

# LUNARIS REVIEW

ISSUE 10



# LUNARIS REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ART AND THE LITERARY

## ISSUE 10

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## FOREWORD

Two years plus and counting, and Lunariss Review continues to ride with full sails, aiming for a crest never static, whose bar is continually on the rise. This of course is the burden we have been charged with: of performing literary service in and to a generation with an ever increasing appetite for knowledge, literary content, and art. Our purpose has always maintained its intersect with that antediluvian charge of pedagogical implications: entertaining, humanising, and enlightening. And we make bold to say, in that regard, Lunariss Review has never faltered.

In continuance of a tradition of meeting high and equally informed expectations of a body of enthused readers, Lunariss Review adds another installment to the collection. 9 issues, 3 years shy of a few weeks, Lunariss Reviews' Issue 10 comes at a much desired time. Rather than begin by highlighting the highpoints of the Issue alongside editorial comments as is the Lunariss way, we decided to allow our readers take delivery of the literary contents absent any form of editorial prompt on our part. This is done with the hope that you are shocked, drawn in, and arrested by well-crafted pieces that make no pretensions to what they truly are: brilliance. You are assured of an immensely pleasurable reading.

Although Issue 10 comes at a much later date compared to its scheduled release in this calendar year, it isn't without reasons, and adequate ones at that. On our own side, the Lunariss Team has undergone certain changes—both in personnel and logistics. These changes also transcended into the technical. We have acquired a new domain; have a new interface and new emails. (You would have to thoroughly peruse the site to have a handle on the new categories and their mode of operations and utilities.) We also have a new site, a Mother-site, to which Lunariss Review, as a periodical journal belongs as a working part of many. We implore that you bear these few but highly significant changes and whatever disruptions they may cost, at first.

They are very germane and vital to our mandate and aim to offer you the best of services always. These changes are the reasons why we had to delay the release of Issue 10 from its scheduled time.

Our deepest apologies go to contributors and readers who have been awaiting the release of this Issue and to see the Lunar Review up and running. Your wait has not been in vain, and we appreciate your readership. Thanks.

Damilare Bello,  
**Managing Editor**

## The Opposing Views of Max and Dennis

*Grant Guy*

CATS MOVED IN AND OUT OF THE FOREST. You could hear the chainsaws at work, shrouded in the shadow of the trees. The air mingled with the scents of birth and decay. When I travel to the interior of BC, all I want to do is inhale the dual scents.

Max, the cat skinner, was doing minor mechanical repairs on his caterpillar when he saw a hook break loose from the log, and dangling in the air below the upper sheave. He crossed over to help Frank secure the hook and lodge it back into the log. The log should have been lowered to the ground, but haste filled the two men. As they jammed the derrick tooth into the end of the log, Max's thumb got caught under it. The crane operator, also impatient, raised the log, jerking the log up and away. Max's thumb was ripped off.

A loud painful cry tore the air. Loggers ran to assist Max, wrapping his hand in any improvised bandages they could find. Another yelled at the crane operator to lower the log, frantically waving his arms as if that accelerated the log's descent. He pried the hook off and scooped up the severed thumb. Another logger ran to the office shed and retrieved a lunch bucket full of ice, into which the Max's thumb was placed. Walt and Bill ushered Max into a jeep and whisked him away to the hospital in

Salmon Arm.

Once the initial screams of pain subsided, before he was whisked away, Max was elated. His feet pounded the ground as if dancing. He announced to the world that he had officially become a true lumberjack. After the Max was taken away, I sat on a log with Dennis, a logging truck driver, drinking cold, bad coffee. Dennis looked up from his thermos cup. He told me a logger was not considered a true lumberjack until they had lost three fingers. Dennis paused looking at all ten digits on his hands, and said, "I hope I never become a true lumberjack."

## Sweet Distraction

*Taiye Ojo*

whereas love is the sad, obvious blur of songs  
people point to when they wonder where it is  
you've gone, like the silence that comes back

a million times bigger than me, & sneaks into  
my bones & wails & wails through my father's  
mouth as a boy i didn't want to live here, not

among the wild absence— the mouth of unsafe  
doors yawning to suck us in, each night like the  
air what is it they say, life is a beautiful melody,

only the lyrics are messed up i picture my mother—  
red hills that loop & elongates in my father's chest,  
in the diaphragm & in the eyes thinking this pain

will go on forever i used to laugh at those who  
fall helplessly for the colors of love shooting out of  
their skin— the lurid red leaves demanding for a

clanging or screaming alarm in bathtubs or how  
fingers under sleep-stunned sheets turn their cold  
wood into a backyard bonfire but the same fire tree

comes to me for the first time in my life, what i mean is:  
there are days i want to feel the exchange, the warm hand on  
my shoulder, the big-voiced song coming out & my ear holding

onto it sometimes i want to lie down on the floor in the kitchen &  
pretend i am home other times i want to stare, or stand in the

field across from the street, watching the

sugar maple throw down its tender winged  
seeds before i nest my head into the blood

of another body with a small live letter  
that says only,

roses

## **Truth**

*Henry Akeru*

I seek not to hide in truth  
Or swirl in the spirals of honesty.  
I just want to rock with ease  
And draw on the canvas of life with smiley strokes.  
I seek not to ravel you with words  
Or drown you in the sugar sweetness of my rhymes  
But to open up your souls to the silent songs of hope.

## Ink

*Cornelius Itepu*

WITH EVERY DROP OF RAIN THAT STRUCK THE ROOF, breaking the silence that had become of the room, you sank deeper into an uncomfortable kind of depression. Not like there's any form of depression that's supposed to be comforting, but this one was just disturbingly distressing. It was one of those days, nights actually, when you felt the pang of loneliness. One of those nights when your thoughts were not animate enough to keep you company. One of those nights when the warmth of accomplishment and success wasn't enough to keep you warm. One of those nights when the emptiness within you screamed words that were just disjointed juxtapositions of consonants, and no vowels. As you sat, staring out the window of your tiny study, you buried your toes into the warm wool rug and for a moment you felt loved. For a moment you felt that warmth and affection that you longed for. But it didn't last. It never does. You stared out into the open, into a world that laid beyond your reach, into a world that doesn't know you. You belong to a world of your own, one where you are both protagonist and villain. A world where you are both creator and created; a world that is part imagination, part reality. That is your world, because you literally own it. It's only in this world of yours that you feel complete, loved, alive.

So as the depression grew into an adult – suicidal thoughts – you made your way to *Melan's Place*. You were dressed in navy blue denim trousers, light grey cardigan, and a pair of suede loafers. Your decision to go without an umbrella was not conscious. You just walked, letting the rain wash off your sorrow. Your mind travelled back to the beginning. Back to when it wasn't that bad, when there was still a glimmer of hope in the horizon of this fictitious world that is yours to live. Then you had desired a female companion, a soft constellation of flesh and blood. A constellation of warmth. But finding one hadn't been as easy as dreaming up one was. And so, you had wielded pen and paper and crafted the companion of your dream. She was the quintessence of what female you would look like. Day by day, you crafted and redefined her. Day by day you got comfortable around her, and she began to feel like an integral part of you. Day by day, she became more animate than she had been the day before. Gradually, you fell in love with an idea. A desire. A dream. Gradually, you fell in love with ink. But there was a bit of a problem; your lady didn't love you as much as you loved her. She said you lacked something, but she couldn't tell what it was.

When you arrived *Melan's Place*, you were drenched to the soul. But for some reason unknown to you, you didn't feel cold. Maybe it's because you weren't wet. But you didn't feel warm either. As you approached the door, you noticed how empty the place was, save for the bartender and some guy seating alone at a corner. You stepped in and found a place; your place. And it was there, just right there from across the guy sitting alone at the corner. As you drew a seat, you realized he was seated at a table for

two. Probably a fiancé that’s running late, you say to yourself, or a missis that’s gone AWOL. When you settled into your place, a waiter materialized from somewhere and walked up to you. “Coffee or tea, Sir?” You looked up at him, and he wore a smile that could heal a million wounds, but not yours. He wore a black trouser, a white shirt, and an oxblood waist coat. He had an Ankara bow tie that was a jamboree of salient colours. He had on white gloves that concealed the better part of his ebony skin that yearned for recognition. From his pocket, hung a slim gold chain that led to a pocket watch. His hair was jet black, with punctuations of different shades of grey. His smile seemed rehearsed, as he wore it a moment too long. “water...” you said, “...just water.” He disappeared, and for the next five minutes or so, you didn’t see him.

