



# RESONANCE

An anthology of short stories

Pencilmarks and Scribbles

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Curated by Tímíleyín, Naomi and Atty

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

Hello everyone, lovely to write to you again. The theme for December's issue came to me after an intense meditation session. “Resonance” a voice kept whispering into my head, like a hymn. Till I finally understood that it'd be perfect for our last issue of the year. This year was immensely memorable to me for a lot of reasons. I learnt so many things and also lost many things as well. As a team, we definitely had a lot of ups and downs that improved our collective skills and reemphasized on just how important the work we do at Pencilmarks and Scribbles is. Needless to say, it was truly an unforgettable year. We received our highest number of submissions yet and it truly excites me to imagine what the coming year has in store for us. A lot of things resonated with me this year- art, life lessons, especially stories- and this issue shows me that it wasn't an isolated experience. I'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone at the Pencilmarks and Scribbles house, the contributors and to you, dearest reader. May this body of work equally resonate with you. Happy reading and until next time!.

Tímíleyín Akinsànyà.

## **IN THE DARK BY POPOOLA OLOLADE ADEREMI**

You start seeing Wura after your cousin insists— twice a week meetings and occasional calls when it gets really bad. Dare keeps saying you're close to a breakdown and need to talk. So, you reach out to Wura, your friend who's a therapist. Initially, she's against the idea, feeling too close to help. She suggests other contacts. She says they are good at what they do, but you insist you'd rather confide in someone who knows you. It takes some convincing, but you manage to persuade her that it's better this way.

You didn't think this was something you needed, but it was only a matter of time until Dare called your mother. You try to imagine what the conversation would have sounded like:

“He's barely eating, Auntie. I don't think he's sleeping properly either.”

Your mother would likely sigh on the phone and then ask to speak with you. She has stopped calling your phone directly since she knows you're not going to answer anyway.

You would make up a silly excuse, fully aware that your mother knows it is a lie but will kindly refrain from calling you out on it. You're tired of breaking the poor woman's heart so when Dare brings up Wura, you reluctantly make the decision to try therapy.

At the first meeting, Wura asks you about the most recent memory you have of Z, one you remember down to the last detail. You remember the purple top that hugged her body so nicely, light cotton, long sleeves. Then there is the street with people milling about, and the overturned car that held Z's body.

Wura asks you about the detail that stands out the most from this memory. For a second, you don't remember, and then it comes to you, like an anvil settling on your chest, crushing your ribs and snuffing out life from you.

You tell her about the screams, not from the people that witnessed the accident, not from Z who was long dead. You talk about the screams that wrenched themselves from your throat after seeing the body mangled in that horrifying way.

You say this stands out because you are a quiet person, usually. And you had never let out sounds like that until that night on the dimly lit street.

Two days later, you wake up in the middle of the night, your body covered in sweat and goosebumps.

Dare mumbles your name sleepily from his position beside you. You tell him to go back to sleep.

“Is it the same one?” He asks in that worried tone you’ve come to resent. “I’m fine, just go back to sleep.”

When your next session with Wura begins, you know you’re in for a rough ride. Wura asks why you didn’t attend the funeral. For some reason, the words come easy to you, and the tears too.

The last time you had seen Z, she was already dead but in the part of your heart that hurt the most, there was a chance that she could wake up, pull her body out of the car, and come running into your arms saying she read your messages before the crash, and that she loved you too, she always had.

You tell Wura that you chose to keep that memory close to you, however delusional. You didn’t want to see Z in a casket, all stiff with cotton in her nostrils. You couldn’t submit yourself to that damage. You knew if you had seen her, you would have never stopped crying.

The dream always starts off the same way. You’re in your bed and Z comes bounding into your room with a laughter that echoes about your house. Sometimes, you can hear it after you’ve woken up.

You don’t like to talk about the dream with anyone, not even Dare. He just knows when it happens, and has come to accept that you may share your words, and your pain but this is the one thing you will keep to yourself.

You haven’t told Wura that Z pays you visits. She showed up for the first time on the night of the accident. You were curled up in your bed, in the dark, numb with pain. You had felt goosebumps covering your skin; then came her scent— sweet and bold, enveloping the room.

You had veered your head around the room in shock. Even with the sun down and the curtains drawn, you could see her, standing, waiting for recognition, for you to call out her name. But you thought it was an hallucination, that it was just too much for you to deal with so you conjured her, down to her scent.

You only believed it was real when it happened for the second time, then the third time, and more times after.

Talking with Wura helps, you've finally come to accept it. You know Z will always be a ghost. Your ghost. You told Dare about your dream, to both his surprise and yours. Talking about it breaks your heart but you know there will be a mending. You still cry during your sessions but Wura says the crying is good, that you may never stop crying, so you cry even harder.

Sometimes, when the sun is down and the curtains are drawn, you still see Z, her scent still enveloping the room. You want to call out to her but you're scared she'll leave, so you lay quietly in the dark and listen to the echoes of her laughter.



**Author's Bio**

Popoola Ololade Aderemi is a Nigerian writer who is passionate about storytelling and its many treasures her works have appeared in Afrihill Press, Pencilmarks and scribbles magazine and African Writer Magazine.

## **1992 BY JOSIAH IKPE**

Bejenia knew certain things were not debatable. She knew some things were beyond her reach, so why bother to insist on how or what road they choose to come in? Over the years, as the world unfurled and bore different layers, she'd come to see politics as something beyond her reach, something only the educated knew how to maneuver, and something a mere person like herself who wasn't fortunate enough to be given the wealth of education, couldn't make a sense of. And it wasn't as though she was stupid, incapable of discerning the nuances of her environment, but it was that some things were better left for those whose shoes knew the road much better.

And so, when Mama Ada had walked up to her days back, asking her who she intended to vote for, Abiola or that man from Kano, Bashir Tofa, the question had fallen on her like a pile of woods, stiffening her brain. No one had ever engaged her politically or required her opinions about her most preferred political candidates. Yes, there was Ogbu, her husband, but he was always too tired to talk about politics, often complaining that politicians were vicious and deceptive. So, it was all strange that Mama Ada would look at her and ask her, a common petty trader like herself who sold household provisions in a small kiosk along Yaba Road, what her thoughts were about the political candidates.

'It doesn't concern me. I'm not voting for anyone,' she'd said to Mama Ada and screwed up her face as though the words had left her tongue sour.

‘Ahh ahh! Why?’ Mama Ada asked, and not waiting to receive any answers, she went on, ‘It’s Abiola I’d vote for o. I heard he’s even going to be at TBS to campaign this Saturday. I think I’d be there.’ Mama Ada said and looked at her in the face as though she was searching for something, something that validated her statements. Her response to Mama Ada’s question was rough, and gloomy, something that bordered on her not having that time to spare, to go and vote silly people into power, people who’d later forget about the citizens and live their lives as if they had never tasted sour food before.

