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IS FATE REAL?

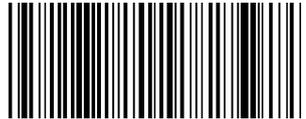
Imou Esparis
Uganda

A TWIST IN FATE

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Nigeria

FATE

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THEME: AFTERLIFE

Writers Space Africa, a monthly literary online magazine dedicated to giving literary enthusiasts a platform for their work, welcomes submissions for her **December 2020 Edition** in the following categories:

- Short Story
- Flash Fiction
- Poetry
- Essays
- Children's Literature

The Submission windows is open from 1st of October to 14th October.

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We look forward to receiving your best.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

What is fate? A big hand in the sky? The deliberate guidance of mystical beings? An interference in what life would/could have been? A bunch of nonsense that gives us comfort when we convince ourselves that we are helpless? A finality. The end of a chapter. An acceptance of what is/what will be.

There are many things we believe and of these many things, few are a constant in all our lives. Some of us do not believe in fate, some of us believe we can influence fate and some of us feel fate is unchangeable destiny. Whatever the case may be, there is a life each of us must live and it is one that is not lived in isolation. These circumstances make that there are choices you and I must make - whether by our own machinations or by pure happenstance - which will collide, positively or negatively, with the choices of another. It is these collisions that we term 'fate'.

Our single choices in isolation are hardly enough to determine the course of our lives. Going by this, what I am saying is simply that we must take our lives and make the most of the situations we find ourselves in. We must participate in this thing called Fate and we must do so with all that we've got.

It is my hope that you enjoy the entries in this edition as much as the team and I did.
Always remember,

Ubuntu.

Warm regards,

Nabilah.

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IN THE EYE OF SILENCE

Obinna Gabriella
Nigeria



Fate is destiny. Or, maybe destiny is Fate. Whatever Fate is, I'm sure she is a sadist; twisted like branches of yam tendrils around a cassava stalk in an unattended farm.

She? She because when I think of Fate, I think of Nne; the old woman who had lived behind my father's house in Enugu. For some reason, everyone was afraid of her. You could see it in the way their voices trembled around muffled greetings of 'nne ndewo,' and the way their hands shook when she walked past. I too was afraid of her, but I could not stay away. I would stare at her from a distance, and attempt to count the veins crisscrossing boldly across her limbs; the green coloration stark against her skin which had yellowed with age.

For me —us, Muna and I—, fate is nothing definitive or substantial. Maybe we are fated to be alone and have no home; to stay out at

sea without anchor, to have nothing but each other and learn the virtues of long-suffering.

It's like a raffle draw where you dip your hands in and select a number. Only in this case, every time we put our hands in the box, we come out with misfortune's definition of a joke. My story started when I was six years old, too young to understand and too old to leave the memories behind.

July, 1967

I woke up to sounds of argument coming from Papa's ubi. This was not new, in fact, it had been an almost routine occurrence since the independent state of Biafra was declared.

The only difference now was in the tone of the gatherings. At first, in the days following the declaration broadcast on radio, everyone had been happy. The men gathered in the evenings and drank father's palmwine —fresh from the gourds.



They stretched greedy palms whenever Mama came bearing her big tray laden with smoked meat. It was a continuous celebration; gather, eat, rest, repeat.

One day in July, the men had gathered slowly, raising dust as they dragged their feet with somber expressions. That night, there was no palmwine or spiced meat. There was only tobacco and they smoked it in near-silence, whispering about 'war' and Biafra. After that night, their gatherings had ceased being nightly celebrations. Sometimes they were heated arguments —with voices raised loud enough to wake the dead— and other times, they were sad silences broken intermittently by sadder monologues.

I was too young to understand these changes, but I grew accustomed to the hoarse bellows of men bearded so thickly that they had earned the right to be inconsiderate of such mundanity as a youngster's sleep.

"Ikenna"

Muna sat up with her right hand stretched towards me from her

mattress which lay parallel to mine. I took her hand rather roughly, smiling to myself when she winced in pain. I hated having to get up just because she needed to use the bathroom. "What do you think they are talking about?" I could not hold back my curiosity.

I walked through the corridor that led out to the lavatory, and Muna followed closely behind me. Her fingertips barely grazed the palm of the guiding hand I stretched out behind me.

"It's war, Ikenna. There is war and you will have to fight. All the boys will. Papa too..." she lowered her voice and went on, "Maybe you will die there..."

"No!" I yelled and yanked my hand from hers, rattled by her teasing. She quickly found the wall with her hands and her laughter followed me down the hallway even though I had my hands clasped tightly over my ears.

September, 1967

"Come out of there. Puta kita!"

Papa's voice was angry and I could see the disappointment that coloured his expression. My legs

felt like sticks stuck in plaster; I could not will myself to leave the safety of the cupboard in which I was hiding.

Muna was standing at the other end of the room. Her face was drenched with tears and she was trembling like she did whenever she was afraid and needed to hold somebody. Somehow, I found the strength to crawl out on limbs that felt like rubber. I dragged myself across the room and knelt beside Muna's trembling legs. The relief that ran through her when our bodies made contact was palpable. She dropped down to the floor and put her hands around me.



For some days, Papa had taken to organizing drills. He started after we began hearing the boom of gunfire afar off —these didn't scare me. The echoes we had heard were like old cars starting grudgingly. What I was afraid of was Papa. These drills, he claimed, would test and hone our readiness for attacks. He would wear a mask and swing his big machete —the one he only used for cutting down palm fruits from the big trees in the farm. The drills always ended in tears because Papa would find us wherever we hid in the compound, and then he would yell frighteningly. He didn't think we were getting prepared. I know now that he must have been very afraid. For himself. For us.

I can swear that in the weeks before the war caught up with us, the sun did not rise over my piece of Biafra. There were only clouds, dark and sad. There was also wind; cold wind that went through our clothes and rattled our bones. October, 1967.

