

sex

saraba
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PUBLISHERS: Emmanuel Iduma & Damilola Ajayi

MANAGING EDITOR: Emmanuel Iduma

POETRY EDITOR: Adebisi Olusolape

FICTION EDITORS: Ayobami Famurewa & Arthur Anyaduba

NON-FICTION EDITOR: Temitayo Olofinlwa

PUBLISHING ASSISTANT: Yemi Soneye

GRAPHIC ARTIST: Illa Amudi

WEBSITE: Ennovate Nigeria

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ENQUIRIES CAN BE DIRECTED TO:

The Publishers,

Saraba Magazine

PH: +234 (0) 805 142 7920, +234 (0) 805 127 5682

EMAIL: sarabamag@gmail.com.

TWITTER: @sarabamag

FACEBOOK: Sarabamag (page); Saraba Talk (group)

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SOMETIMES SEX IS A WORD, SOMETIMES IT'S NOT.

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We Have Chosen to be Gay

KEGURO MACHARIA

AN ANONYMOUS African gay man says,

We have chosen to be gay, that is what we want,
and that is what we like. That is what we have chosen
and we want to display it.

What does it mean to “choose to be gay”? What does it mean for an African man to “choose to be gay”? I am not interested in claiming that “gay” is a “Western” term so I can privilege alternative terms—*kuchu*, *basha*, and so on. Instead, I am interested in “gay” as an object of desire and as choice and as spectacle: “we want to display it.” Because, arguably, what is at stake in most anti-gay legislation is precisely the relationship between choice and spectacle: the making public of what Foucault terms “a way of life.”

Some old ground: In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta claims there was no homosexuality among the Gikuyu. I have wrestled with this statement for a long time. Was he simply homophobic? Was he so removed from the Gikuyu that his statement carries no weight (Kenyatta left his rural home at 9 years of age and never “re-turned” to it)? Was he responding to theories of sexuality in anthropology? (For answers to these, wait for my book, where I address them in complete sentences.) In more generous moments, I have absolved Kenyatta of homophobia and considered his statement a comment on homosexuality in the U.K. Re-framed in this way, it would read, there is no homosexuality among the Gikuyu as exists among the English in 1930s England. This is, perhaps, too generous, but it allows a necessary way of thinking about the geo-histories of homo-sentiment.

All the African anti-homosexuality legislation I have seen and the various reports I have followed focuses on homosexuality as public spectacle: the problem of *chinkhoswe* for Stephen and Tiwonge; the circulation of queer-friendly material in the form of pamphlets, film, books, posters, music; the public appearance of queer intimacies—same-sex individuals holding hands, kissing, displaying affection. Implicitly, anti-homosexuality campaigns are, more precisely, campaigns against public homosexuality. (I set aside, for the moment, the question of whether homosexuality can exist as private.)

Indeed, Kenya's minister of justice, Mutula Kilonzo, has followed a *Lawrence v. Texas* paradigm by arguing that the state has no business monitoring same-sex consensual acts performed in private. In other words, be a gay on your own time, away from innocent African publics. Practically, we know this doesn't work. Rowdy homophobes break down doors, invade private residences and rented hotel rooms, leave nasty facebook and email messages, scrawl trollish blog comments (I don't get this, and if I figured out why, I might offer advice to those who do). The public always breaks through to the private: and one might argue that at least since Oscar Wilde's trial, homosexuality has been constituted as the making public (through humiliation) of the private.

To "choose to be gay" is not the same thing as "coming out," even though they both intervene into a public. Here, I use a Foucauldian distinction. Today, coming out is understood as an expression of identity, an "I am this." And it is troubling, as Samuel Delany explains:

The rhetoric of singular discovery, of revelation, of definition is one of the conceptual tools by which dominant discourses repeatedly suggest that there is no broad and ranging field of events informing

the marginal. This is true of science fiction versus the pervasive field of literature; art as compared to social labor; blacks as a marginal social group to a central field of whites; and gay sexuality as marginal to a heterosexual norm. That rhetoric becomes part of the way the marginal is trivialized, distorted, and finally oppressed. For what is wrong with all these seemingly innocent questions—which include, alas, “When did you come out?”—is that each tends to assume that the individual’s subjective field is one with the field of social statistics.