Reflecting on all of it now, as she sat on a wooden chair in her kiosk on a warm Friday afternoon, she knew she’d said the right thing. Wasn’t it all what they all do, those politicians? Ride fancy cars with tinted glasses, wear the most expensive laces, and take vacations to various resorts? Why then go through all that stress of standing under the sun for hours to vote for somebody who would do as he pleases immediately after power touches his hand? Why then waste her time to campaign for someone who would later forget that a woman like herself exists? It was too much jargon, too much waste of time, time she’d have used to build her business, to go and campaign and carry somebody’s name on her head like a pail of water.

It was ten past 9. Bejenia was curled up on the worn-out leather cushion, listening to the news on NTA. Ogbu was seated next to her, fumbling with the lace of his shoe. Behind, down the corridor to the kitchen, she could hear her children arguing among themselves on who should divide the large chunk of meat. This kind of argument often occurs. Whenever it does, she would say to settle the issue, ‘Let Emma share the meat for everyone. He’s the oldest.’ But she chose not to butt in this time. Let them argue, fight, and even bring down the whole house if they like. After all, they were children, and differences of this sort were bound to come up.

‘Your children have started their madness again. Won’t you go and see what the issue is?’ Ogbu asked and fixed his gaze on her. The ceiling fan squeaked, slicing through the air. Bejenia was aware of Ogbu’s eyes on her, the stillness of it. But she neither budged nor responded to his question. Her eyes were glued to the TV and her mind was determining things. On the screen was a woman heavily kitted up, her head tie

sitting gracefully on her small head. She was reading out the events that had taken place much earlier during the day – the protests from the NUTs, declaring that they want better pay, the people from the East expressing their differences about the Muslim-Muslim tickets. Soon after a short ad, M.K.O Abiola, the presidential candidate of SDP, comes up. He was a man of towering presence, and she could tell from his appearance, his crisp white agbada, the cap firmly positioned on his head like it was meant to sit there, that he was a man of reputation.

‘Now, let’s hear what he has to say,’ Ogbu said, interrupting her thoughts. She looked at him, placed her hands on his thigh, and smiled. She knew for certain that he would surely criticize and interrogate whatever the man intended to say. So, she sat slightly composed, staring at the screen, and waiting for Abiola to begin speaking.

M.K.O Abiola’s voice was soft, his words awakening: “No one can give you power. It is yours. Take it! From this day, show to the world that anyone who takes the people of Nigeria for fools is deceiving himself and will have the people to answer...”

The TV went blank, acting up again. As if something had fallen upon Bejenia, seeping into her skin, she jumped to her feet and raced to where the TV sat. She tapped its side repeatedly, as that was how she could get it to return to normal whenever its madness began. But this time, it didn’t respond. It only loomed back in blankness, the sound echoing continuously.

Bejenia cursed. She continued tapping the side of the TV, hoping that it would return to normal, praying that a miracle would happen somehow. ‘Won’t you come and help me fix this?’ she called to her husband, who, at this point, was laughing so hard.

‘Just leave it,’ he said. ‘It would fix itself much later.’

‘I don’t want later. I want now,’ she said, her voice above whispers. Beads of sweat coursed through her forehead. ‘John,’ she called out to her son. ‘Come and help me fix the TV.’

Whiffing of competence, John appeared. But as soon as he made his way to the shelf where the TV sat, the power went off, and darkness clothed everywhere, covering the living room like a makeshift blanket.

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Multiple thoughts sprinted through the hallways of Bejenia's mind. M.K.O Abiola's words trudged deeper inside of her, making it impossible for her to fall asleep. It was as though something, something beyond her reasoning was descending upon her, making its way towards her, and then enveloping her. She couldn't place her fingers on it yet, but she knew her spirit was rising, that her body was restless, and that her desires were evolving. She knew that beyond the crucibles of her most visible self, a small voice was yelling within her, wishing to be heard, longing to be recognized.

All her life, she'd walked with just a few things in her mind: to get married, have children, engage in any kind of business, and see that those children don't starve. No one had ever told her that her mind could accommodate more than all those things, that she could aim higher, and that she could do all of those things while tending to other things. What if she ventured into politics, not as a politician, but as a voice, a voice for women like herself? What if she ventured into politics as a voice, as a voice for her children and other children that they don't have to know anyone or have this or that connection before they can secure a good job? And what if she ventured into politics to change things, to change structures, to change policies, policies that are favourable to only one faction of the masses? She asked herself. Would it hurt anyone if she now decides to wear a new outlook on life?

Like a gust of wind, the power came back on. A beeping sound rented through the air, bringing appliances to life, and died down seconds later. Her husband was on the other side of the bed, fast asleep and snoring louder than usual. She turned on her side and closed her eyes, beckoning for sleep to come. Deep within her, deep within that place where her mind lay, she knew her questions had been answered.

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Tafawa Balewa Square, at the heart of Lagos Island, was a space reserved for monumental events. Bejenia knew as she got down from the molue-bus a few minutes ago, that her spirit was enlivened, excited for things yet explored. Of course, there were her fears, her fears of being different from the others. But those fears had vanished into thin air the moment she walked into the Square and spotted all sorts of people, people like herself. From the entrance of the Square, where four huge sculptures of horses stood, down to the makeshift stage where M.K.O Abiola sat with a few men behind him, the space was filled with all

kinds of women. And she thought briefly that this certainly had to be all the women in Lagos; all of them here, assembled in one place.

Christie Essien's Seun Rere was being played from a far corner. She could make out the pungent smell of party-jollof wafting through the air, and this made her stomach churn, bringing to her knowledge the half cup of pap and little bread she'd eaten that morning. Behind her, only an inch away, a group of women was arguing among themselves on why M.K.O Abiola was the right man and why Bashir Tofa wasn't.

'Abiola is a good man. He will make life, as market women, easy for us. He knows our desires and what we yearn for,' one of them said in pidgin, her thick Yoruba accent weaved into each word.

'All these politicians nah the same. Wetin be the difference between Abiola and Bashir Tofa? Nah so so promise all of them sabi make,' another said and squeezed her face as though there was an unsettled dispute between her and politicians, between her and the world at large.

'My sister, you aren't lying. But if we use the past to make a basis for the future, if we look to the past and allow it to blind us, then I'm certain no one will come out to vote. Let's go past that already. A change is what we collectively seek,' another said.

'Yes ooo. Nah change we want,' the first woman said and knotted her wrapper at the edge, as a sign of wrapping up the discussion and as a sign of better things to come.

Bejenia stood watching, her countenance unmoved. A thought settled within her. Her eyes darted across the square, and from nowhere, perhaps from a place where her will and inclination met, a voice streamed out of her. 'Change. Change. Change. We want change,' she shouted. And as she did, her legs began moving too, towards the stage where M.K.O Abiola now stood with a few of his political allies. As if a fire had been lit and was spreading to all corners, voices emerged and resonated along with hers'.