I sat on the old kitchen stool, sobbing silently; my shoulders shaking violently. I shut my eyes as tears slid down my cheeks, marking my dark skin with their heat. I buried my face in Muna's

torn dress, trying to drown out the sounds of exploding mortar. Mama. Papa. I do not recall how long we sat and waited —for nothing in particular. Muna nudged me gently. She stood, pulling me up. Her knees must have hurt from kneeling so long to hold me.

I tried not to look at the far corner of the upturned, sooty kitchen but like a moth drawn to flame, I couldn't fight the pull. I looked, really looked. I stared into his still open eyes. Papa. His stomach was split open and his innards spilt over the now slack flesh-like offering to the gods of war. A choked sob escaped me. Muna's grip tightened as we walked out; she could not see him. I do not know what became of Mama. The soldiers had been mean, adamant to my pleas. They had pulled her outside and her cries had rung for only a short while.

I remember Muna's stumbling progress. She needed my help as I needed hers. She'd always needed help, my Muna. I remember the cold, the hunger, and the long, long trek. I was six but, I remember.

1976, Lagos.

I was older, still I did not know how to read or write. Children in bright uniforms hurried to school as fast as their stubby limbs allowed, and I could only watch. I was caught in a world of silence. I did not speak. No, I couldn't speak. Every time I tried, a cold, deathly fear came upon me and I broke into a sweat.

After the war, we'd come to live with our Aunt, Ifechi, but she was hardly home. Her business was more important than her handicapped niece and nephew. One day, I'd been sitting beside her window in silence and I heard her tell her friend, Philomena, that we were burdens.

Michael, Aunt Ifechi's boyfriend was hurting Muna. I heard and I saw; everytime he hurt her, I heard. He snuck into her room whenever Aunt Ifechi wasn't around and clawed at her. My Muna. He pulled her hair and made her cry. I cried along because I felt useless.

The pastor visited sometimes and I wanted to tell him. He said I couldn't talk because I was possessed. I tried to tell him about Michael but my lips quivered wordlessly, my eyes wild in desperation.



He took this as a manifestation of evil and prayed louder, twisting my neck about, sprinkling holy water in my face and commanding the demon to 'die by fire!'

One night, I swore to end all of it and I hid behind the curtains. Michael came in drunk and undressed in a haste.

He reached for Muna and she cringed; her unseeing eyes darted around in fear. Briefly, I hated her for letting him hurt her; for being silent when she could choose to speak. In anger, I charged soundlessly and sunk the blade into Michael. He fell off Muna and his blood trailed down onto the floor.

Muna called my name; reached

out blindly. I knew she was scared so, I took her hand and pulled her off the bed. We left. Again. I felt no remorse. It was Inevitable, orchestrated by Fate and we are all subject to her will after all. Aren't we?

LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

Ugbede Ataboh
Nigeria

To the best of my knowledge, fate breaks down social and cultural stereotypes to achieve a divine purpose or goal. I

two weeks of my life. It was really special for me because there was nothing carnal about what we had; we didn't even kiss! We held

every day. Whenever we had the opportunity to chill indoors, we just held on to each other and talked about our individual plans and dreams.



do not believe in fate, but I believe in destiny which can be altered by the dogged will of man backed by God, the Supreme.

Last month was crazy for me. I fell in love and had the most magical

hands in the evenings and took long walks together, talking about any and everything under the sun. It was amazing! I even stopped sleeping early because we talked on the phone late into the night

Oh! If wishes were horses, I'd be the first to ride over and over again; this guy made plans with me in it, but I remained silent the whole time and could only imagine the possibility of all our dreams of being together in a world free of social stereotypes; the kind of world that will not raise an eyebrow as a young man and an older woman walk romantically on the street; the kind of world where a mother will not prevent her precious son from marrying the love of his life because she has long been plucked from the proverbial tree of innocence; the kind of world where a woman will not lose her confidence as age begins to catch up with her, while her man is just beginning to bloom.

Yes! I am almost a decade older than the current love of my life, but before you run off on your high horse pointing fingers at me, just know that he is a different kind of man with a strong air of maturity around him.

I honestly knew he was younger, but I didn't know the gap was super wide until he mentioned his age in a conversation and I caved in. Why now? Why him? Why me? was all I could ask God as I tossed and turned in my bed during the early hours of the last Sunday morning in September. After a few days, he noticed my blue mood and asked for us to meet... "Mon amour, you have been so distant lately and you have not responded to my request. Please be officially mine so we can plan and build a future together." He cooed ever so lovingly. "I really need to come clean about something...I really like and...I am way older than you! I don't look my age but I am way older than you. The worst part is that you look older than your age" I wailed petulantly.

"Mon amour, so what do you suggest we do now? It seems like you have already made a decision" He responded in his

usual mature manner.

"I think we should honestly just remain good friends. Thankfully, we have not been intimate in any way. You still have many experiences to enjoy and learn from...many more people to meet...many more hearts to break. I cannot stand in the way of all the adventures life has in store for you. God knows I want to be yours and I want you to be mine but..."

"But what mon amour?" He asked impatiently.

"But, there are several obstacles on our path. Obstacles we cannot ignore even if we want to."

"Seul l'avenir nous le dira" He responded...oh yeah! I forgot to mention that he grew up in France and occasionally switches to French unknowingly.

"You just spoke French and it literally sounded like "French" to me" I responded with a blank look on my face.

"Oh shit! I'm so sorry. I keep doing this...it means- Only time will tell. So, let's give ourselves time"

I really cannot believe his

response. Time?! Time is literally what I don't think I have. Am I supposed to wait for him to grow into a man?! Na wa oh! On these streets, I have seen a lot, but this particular one, weak me wella. Chai!

We still talk, but our conversations only reopen my fresh wound – I feel so blue. Does love truly exist? Is it a feeling people build after confirming their matches meet almost all or all social and cultural requirements?

For the first time ever, I wish I can go back in time and be born the same year with my love or even be a few years younger. I wish I can come face to face with Fate and align my romantic star with his. I know life is way bigger than romance and has many other branches that can fill and satisfy me, but oh! How I wish!

