shore,
it isn't as though it is their will to
It is because they are willed to
The turbulence afar calms at its destination
and a long-time friend gets to say 'hi'
When the sea gets to see the land
and both fall into each other's arms,
what an embrace that is!
When the troops come to a truce,
it is no miracle;
that's where it is to end
They were only carried away by their weapons
When the sinner recognizes his sins
and asks for remission with a heart of snow,
is it not with warmth that he is received?
When the prodigal son deserts home
and in his wanderings,
remembers where his umbilical cord was cut,
is it not a feast which is prepared for him?
When the waves meet the shore
and the chaos succumbs
and the undercurrents kiss the sands,
the sailing winds carry the vibrations
to brew a soup of serenity

GENRE: SHORT STORY

TITLE: SACRED LETTERS

WRITER: MARY FRANCES IBANDA, UGANDA

REVIEWER: PRECIOUS ADEKOLA, NIGERIA

Contrary to the general notion of women's inability to get along easily, we are presented with a scenario that brings the female folks together. Shared plight and predicament (as pregnancy) is perceived as the centrifugal force binding these women.

Some of the matters that become of interest in the gathering of typical African women is the talk of husbands and how to get money from them as we can deduce from the use of sarcasm 'hand made of super glue'.

The inflation of prices during pregnancy by these women and other ridiculous ideas come up as matters that affect these women differently. Perhaps the author uses this to reveal ideas of morality through one of the female characters.

We find the death of Matsiko's husband symbolized as it exposes her to the truth of her husband's affiliation and flirtation with three other women who have one child each younger than her two years old daughter. This emphasizes the idea of polygamy and patriarchy.

As a result, Matsiko must take a test for HIV which result is referred to as a death sentence which is a hyperbole that underscores the stigma attached to people living with HIV/AIDS. We can also deduce the idea of fear from the vivid description of Matsiko's reaction to the idea of testing positive.

The author makes use of symbolism in the portrayal of the fly trying to escape from being caught. It is significant of the inner struggle attached with collecting a result at 002 and deciding to accept the fate of a negative or positive result.

The release of the fly can be compared to the freedom which the woman feels when she finally receives a negative result.

It is poignant that Matsiko, like most Africans, is religious as a result of fear. Troubling times automatically call for prayers whether the prayer changes anything or not. Religion is a tool for gratification as portrayed in this short story.

The character of Matsiko is a typical representation of the everyday married woman/mother. In the story of women, there is always a Matsiko.

GENRE: COLUMNS
TITLE: THE POLITICS OF FEAR
WRITER: LEO MUZIVOREVA: THE OBSERVER, ZIMBABWE
REVIEWER: NAMSE NAMESTANG UDOSEN, NIGERIA

Leo writes on the politics of fear with a pen soaked in emotions. It projects fear as the source of discrimination and oppression by demagogues. It presents different human experiences of fear such as fear from experience, fear from observation and fear from learning from members of our species. The role of tribal identity as the source of a common labelling building. I guess on the saying “birds of a feather flock together. This tribal identity is described as the source of emotional dissonance in society. He uses the term “tribalism” in a generic form, not as the term that refers to a group of people of common ancestral descent. That having been established, he goes on to explain how politicians play on the fears of their citizens to their advantage.

He describes tribalism as a “biological loophole capitalized on by politicians”. A rather strange claim to make. We are not very sure if “fear” is exactly a biological factor. Fear is a construct that science still doesn't have a full explanation for. He should have done some contextual definition of the terms at the beginning of the piece.

I think the word that matches what he is trying to describe is prejudice. Then another question arises; “are prejudices a product of fear?”

He makes a valid point in alluding that our brains can create and assess “in-group” and out-group” membership within a fraction of a second. This ability, once a necessity for survival has now become a problem. He makes a good case about manipulations of primordial sentiments by the elite and ruling class.

The article is topical and timely.

TITLE: KANTO AND THE BEAST
GENRE: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
AUTHOR: TENDO GRACE, UGANDA
REVIEWER: RACHAEL TWINOMUGISHA, UGANDA

Hehehe! This is the best children's story I've read all my life. A flash fiction for children, an idea so wonderful! Kanto and the Beast is a smooth read that introduces children to what I'd call "new language skills, suspense and tension."

Tendo Grace holds suspense so beautifully till the end of the story when we learn that Kanto has been scared of his own shadow, and not a beast like the title suggests.

Brief and hilarious read. Kanto's shadow teaches him to always listen to his mother who had always cautioned him never to play away from home.

Later, he learns to converge friends at his home and play there. What a beautiful lesson!