'Change. Change. Change. We want change,' rose from the ground and lingered above the air of Tafawa Balewa Square.



### **Author's Bio**

Josiah Ikpe is a final-year law undergraduate at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan. He likes to think of himself, before anything else, as a storyteller that is constantly evolving. Much of his writings capture the interplay between family struggles and love, societal issues, and religion, and how they all play a vital role in determining who we are as humans. You can find him on Twitter @josiahikpe.

## **EMBRACING SHATTERED PIECES: THE ART OF LETTING GO BY AMIRAH ABUDULAZEEZ**

For a little over a month now, I have debated putting these memories on paper. The fear that writing it down would inevitably make it real has held me back. However, the thought and concept of the previous month being a reality are way too damning for me to approve, much less accept. Attesting to these incidences would mean coming to terms with the fact that my life will never be the same again... but here goes.

Exactly two weeks before Christmas, we got into a heated argument over something so stupid and minuscule. In retrospect, most of our disagreements are always like that. But in the heat of the moment, it feels like life and death. My stubborn, egotistical nature never likes to be wrong; I would never give you the chance to finish your sentence without interrupting. However, this argument was different.

Normally, you would scream back and counter with your own point of view. Then, I would call you a liar and tell you I don't believe you. We would continue our screaming match until one person finally yields or someone understands where the other is coming from, and we try to settle amicably. But our screaming matches always result in you apologizing. You always apologized after we fought, not that I didn't... I guess yours was always more genuine, and I could see it in your eyes that you meant every single word you said in the apology. But this time, you didn't do any of that. You just glared at me for what felt like minutes. Then, without a word, you took a coat off the rack, opened the front door, and looked back at me. In that moment, I could tell this time I genuinely hurt you, but I didn't care; I was too rooted in my anger. I planned to apologize and make things right, but I just couldn't bring myself to utter those words. And with that, I watched you leave, your footsteps echoing in the distance until you left our floor. I remember every single detail of this argument because when you came back, everything changed.

I still remember the morning of the next day like it was yesterday. I walked into the sitting room after a sleepless night, and there you were, standing in the living room. You stared at me, your eyes cold, dark,

and empty. Without a word, you walked away, and that has been my routine... my life in a nutshell. Every morning, I walk into the living room, and I find you there, looking like you're in the process of making your morning coffee. You stare at me and walk away. Sometimes I try to initiate conversations with you, but nothing changes, nothing prolongs your stay. It's always the cold, empty stare, and in a matter of seconds, you're out the front door.

Every Christmas Eve, you and I always had this tradition. I would make our special eggnog and spike it with your favorite type of cognac. We would drink while playing Monopoly and other board games. When that got tiring or we were too inebriated to make logical decisions, we would decorate our Christmas tree. And you always found a way to get me under the mistletoe, a part of our evening that I loved, and you knew it. So this Christmas, I waited patiently, made the eggnog, and even added extra brandy just the way you liked it. I anticipated your arrival...

...but you never showed up.

I couldn't bring myself to decorate the tree. I couldn't bring myself to pack it up either, so it stayed there over Christmas alongside the box of decorations. Then the New Year's celebration kicked in, but by then, I had already become a shell of myself. I hadn't left the apartment in days. I couldn't bring myself to respond to the numerous calls and text messages left by our friends and family. One time, I heard a knock on my door and the familiar voice urgently saying, "Reema, come and open the door, I'm fucking pressed." The urgency in your voice made it sound so real, and for a moment, I thought you were finally back. The first thing I planned to do was hug you and tell you, "I'm sorry; I would never fight with you again, and I mean it this time." I rushed to the door, and my doorway was empty, not a single soul on our floor. Shutting the door behind me, I turned back to face our small apartment. The empty tree, devoid of ornaments, stared back at me. And that's when I noticed it: a cluster of vibrant green oval leaves adorned with small pale ivory berries, suspended in one of the branches; a mistletoe. I walked closer, inspecting it.

When everyone was outside chanting the 10-second countdown to the new year, I was on my knees, crying and begging the almighty to please take me away. I didn't want to live anymore... how could I... you're not here.

And there I was, fetal position, in the early hours of the morning but still dark outside. My front door was bolted shut, but somehow, somehow, I saw you make your way towards me. It was you, still you. I raised my head up, face partially covered in snot and tears, and I stared at you. For the first time in what felt like years, you smiled at me. Your eyes were warm and inviting; you didn't glare. You knelt down beside me, stroking my hair. Your hands felt so cold, icy even. I managed to let out a mumble saying your name, which only made me tear up. You placed the mistletoe in the palm of my hand, closing it tightly. Then you spoke. I didn't realize how badly I yearned to hear your voice until you said those words: "Reema, it's okay. I love you, and I always will, but you have to let me go now." I could only let out a whimper amidst nods. I knew I had to let you go, but I just couldn't. We stayed there in that position, crouched down, hand in hand. In that moment, I felt peace. I was so rooted in the state of ataraxia that I must have fallen asleep, because when I opened my eyes, it was past daybreak, and you weren't there. I felt a mild prickly feeling in my palm, and there it was... the mistletoe, or rather, what was left of it.

My morning routine was the same as always, the only difference being you weren't there by the coffee table. The random knocks on the door stopped; you didn't show up randomly, nor did I see you roaming the corridor halls as I had multiple times over the past weeks. You just never came back... something I have to accept and move on from. I have no other choice because I know you will never come back.

How could you?

When we just buried you yesterday.

In the grand symphony of life, where joy and sorrow weave an intricate melody, one of the most challenging notes to strike is that of letting go.

As sentient beings, we are intertwined with bonds and connections, When we love, we do it so deeply to the point that letting go feels like going through the worst pain imaginable. Most people would rather remain in unhealthy settings, regardless of the situation because they would rather put up with the normalcy they are used to than sever ties and bid farewell to a chapter that was etched deeply into their souls...because normalcy is easier than change.

“Loss” “grief” “breakups” and “splits” are not mere words, but profound experiences that sculpt the contours of our hearts, carving valleys of pain that reveal the depths of our emotions. They are emotions that every human being at some point has or will experience but just because this is a general concept doesn’t minimize how hard it can be to move forward when we’re holding onto memories that hurt. It’s like trying to heal a wound while keeping it open.

Reemas first entry, is witnessed through the lens of a heart-wrenching account, serves as a poignant reminder of the excruciating journey that accompanies the release of what was once so dearly held. Her story resonates with the piercing anguish of unmet expectations, the echoes of heated arguments that still reverberate, and the emptiness that gnaws at the corners of one’s existence. Each detail explaining the ways in which the claws of memories cling stubbornly, refusing to release their hold. It is in these complexities that we discover the maze like web of emotions that follows loss; grief that transcends the boundaries of time, the struggle to make sense of an altered reality, and the relentless ache of a void that can never be filled. But in this sad melody, there’s a note of hope. The pain we feel isn’t the end of the story, it’s just a chapter. As we face our emotions and let ourselves feel the sadness, acknowledge and accept it is only then that we will begin to find healing. It’s like turning pain into strength. Reema knew all along her partner was dead but she couldn’t come to terms with departing with him because she wasn’t ready to let go, she still had expectations, regrets, and occasions she vowed to do over. But sometimes in life, there are no do-overs.