In all of this, I am still grateful to God because I totally stopped believing that purity and love can be found in romance, but I am happy my Love made me unlearn all I have learned over the years just so I can learn again. We were destined to meet and we have; we were destined to love each other and we have...and the rest? I do not leave to Fate. Time will tell.

KUBO AND THE BAOBAB TREE

Bernard Ewhomazino Glory
Nigeria

"Help!"

Kotu yelled into the thick forest as he was lifted from the ground by some odd looking men.

He'd never seen them in his life before, and they had accosted him on the lonely path to the stream.

They were dressed in Raffia skirts and had large afros. Their hairstyle and manner of dressing was strange.

But what did they want from him?

Kubo wondered as he bounced on their shoulders from left to right. The rickety road intercepting his thoughts. He thought of his poor mother back in the village. It was dusk already and she would be standing outside waiting for his return from the stream.



She would never know that he'd been abducted by strange men just as he was returning from the stream with a bowl of water on his head.

She'd stand under the moon and strain her eyes at the road from time to time watching for her son.

Maybe after a while she'd realize that something was indeed wrong. Kubo was not like the other boys in the village who liked to make their parents worry unnecessarily. She'd be able to tell soon and report to the village elders. They'd come looking for him with the strongest warriors of the village.

"Hey! ..put me down, I have not taken anything from you, neither have I stolen your fruits. What do you want from me?"

"Watch it boy!, you'll awaken the spirits that sleep in the forest" The biggest man in the group thundered with a menacing scowl.

"But I don't want to be here, please I want to go back to my mother, I've been a good child, don't take me away"....Kubo begged profusely, his voice shaky with fear.

He'd heard sad tales of what happened to little boys in the forest at night.

He only hoped the warriors from his village would come looking for him soonest, before these strange looking men did something dreadful to him.

Suddenly, they stopped as if they'd been quietly commanded to.

"Huboo"

"Huboo!" The men suddenly began

to chant in unison at the top of their voices.

As they chanted the strange words, their body brightened with an invisible light. The huge hair on their head seemed to shrink, and the wind hollered in rebellion.

Kubo began to cry, everything was strange, he could not understand it anymore.

What did these people want to do to him?.

As if on cue, the strangest thing happened, the Baobab tree before them began to take shape, and Kubo could see eyes and mouth on the tree

"Is this the child?" The tree thundered.

The leader of the group nodded. He looked different with his shrunken hair

A speaking tree? Kubo shook with fear, and his legs wiggled uncontrollably beneath him.

The baobab tree as if reading his thoughts, suddenly turned and lunged for him. He was to become a sacrifice to a strange tree.

Kubo peed his pants almost immediately and screamed! He did not want to die....who would save him?

Suddenly he heard his name being called far away.

"Kubo! Kubo! Wake up!"

Kubo opened his eyes. He was in the real world. He'd been dreaming.

It was his mama prodding him.

"Oh mama, I was so scared!" Kubo said as he noticed he'd peed himself physically.

"It was just a nightmare. could you hurry to the stream before it turns dark, I want some fresh water." Mama asked, stroking his head.

"Never Mama!" Kuto suddenly retorted.



ARE OUR CHOICES MEANINGFUL?



Oluwadamilola Yusuf
Nigeria

Humans can only decode actualities that are within the structure of time and space. With this, the whole idea of fate that exists outside time and space may be difficult to visualize. Many a time, it is up to you to make the choices you want. Imagine, for a minute, you find yourself in a sinking boat and for you to survive, you need to get on a lifeboat. Inevitably, you have two fates in front of you. You either choose to take the lifeboat or choose to stay on the sinking boat reasoning that perhaps, destiny wants you to be on a sinking boat. As status quo detects, one is caught in a thin line between fate and choice. The former provides alternatives for you while the latter determines whether you make something out of it.

People often misinterpret trust in fate to mean not acting. Indeed,

our actions are significant considering that they are motives for transforming life's proceedings. For instance, a person may not follow the guidelines for using his car or any other gadgets thinking that it doesn't have an effect on what fate has ordained for him.

Truthfully, the reality is in between our actions and what lies ahead. In other words, our actions without fate is nothing, yet they are necessary for life and its goodness (fate can either shed or unshed life purpose). It is that principle or idea by which every event happens beyond the scope of a person in reference to being directed by a supernatural power. One may then think; why do we need to toil if everything has already been predestined? Humans are however special mortals with purpose. Thus, the free will to direct our own lives is

present.

Over the years, the idea of fate concerned most theologians and philosophers. In Book III of Nicomachean Ethics, the saying, "Unlike non rational agents, we have the power to do or not to do and much of what we do is voluntary, such that its origin is 'in us', and we are 'aware of the particular circumstances of the action'" is the idea of Aristotle, which clearly tells us that we have freewill. Personal judgment about fate, exerts a part in our perception of the world and day-to-day activities. Since we are often unaware of the future, our decisions are rooted in our perception of the way the world around us exists. Therefore, man is subdued by the pressure of two realities, the world of fate, which is unalterable and its immediate freewill.

Our African predecessors also



understood that whatever came to be, either good or bad, was fate plotted by a vital force. An in-depth elaboration about this is traced in Placid Temple's Bantu Philosophy where our ancestors believed that everything that transpires in the world usually finds root in fortune. Fate served as a definition of human norms and practices obligatory for a culture to adjust to a given environment. For instance, the sole belief of the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria is that fate finds its way to find a man even if he does nothing to strive for it. Such as, a person who sits at home all day still has fate in store for him. This belief is held in their adage

which says, "The toad's luck does not go up, even if it goes up, it must surely come down because the toad does not climb".

Eastern Nigeria has a different view of fate. Here, palmistry which is known as the hand's fate is a general practice. It was believed that each person's hands are different, which has an effect on a person's current life and future. Thus, the outcome of a person, either good or bad is ensured by three main components. First, the blessings of his chi (god); second, his endeavors and choices in life; and third, customs that are inculcated by the community.