As you waited for your glass of water, your eyes walked the floors of the diner, pausing for short moments of sober reflection whenever they stumbled upon something that rung a distant bell in your head. One time, your eyes paused at the feet of the man sitting alone at the table for two. You noticed his shoes, how the perforations were arranged in neat rows of perfect turns; how a lurid sparkle nestled atop the tip of the shoe, confessing affluence to those who wished to hear; how his multi-coloured socks peeked from within his trouser and shoe that had become to it, some sort of solitary confinement. And in one brief moment of reflection, you realized you knew him. But when you began to stretch the thought, you discovered you did not.

“A glass won’t hurt...” were the words that yanked you out of your reverie, flinging you onto the bare grounds of reality. His voice was deep, still yet comforting. You examined the man sitting across from you, a sharp contrast from the voice you had heard. You were unable to hide your surprise, and he read you like one would read a book. “I know, I get that a lot”, he said. And with one swift motion of the hand, he invited you over to his table. You hesitated, but he let you know there was nothing to be bothered about. As you joined him at his table, you did a quick scan of all that was there, and immediately you began guessing what he did for a living to be able to afford such. From his clothes and jewellery, you guessed he might be some business magnate. But he looked too young to have accomplished all that within such a short period. That sort of wealth was the type one enjoyed in their late fifties, not late twenties. Probably he was some fortunate heir whose father passed on way too early, you thought. But before you could finish thinking, he told you he was a driver. A Formula-1 driver. He said he lived in the UK, but was visiting home for the summer. You got talking about cars and engines, and he was quite knowledgeable. He spoke with so much confidence, so much passion, so much zest. He spoke with so much words. He was quite the driver, and he knew his craft. When you had spent half an hour talking engines, you moved on to buildings and Architecture in general. He lamented about the fact that Nigeria doesn’t have a strong architectural heritage of its own, like countries in Asia and Europe. He lamented about how all that we’ve come to know of building and building structure was either imported or fed to us in the colonial days.

He gestured with his hands when he spoke. And when he did, his watch whispered a million words. So did his ring. With every flight his hands made under the shimmery diner light, came glistening sparkles of rose gold and sapphire. For the most part of one hour all you both did was order wine and more wine. Once, when the waiter came to take your orders, you asked if he wasn't going to eat. He looked at you, smiled, and then worded something that sounded like food to the waiter. You heaved relief, but she disappeared when the waiter returned with another bottle of wine. Your forehead cringed in disapproval, to which he replied "Give it a try, it's more food than you can imagine". You did, and he was right. It was tasty and at the same time filling. You had a bottle, and then two.

By the end of the evening, you had learnt a lot about him, almost all there was to know. You knew his past, his present, and even his future-if there was to be one. He spoke on and on about himself, never stopping for once to ask about you. He didn't care to know anything about you. You almost didn't exist to him, save for the fact that you were seated at table with him. At some point, you stopped drinking because you realized the wine was getting to you. You realized the wine was beginning to take charge, leading you on a path that led deeper into the depressing state that you had been running from. Your companion didn't stop. He drank on and on, pouring glasses for you both and drinking of both glasses. You just smiled, listened, and responded as was necessary. Then came time for you both to leave. He slipped a cheque under the menu, and gestured for you to step out with him. Outside, his chauffeur pulled up in a

silver Mercedes S500, Maybach edition. He whispered something to the driver, and the car sped off into the night. “Do you mind joining me for a walk?”, he asked. You thought about it for a second. You knew there was nothing worth returning to in that lonely apartment of yours, so you accepted his offer. As you both walked, he let you into more personal areas of his life, and for a moment you began to wonder why he felt so comfortable sharing all those things with you. As you moved farther from the diner, the streets got darker and more deserted. By the time you had walked some ten minutes, the streets were completely empty, with no sign of life at all. And then the thoughts came pouring in like the rain that had drenched you earlier that evening.



YOU KILLED HIM BECAUSE YOU COULD. You realized you could kill him and get away with it. You realized there wasn't going to be any Police investigation or inquiry. No detective waltzing up to your door at uncomfortable hours of the day to ask about a man that had just been murdered. There wasn't going to be any twenty-four-hour news coverage about a man murdered at the corner of Ozumba Mbadiwe and Adeola Odeku. No family to wail and sing dirge for a husband, father, brother, uncle, cousin, that had just died. And most of all, you killed him because you knew, with a strange kind of certainty, that his ghost will never come to haunt you. And that's because he doesn't have one. They never do.

When you were sure no one was watching, you retrieved the Colt from your waist, beneath the cardigan. This Colt was supposed to be your doorway to the world

that laid beyond, but now it was to be his. While he was lost in his own world, lost in words, you carefully slowed down, getting in behind him. He chattered away without realizing you had left his side. From behind you trained the pistol in the direction of his heart and squeezed. One shot did the trick, and he dropped to the ground, one hand clutching his chest while the other reached out to you for help. He never knew you, so he couldn't understand why you did it. You never did either. He seemed to have possessed that quality Melan said you lacked. You still couldn't tell what it was, but you were almost certain he had it. He was competition, more so he was a threat to your love for her.

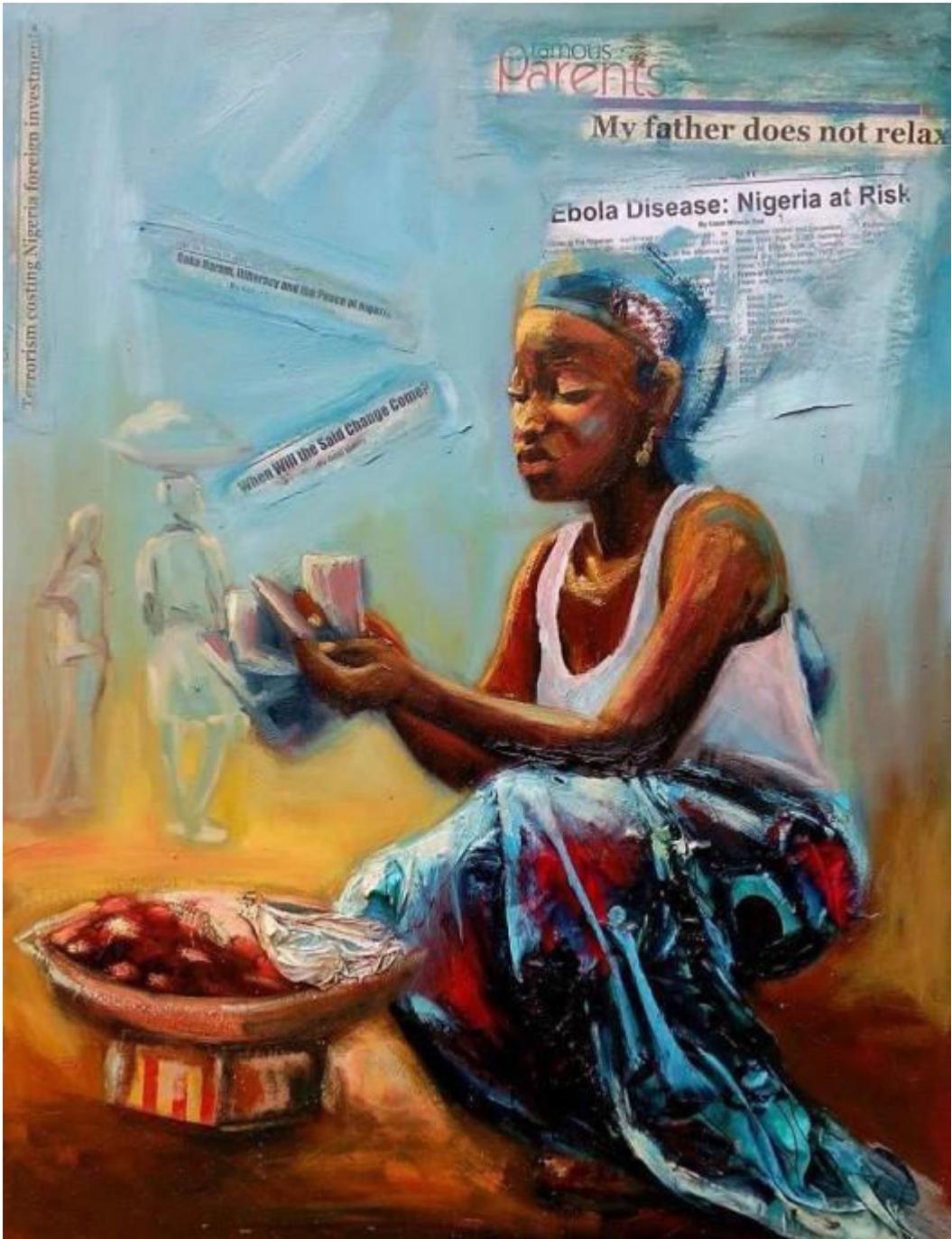
He bled. First blood. Then water. Then ink.