Moments like these in life, you only get one chance.

Yet, in this symphony of sorrow, As tears fall like raindrops onto the parched landscape of a grieving heart, they water the seeds of a new beginning.

The process of letting go, though arduous, is also an affirmation of our capacity to heal. It is an acknowledgment that the pain, the memories, and the love are not terminated but transformed. Just as a caterpillar surrenders to the chrysalis, emerging as a butterfly reborn, so too do we emerge from the cocoon of loss with newfound wings to navigate the world.

Grief, often mistaken for a stagnant state, isn't something that stays forever. It's more like a river that guides us to a place of acceptance. It is the acknowledgment of our emotions; the anger, the denial, the bargaining, that ultimately leads us to the shores of understanding. Just like Reema, we must face the ghosts of unresolved conversations, the residue of unsaid words that linger like shadows. To journey from the depths of heartache to the heights of healing is to honor the memories that were, to acknowledge the pain of their absence, and to embrace the transformative power of release.

Breakups, too, carry their own symphony of emotions. Two souls that once danced in harmony are forced to part ways, and then a mix of emotions ensues; anger, regret, and perhaps even relief however It's important to remember that even though things are changing, the love and memories aren't lost. they create a tapestry of lessons learned, moments cherished, and a future rewritten.

They become a part of who we are.

In this journey, we become alchemists, transmuting the lead of pain into the gold of growth. Each step away from what was marked a step closer to what can be. We learn that letting go is not synonymous with forgetting; it is an act of profound courage that allows us to honor what was while making space for what will be. Just as a tree releases its leaves in the autumn, allowing them to return to the earth, enriching the soil for the cycle of rebirth, so must we release what no longer serves us, allowing the soil of our souls to be nourished for the emergence of new experiences.

Ultimately, the journey of letting go is not one of erasure but of transformation. It is an invitation to evolve, to find solace in the fractured pieces of our hearts and to use them as stepping stones toward a brighter horizon.



As we write the narrative of our lives, Just as music has high and low notes, we encounter moments of crescendo and decrescendo, and it is in the echoes of what was that we find the strength to whisper the words, “I release you,” and in doing so, we free ourselves to embrace the symphony of what will be.



### **Author's Bio**

I'm Amirah Abdulazeez, an international relations graduate however I have a strong passion for writing and theater. I enjoy cooking, reading, going on walks, content creating, listening to podcasts, especially true crime. All in all I aspire to evolve and deepen my connection with the written word on my creative journey.

## **UGODIYA OR HER HUSBAND'S EAGLE BY ANGEL NDUKA-NWOSU**

I could see the ghost of a smile on his face. As he measured out money for pepper soup, I could see the ghost of a smile on my husband's face. I had my movements planned. My freedom planned. My life with Durotimi planned. I had these planned.

And that smile made me uncomfortable. Left me with the desire to retch on him and place camphor balls instead of uziza seeds into his pepper soup.

The previous week he had told me that no one would believe me when I said that my husband had a duty of waiting until I slept before he climbed on me. Okwudili had told me that no one would believe me when I told of how on our wedding day, he kept a gun in his suit and threatened to blast my brains out if I didn't kneel to serve him cake. My husband had told me that no one would believe me. He had said that when it came to me, it was always his elevated words against mine.

And he was right.

At the family meeting to discuss the freshest of scars caused by his belt no one I could call family did. My mother didn't. My father didn't. Not a soul whose name I once answered let me know that I wasn't imagining the mornings I woke up in pain and a dry vagina. Everyone saw me as an exchange for the better things of life. My father: for a loan to set up a better import-export business. My mother: for more George and Hollands wrappers to be worn in a bigger house in Lekki. My brothers: for political alliances with one of the biggest politician's Igbo in Lagos knew.

But Durotimi believed me. Durotimi, the one who acknowledged all along that I wasn't a liar each time I came to buy makeup concealers at her boutique whenever he left my face with the shocking purple and

brown colour of an overripe pear. Durotimi, the one who advised me to have a secret stash and to buy gold from each money that Okwudili gave me.

Durotimi, the one whose tongue around my nipples made me beg her to stay true to her name and stay with me. She did.

Today, I too shall live the meaning of my name. Okwudili calls me Ugodiya with pride at each party, almost as if he doesn't come right back to slap me for greeting this or that man.

Her husband's eagle.

He doesn't understand that an eagle can not only carry one to light. Okwudili doesn't understand that an eagle can drop one from heights unknown.

Today, I shall drop him from the heights of life.



### **Author's Bio**

Angel Nduka-Nwosu is a writer, editor and journalist. She has been published in Isele Magazine, The Random Photo Journal and Ake Review to name a few.

The editor behind an anthology of poetry by young Nigerian women called *The Woman Is No Messiah*, she writes from Lagos, Nigeria

## **WHAT DOES YOUR FLESH WANT GAN GANN? BY BOLUWATIFE**

### **OLOWOYO**

“Gan gann” is a Yoruba word meaning “exactly”

The past couple of days have been alive with festivities. There’s colour everywhere. The village masquerades were dancing, jumping, and erupting red sand into the air. Today, they will not chase anyone who refuses to extend money with long whips. They seemed content with yesterday's wahala. Even Iya Basirat's usually empty small kiosk was bustling with children buying balloons of different colours they would eventually release into the air and plastic sunglasses they would lose. Everyone was dressed in purple, blue, and orange adire; this was the colour of the festival, and it felt almost shameful not to participate.

People were seen carrying trays of food to share with their neighbours, and hunters worked twice as hard to provide the excess meat. Women gave their children extra sweets without complaining of the possible tummy ache, and birds seemed more plentiful in the sky.

There were smiles on faces that didn't know how to hold smiles, perhaps saving it for the New Year festival. It is the way; the smile hangs too loose on their cheeks, almost as if they were afraid to drop it.

Bliss was knocking on everyone's door, and even the devil answered the door.

Hmm, the devil, the one who birthed me. He wasn't fighting to hold a smile like the rest. He wore happiness on his face daily. You could tell; he breathed out fury and sucked your glee right in front of you. You could always tell. All he felt was satisfaction.

The food was plenty. The children were happy, and the drums were loud. The dusty drummer boys were practising every day on the drums. They will be followed by the voice of the powder-faced ladies, singing in high pitch and enunciating every word the songs carried.

It was two days to the New Year, precisely two o'clock in the afternoon, The devil was on one of his frequent visits to the neighbouring village, visiting his women for the celebration. This was the perfect time for the discussion according to Bidemi.