Conclusively, Osuagwu confirms that Africans have assumed direct and immediate responsibility for all their African and human destiny. With full consciousness of moral demands and expectations, they demand to take up their place as authors, architects, masters, custodians, and advocates of their existence (Osuagwu 1999, 211). However, fate is a conundrum on account of human's restrictions from understanding the structure beyond time and space. But if a person is destined for greatness, he has to work to achieve it. To put it simply, a man's destiny is right in his hands.

IS FATE REAL?

Imou Eparis
Uganda

You miss your morning bus by a few seconds and have to wait for the next one, that's taking longer than usual to arrive. Amid your frustration, a handsome stranger says hey to you. In that moment you forget all

to your work place. You two really hit it off and now he has your number and is already planning to see you again. Five years later you and him are married and expecting your first child. You look back and see that it was fate

about in a fiction movie, yet its talked about and believed by many in our world. Fate, as it is termed, is an event or course of events that will inevitably happen in the future. Fate tells us everything in our lives is already predetermined. But, is it true?



your troubles and smile at this fine looking man and hope he is going to get into the bus you are getting into. He does and that's not all, he sits next to you and to your luck, he is a chatty Cathy! The conversation lasts the entire ride

that brought you together that day.

The existence of a supernatural force controlling or predetermining our future sounds like something you would hear

There are some things I agree are predetermined; for instance, your family was predetermined, the environment you were born in was predetermined way before you were born, your school, your culture, your tribe, how ugly you look on your national ID, all of these things are predetermined and you cannot do anything to change them (you could try asking for another ID photo but it will turn out the same, trust me, I have tried ooh!). I will say, these situations described above are fate.



The things that are not predetermined however are plenty. Things like who you will marry or how well you will do in your exams or who you will vote for in the next election.

These things I have mentioned are only determined by yourself. You decide who you will date or marry. A handsome stranger won't meet you at the bus stop and confess his undying love for you. He doesn't know you, you creep! How well you do in your exams is determined by how much you care and put into your academics. Who you vote for next is determined by the company you

keep, the conversations you have been having, where you live and what you read. All these situations are all based on the choices you make or have been making.

Choices guided by your convictions rather than chance, determine your fate. How wise have your decisions been in the past? Have you dated just anyone who showed you interest? Have you prayed for help to succeed in your exams without actually studying for them? Have you let past failure dictate your future? Well I am telling you now that that isn't the end of the story, you

shouldn't just willingly take whatever life hands you on a plate; throw the plate away and make your own meal!

You may have been a victim to chance, but it's not too late to change your story. Your present choices will determine the rest of your life. I will conclude by saying we are all masters of our fate, nothing of our future has been written yet because we are the ones writing it, through our choices.

TOMORROW NEVER COMES

Kenneth Minishi
Kenya

In our beloved continent, it is customary to cast a blind eye on posterity. Maybe you could conclude that we view posterity with some sort of trepidation. I mean how else would you explain the chronic inclination to live in the here-and-now with close to little or no regard for the future? As inevitable as death is, so too old age; these two are given a wide berth when it comes to planning. You only have to look at the number of people who regret not saving up towards their pension. You only have to look at families embroiled in messy tussles over land, property and wealth, because their deceased patriarch left no will.

Politicians, supposedly the bane of our existence, are actually the few who espouse the value of providence. No sooner has your average politician assumed office than he is already thinking ahead; incredulously spending the bulk of his present term in office

campaigning for his next term. That's what you call bona fide forward-thinking.

Just this week in fact, I was compelled to do some forward-thinking of my own. At about quarter past four on Tuesday, I was aboard a bus headed to Nairobi's City Center. I sat beside the window, rapt in thought, typical of any introspective introvert. The window afforded me a vista of the city's changing landscape. My chief concern was that traffic would not be very bad. I was making a jaunt to the center of Kenya's capital for two reasons. I was hoping to buy a grey tie for the throw-away price of one hundred shillings and the City Center was just the place to get it. The other reason was to pass by the Post Office to check if my family's rental box had any mail.

Upon the completion of those tasks, I was to head to

Kawangware to purchase a sweater, also at a throw-away price. I am no sapeur by any stretch of the imagination. The exuberant suits I leave to others elsewhere big on style. I go for the comfortable and bespoke at cut-price deals in the market or on the streets.

All these activities being completed, I planned to work out, doing a couple of bodyweight exercises. Not that I needed calories burnt or weight reduced. It's just to keep fit and maintain my soon-to-be chiseled physique. In all fairness, I could have done these things earlier in the day, but you know us Kenyans, we follow in the legacy of our long-distance runners, we have that final-kick in us. We dither about for a while only to spring into action at the last possible minute.

Shortly into my commute, a light drizzle broke out. Gradually, it increased to a torrential downpour that had people scampering. The onset of rain for some unknown reason, elicits discomposure among our drivers resulting in epic traffic gridlocks. I was fervently praying that this was not to be the case. Little did I know that it was to be the least of my worries.

The bus hurtled down Valley Road, inching ever closer to my destination. By then, the rain had rendered the windows misty, obscuring our outside view. To my surprise, the bus turned right into Ralph Bunche Road. This was completely out of the norm. Normally, buses would turn into Ralph Bunche Road when leaving the City Center, never when going towards it. A few seconds later I realized the turn was anything but intentional.

A thumping noise from the back of the bus ensued by a crashing sound of broken glass, threw us into a panic. The bus had rammed into something or something had rammed into it. It was hard to tell. The bus was now

careening across the wet road. My fear was that another vehicle would send the bus toppling over, falling to my side and squishing me to death.

I braced for another collision. Understandably, everyone had lost the plot. Screams of panic-stricken passengers engulfed the bus. Women shrieked hysterically. I heard one cry, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"

I couldn't believe it. Was this really happening? My mind, like the bus, was spinning wildly out of control. I was powerless to do anything. Was another more fatal collision imminent? Thankfully, the answer was to be no. The driver managed to resume control of the bus, slowly steering it towards the curb on the left side of the road, before grinding it to a halt.