YOU RETURNED HOME THAT NIGHT, still feeling that emptiness, still feeling that pang of loneliness. The warmth you desired was still not there, yet you felt better than before the evening. Than before you gave life and then took it in an instant. Before you became protagonist and villain. Before you became ink. You drew a hot bath and immersed yourself in it. As you sank deeper into it, the memories of the evening faded away slowly. As seconds ticked into minutes, and minutes into hours, the evening's encounter thinned into memories, then images, and finally, long-forgotten thoughts. You felt better, able to live with your depression. It became a comfortable kind of depression, but it never left. It never does, and it never will. It's who you are.

# Man Must Survive

*Bertha Onyekachi*



## Memory of Heaven

*Hongri Yuan*  
Translated by *Yuanbing Zhang*

I love the peach orchard in early summer </br>  
Peaches with deep red and pale red </br>  
as if the stars are hanging in the kingdom of branches and leaves </br>  
And it seems as sweet as the garden in the universe </br>  
The wind in the moment made time transparent </br>  
I saw the eternal smile </br>  
Twinkling in the branches </br>  
And the singing of birds </br>  
draw a picture of the heaven memory </br>

## how old are you?

*Micheal Ace*

She stopped halfway  
and admired the chandelier.  
she wrote something on the wall.  
that night, her heart was broken again.

"if tonight, you look through the mirror  
and it hurts you, fix the reflection-  
fix yourself; mirrors don't lie"  
so she wrote, and died.

shadows don't sleep  
and they know how it feels  
to walk the nights in your shoes.  
so ask yours tonight how old you are.

my grandma is sixty  
she looks young and pretty;  
and you were born in the nineties  
but your soul stinks of dirt, and rust.

you have held your wrongs for so long  
and they begin to hurt, eating deep  
into your body, and mind-  
you have really aged.

the sun shines at dawn,  
let the beam break you loose  
so you may stop numbering days  
and live: laugh, dance, now while you can.

## Footprint in the Sand of Time

*Hareendran Kallinkeel*

PUNISHMENT FOLLOWS EVERY SIN, I think, relishing the way Gopalan wobbles out of his hut's door, his lean figure an apparition dissolving into a semi-dark night.

The arrack I poured so lavishly into his glass, while I savored my double shot of single malt, serves the intended purpose of making him lose control of his body and senses. I know the moonlight can't help drive away the dark shadow of guilt that follows him.

The hut reeks of his vomit. A watery film from his puke slowly spreads along the floor, moving away from the tidbits of half-digested pork and rice, clustered with tomato peels. By dawn, his bile's acidic stings will leave indelible marks on the floor's cement skin, like the pale patch of vitiligo that Gopalan can never hope to erase from his wife's dusky buttocks.

Despite the pale blemish on her skin, and the hatred I harbor against her husband, I like Malathi.

On the bed, she snakes onto my chest. The stink of arrack from her husband's vomit blends with the scent of her sweat. I bask in the warm feeling of vengeance achieved; wife pursuing the path of sin, husband seeking escape from past sins...

She runs her fingers over the creases on my forehead. "You should've waited till I cleaned up the mess," she says.

"It's not a problem. I rather like to smell the remorse in his guts." I run a hand through her lustrous hair.

"Why do you speak in riddles?" Her head moves down my chest. Fingers slither through the profuseness of hairs on my belly. "Shall I close the door?"

Crickets chirp in the thickets. I don't want to see patches on her skin glow in the moonlight that seeps through open windows. I peer outside. Gopalan lies supine, on the veranda's floor, limbs restless, as if swimming in a dream across the tides of remorse.

A bat quits a cluster of banana plants and flutters towards the full moon. I visualize a maze of veins beneath its semi-transparent, brownish skin, a veil that conceals mysteries within its folds.

"Your husband's passed out." I tease Malathi.

"When isn't he?" she replies, moving back to my chest like a tidal wave. Her silk petticoat rustles in the fluid movement of her thighs.

"Yes, when isn't he? I like it." I wrap my legs around her thigh. "The ritual of vomiting is his revolt. The slumber his surrender, his inability to react... I wait for him

to raise his voice.” “More riddles,” she whispers. “I think his silence serves us better.” She looks into my eyes, her thigh thrusting between my legs. “Stop supplying him liquor if you need a different revolt.”

I return her gaze and pull at the hem of her petticoat. “I need this too; the way you crave for me...”

*Your participation in avenging your husband's sins...*

Her arms snake around me, her hunger lashing like wild fires over my rigid muscles. Still, I grope through intricacies of the past to fulfill my present quest for vengeance...



IMPRINTS IN THE HEART didn't fade away with time.

I blabbered... she laughed.

The music in her laughter rippled along the pond's surface. “My round-eyed wonder boy,” she said, breaking into another bout of laughter. Her tresses, curly like spring coils cascading down her shoulders, encased the swell of her breasts. Fresh after bath, her hair smelled of herbs heated in coconut oil.

She giggled a lot, sounding like pearls clattering on mosaic floors. Distinct, like the sparkle of her white teeth; the warmth of her bosom... I clung to her neck.

“Feeling sleepy?” she asked.

“No, aunty, lift me up to the sky, will you? I wanna touch mom,” I whispered in her ears.

Pearls became silent.

A pale hue shadowed aunt's wine-red lips. Her arms tightened around me. The soft garment of her sari flapped against my feet. I shifted my leg and felt the smoothness of her belly that had begun to swell. I glided my leg further down and my toe lodged in her navel, causing her to giggle again.

"See, I can make you laugh," I said.

She kissed my forehead. "That's naughty. Let's get back home."

I look towards the pond. Lotus flowers swayed, bidding us adieu.



DREAMS ALLOWED ME TO RETAIN MEMORIES in vivid details. I'd never thought of them as nightmares despite their being so.

He arrived, clad in green pajamas and shirt. I recognized him by the scent of the cologne he wore... different from the musky variety that my father used.

I felt him, hovering behind windowsills. Murkiness of his shadow crept into the room, and I cuddled closer to my aunt's body.

The moonlight rekindled her cheeks to a natural glow as the sound of his footsteps faded out.

"Why does he always inspect us?" I asked her.

Silence... She never responded to complexities, and left me to draw my own inferences. I got up and walked into the shadows, towards my father's bedroom. I heard muffled voices. *Why do they discuss things in the middle of night?*

“She’s carrying, can’t hide it for long.” *Why should dad bother about someone carrying something?*

The man in green didn’t respond.

“I’ve no alternative but to marry her,” Dad, said. *Well, he’s planning a marriage?*

“So you break our pact...for a second time?” Voice of the man in green had turned grim.

Her hands swept me up. She held me, pressed to her bosom, her swiftness choking me, and slunk into the shadows, my legs wrapped around her midriff.

“You shouldn’t sneak into others’ privacy,” she said, putting me back to bed and tucking me under the comforter. “It’s bad manners.”

“Then why does the man in green poke into ours?”

“So defiant, eh...” She avoided another complexity with a pat on my cheeks as she slipped beneath the comforter.

Her hair smelled of jasmine. I remembered dad smelled same when he kissed me on the morning of my seventh birthday a few months back.

“How good you think I’m at the guess game?” I asked my aunt before drifting on the wings of dreams, before the green-clad man would peer at me again when he left.



SENSUAL MEMORIES RENDERED BEAUTY to my life; dreadful ones gave it a purpose. Things I did not know made me speculate. Hope, gleaned from the

exquisiteness of dreams, encouraged me to survive the perils of death of most dear ones.

The moon retreated into a refuge of dark rainclouds. Thunderbolts fell, splitting through the sky. Earth shivered and the house shook.

In the blinding light, I saw the bodies. Darkness followed. I stood, gazing through the pitch-black night. Lightning flashed again and I recognized my aunt. And then... the stillborn... my aunt's child... *or my half-brother... half-brother-cum-cousin?*

In the murk, my father was digging a pit. I saw sweat running between his shoulder blades, when lightning flashed; listened to his rapid breaths when thunder stopped rumbling. His heaves sound the same like when he was bolted inside his bedroom with the green-clad man. My eyes behind the binoculars followed a thin red line that ran between my aunt's legs. The line broadened into dark shades of scarlet on the pink sari around her midriff.

I noticed the footprint.

The heel mark of a sandal was imprinted on her garment. The toe mark traversed over her navel. I recoiled as another thunderbolt spiked through the sky. A cry gurgled inside my throat.