Bidemi instructed that the sitting room table be moved towards the right side of the television, then, He told Sola he wanted to share something with her. They had a previous heated conversation that ended in both of them yelling and storming away. Since then, the house has been filled with eerie silence and random snarky remarks. His friends had been hissing in his ear, and he realized it was time to offer her what he knew she needed. It is the festival period and he demands Alafia (peace) for the week. He will drink palm wine and eat hard meat with his kinsmen.

Bidemi sits on the leather sofa as he speaks to Sola. She has a distinct look on her face. It screams of fierceness, fear, and irritation. She is listening to him intently.

He continues to speak:

“If you stare at me like that, I will assume you are still rude. Even though I am perfectly aware this is a reaction to the foul words I spoke.

I need you to kneel as I apologize for asking you to kill yourself. I acknowledge that my earlier words were offensive, and I apologize. However, I need you to kneel as a gesture of accepting my apology, even as I explain the reasoning behind my harsh words.

It frustrates me that you consistently find yourself in situations that provoke complaints from everyone around you. We all navigate challenges in life, akin to dining with the devil and enduring his whips daily.

So why do you amplify your grievances? Why must you cry louder than us all? Why must you act out? Must you infuriate him more? We are all but one. Why scurry away? Why must your actions cause us harm?

The way you gallivant in the village with people you know you shouldn't be seen with is reckless. Your friends have no clear gender or too many. You parade in the market with them, haggling over meat not meant for Mother. The villagers have eyes, Sola. Folarin took a liking to you till he saw you with that person -or do I dare say, woman? He shook his head in regret as he told me how you touch each other's face in public.

You clothe yourself in agbada as if you were a man for the Saturday weddings and on Sunday you fling on two pieces of sparsely looking dresses and go to strange parties at night. Are you a man or a woman? Eh! Sola! At Least pick one!

While I don't speak of your worldly pursuits, it's the way you upset the devil, the one who orchestrated our existence that annoys me. Have you considered how many times Mother has shed tears because of your actions? What does your flesh want gan gann?"

Sola gives him another look that reeks of anger, pain and disgust

She says, "There is a way you move, and I will just know you don't know who you are but rather what you are to be. I have always known who I am. We can never see eye-to-eye. You hold too much power in your hand, as I have nothing but my mouth.

When the time comes for you to choose a partner, the devil will be seated there, grinning from teeth to lips. If you will he should not be there; it is with shame that he will go towards his demons to wail. They will gather like ants drawn to sugar, offering eulogies to soothe you. But for me, he would spit in my face if I were to extend an invitation. His demons will even laugh at me.

I must admit I am faulty. I may have pushed for a war with the devil too soon. I have held Mother crying repeatedly as I have met her kindness and fury. I flocked out, hoping to wield myself from the whips of the devil because it hurt too much. I cannot hold my tongue either. My mouth has been shaking since I was born. I feel my rage in my chest, and it forms quickly into words. I do not have to dine with the devil if I don't want to.

My error was assuming that everyone possessed words as well. I've realized that begging for more words from others is foolish. I instead offer consolidation on what we have suffered from the devil. But I will

not kneel to apologise for the mistakes I did not make. My anger reminds me I am alive, and if, by chance, I let it go, then it is from my heart.

I will not ask for words anymore. I will not accept the things that have happened to be reversed.

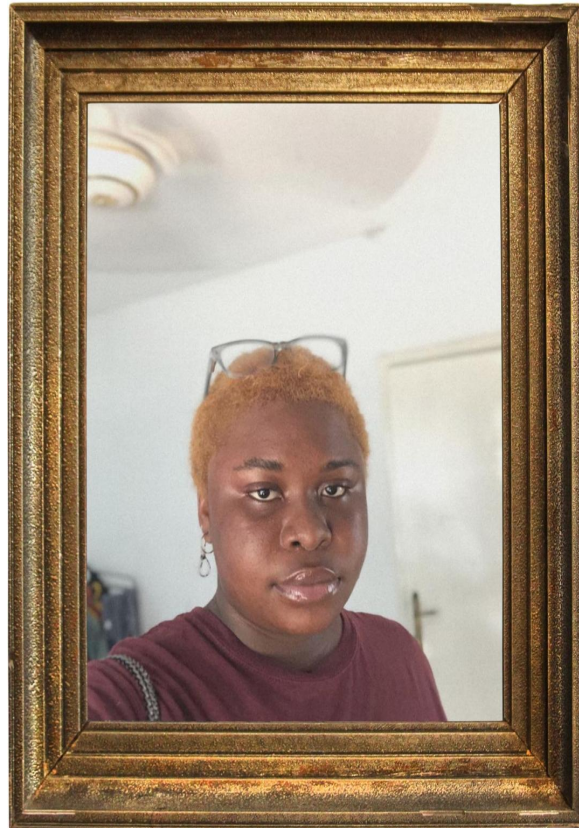
It is my cloth you say is immoral? Cloth that keeps me warm, so why should I struggle with the exact one to wear? If it stings your eyes, I must encourage you to look away or pluck them out.

If humans cannot see, then there will be nothing to look at. So we must let the ones who want to see, see.

And speak, run, walk, and leave, and we will not let them kneel to accept apologies or to apologize for transgressions, as you call them, that will never be erased.

Hmm, I saw Folarin. I watched him stare at me in spite and anger. I do not care for his feelings. I do not care. Is it even Folarin you should speak so highly of? The one whose name has been tainted with sin from the day he came. You claim white men do not sin and those young girls wanted him. I say you've lost your mind, chewing meat with a man who stole our name to be able to sin more comfortably.

You ask me what my flesh wants. I want my chosen kinsmen to be who they are. We will go to the market draped with colourful attire and batik, —be it the aso oke, abgada, or buba styles. We will show our smooth bellies, line our waists with beads made from seashells and party like you and your friends do in the open. We will do all this and not have our heads chopped off or our bodies burned. That is what my flesh desires gan gan”.



### **Author's Bio**

My name is Boluwatife Olowoyo, and I am a writer. Presently, I work in content writing, while also curating my newsletter titled "All My Musings." I use she/they pronouns, and I identify as demigender. This piece resonates with my sexual identity. I wrote it out of a place of anger, and relatively, it is a well-coordinated "period story" of a part of my experience being queer. I write for people with words constantly pouring out as soon as they feel their emotions. I always have words, which can be draining, so I write when I am tired.

On a lighter note, I absolutely love frog memes and exclusively enjoy watching mostly animations. The "conversation" is what most queer people have to deal with at some point, and how it ends sets a pace for literally the next day. I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Caio!