Gingerly, I rose from my seat. "Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!" A lady in the back repeatedly uttered. Beneath me were shards of glass strewn across the floor, the windows now just mere frames. There were small streaks of blood on the surgical mask of the passenger who sat across me. Yet, he was selflessly commandeering

people out of the bus. Another man at the back was trying to usher an injured passenger out of the bus.

You never imagine you will be in an accident. Well, I had been smack in the center of one. Passengers began filing out of the bus, fearful and relieved at the same time.

It seemed the passengers at the back were worst affected; a few nursing some cuts and bruises. Most of the passengers had just been shocked from it all. Looking around, it didn't seem that there was a passenger who had lost his life, nor was there one who was unconscious. Most of us came out virtually unscathed.

I dismounted the vehicle, slightly disconcerted. I trooped to the next bus-stop still intent on completing my objectives for the day but obviously still reeling from the accident. I could have died. Just like that. I could have been in a body-bag, being whisked away to the mortuary by first-responders in COVID-19 PPE kits.

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The incident sobered me. Life is brief, tomorrow isn't actually a guarantee. Like the lady in the bus, I was thanking Jesus. I was thankful to Him that I escaped the accident without as much as a scratch. It got me wondering how much time do I really have left on earth?

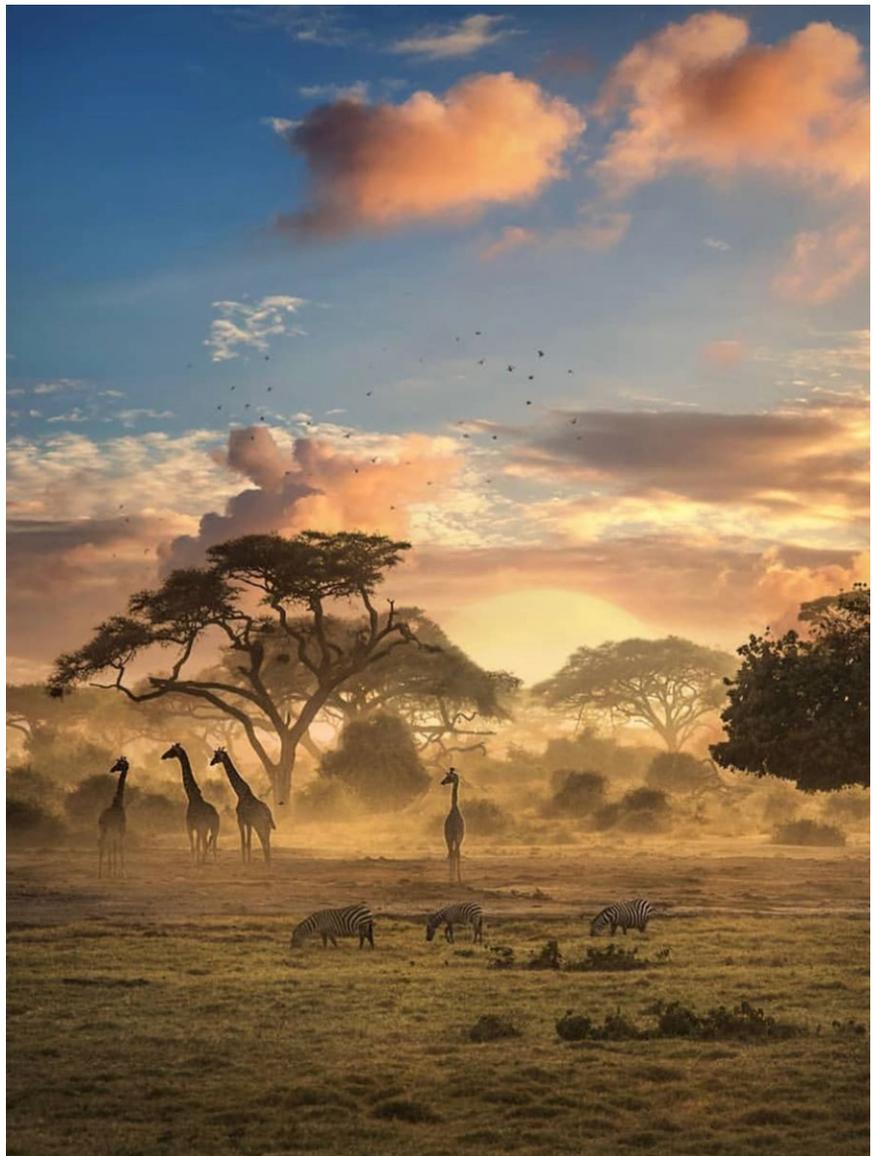
When Kenya reported its first case of COVID-19, I will be honest to admit that I anticipated to be among the virus' casualties. I didn't see a future.

To my dismay I reckoned, "I'm going to die so young. I'm going to die without starting a family." I'm going to die only having known the friend-zone. Bummer. Okay I didn't think 'Bummer,' but you get the point, don't you? It was just disappointing to not envisage a

future.

For most of my 31-year existence, life has been lived with a presumption of tomorrow. The inclination has been to believe I will eventually overcome this quarter-life malaise, settle down, start a family and so forth. This accident and COVID, have made me do a rethink.

The accident put things into perspective. The gift of life is undeniable. It could be taken from you at any time. Jesus, gives me the gift of life, of today and it is one I should gladly receive. One that I should exhaust not in frivolities but in purposeful activity, because one day, tomorrow will never come.



A TWIST IN FATE

MaryCynthia Okafor
Nigeria

Ezimme had wanted a child the very first season after her marriage rites were completed but she couldn't have any, and even more than ten planting seasons after, she still couldn't bear a child.

Though her husband stuck by her, his family was another matter. Asili was that she had traded her womb for beauty – hers exceeded that of every woman in the whole land.