Rain burst, hitting the gravel on the ground, drenching my aunt's baby, washing the footprint on its mother's belly. The imprint exploded inside my head and my eyes closed against the bright streaks of a thunderbolt.

●●●

I SEARCHED FOR THE TRUTH after almost a decade since the lies prevailed. Bits and pieces of memories, and shreds of images sifted from the threads of my dreams, guided me through the labyrinth of the past.

The cellar door creaked as it opened inward and cobwebs, hanging across the doorframe, parted. Thick films of dust veiled the shelves and their contents... dreams corroded by the rust of dissipating illusions. I pulled out an album from one of the shelves. The suffocating pollen of an obscure past swept through my nostrils and choked my lungs as I turned the leaves. The set of photographs covered a national singles badminton championship.

Dad's black tracksuit, drenched in sweat, glistened like a cobra's back in the stadium's neon floodlight. I could almost smell the familiar scent of his aftershave waft from the blached image. He was frozen in midair, his racquet poised to smash the shuttlecock in flight...

I pulled out a pen from my pocket.

Tidbits of stories I heard, coupled with my imagination, unfolded the event in vibrant blue jottings on the pages of a scrapbook.

The racquet hit the cock. I heard the reverberation of the taut guts, and the thud when he landed back on the court's wooden flooring. The cock slanted to a crashing drop, scraping the tip of the net. His opponent dove to reach it and returned with a crosscourt drop towards the net's left corner. Dad leapt, and with a flick of his wrist sent the cock to back to the right corner. The cock rose to a loft in slow motion,

hung on for a doubtful moment at the tip of the net, and dropped to the other side, sending the opponent sprawled, his racquet failing to make connection.

The crowd, mostly dad's fans, rose to their feet, applauding the winner. In the forefront, the man in a green tracksuit threw both hands up in ecstatic abandon. Dad shook hands with the loser and waved to the cheering crowd.

He went to the man in green. They hugged.

I put the album back into its dusty abode and picked up a diary. The moisture on my fingers left wet marks on its black cover. In the inside were words dad scribbled in bright blue...



NEON BULBS LIT the bar.

Dad sat, eyeing the long fingers of the man in green wrapped around the slender wineglass. He picked up his glass, swallowed the drink in a single gulp and beckoned for the waiter. "One large," Dad told the bearer. "Why don't you have a whiskey?" he asked his companion. The man in green shook his head. "I must get to her fast," he said.

"Bring our bill also," Dad told the departing bearer. His fingers tightened around the empty whiskey glass. "Didn't I make things clear to you already? It's either her or me. I don't relish buddies stuck with girlfriends."

The man in green remained silent. The bearer brought the drink. Dad snatched it from his hand and downed it straight.

“One more,” He ordered, placing the crystal glass on the oak table with a thud.

Its echo left the bearer gaping.

*More entries in the diary; more glimpses into the past; more dust to make me choke.*

Hand in hand, they walked through the darkness that shrouded the pavement.

“Let’s hire a cab,” the man in green said.

“I wanted to walk. And talk. I thought you knew why I didn’t call my chauffeur.” Dad stopped and looked into the eyes of the man in green.

“People won’t relish the idea of their future Municipal Chairman walking the streets after midnight.”

Dad continued to stroll down the pavement, in silence.

“I think your brother still stands a pretty good chance,” the man in green spoke. “He’s been in the chair for a decade now and his clout’s strong.”

“Not now when electricity and water supplies disrupt frequently. My boys are paid well to ensure that things remain awry.” Dad paused to light a cigarette. “He’s already begun to draw flaks for administrative failures.”

“That’s a third rate politician talking,” the man in green says. “You don’t sound a bit like the ideal man I cared for.”

Dad blew out smoke in slow rings. “I have a vision. I know I do have the support of the masses,” he said, stopping to scratch his right calf muscle with the toe of his left foot. “But winning elections and staying in power takes more than ideals.”

“But you weren’t one who resorted to cheap tactics,” the man in green said.

“Finally, it’s the welfare of people I want. I know I can deliver better governance than him. That justifies whatever means I adopt.” He put his hand on his friend’s shoulder. “And, to make winning a certainty, I’m roping in a new ally. I’ve decided to marry one of the opposition leader’s daughters.”

The man in green stood gaping into dad’s eyes.

“Priorities change over time, you know.” Dad took a deep drag on his cigarette and continued, “I know what you’re thinking. We made our pact of staying bachelors under different circumstances. Years back. You dumped your girlfriend to be with me. But we aren’t lads pursuing careers in sports any longer. This is my chance to get into the big game. Marrying her will remove some hurdles in the path. I need your support now more than ever. And, of course, you’ll be rewarded.” Dad’s hand pressed into his friend’s soft shoulder muscle before he drew him close to his chest.

Dad felt the warmth of wetness on his collarbone and patted his friend’s back. “Now, people aren’t going to relish this either,” he said.



FINALLY, I CONFRONT GOPALAN to pronounce the verdict of his punishment.

“A few jottings in diaries and random photographs in albums can’t help you learn the lived experiences of others,” Gopalan, sitting on his hut’s floor, says avoiding my eyes.

I pull his head towards mine and stare into his eyes, relishing the primeval fear that dances in them. “I’m not bothered what kind of complexities ruled the lives of

men like you and my dad. I'm only concerned about my aunt. I'll avenge her death – her murder. No, I won't kill you. I'll let you live to feel the pain. Your wife's moans, when she mates with me, leave gashes in your heart, right?" I push him away.

Gopalan lands on his back, straightens himself up, on his hands and knees. A smirk creases his face. "She's my wife not because I love her, but I needed someone to look after me. And at half my age, you don't think I expect her to be loyal."

"That's a blatant lie, you do feel hurt. The way you retch, it's regret that you disgorge." I yell at him.

"You're the one who lived through lies. You always judged me with scent of colognes and the prejudice you inherited from your mother because of her jealousy about my relationship with her husband." Gopalan stood up, looking straight into my eyes, his fear dissipating.

"What lies?" I ask.

"You can't see truths. You never look close enough." Gopalan spits on the veranda, takes a deep breath and says, "Gimme another drink."

I pour him a large shot of whiskey in a steel tumbler, and hand it over. "Have it and then show me *your* truths."

Gopalan gulps the drink and smacks his lips. "You never bothered to ask me. Why now?"

"I never trusted you," I say, watching tears form in his eyes. "I never considered you any better than a parasite that lives off crumbs thrown by my father."

Beneath the film of tears, his sadness silently implores me for more alcohol.

“You said I never looked close enough, what do you mean? I’ve another scotch with me.” Gopalan places the steel tumbler before me. “I thought I’d never tell you. But since you’re hell-bent on vengeance, I’ll identify your target.”

“My target is quite clear to me.” I pour his drink, this time filling more than half the tumbler and say, “You know, I never thought of you by your name until recently when I planned the revenge.”

His fingers shiver as he picks up the tumbler and swallows the drink, throwing his head back. “The man in green... A funny way to give vent to fear of chameleons, I say! But the real reptile is at large. Do you think you’ll ever find him in the cliffs of Himalayas?”

His words cut through my chest like a bolt of sudden chill. “How’d you know that I thought of you as the man in green? Aunt was the only one who knew.”

“How good are you at the guess game?” Gopalan replaces the tumbler and lights a cigarette. His fingers cease shivering.

The chill gnaws at my flesh, spikes through my veins. My body shakes. I pour a drink and take a sip. The tremors won’t subside. I drain the glass. “So, you’re the father of her son... but you never smelled of jasmimes.”

Gopalan nods, blowing out smoke in circles. He throws the cigarette away, snatches the bottle and makes my drink. “You never smelled me close enough. The man you call Dad, well...he’s not made for women.”

“What do you mean?” I snatch my glass and swallow the drink.

“Your dad is not your dad. It’s another lie you’ve lived through.” A look of dismay shadows his face.

“No...”

Gopalan ignores my shout. “He never allowed me to live my life. I had a fancy for him when I was young. He was my hero... You made a point: a parasite that lived off the crumbs he’d thrown.” Gopalan laughs. “But I’ve had to barter everything I held dear as the price.” He pauses to make his drink. “He was so possessive of me that he married the woman I loved, lest he lost me to her.”

The image of the man in green dissipates into thinness, and an image of the man I’ve remembered as dad, clad in a black track suit, emerges. I empty my glass.

“Brace up for the rest,” Gopalan says and gulps his drink. “Your whiskey is finished,” he says emptying the remainder of the whiskey into my glass.

I down the scotch in one go and feel the inflammation inside my throat. Perspiration breaks on my forehead. “How did you both do away my aunt?”