## **THE BATTLE I LOST BY TRIPHINA**

### *TRIGGER WARNING*

*This story contains the use of strong words, details of attempted suicide, depression, domestic violence and abuse.*

The first time I experienced depression was in my junior secondary class three, I was just thirteen and didn't know anything about mental health. Nobody spoke about it, nobody had ever mentioned it both at home or in school, so when I started feeling like I was crumbling I thought I was just sick with malaria. We were preparing for our junior WAEC and I didn't realize it had been stressing me out and eating me up from the inside. The day I broke down, I remember getting to my hostel after afternoon prep and I was trying to rest my head a little before another school activity would chase me out of the comfort of my bed. I didn't even get five minutes of me time before some of my classmates came to practically drag me out to "advise" me. Thinking about that day now, I can't believe I actually sat and listened to their nonsense and let it infest my head, but I was a child who wanted to please everyone around her at the time so I swallowed everything they told me. They cautioned me about following "bad friends" that could lead me astray, informed me that I no longer seemed as serious as I was in previous terms and that I needed to buckle up. They sounded like my parents, ew. I didn't say one word till they were done, what would I have said even? When they finished I said, "I have heard you people. I'll do my best", and we parted ways. I went back inside and fell apart on my bed, broke down in tears that shook my core. I was mumbling to myself about how I was going to fail the exams badly and nobody would like me anymore. The days that followed that day, I became a zombie. I only talked when I was spoken to, I walked alone to class and to the dining hall, and I spent whatever free time I had crying and worrying so much I couldn't even read my books.

It was the events of that period that gradually traumatized me, albeit unknown to me then, and left me with a personality disorder which would later be diagnosed as Dissociative Identity Disorder. I was barely present in my body for the rest of that term, even now I cannot remember how my exams really went because there are gaps in my memory.

The first time I tried to take my life was in my senior secondary class three. My depression had resurfaced and I had no idea. Bear in mind that both times I had no idea I had depression or any other mental health issues as I would come to later find out, I just thought I was sad. This time around, I had been ambushed by fellow classmates who had accused me of something I had no hand in I didn't even get the chance to

explain myself before they pounced on me. The school management suspended them but only for a short while. I had been so scared and paranoid, especially because of the recurrent nightmares about the event. When they resumed, my fear tripled, I thought I was going to get attacked again and I wouldn't survive it. I had no one to actually tell how I was feeling because everybody except me had moved on from it, they had probably started forgetting I got beat up for something I didn't do. I was the only one left with the flashbacks. I would cry for hours on my bed, burying my face in my pillow so that no one would hear me, I would cry till I fell asleep and would often wake up with a terrible headache that wanted to split my head in two. So I decided it was best to put an end to the torture, before they came for me I would take myself out and leave them with nothing. I mean, that would be a win for me right?

We hung our clothes at the back of the one storeyed building that was our hostel, the clothes lines were of various sizes, I chose the smaller ones, they would easily go around my thin neck and hopefully be quick. I got to work and started twisting and turning, tangling my neck in the ropes, feeling them get tighter and tighter around my throat. This was it, it was happening, my life was going to end and nobody would ever hit me again. I thought of how I had not written any note for my family, none of my friends even knew where I was and of course the backyard was empty as it was currently dinner time and the hostel was nearly empty. I could feel the air leaving me, I opened my mouth to take in air, but it would not pass through, that's how I knew it was working. My body was becoming limp and even if I wanted to get out of the ropes at that moment, I couldn't, my fingers were starting to feel cold, my whole body was starting to feel cold actually. So this was what death felt like? This was what my best friend went through before she stopped breathing? I closed my eyes and started reciting the Hail Mary prayer in my head as my mouth was too dry to open up. In between reciting what was probably my thirtieth Hail Mary, I felt hands untangling my neck from the ropes, gently but rapidly. At first I thought mother Mary herself had come to free me, but then a voice followed the hands "Jesus, I hope she's not dead. Oh my God". I let the hands continue what they were doing and they finally set me free and laid me on the ground. This ground that I had walked on everyday and complained about how dirty it was, I didn't mind it this time, it felt cold but it still somehow sent "life" running through me again. My body could feel it, so I knew I wasn't dead.

Then I felt water on my face along with someone lightly tapping both my cheeks, I had to force my eyes open so they could stop pouring the water and not drown me. That was not how I planned to go. When my eyes opened, I could see it had gotten dark and the only source of light was a dim torchlight laying next to me, there was no moon in the sky and the hostel didn't have light. The person who had rescued me helped me sit up and with the help of the torchlight, I could see her face a bit. I didn't know this student so she must be a junior, "who are you?" I asked her. "my name is Rosemary, I'm in SS1. I came to pack my clothes and saw you between the lines". Her voice sounded shaky, I must have really spooked her. "thank you, Rosemary", I said to her without adding that what she did was unnecessary as I was there on purpose, I didn't want to scare her further, plus I was thankful she didn't call any other person when she found me. I managed to get on my feet and Rosemary let me lean on her as she guided me back into the building and to my room. I thanked her again before she left. Neither Rosemary nor I told my friends what had happened, they said they had been worried when they came back from the dining hall and didn't see me, I told them I took a walk and only asked Rosemary to help me because I felt a little weak.

The paranoia and nightmares didn't go away after that incident, if anything it got worse because now there was the fear of dying. I still think of Rosemary and wondered if someone else would have found me on time if she had not come to get her clothes. I doubt it though. How I hid the scars on my neck till we graduated is still a mystery, but I did it and if you look at my neck now you would not see those scars. They healed perfectly and went away like nothing happened and they were never there, but something did happen and they were there, until they weren't.

The first time I saw a therapist was two months after graduating secondary school. It was also the first time I was finding out about therapists and knowing that they even existed in Nigeria, was a real shocker. My therapist, Ms. Evelyn, was the sweetest person I knew at that time. I had found her on the internet after going down an unknown rabbit hole, which I am very grateful for now. We started our sessions online, which was weird at first because how was I telling this person I had never met, everything about me? But it sort of got easier, and soon I was telling her how I have felt since my first day in secondary school. Ms. Evelyn and I spoke almost everyday, but mostly because I would text first asking if we could

talk more, she just really got me and it made me feel very seen and valid. She suggested we met in person after a month of online sessions, and I couldn't be more happy but also nervous. What if I wasn't as open as I was online? What if I couldn't speak at all? I worried about that until the day we scheduled to meet came and to my surprise, I did very well. Ms. Evelyn was happy to see me as I was to see her, she treated me so well and allowed me say everything in my head, not that I had not spoken about all of it already. Therapy helped me clear my head a bit and I started getting myself back gradually. I'm really grateful to the universe for bringing Ms. Evelyn my way and using her to help me.

You would think after Ms. Evelyn I would be somewhat stable, after all what could possibly upset me now that I was out of secondary school? Boy was I so wrong.

The first time I fell in love with my queerness and a queer person, I had gone abroad for school, it was 2018/2019. Traveling out of Nigeria was a big eye opener for me. My childhood and teenage years before then were very limiting and lacked experience in practically everything. I was a naive baby and didn't even know how to navigate life in a new environment, all by myself.