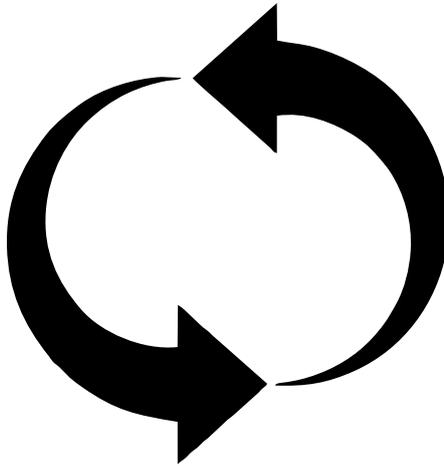
As was usual, she went to the shrine of Akaraka, the three agbala that wrote down a child's destiny from birth. After her sacrifice, she lay at their feet and cried herself to sleep.

And she dreamt.

She was in a meadow and before her were three women. She knew at once they were the three fates

and she pleaded her plight to them.

They sang, "Your tears have granted you audience with us. We've written nowhere in your tale will you birth a child as you—and your chi—decided that you'll never have a child, but



destinies can be twisted. Today, we entwine yours with a child's."

"Anyanwu ututu you shall call her, for beautiful, she shall be," Mbido—kind—said. Ezimme gave a joyous cry.

Etimi—solemn—said, "She shall live strong and long and bear many children."

Ezimme prostrated her gratitude. " B u t , " Mgwucha—apologetic—added. "She will break your heart for the wife of an alusi she shall be when you choose to do the will of the gods. At eight, she shall be taken to live—until her death—in Agbusu's house and never again shall she call you Nne."

Ezimme awoke with a start. The dreams of a desperate woman, she mused. But the next day, just as the sun peeked through the clouds, she conceived a child who shall be named after the early morning sun.

CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Christiana Agboni
Nigeria

Some people do all they can to trample on my significance. If you must know, my influence cuts across all lives and spheres. I come in different ways; I shout, whisper, nudge, and even push.

I remember shouting at Alami, to change location when her fiancé left her standing at the altar. Today, she's happy with Enejoh. I work on my own terms and conditions.

Ugbede is about to throw himself into the Lagos lagoon; he is tired of being jobless. They will fish him out of course.

People will gather to berate me, saying, I am not being fair to him. They do not know it is for the greater good. Soon, he will run a counselling centre, to help

those like him. The same people will marvel at my impact.

I hope they give me credit then; many think I don't deserve credit.

Some people claim to be ignorant of my existence, when I'm blatantly obvious. It's funny, the way some try to delay me. They can try, but I remain an unrelenting game changer.

I laugh at your antics. Puny humans.

Some call me callous. Some call me fickle. Others call me amazing. I agree with all that and

more. I do not act in a vacuum; I only work when you decide to get busy. I'm a subtle poker player. I reveal my hands when it's time.

Some are trying to avert my hands, it will end in futility.

By my sleight of hand, you are where you are right now, doing whatever it is you're doing or not doing. I am not a disease, nor an anomaly that some have and others do not.

My name is fate. And I am closer than you think.



Nocturnal Gift

Ibanda Mary Frances
Uganda

There it was again, a brief rustling, a soft stirring in the grass that only ears accustomed to the subtlest nocturnal sounds could pick up. She lay still. It could not be them. The game warden had said the gorillas seldom ventured down the mountain close to the human settlement. Besides, they were

not night shifters by nature. For three days now the animals had been elusive and she was beginning to regret this whole trip. On her knees, she crept up to the tent wall. Her trembling hand

painstakingly drew the zipper back, creating a tiny peephole. By the glow of the full moon, she would be able to see whatever was lurking out there so close to

the camp.

There, at the edge of the clearing, majestic and enormous, a silverback stood like a bronze statue. He was staring at her tent as if he was aware of her wakefulness. His black eyes held a bottomless depth that she knew better than to meet while his



presence hung on the silence like a held back cough. Was he an inadvertent sentinel of the dark like her?

Transfixed by the magnetic pull of curiosity, woman and beast waited. Her years of chronic sleeplessness must have been priming her for this pause in time, when nature defied norm to offer her a sight her group had pursued in vain for three days. The moment stretched on. Then, silently the ape turned away, and beast and forest

merged into one. Her thoughts switched to her friends, insulated by their dreams and sleeping bags, oblivious to this magical encounter. They refused to believe her when she called them out of their tents shortly after, until they

inspected where he had stood. The ground was still warm.

A SUTRA ABOUT FATE

Juwon Adeola
Nigeria

We arrived with destiny lined in our palms—
stars wrapped in flesh & blood

wings of dreams ready for flight,
ready to unfurl colours locked within us

but our feathers are prey to razors &
expectations are a burden to fly with.

We're meant to be great
but our dreams are ferried on paper boats.

Stranded on the island of despair,
where do we go from here—
do we sail backwards to straighten crooked fates?



DIET OF UNCERTAINTY

Deep Martins
Nigeria

So much talk in my sister's physics textbook,
but never one study on how much horsepower
it takes to turn the hands of time.

In my literature classwork, I'm dull enough to
write a clock's tick-tock an example of onomatopoeia
for the footfalls of uncertainty -----

A guest no one knows how close it is, & for what
it is coming [And the door is always ajar,
because we have straw for bolts]

I've planted my hands on the plough
long enough for my bones to grow into steel;
to wield muscles strong enough to steer
the rudder of life in one great turn into a fairer course.
Each muscle grown is mocked by the featherweight oar
I am given against a tempest that burps
in my face the scent of my swallowed kindred.

At a puppeteer's show, I imagine my little brother,
in '97, pulled by strings into the jaws of silence.
Trying to snithe any wire tied to my feet,
but it is the air I am beating;
the strings pulling me into movements of dance
where I can only leave footprints behind as I tread
whilst hoping they're not eaten by the wind.