“She didn’t tell me she’s carrying. Told him instead; pleaded with him to arrange our marriage. Again, he denied me life by deciding to marry her. She’d never marry him out of her devotion to her sister. Suicide, possible; murder, likely.”

The grit that the exquisite dreams have bestowed me with helps me contain my emotions. “Why didn’t you revolt?”

“What good would it have done? I don’t know why, but he cared for you. And I thought it’s better to leave things as they were. You had a more secure life as his son... estates and cars to dabble with...” Tears stream down Gopalan’s eyes. “Where’s the next bottle?” he asks, standing up.

*The sin still remains; of discarding a child, just stealing a look at him, denying him the warmth of fatherly hugs... punishment follows.*

The bile churning inside my bowel gushes out in a spray of retch. I make an attempt to stand up, but slump into the pool of my vomit with a loud thud. “Dad, pull me out of this filth.” I stretch my arms towards him.

The jingles of Malathi’s anklets stop as she, rushing out to check the commotion, stands frozen on her tracks. She turns her face as I look at her.

My father pronounces the verdict, “What does life hold for the three of us now?”

**Take Away**

*Bertha Onyekachi*



## Losing Linda

*Pam Munter*

LINDA GLIDED ALONG THE SURFACE OF LIFE, like a bee checking out fragrant flowers, always in motion, never alighting for long. Our lives intersected only intermittently but at critical junctures. I missed a final opportunity, though. I found out this morning she died two months ago.

Our first meeting was over 50 years ago. It was in one of those godawful 8 a.m. seminars, an editing class at Cal in 1964. I was a senior journalism and political science major, writing a weekly TV and film review column for the Daily Californian. I was hunched over a news story when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone crouching next to me.

“Excuse me. Aren’t you the Pam Osborne who writes for the paper?”

Stunned by both the interruption and the polite deference, I answered quickly.

“Yeah. And you are...?”

“Linda Morrison.”

She had a curly crown of bright red hair and a lively expression on her wide-open face. I hadn’t noticed her before but I knew she had to be in the class. Who else gets up that early if you don’t have to do it?

“Hi, Linda.” There was an awkward pause. I could see she wanted something.

“I was wondering. I’d like to write for the paper, too, but I don’t know how to make that happen. Can you give me some advice?”

I was happy to provide the contact info and offered to make an intro. I don’t remember if she ever followed through but I do remember we developed a quick friendship. Not only did she live just down the block from where I shared a house with five other girls but she was in possession of a TV set, a rarity among us undergraduates.

Linda was warm, engaging and verbal but I wondered why she was in college. She was a junior, transferring from a small Colorado school. She didn’t study and I never saw her read anything. She told me she hoped to become a stewardess for United Airlines, her father’s place of employment. On almost any given night, Linda and her roommate were hosts to a party. The booze would be flowing and the boys were draped around her like Spanish moss. Her lifestyle seemed like something out of a novel, foreign to anything in my experience. While I was undergoing major adolescent collegiate angst, Linda was perpetually cheerful. She had a look of half amusement on her face, her expressive eyes suggesting she knew something you didn’t. She was usually ready with a snappy, clever remark. She gave off the impression of buoyance, that her life was good. Was she as simple and happy as she seemed?

That June, I graduated, and moved back to the family home in Los Angeles while I looked for a job. I was in and out of a few and couldn’t get my existential bearings. Then I got a letter from her, telling me she was dropping out of school,

moving to LA and wondered if she could stay with us for a few weeks until she got settled. Of course, I said. After a month of looking, she landed a job and moved to a small apartment in Beverly Hills, where the partying went on nonstop. Like me, she seemed to have trouble staying at a job for very long but for different reasons. I was peripatetic because I wanted to find myself. Linda wasn't as introspective. She just wanted to have a good time. We socialized now and again but her lack of substance, alcohol abuse and her promiscuity pushed me away. She casually listed her liaisons with famous actors as if they were merit badges. My life was going in a different direction. We lost contact.

Flash forward nearly forty years. I don't remember who was the initiator but it was immediately clear we were happy to have rediscovered each other. I was curious, too, about her choices and who she had become. My partner and I were considering a move to the Palm Springs area from Portland, OR. Coincidentally, Linda and her husband were looking for a place to live in Palm Springs after twenty years in Santa Barbara. She had used her journalism training, working as an adjunct teacher at a community college and as a freelance writer for a local magazine. When she sent me some of her work, I recognized her style immediately. It was so like her – breezy, nimble, with affection for her subjects. We ended up living within a few miles of each other in the desert.

For some reason I can't recall, we rekindled our connection on a street corner one afternoon in downtown Palm Springs. Her hair was darker now but she was the

same ebullient and smiling Linda. When I told her I wanted to hear all about her life, she suggested we meet at a local upscale mall. There was a public performance space that was nearly always empty and so we arranged a mutually compatible time. Odd? I thought so, since we both had homes which would have been more comfortable. Once seated on the deserted concrete risers, she began to spill her history.

“I worked for ten years in New York for some famous and infamous people in the fashion magazine industry.”

“That’s exciting! Who?”

“Oh, Estee and I were pretty close. She was a character but we got along like a house afire.”

I knew she was referring to Estee Lauder. Linda seldom provided the full story. She left it to her listener to fill in the blanks.

“I thought you might have made your way there. You liked the glamorous life.”

“I did. I loved living in New York. But....”

I waited, hoping for more.

“I started drinking too much.”

That did not surprise me, given our experiences decades before. I had outgrown my early 20s beer binges but she had not.

“How did that complicate things for you?”

She laughed. “Well, I was unceremoniously canned.”

She told me she moved to Santa Barbara for a new start, met her husband, who had been a comedian and television personality. Soon they had a daughter. Linda said she had been sober all these years, after just a weekend aversive training class.

I was skeptical, knowing from my educational and professional background how recovery works best. “Wow. That’s quite a turnaround. You didn’t do any therapy?”

“Nope. Once the drinking stopped, I was fine. Alcohol was the problem. And then I met Willie and we took care of each other.”

She admitted the marriage was problematic almost from the start. He was older and paternalistic; she was passive-aggressive. She told me they had fought and joked their way through countless crises, had divorced, then remarried. I knew she was conflict-avoidant from stories she had shared. She was familiar and comfortable with things left unsaid and undone.

Our mutually revelatory conversation went on for four hours that afternoon. A few weeks later, we agreed to meet again, this time outside Starbucks. Having thought about her story, I had more questions. I still didn’t understand the preference for public meeting places but I would soon find out.

After we embraced and bought coffee, she took hold of my arm and stopped me.

“There’s somebody over here I want you to meet.”

Uh oh. I was immediately uncomfortable as we walked toward a table in the plaza. There was a man sitting alone and rose to greet Linda with a hug. He smiled at me.

“This is Michael.”

I shook his hand and returned the smile. In her letters, she had mentioned taking piano lessons and I thought the teacher’s name was also Michael. Was this the same guy? Why the deceptive, manipulative introduction? Didn’t she trust me? Or was this just her M.O.?

Watching their interaction, I understood what was going on. Still, we had spent all those hours talking about our lives, revealing deep feelings and experiences. Why hadn’t she told me then? Somehow, I felt violated.

Michael played piano in bars and lounges and worked as a salesman in a local piano store. As it happened, I was in the market for an electronic piano for my Dixieland band. A few days later, we met at his store.

He purposefully walked toward a large piano. “This is the one you should buy,” he announced, before he heard what I was looking for.

“OK. Why is that?”

“It’s a good price and it will do everything you want.”

I was irritated, feeling pressured by this ham-handed aggressive salesman. I had expected a personal interaction and got a shark instead. If he hadn’t been close to

Linda, I would have walked out. As it was, I told him I had just started looking and I'd get back to him.

Later that day, he called and upped the pressure to buy the piano he had prescribed. When I was there, I had noticed a smaller, less expensive model, just what I was seeking, so I agreed to purchase that. He seemed satisfied and ended the high-pressure tactics.

Thanksgiving arrived a month later. We had invited Linda and Willie (who was still clueless) over for the holiday dinner. Willie had palpable ADD and couldn't sit still for more than an hour or two. The minute dinner was over, he excused himself and left. When he was safely out the door, Linda reached into her large purse and pulled out another set of clothes. She entered the bathroom, changed and emerged, announcing she was meeting Michael.

The pattern here was disturbing. What Linda wanted, Linda got, regardless of who might be hurt. I knew I had to distance myself, angry at being used. But I relented when she made a special request. I had been a singer and had worked with a software program that I could program with chords and tempos to allow rehearsal. Linda knew about this and asked for help. She wanted to surprise Michael by singing a song for him on his birthday, "Mr. Wonderful." We sat down in my home office. I handed her the words and put on the music. She could barely carry a tune but with a little coaching, began to feel comfortable singing the song. It was a lovely way to surprise her lover, though I felt like a co-conspirator, aiding and abetting an emotional crime.