With such suspense and tension employed, it is obvious that Tendo kept us on our toes, and evident of our hearts and faces was fear.

It's a beautiful read, and will be memorable to children, I believe. (We have been scared of our own shadows as kids, haven't we?)

The writer uses simple diction which should enable the kids to read this independent of parents/guardians/elders, but of course not at night... Hehehe

GENRE: FLASH FICTION

TITLE: FEAR

WRITER: CHRISTIANA AGBONI, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: MAJORY MOONO SIMUYUNI, ZAMBIA

One of the cliché figurative definitions of fear has been “False Evidence Appearing Real.” But maybe this definition is not so cliché after all! Considering the era of Corona we are in, fear can be said to constantly yank to life all things imaginary and Agboni depicts this reality in her flash fiction: Fear.

Lily is quick to notice her younger sister is perturbed. One would wonder why the swiftness in recognizing her sister's moment of fear. They say 'send a thief to catch a thief'. Because they use similar tactics, a thief will catch another thief more easily. Is Lily able to tell something is wrong with her sister because the same fear is what's constantly pricking the balloon of her serenity? As the story unfolds, we realize the answer to the foregoing question is a resounding yes!

When Coronavirus started, it was thought to basically be a Chinese virus that would end in China, just as it had bred right there. To our dismay, it spread across the world, but for a while, did not touch the African continent. Just like Lily, we all probably thought it was some 'stupid faraway disease' until it wasn't, because it had mastered its way into our continent and quickly into our countries. Having seen death tolls rise on other continents, and eventually in our own backyards, who didn't fear for their life?

'Stay home,' they advised. Lily and her family obeyed the health precaution as did we all, but we see her mother's tone hardening from the inception of the quarantine. Everybody is afraid! Fear knows no discrimination; it clutches us all. And in the boredom of quarantine, it's not so difficult to lose one's mind to false evidence appearing real. Every other cold, as if we've never suffered colds before, makes one fear they have finally contracted the virus, just like Lily. As her palms turn pale, probably from the chills of the weather, she loses her calm and doesn't hesitate to see death approaching, for she is certain she is sick too.

'Fear' is a very relatable story, unless one lives in a world different than the one we live in today.

Cheers to Agboni for reminding us that though we have moved on somehow and now 'reside' in the new normal, constant fear for our lives has also since become a new normal.

GENRE POETRY**TITLE: GENITAL TALE****WRITER: NZERE CHINEDU, NIGERIA****REVIEWER: NNANE NTUBE, CAMEROON**

"If I die in this poem
Will you bury me in the words of my ex?
Will you teach me the tricks of loneliness?
or will I become another genital tale on pages of newspapers?" (L14 to 18).

Fear is established when the society we live in is void of security. We know not where to hide or when our end will come. Fear of the unknown gains a physical form as its paws keep the persona frozen with a lifeless heart.

"The Genital Tale" by Nzere Chinedu is not only an outcry of fear of the known in the dark world of today, but a portrait of the highest level of immortality, absurdities, wickedness and injustice. It paints an image of a society that has tagged human life as being 'cheap'. Hence, the meanness and scary deeds such as rape; "peeping beneath my purple coloured skirt making way for his rage" (Lines 2 & 3).

The thought of the persona's mother being bought for a token projects the negative view of men about women. It reduces a woman to a state of nothingness and places her as a vulnerable being in the hands of vultures. This prompts a review of the Nigerian society in the last six years that brought us to a collective sad and frightful stories of rape. For example in March 2014, news of a 17-year-old boy who allegedly raped his mother and 4 young children in Ebonyi State made a "genital tale" on the pages of newspapers. Last June 2020, a man was reported to have raped a three-month-old baby in Adogi village, Nasarawa and everything became a "genital tale" on the pages of newspapers. Why? Because "the world is [now] a horror thriller" (in the persona's father's voice).

The persona, through analepsis, brings up earlier occurrences as if to create an analogy between the "genital tale" and other tales. In an embedded narrative, the tale of Rinji Peter Bala, a 20-year-old level 300 student in Nigeria who was shot by Nigerian Army Operation on May 12, 2020, is recounted. This culminates in instilling fear in the persona's mind as there is no safe place in this world – danger looms everywhere.

Following the advice of the persona's father, one needs to be careful and watchful.

In this 18 line poem, Chinedu calls us to be watchful because we are all in danger, for we do not know when and where our own unfortunate stories shall trend in newspapers.

The tone of the poem is firm as it expresses what is real of the world today.

The mood is gloomy filled with scary notions like rape, death, danger.



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at it's peak.