FATE IS A NEW NAME HERE

Olajuwon Alhaytham Abdullah Adedokun
Nigeria

your sister has whole cities burning in her stomach,
Beirut! she has seen coloured flames swallowing you alive,
now, she sits in the kitchen, tucked in a corner
writing about how much the smell of hot water boils her
nostrils.

your brother once carved your name on trees,
he watched your blood water the dried leaves,
now he kneels under the shades, munching God's name,
begging to be ridden of your memories

Mama, the echoes of your name is still heard here,
Lebanon is burning, your little daughter's pleas,
in the the search for your face, a fifth direction was born,
Not east, not west, not south nor north,
deep in graves, where dead bodies meet.

Father.

your face is a skinned mango, the seed slashed in half,
juicing our hopes with the fireworks that lighted your skin,
someone somewhere will learn to mutter "fate" in place of
your name,
and your heavy footsteps will be remembered by the scent
of burns.

LET ME BE ME

William Khalipwina Mpina
Malawi

They are a moon
starring the August night
They are a star
twinkling in beauty & fame
and I am alone
stuck in the mud
I would rather be me
shunned, smelling of smoke
always at home
like a flower pot
and be watered
by second-hand
love and dirt
let me.be me
Black as night
and free like
a column of black ants
sauntering toward
a loaf of bread
whispering love
let me be me,
a smile always
taming tears
or a frown
mocking a snake
slithering around
the pot of hell
let me be me
and be happy
powerful beyond measure

LUCKY MEN

Temani Nkalolang
Botswana

Fate smiled when they met,
They complement each other
Above all, they complete father.

Call it coincidence but I believe
Fate smiled when they met,
Hard as it is to perceive-

Father's two wives are the key
To his and our joy. So you see
Fate smiled when they met.

MOIRAI

Trisha
Uganda



When a child is born
His destiny is threaded and decided
The road he will take determined
By the dangers of nyx
Or so the story goes
Clothos pins the thread of life
Lachesis measures his length
Atropos with her shears will cut it

Whether he be a pauper or a noble
He might become handsome
Strong and dandy
Better still, he might be heir to a powerful throne
He could be a thief belonging to the streets
Does it really matter when his life is predetermined
At the end of it all, when the fates decide
Even Zeus has no say.

REJECTION LETTER

Adedayo Adedamola
Nigeria

residues from the editor's non-committal desk
escort a vapid poem back into the garbage-inbox of my
Gmail:
you have a beautiful piece here
but it doesn't meet our expected standard for publication.
thank you.
& another jettisoned fate depletes fastidious ego
as my muse mourns a setback in which three-quartered
scoop of furious writings find reasons to doubt themselves
before braving the limelight of publications.

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GENRE: SHORT STORY

TITLE: REDEMPTION

WRITER: OHANYERE OGOADA, NIGERIA

REVIEWER: FUNMI RICHARDS, NIGERIA

Redemption is a short story with themes across guilt, suicide as a vehicular expression of issues with mental health, surviving loss and false altruism. It is written in a first-person narrative and interestingly in such a way that the sex/gender of the character is unknown until the character is willing to be identified.

The writer skillfully transitions through the story using foreshadowing and flashback, both of which are embodied and expressed in the form of symbolism, imagery and paradoxes. The writer uses 'black' to symbolise nothingness, that is the oblique afterlife moment where your fate is yet to be decided, but you are not really alive. Also, the 'vision/revelation' is represented as that moment where resolution comes and reason for a future is given; 'hairpin' represents a

The imagery, on the other hand, is quite tangible such that you start to feel the scenes are not only figments of the imagination of the writer but moments in time of an actual human. All of which could imply that these scenes have been relived repeatedly so that it is familiar and tangible.

Though the story touches across multiple themes; one theme that seems understated but follows through the entire story is altruism or in the real sense, false altruism. From the onset, we see results of the character's blame-game with herself causing her to attempt suicide repeatedly, we also see how this 'altruism' makes her spend resources on religious intercessions she doesn't believe in and know to be false in a bid to 'comfort' her adopted mother.

Furthermore, we see how this 'altruism' is in actual fact is baseless because she really didn't cause the death of her parents as she had thought. Finally, we see how she eventually accepts her adopted mother and refuels her altar of altruism with a new allegiance which could very well be thwarted again if she were to lose her adopted mum too.

In conclusion, the story is a call for awareness of possible or potential causes of depression – situational depression in this case as it is brought on by the loss of her parents. It also exposes the interdependency between people and the desire to please others and own burdens that are not ours to carry. And finally, it reminds us how powerful our minds can be when it has a purpose.

GENRE: COLUMNS

TITLE: RECONCILING RECONCILIATION IN AFRICA

WRITER: LEO MUZIVORERA, ZIMBABWE

REVIEWER: NAMSE KHOTSO UDOSEN, NIGERIA

Leo strikes a strong chord with this piece. Peace and reconciliation has been a thorny issue for many African societies. I am particularly interested because the issues raised in this essay can be related to my home country, Nigeria. Many years ago campus gangsters popularly called "cultists" were pardoned after a public show of renouncing cultism. Their past crimes were washed away; then we had militants blowing up oil facilities, kidnapping, raping and maiming citizens. A bogus amnesty deal wiped all that away. They were sent abroad for studies and paid monthly allowances. Recently, members of the dreaded Boko Haram sect, were rehabilitated and reconciled back to the societies they once terrorised. All these in a bid for reconciliation.

In this essay, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission along with Rwanda's Gacaca Community Courts are x-rayed. As I read the article, my mind wandered to Nigeria's Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission, popularly called Oputa Panel (it was headed by Justice Oputa). The panel was set up by the leadership of the 4th Republic to heal Nigerians of decades of military brutality. The result at the end was similar to what Leo presented in his essay.

He points out that reconciliation goes hand in hand with many other factors and generates many difficult questions. One of such questions is whether reconciliation "is trading justice for truth" as was the case in South Africa?

He notes that the trading of truth for justice is one of the low points of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He points to the calls for economic justice as a pointer that truth-telling is not enough. Unfortunately Nigeria's truth commission suffered the same fate. As Leo states "very little follow up work was done by the government and the policies left many South Africans feeling cheated, ditto Nigerians.