When Willie called me a week later, crying, telling me Linda had announced she had found another man, I didn't know what to say. Willie and I had met only a few times, had little or no camaraderie and now he was seeking information about "the other man." This wasn't my business or my responsibility but they were both sandwiching me in the middle of their domestic drama.

"Who is he? Is he handsome?"

"Willie, I'm very uncomfortable talking about this."

"But you knew about it, didn't you? Didn't you? How long has it been going on?"

"I think these are questions you need to ask Linda. I don't want to get in the middle."

"Can you think of anything I can do to win her back?"

I felt sorry for Willie. Of course, he wanted to know and was devastated. I called Linda, informed her of the calls, and reiterated my fervent desire to stay out of it.

We emailed now and then after that but I had no further desire to get together. We sent each other birthday greetings with a quick note. And again, time passed. Ten years, to be exact.

In the interim, life held some surprises for me, too. I now lived alone. Part of the process of reconfiguring my life involved redoing the house. The master bath remodel was sufficiently glam that the local paper covered it in a big Sunday article. A

few months later, I saw an email from Linda, now sporting her “new” husband’s last name.

“Hey, stranger. Are you up for a glass of wine?”

I saw it as more than a simple invitation. It could mean she’s drinking again. We met at a bar at a country club at four in the afternoon, the only people there. Once again, I was curious. I still found her fascinating, so unlike me in many ways. What was her life like now with Michael and likely a reduced standard of living?

I saw her get off the elevator. At first, I wasn’t sure it was her. “Hi. You look great.” Something was different. A little heavier, perhaps, older. We both were the same age, in fact. She sat down and immediately began scanning the bar menu.

“What do you like to drink?” she asked, as if my choice would influence hers.

“I’ll have a glass of wine.”

She signaled for the server who was sitting at the bar, chatting with the bartender. They smiled as if they had met before. “What’ll you have today?”

“Do you still have the double for the single glass price?”

I hadn’t seen that on the menu but, then, a single glass was more than enough for me.

“Sure.”

“That’s what I’ll have. Oh, and a side of sliders.”

The server looked at me. “You?”

“Just the single glass, thanks.” I turned to Linda. “Will you share the sliders?”

“Of course.”

“It’s really good to see you again. Can’t believe it has been ten years. How the heck are you?”

She looked at me briefly, then turned away, surveying the room without responding. Was she expecting someone? I hoped not. Please, no more surprises.

“I’m fine.”

I had googled her and saw she and Michael were running a small teaching studio for guitar and piano.

“How’s business?”

“Good. We have big plans for expansion.”

“Sounds great. Like what?”

She didn’t respond. She shifted in her chair.

“I saw the article about your bathroom.”

“Oh, yeah. They did a great job. I’m very pleased. It’s gorgeous.”

“It said you were living alone.” She looked at me expecting a clarification I really didn’t want to give. It was way too involved and would have required another one of our four-hour time blocks to get through it all. I gave her a quick explanation which involved describing a few of the tell-tale symptoms of dementia. She perked up and looked directly into my eyes.

“What were the symptoms?” She hadn’t taken in the info I had just given her.

But I didn't want to get into this at all and was puzzled about why we were talking about someone who wasn't there. Was this the reason for the meeting? There was something she wasn't telling me, as always. It felt like a game and I didn't know the rules.

"Well, as I said, they weren't the classic signs, really. It's an idiosyncratic set of symptoms. It was a tough time." She kept pressing. I watched her down her big glass of red wine, order another and wondered if she might be having some troublesome and confusing symptoms, herself. Her conversation seemed to lack linearity, her references disconnected. I changed the subject, seeking a focus.

"How are things going with Michael?" I thought that if she were asking me about my relationship, she needed to offer an emotional quid pro quo. What came out was not what I expected. For the next 20 minutes or so—it could have been longer—she described in excruciating detail an event that had happened recently. Michael's car had died on the freeway and Linda's attempts to pick him up involved miscommunications that ultimately left him stranded there for hours. I wondered why she was sharing this trivial story but she was quite animated while recounting it. It was the sort of amusing anecdote you'd tell to an acquaintance at a cocktail party.

By the time she concluded the story, my boredom threshold had long been crossed. I was disappointed there had been no real connection, more like two acquaintances exchanging stories about other people. We agreed to meet again soon. In her mind, we had resumed our friendship. For me, I welcomed another hiatus.

Other than the query about why I was living alone (which was obviously not about me) there had not been a single question. Was it a lack of curiosity or something else?

Over the two years since that meeting, I have thought about her often. I missed her bubbly exuberance, then realized it had been absent during our last meeting in the bar. She wasn't there very much at all; she was preoccupied. I had known better than to probe, recognizing her penchant for secrecy and covert lying. But now, I was feeling a need to check back in.

I sent a light, casual, "Let's not let another ten years go by" email. I sent it to the address she said she'd never give up and it bounced back. So I sent it to their music studio and within ten minutes I got a reply, reprinted here the way it came.

"Sorry            pam            I            died            last            July.  
Sorry Pam, I was so devastated by Linda's passing that I neglected to inform a everyone.  
My sincere apologies."

At first, I thought it might be one of Linda's clever jokes, that she just didn't want to get together. But the spelling and punctuation errors told me it hadn't been sent by her. It was from Michael. But why? How? I had to know.

Michael was kind enough to respond. He had not known the extent to which she drank, he wrote, or noticed the depletion of their funds. Like any good alcoholic, she cunningly kept it from him. In his responsive email, Michael said, "Basically, Linda drank herself to death." Of course, he misses her and so will I. Or at least the upbeat,

positive, funny young woman I met when we were both 20 and still so hopeful about our lives.

## The Last Song

*Madu Chisom Kingdavid*

*(For Ese and Other 25 Nigerian Women Who Died InThe  
Mediterranean Sea While Crossing Into Italy from Libya.)*

26 wooden coffins spread on a stone dais:  
a white rose for each on the lid.

Now the flames of grief from the hearts  
of sympathizers  
have burnt the flesh of my Poetry...

And rains breaking  
from the desert of their eyes have

been drowning a thousand silences  
standing before post-mortem candles  
flickering in solemn goodnight.

The grey womb of Salerno will house  
you and others for eternity in the  
dignity of humanity  
which your homeland will play Judas.

"My country is a naked Sahara, stifling life.  
A closed casket where today sleeps  
in the carcasses of tomorrow," you said with a heart  
full of ageless graves,

Before travelling to pluck springs in a  
land where fields are green with succulent  
breasts and pointed nipples, to water

your parched home you left with torn

kinsmen waiting for your homecoming springs  
to wash off the ageless dusts of privation.

But water was your enemy. Water was your  
crossroads. It could have seen the stretched  
scars of a brokenclimein your smile.

Itcould have seen the scary sores on the streets  
of your thighs after numberlessphalli played forced  
pornography inbetween  
in Bani Walid.

It could have seen the sterile clouds hanging  
on theafterbirths of your dreams.

But it let you and others to sink with a rickety  
boat untilyour existence became absence.

If you had known you would have stayed  
back and joined us in this wilderness called  
home, breaking stones withteeth to survive,  
wiping tears and blood from browsfrom  
dawn to night.

Oh! You would have!  
Dear comrades, you would have...

## **New Body Backfire**

*Nicholas Boever*

I kept the earth-  
torn pebble; my anatomy,  
kindling: coke bark  
gorging true trembling

flames. Forests of reactions  
in heavy rusted sockets,  
growing heavier

sweating pleas. Something  
that snores underwater,  
but I  
could not hold. I

so easily split by  
an atom in me.

## Waste Management

*Daniel Uncapher*

**T**HIS MORNING I WENT FOR A TRASH RUN, which is to say I cleaned the house. Last night was long, but I was in full control of my faculties, and when morning arrived I came to a decision: *throw it out*.

It wasn't a novel idea but I took credit for it just the same. Initially, I tried to solve the problem intellectually, in accordance with my training. As I reminded the Ethics Committee: I'm a *trained deontologist*. I deal in rules, not consequences, and what happens afterwards is none of my business. Alien rules, alien consequences: that was my position at midnight.