I had been questioning my sexuality since after secondary school, but after leaving the country I started seeing myself better and I finally had the chance to grow and be free.

My relationship wasn't the best, it broke me in several pieces. Everything I felt in that relationship were all new to me, I didn't know what to expect and just went along with it. It was one of the most painful periods of my life. It was within that period I attempted suicide for the second and third time. It was in that relationship I self harmed, a lot!

I got my diagnosis for DID late 2018, I also got diagnosed with seasonal depression early 2019. The DID diagnosis explained the gaps in my memory, explained why I had blackouts and could not remember a lot of things even things that were recent. Battling all of that plus a toxic relationship was enough to sink me to the ground. I didn't know how to deal with all of that and I didn't know who to talk to. I had started isolating myself because the people around me tried to talk me out of my relationship, but I didn't want to listen. How silly!

I was outed to my family in 2019 too. I faces conversion therapy and so much pain from them. I was betrayed by every person I managed to confide in. I thought that year was the worst until 2020 came. It started in January, in a small motel. When I think about it now, if it had gotten out of hand, I would have died and no one would know where I was. I cannot remember what happened that led to it, the scenes are blurred a bit, but I remember being forced to shower and then dragged out of the bathroom. I remember sitting and trembling just before my knees got knocked with a wooden drawer, which would end up leaving a permanent impact. I remember the choking. How I got away from that room, I'm not sure. But I didn't get too far away. I remember them threatening to smash my phone and each time I would say something they thought was "off", they would hit the screen at the edge of the table, lightly though, but enough to crack the screen guard. And they did it with a smirk on their face. I remember that smirk.

It would go on for almost half of that year. The nights I couldn't scream because nobody could know they were in the house with me. That night my face was jammed into my laptop and my jaws hurt so bad but I could not cry out. The night I was being choked and a pillow was held over my face and I was told no one would know what happened to me. The days I would hide in the toilet and cut my arms to channel the pain there instead. That didn't work.

I do remember the good times too. I remember the way they would smile at me and make me laugh. How we would hold each other softly. But my head is clouded with pain and it pushes out the good a lot. I blamed myself for what happened. If only I behaved. If I didn't talk back when they said to keep quiet, maybe they wouldn't do it. It ended in 2021.

The year is 2023, the battles have still not been won, but there is a bit of peace.



### **Author's Bio**

Hi, my name is Triphina. I'm 24 years old. I am a graduate of international relations. I'm a writer, at least I like to think I am. I started writing when I was 8 years old and I have just been in it since then. I hope to get published one day though. I also love crocheting, baking and reading African literature.

## **IMADE BY MODESIRE O.**

Imade is empty. Please remember that. She is spiraling, and her skin does not feel like her own. The matter in her head is pilling, so the past is coming before the present, twisting, turning, rolling over. She is remembering. Remembrance is a ritual, a last-ditch effort to fill her back up.

It was last week. Or maybe the week before. Or perhaps, even the week before that. You get the point. It is not today, not right now. Merely a time in the near periphery. Near enough, but far enough to be distant. Whatever it was, whenever, it was the first time she realized with all certainty that she did not have a home in anyone but herself. She could feel it so physically—her rage. Her teeth were chattering, and the synapses of her brain firing. She is back there again, in the musty old lounge chair. Her hands are gesturing wildly, and she feels that ache in the area under her breasts. “I don’t like it. I don’t like it at all.”

“You’re too sensitive. It was just a joke-”

“Fuck that, please. I don’t like it. I don’t think it is a funny joke, and you should never make it again.”

That should be the end of it, but then Imade hears her speak. “You’re dragging it out. Drop it. What’s this stupid beef that you guys have?”

Snapping back to the present, Imade shakes her head. Once, then again. She can remember the shuddering, and how she felt that it was unfair that her realization had chosen that time to taint her taste buds. That moment? Well, that was when she realized that there was isolation in her anger. No one else was in it with her. She did not make sense to anyone. She was ‘irrational’ and ‘difficult’/ ‘weird.’ It would make no sense to anyone else, this rage.



She would rather make sense to everyone than live alone in this anger. So Imade shuddered, and she pretended. Oh, all was okay. All was fine. We were fine; the system was whole. We were smiling today, hiding, masking, pretending.

Until we unravel, that is.

We are fine. Imade is fine.

Suddenly, Imade is in Mrs. Eze's classroom, learning what Adornment is. The word is beautiful, but something is wrong with the cadence of Mrs. Eze's voice. It sounds a lot like 'adoration.' Imade knows what adoration means, and when the woman asks who knows what the word means, her hand shoots up to ask, to be sure. "Ma, could you pronounce it?"

The woman's voice calls out 'adoration.' And now, Imade is sure.

"Adoration means respect, worship." one more thing, "and it doesn't have an 'N' in the spelling."

There, she had said it. Imade is what? Six? But she knows. It is wrong, and she has a brain sparking just then, needing the satisfaction of the wiped, misplaced alphabet or a lesson. Correction.

"That's good! But the word is spelled correctly. It is adornation. Does anyone else want to try?"

Imade inhales sharply, wondering why the dictionary she had read the night before - the A section in particular - had lied to her. She had gotten to the ADUs, for adultery.

To make a fuss or be quiet? Compliant or curious? Why were they mutually exclusive?

Imade waits. After the class, she glides out of her chair to meet the teacher to ask why the word is not in the dictionary and if it is sisters with the word 'Adornment.' She remembers adornment.

She can taste shame from how the woman says she is an 'I-Too-Know.' The pronunciation and the inflection of her voice carry condescension. In it, Imade can hear that curiosity is bad.

It will take years for her to unlearn the shame of curiosity, of sharing and gathering knowledge.

But then again, Imade has never forgotten anything, has she?

Ibukunoluwanifunilalalaifilaalasi. What age was she? Imade thinks it was 19 years old. Or 17. She was stuck at 17 for a long time. More likely, it was 13 years old, though. Imade has found a way to do it. She has just learned how to express dislike. "I don't like this," she says, but do you know, nobody likes a complainer.

A fight will happen. Well, not really. Imade just expresses a dislike. Passionately, for once. This dislike matters. This dislike hurts. It isn't really an argument. That would require speech from both sides.

Ibukun merely nods her understanding.

Imade is there again an hour later. Imade says hello in the painfully blue hallways, and she-who-shall-not-be-named keeps walking, a new half beside her, a new pair formed.

Imade realizes in a flash, with a cruel suddenness, that she is replaceable if she is not exactly what is needed. The new person has her physique, a tinkering laugh just like hers. A cookie-cutter replacement best friend. She learns two things. One, she is replaceable. Second, there is a lot of pain in community.

Okay, that is dishonest.

She learns that she has no community, and might not ever have one. She is a straggler, and comfort is a foreign thing. A new thing. A confusing thing. She doesn't like new things in any capacity.

Unlearning is easier for her than learning. She unlearns the expression of dislike.