The article points to the opposite direction Rwanda took. Perpetrators of genocide crimes were tracked and punished. He describes the community courts where justice was swift on those found guilty of the crimes. That was the only way the wounds of the victims could be assuaged a bit. There are wounds that are never completely healed. This method also has been questioned by neutral observers. They question the objectivity and fairness of those trials done in the Gacaca courts.

The column concludes nicely with some words for leaders with conflict in their domains. "Reconciliation does not begin or end with commissions or trials. It requires change and transformation at the systemic level. This would be evident when victims and perpetrators are willing to work together to erase past hurts.

This is an apt and timely piece for our troubled times in Africa. I recommend further studies into reconciliation using a combination of the truth commissions and community courts to dispense justice as a tool for reconciliation.

GENRE: CHILDREN'S LITEERATURE

TITLE: LET'S TEACH FOR CHANGE

WRITER: IMMACULATE AJIAMBO, KENYA

REVIEWER: ANTHONY NWAGBAOSO ONYEADOR, NIGERIA

The story is about Madge and how she became a taunt owing to her body size which was the primary objective of the story. The story began in a setting; a dark, pitch black dining room. Her mother at first, was scanning which of her daughters was wailing before tracing her to the room. She found Madge's head buried between her thighs. Then a conversation ensued as Mother sought for a solution to repair Madge's broken confidence. After a tight motherly hug, Madge recounts how she became a mockery of her size at different occasions. Finally, Mother came up with a solution: teach about Anorexia; which became a second objective: Anorexia as a teaching object of change.

What is Anorexia?

This is an eating disorder characterized by low weight, food restriction, etc. Mother requests her to use this disorder in a teachable way so as to impact change on the person and correct an ill done to her. So, Madge will eventually learn how to use anorexia as a tool of joke in reply. So she can reply the person is 'A figure one', 'Kpanla', or 'A thin stock'.

What lessons does the Author map out for us?

First, the story presents a two-fold scenario: the reaction displayed by Madge. Her character was in shatters because of her size and age as well as adolescents who are trapped by how to react effectively to this and the person who made the statement. A better approach to deal with such a situation and the reason why such comments, mockery or taunt was made. It varies across situations but shouldn't be read out of context.

This, Mother studied before giving Madge a great reply and thanks to Mother, she can return to school to reassert her confidence and reply well to her friends, teachers and other pupils.

The writer did great justice to role-play Madge's story as a tool for using teaching as an epitome of change. The story's settings, mood, plot and diction which became the third objective of concern were neatly interwoven.

GENRE: POETRY

TITLE: DACHAU

WRITER: CHARLES DUNCAN, MALAWI

REVIEWER: TEMANI NKALOLANG, BOTSWANA

Something has to go wrong (disorder, discord, division) for there to be a need for reconciliation. Thus the prefix 're' meaning "back/again" and 'conciliare' meaning "bring together" suggest 3 things:

- the status quo (calm or harmony)
- disturbance of the status quo
- the need to restore the status quo

The poem 'Dachau' as it tackles spousal betrayal brings to light the aforementioned three things and thus stands as a locus classical.

The first line of the poem starts on a note of realisation as it presents both the persona's previous emotional calmness (status quo) and the now sore emotions that soar high with bitterness in the subsequent lines.

The diction employed throws the reader right in the middle of a concentration camp where the persona's raw emotions are let loose - anger, bitterness, vengeance, murderous rage - creating an emotional thriller. A heart betrayed is a heart capable of killing.

Skillfully weaving symbolism and imagery, the poem not only marries the persona's fire of vengeance to the worst kinds of genocide to ever plague humanity, but exalts them far above the Holocaust and Kigali genocide (S3, L3). Only when the reader reaches stanza 2, line 5 does she realise emotions got the better of her, it's not real, phew! But are they just lines in a poem? Look at the world around, the destruction vengeance gives birth to; the statistics are alarming, broken families, abandoned children, passion killings and we are still counting.

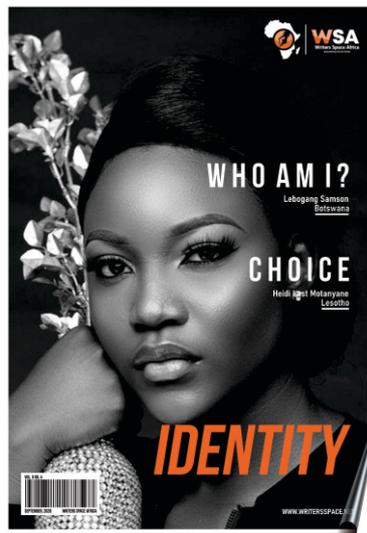
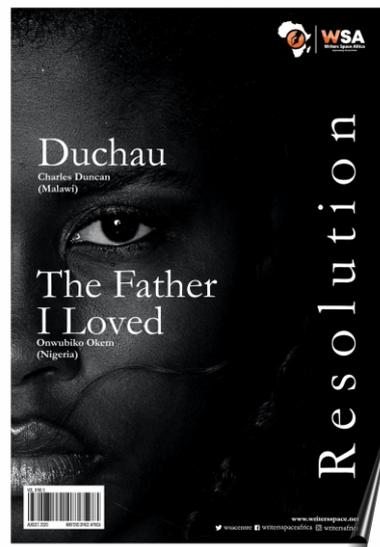
The poem draws a line between the persona's vengeance and the Dachau killers, citing provocation (S3, L1 and L5). Does this mean provocation justifies vengeance? Definitely not! As the persona introspects, he chooses forgiveness over vengeance (S3,L3-L8). The realisation that God forgave even the worst kind of sinners is a turning point and leads to the restoration of the status quo (S2, L3 and L4).

Thus, the poem which started on a bitter tone caused by spousal betrayal ends in a harmonious chord of reconciliation and leaves the reader in a pleasant mood of accomplishment like one who just solved a puzzle.



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