By sunrise I'd abandoned the intellectual approach altogether and tried the so-called *spiritual approach*. A host of spirits assisted me, their identities unclear but their messages clearly impressed: purgation, they said, with fire. I made out a few faces—Pontius Pilate taking a steam bath, Pythian Apollo burning a barn, and in a flash at the finish St. Francis, who called his sickness a sister. Sister Death wasn't shy with her feelings for me. She insisted I take out the trash. The public can't know anything about this, she warned; they'll take it to the regular dump and in twenty years mine it back up and commodify it.

No, the spiritual host had been clear: I was to trust no one. I was to state my case as clearly as possible and break the matter off at the next logical point. Not an *extinction*, she assured me, any more than I could extinguish a cold ball of wax, but a firm and a decisive *stamping out*. As the Protestants say: *kill the Church*. The body is the Temple of God and death an exhumation. I stayed up through the night and prayed against exhumation. I saw God's many faces in the loblollies and the bean fields, picking the beans and then boiling them. I ate boiled beans and suffered bean-drunk visions of biblical passages. I saw the passage of peoples across history and lost my way with them, with bagworm moths and dung beetles.

By now a plan was forming in my head: I would throw dirt on the problem and walk away for good. It was the least I could do. I'd brushed the limits of reason and come away an equally inevitable creature, simple and base, and whatever happens next has nothing to do with me. Matter to energy, energy to matter, and the irreversible decomposition of bodies. As a Catholic I tried the impossible: I tried to squeeze the very wetness out of a glass of water. I tried to reduce the intelligible world into one substance and test it empirically—could I fold it seven times? Could I stretch it out to the moon, or dissolve it in a glass of water? As a Protestant I ate peanut butter and thought nothing at all of water solubility. I went seven days without a bowel movement. As I explained to the spiritual host: I'm a bible beater, not a theologian. At least, that was my position at midnight.

So, when the morning finally arrived I bagged up my trash and drove it down the Natchez Trace out of the Chickasaw country cane brakes and into the enduring forests of the Choctaw, where under the clear blue light of an open sky which contained in its scope not just one but *all possible universes*, I took care of the issue once and for all and I buried my trash in a burial mound. The best of all possible worlds was at hand. It was up to the consequentialists to worry about the future, about *tomorrow* morning, when some stupid kid will discover my garbage and mistake it for something of interest, for plunder, and they'll mistake themselves for plunderers: erosion, looting or wild pigs will break up the ancient earthworks and a clumsy little boy will twist an ankle on a piece of trash, upturned in a hundred-year storm of singular power, or an adventurous young girl will prick her finger on a sharp edge while digging for worms in the soft earth; and rather than run away she'll dig on, incurably curious, as the process begins again, possibilities diminishing, waste accumulating, visions receding across the distance until finally, in the dumb laughter of the final realization, she'll realize how to arrest the process – and how wasteful a process it'll be, she'll think, and how stupid she'll feel for having wasted it.

## Black Bra

*Bertha Onyekachi*



## Fragments

*Zami Yuba*

With you  
are Fragments of golden sunsets  
And moonlit stones  
Stormy nights          And fading whispers

I buried these inside you  
Because inside me couldn't house them And  
Every time I'm running home  
It's your body I find myself in

now you find yourself embracing spirits

I'm scratching through earth  
And running through dust  
looking for the fragments  
I buried

## **The Face of my Old Friend**

*Margarita Serafimova*

**I** saw life, and felt anguish over the beloved.  
The border river was flowing.

## **Drowning Oceans with Water**

*Nwanne Agwu*

I WISH I HAD WRITTEN THIS WHEN I was watching that boy demonstrate words. I'm sad. I feel like breaking bottles now with this gin going through my nerves.



I WAS IN MY ELDER BROTHER'S ROOM, this evening, looking out onto the street through the windows. The street was busy like it always was every other Sunday evening; vehicles were moving past at different speeds, young and older persons, boys with visibly cute bulges and bodies and faces, long-legged girls with grace in and on their bodies and gaits.

I was there for the boys. There is something about boys to me. This something about boys is like an unquenchable longing, an indestructible want. But I wasn't caught by a boy with much beauty. I was caught by my emotions, superior emotions: love, sadness, sobriety. But the emotions got caught and caused by a boy. I call him a boy because I think I saw a little swelling around his crotch, covered by a pair of ash-coloured shorts. If he was really a boy then he was an effeminate. His gait. The movement of his hands. His butt. Much about him seemed feminine.

I cried when I saw him signal to a child passing by and its mother. He first made a sound, and then started with his hand. But they never saw him. They didn't notice him though the way he behaved showed that they were neighbours. He then turned towards the road. Yes, towards the road. He was sitting on a big old and out-of-the-state-of-usability tyre beside the road. He started soliloquizing. But not the way we do it. He spoke to himself with his hands. I saw life. He gave me some sense like a finger of banana out of a bunch. He would later ask the woman selling oranges at the junction, who had given him an orange, if she was leaving her wares to go home. The woman would nod. And tell him, with her hands, that she was going to return after a while. And he would nod.

He would soon join his elder brother, who was playing with other kids, but he would sit quietly away from them. He stayed on his own and he was not the sort of kid you could easily label as a good child. No. I watched him beat up younger kids who had sat beside him on the tyre. His smile was that of wickedness. He smiled to them only when he was about doing something wicked. He was happy when his brother ran away with the rings of yellow and red and green rubber bands that they all(the other kids) played with. He supported evil.

But I cried for him. I cried because I knew what it meant to be alone. I cried because he was too young, maybe seven, eight, or nine. I cried because I couldn't hold myself back. I cried because words could be formed in his brain and tongue, but could

not roll out. I cried because I could only cry. And now I want to write that I wept. But I think that crying is just the same thing as weeping.

I would later learn that there are two dumb boys in his nuclear or immediate family. I would learn that they(he and his brother) are also deaf, and not just dumb.



I HAD MY MATHEMATICS EXAM YESTERDAY. It wasn't easy. I tried my best. And when I was ready to shade the ones I didn't know and couldn't solve out, a girl sitting beside me, who had subscribed for answers, and had also paid the Chief Invigilator to let her use her phone, offered to help me. I happily agreed. I would later request that she shade the answers herself so that we would not be caught - the invigilators will not let anyone who hadn't paid to pair with someone who had paid them. It was not bribery. It was not corruption. It was not examination malpractice. Call it this: Helping Yourself. People were helping themselves, though they never did that when the External Examination Centre Supervisor arrived.

Sometimes we can't stand as high as we have always stood. Sometimes our eyes, our legs, our bodies become so heavy with problems and we have to run for support in ways we once considered to be not-so-good.

There was this boy in the hall; slender, almost yellow like a pepper coated with a whitish-brown powder, lovely. He was the son of the President of the Customary Court Judges Association in the state. He was always helping himself. Unlike others, he

never paid daily. Maybe a parent had paid for all his papers. Sometimes he was using his phone, a textbook, notebook, etc. I had learnt his name: Valentine.

And there was Vincent who always sat with the Essay Answer Sheet and pretended to be writing while a teacher from his school, which was the examination centre, wrote for him. The External Examination Centre Supervisor arrived while we were writing our Government Objective Paper. The beautiful woman made it to the centre against the anticipation of the centre invigilators. Vincent couldn't write. Later, when the woman had gone, one of the teachers would help him erase the 'wrong' answers and shade the 'right' ones.

And Jennifer a Grade 11 student who never came to the hall but, like the ones who stayed outside, under the Jacaranda tree, had her papers passed in the hall. I wonder what happens to her attendance register. Jennifer is a celebrity in and outside the church, her school (the examination centre) and other places. She is a lot of Miss (this and that) and she had won a scholarship to study freely for a school year because she had performed astoundingly well in the state's debate competition.

While we wrote the Government paper. I talked with a boy sitting behind me. A sweet, cute boy who was my senior in school. We talked about people who came into the hall to take many answer sheets, to submit some and pass the others to students. We talked about students who paid so they could move to the backseats and help themselves. And we also talked about the noisy helicopters moving in the air because the President of the Federal Republic, a wiry, once beautiful, sick man had

come to commission the flyover bridges and road projects in the state, and take some chieftaincy titles.



HE DIDN'T GO ON LAND. He didn't come from Abuja in a car.

Mr. President, do you know that Nigeria is a country and not a nation?

Mr. President, how will you know the state of the federal roads when you don't use them? Why should your coming stop the normal activities in the state capital and keep people grounded in their homes? Didn't you notice that the way to the places you visited were barricaded? Maybe you didn't notice that because of those carrying placards and singing for you by the roadsides. Those people suffered to get there. Didn't you notice that none of them could come nearer than they were? Their legs weren't actually stiff.