She will never forget how it felt to her, in that moment.

A migraine hits just then, and she is snapped back to the present. Her entire frame zings, and Imade moves from the floor she is scattered on, pulling her legs to her chest for comfort before punching the air with each arm. The satisfying crack! of her bones propels her to get up. The mild pain faintly reminds her of where she is before fading out.

She needs to cook. She does not like food, but she has to cook. Starving to death by accident would devastate her mother.

Mother. Mummy.

She adores mummy with everything she has.

Her eyes conk out for a second. She cannot see. The pain in her head is in her eyes. She can feel her heartbeat in the sockets of her eyes, and she knows it is not normal. But she also knows that it is constantly happening these days.

She simply crouches to the floor and shuts her eyes, more for familiarity than anything. She is temporarily blind, so who cares if they are left open?

She wishes to beg God. It is hard. Everything is. Every breath, the loneliness and isolation she has taken on - a perfect shield from being misunderstood - the world is noisy, so her eyes water, and she cannot seem to say things in a way that makes sense to anyone but her. Imagine being articulate at advocacy yet losing vocabulary the instant it is for yourself.

Pathetic.

She remembers that she was 4 years old with more spirit.

She snaps back to 4 years old, at work with her father because her mother was busy.

“Don’t touch,” she had said, slapping a hand away. She had been curious then, too. She had tracked the man's movement across the factory. Asked her father what room he went into. He came out without wet hands; dirty, dirty, dirty. It was a toilet. And now he wanted to lift her. “Don’t touch!” she had said, and promptly slapped his hand away so hard, her father had to remove her.

Something touches her skin, and she looks up. There is nothing but blackness. Perhaps her brain catches up before the rest of her. If it was rain, she would be outside, and all of her body would feel it. She loves the smell of petrichor, and she would simply know.

She is crying. Her father, Baba Imade. He used to carry her. He used to be soothing. He was safe. She missed the foolishness of 4 years old. Being carried.

Imade. What is wrong with you? How did you manage to lose his love? Where did it go?

She has her father, but she misses daddy.

She was gifted. Not anymore though. She used to be great. She was wonderful, one upon a time. Before. Not too long ago, before 20. Her eyes shoot open, and she makes her way to the kitchen. She keeps Ibuprofen in there, along with the leftovers she plans on heating for breakfast.

The diagnosis unraveled her. One more for her christmas basket. Bipolar, ADHD, Autistic. Pretending was doing her harm, according to what they said. She had never returned, for fear of that pity in their eyes, but she had listened. Learned that pretending was called masking, and the fix? Unmasking. She had tried. Had unmasking done her any good? No, not really. At least before, people pretended to love her. Imade missed pretenses. If only someone could pretend to hold her again. She would simply melt.

She is in pain. Mentally? Physically? Which kind? Both. They are now the same. She can pretend to have what it takes to distinguish them, but she was never any good at telling. Maybe that is why, and it isnt the 'tism. Imade has never been good at analyzing for long periods of time, unlike literally everyone else. Things were what they were. Things are what they are. Or are they? Everything seems to have multiple meanings now, many different states of truth. There are seven truths, sometimes even more, and she can never seem to pick the right one. Her head hurts. A lot. She never did get up to eat.

It is painful, this being. Alive-ing feels a lot like dying, sometimes.

Dying.

Imade does not scar well, but she can still see one of the three vertical lines she drew on her wrist. She was not trying to die, or at least, that is what she tells everyone. But when you are trying to excise a rot and its home is in your veins, on your wrists, strategically vertical and not horizontal, then maybe, maybe you are trying to die.

It will take another decade to pry the truth out of her. But we deviate.

Imade thinks living is a lot like dying because she doesn't want to do either. They both require work that is physically painful for her to deliver. If she fails at any, she will lose another bit of her pride.

Too much trying.

Once, Imade was 14, and she was 6, she will be 22, but she hopes she is not 43. It is her brain, the errant little thing. It is too chaotic. It is too different, too lazy, too indifferent, too affected. It likes to mock her, to disobey. It will not let her live, or die, or breathe. It will not allow her inhale, it will not shut up. It is telling her everything that can go wrong and it is telling her loudly.

She treats it like a remote control with a faulty battery, slapping the base of her palm against it, over and over and over again. It will not work, it will not forget, it will not remember, and she is well and truly tired.

When will she be better? Will she be better? Does it get better than this, ever?

The lights are back on. By which we mean that Imade can see again, by which we mean the migraines are receding, planning their next attack. Imade knows this, so she gets up, like there is a fire under her. Food. She is methodical about sustenance, none of that 'love is one of the main ingredients' schtick. And she stands for the two minutes it takes the noodles to cook. She swallows the gel coated painkillers and makes her way back into the room, where the unfurling had begun.

Imade sees her journal, the bright blue gift from a man she no longer speaks to, a man she barely knew in the first place. She will cross her legs under her frame and begin to pour. Just see.

So she writes, the noodles forgotten by the third forkful.

It is not even noon yet. But she says,

Dear Journal,

Today was a hard day. I want to remove my brain. It doesn't work. I wish you were a person, so I could say this to you in person. I want to remove my brain and give it a nice, long wash. Sometimes I wonder if that is why I cut off my hair.

I had an argument with them again. I did what I always do. I tried to be patient. I allowed my body language speak for me, but they don't like that. They never do. I exploded. I just couldn't anymore. Now they are avoiding me, and I'm afraid to reach out. I'm sorry. I know I said I would try this time. But I can't stand it. I don't like how they make me feel, and I'm not sure I like them, but I am desperate for company. Desperate to not be lonely, desperate to feel heard and loved and understood.

I want to be somebody's best friend. I saw someone's tweets about their best friend, and I can feel myself getting even more jealous. I want a best friend. I want to be the first person that is called for good news and bad news and I want someone to choose me in a room full of people.

I'm so lonely oh my god. I-

Imade was revealing too much. She is resting now.



### **Author's Bio**

Hi there! My name's Desire, and I'm a 20 year old who's always trying to build something with my words. I often feel like I give bits of my little life away in my pieces. And all I hope for - in spite of the discomfort of doing that - is to make someone else feel.

### **NOTE FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Hello everyone, wonderful to read you and write to you as always.

We decided to do a theme on resonance because with the year ending, there's so much that will stick and there is so much we will part with. It is essential to know which is what.



We are excited for the new year here as it will be our 7th year and we will have a ball. Without giving too much away, we are inviting you to the house next year and the years that will follow. Revisit the website and the bulletin board to see anything you may have missed during the year and as always, enjoy the collection.

With all the excitement we can pour into our lives,

Happy Holidays from our house to yours,

Clara Jack.



***Seasons Greetings and Happy Holidays from Timileyin, Dammy, Precious, Patricia, Atty, Naomi, Jess and Clara of the Pencilmarks and Scribbles Publishing House.***