Mr. President, it was fear. Fear. That single word that meant almost everything. That word that could be attached to every feeling or emotion. It hardly changed its form but it could change that of others. Those people were fearfully happy. Those people cheered and applauded you in fear. Those people were afraid of some things. They were afraid of the military men everywhere. They couldn't draw nearer because they had seen a little girl lose the full tray of groundnut. They had watched the soldiers beat-up an old man. They had seen the soldiers flog people out of the way. They watched the military men do all that for you. They had seen the fastest vehicle that conveyed people to the transcendental planet. Guns. Big guns were everywhere.

Fear is two cold arms folded over the chest. Fear is a heart beating, pulse counting rapidly, eyes wandering with caution, ears carefully listening for the slightest sound signalling danger.

Mr. President, how big are you that you are bigger than a crowd? How old are you that the aged get beaten because your legs have touched the ground? How kind are you that your presence made those soldiers disperse wares to the crowd - if they were ready to feed from the ground? Were you like them when you were an active soldier? Will you destroy me if I tell you that I had wished the helicopter you were in had crashed?



YOLO YOLO BY SEYI SHAY IS LOUDLY PLAYING on repeat from the home theatre. I am lying back-to-the-floor in my elder brother's room. I am trying to see the young boy (I believe he is not up to sixteen years old), who had helped a woman transport her heavy tubers of yam in his wheelbarrow, in my mind's eye. The boy was smallish. He was dark. I hardly believed it when people compared the skin colour of others to charcoal, but the boy I had seen was almost a charcoal. He was sweating. Salty water soaking up his used-to-be-white shirt. The woman would later give him a fifty naira note. The boy would complain that the money was too little. He would beg her to increase it, to add a little more. And the woman would smile devilishly and arrogantly tell the boy to thank her for being so generous as to give him that much.

And why do we think young boys who are thieves are wicked? Can't we see that we sometimes lower our standards and level of discipline because we can't live through them, because people will always hurt us if we keep our hands folded watching them, because the world is not a paradise, because life is never fair?

I'm not drunk like I was that night when I mixed some orange juice in equal proportion with a half-filled tot glass of my father's gin. My stepbrother had brought a bottle of 8PM whiskey to my father that evening but I was afraid of drinking the whiskey. Not because it would have a greater alcoholic percentage. No. I was just afraid. I feared that he might have added some spells, some wicked prayers to the drink. I was afraid of harm. I was afraid of writing this. The Electricity Distribution Company are afraid. They will not cut the electricity supply until the President leaves the state. And there will be a total blackout.

Fear has always done something unexplainable and inexpressible to us. Now I'm afraid that all magazines will reject this.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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**Bertha Onyinyechi Onyekachi** is a graduate of Fine and Applied Arts from the University of Benin, Nigeria. She hails from Abia state. Bertha is a lover of the arts as she's multi-talented in drawing and painting, singing, and acting, she loves to cook too. Bertha did her training under renowned master Ejoh Wallace which influenced her brush work approach to painting. She explores the chiaroscuro technique that refers to a strong self-conscious juxtaposition of light and shades which results in a stunning visual effect in a work of art and brush work approach.

**Corneliusitepu** writes prose, poetry, and a weekly blog at [drawnbythefather.blogspot.ng](http://drawnbythefather.blogspot.ng). His works are reflections of his thoughts, and perspectives to life, and are a wide window into his subconscious. He believes in the power of literature to transform minds, and hopes to achieve such through writing. You can find him on twitter @corneliusitepu.

**Daniel Uncapher** is an MFA candidate at Notre Dame whose work has appeared in *Neon Literary Magazine*, *the Baltimore Review*, *the Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Posit*, *Flash Frontier*, and more.

**Grant Guy** is a Winnipeg, Canada, poet, writer, editor, essayist and playwright. Former artistic director of Adhere + Deny. His poems, short stories, essays and art criticism have been published in Canada, the United States, Wales, India and England with publications like *Peeking Cat Poetry*, *Unbridled*, *Lexica*, *Prairie Journal*, *Canadian Dimension* and *Paper Wait*. He has three books published: *Open Fragments* (Lives of Dogs), *On the Bright Side of Down* and *Bus Stop* (Red Dashboard). His plays include *A.J. Loves B.B.*, *Song for Simone* and an adaptation of *Paradise Lost* and *the Grand Inquisitor*. He was

the 2004 recipient of the MAC's 2004 Award of Distinction and the 2017 recipient of the WAC's Making A Difference Award.

**Hareendran Kallinkeel** lives in Kerala, India, after a stint of 15 years in a police organization and five years in Special Forces. Waking from a hiatus of nearly a decade, he has recently returned to fiction writing. Prior to the hiatus, he has been published in online and print magazines. The title story of his short fiction collection, *A Few Ugly Humans*, has earned a nomination for the Pushcart Prize in 2005. Recent publications include flash fiction pieces in *Aphelion-Webzine* in their September and October 2017 issues. His stories are forthcoming in November issue of *Scarlet Leaf Review* and December issue of *Flash Fiction Magazine*.

**Henry Akeru** is prolific chemist with a zeal of large compounds and structures.

**Hongri Yuan**, born in China in 1962, is a poet and philosopher interested particularly in creation. Representative works include *Platinum City*, *Gold City*, *Golden Paradise*, *Gold Sun* and *Golden Giant*. His poetry has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada and Nigeria.

**Madu Chisom Kingdavid** is an Award Winning Writer, Historian, Paint Maker and Poet. He's a graduate of History and International Studies. His work appears in some literary journals, including *One*, *Public Cool*, *Bombay Review*, *Kalahari Review*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, *African Writer*, *Expound*, *Praxis*, *Afrikrayons* etc

**Margarita Serafimova** was shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017. She has two collections in the Bulgarian: *Animals and Other Gods* (2016), *Demons and World* (2017). Her work is forthcoming in *Agenda*, *Trafika Europe*, *Poetic Diversity*, *TAYO*, *Transnational*, *SurVision*, *Bezine*, *Antinarrative*, *Home::Keep/ Geocommunetrics*, *Borfski*

Press, and appears in *London Grip New Poetry*, *The Journal*, *A-Minor*, *Waxwing*, *Step Away*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Minor Literatures*, *Writing Disorder*, *The Birds We Piled Loosely*, *Noble/Gas*, *Obra/Artifact*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Punch*, *Futures Trading*, *Ginosko*, *Dark Matter*, *Red Wolf*, *Window/ Patient Sounds*, *Basil O'Flaberty*, *Peacock Journal*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Wild Word*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, *Oddball* etc

**Micheal Ace** is a poet and writer from Ibadan, Nigeria. He has authored two poetry chapbooks *Sermon From a Stammerer* and *Scarlet Silk*. His works have been published on several local and foreign journals, reviews and magazines. He believes that the world is too complex for a pen to remain idle.

**Nicholas Boever** is a graduate of the NHIA Creative Writing MFA who sold his soul to corporate marketing to rent a house on a lake to write in. Unfortunately, the lake isn't always there. When he's not writing, he's busy trying to turn throat sounds into words.

**Nwanne Agwu** is an Igbo teenager. He is a shy, happily angry humanist with many questions smiling in his mind. He dislikes and likes a lot. Some of his stories have appeared in the *Pegician*, *Flash Fiction Press*, *Brittle Paper*, *Afreecan Read* and *Youth Shades*. He'd also posted some things here: [nwanneagwu.wordpress.com](http://nwanneagwu.wordpress.com)

**Ojo Taiye** is a young Nigerian who uses poetry as a handy tool to hide his frustration with the society.

**Pam Munter** has authored several books including *When Teens Were Keen: Freddie Stewart and The Teen Agers of Monogram* (Nicholas Lawrence Press, 2005) and *Almost Famous: In and Out of Show Biz* (Westgate Press, 1986). She's a retired clinical psychologist, former performer and film historian. Her many lengthy retrospectives on the lives of often-forgotten Hollywood performers and others have appeared in *Classic*

Images and Films of the Golden Age. More recently, her essays and short stories have been published in *The Rumpus*, *Matador Review*, *The Manifest-Station*, *Litro*, *The Coachella Review*, *Lady Literary Review*, *The Creative Truth*, *Adelaide*, *Canyon Voices*, *Open Thought Vortex*, *Fourth and Sycamore*, *Nixes Mate*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Cold Creek Review*, *Communicators League*, *Switchback*, *The Legendary*, *Scarlet Leaf*, *Down in the Dirt* and others. Her play *Life Without* was a semi-finalist in the Ebell of Los Angeles Playwriting Competition and has been nominated for the Bill Groves Award for Outstanding Original Writing, along with a nomination for Best Play (staged reading). She has an MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

**Zami Yuba** writes the words as they come to her. When she is not eating or taking nude selfies, she lives in Enugu.