Sexual interests, concerns, and observations form a broad and pervasive field within every personality, as broad a field in me as it is in you, as broad within the straight man as it is in the gay woman. When we speak of burgeoning sexuality, that’s the internal field we speak of—not the social field defined by what percent of us are gay or straight, male or female. The discourse behind that same rhetoric of singularity is, of course, the discourse which stabilizes the belief that a single homosexual event can make an otherwise straight person gay—or that the proper heterosexual experience can “cure” someone gay and turn him or her straight. (“Coming/Out”)

To “choose to be gay” is to contest the singularity of definition, to engage and re-organize the social. It is to shift the air, to pluck at vibrations, to unsettle the low hum of heteronormativity. To bring attention to the silence that passes for normativity by exposing its fiction, disrupting what Elizabeth Freeman terms its “chrononormativities”: the middle-aged gay man who goes out dancing and drinking and fucking instead of staying at home with the wife and kids or cheating on his wife

with his mistress. The unattached who trouble our belief in adult heteronormative attachments with their illegible and promiscuous attachments to objects, animals, friends, fictive kin.

To choose to be gay is to contest dominant narratives about life trajectories: school, work, marriage, children, grandchildren death. One acquires, instead, and perhaps, tricks, lovers, cum-encrusted souvenir jock straps, an STI or two, dildos, cockrings, massive porn collections, open relationships, a houseful of cats, poetry. One accumulates a narrative that requires narrating, complicating the unspoken scripts prepared for us to follow.

One notes, to the state's consternation, that the unspoken script is damaged: soaked in floods, rubbed through mud, eaten by termites. Words are illegible, the language foreign, the instructions unfathomable. That to live is to innovate, to practice what John Stuart Mill called "experiments in living." Such experiments trouble the ostensible stability envisioned by the state and privileged by tradition. They trouble the narrow trajectories that manage "population." They trouble the quotidian heteronormative, heterocetera interactions that lubricate the social. They make "trouble."

Those who "choose to be gay" offer the disturbing possibility that attachments and affiliations can be chosen outside of state-sanctioned norms. That there are ways of living not envisioned in school textbooks. That how we choose to live matters just as much, if not more, than how we are supposed to live.

To choose what one "likes" over one's "duty."
So much depends on the latter.
Too much.

Marebeta Ma Wamuyu

NYAMBURA KIARIE

Nyũmba ya Gĩkũyũ ni yahandirwo
O tene tene Mukurweini wa Nyagathanga.
Niurikũ ucio, ucio wauma naja na gitairo kia nayama njeru?
Gũtirĩ witũ ũkoima na njĩra.
Nigwiyaria ndimugĩkũyũ.
Atĩrĩrĩ,
Ciana cia maitu nigwiyaria ndimugĩkũyũ
Na mũciĩ ũyũ nĩ witũ.
Ithaka na mihaka nũũngimenya?
Ūgarũrũku nĩ ũkĩte thĩ yothe!
Njita Wamuyu Kana Warigia.
Ĩĩ ugũo nigũo
Gĩkũyũ gĩtikũdengũra.
Ndeto nonginya ingeteretwo,
Kana Mugumo Nimuinamu?
Nyũmba nĩriko iria itarĩ mahiga matatu magwakĩria mwaki?
Nyũmba ĩtarugagwo, ndikiagio mwaki.
Ndeto nĩihagirwo riko.
Njita Wamuyu kana Warigia.

ugũo nigũo
Gĩkũyũ gĩtikũdengũra.
Ndeto nonginya ingeteretwo,
Kana Mugumo Nimuinamu?
Nyũmba nĩriko iria itarĩ mahiga matatu magwakĩria mwaki?
Nyũmba ĩtarugagwo, ndikiagio mwaki.
Ndeto nĩihagirwo riko.
Njita Wamuyu kana Warigia.

Wamuyu's Poem

NYAMBURA KIARIE

THE HOUSE of Gikuyu was planted
long, long time ago at Mukurweini wa Nyagathanga
Who is that coming from outside with a woven tray with fat
meat?

Our own will not come from outside

I will speak for I am of the Gikuyu

Atĩrĩrĩ,

Children of my mother, I will speak for I am of the Gikuyu
and this is our house.

Land and boundaries who can know?

Change has come over the whole world!

Call me Wamuyu or Warigia

Yes, that is how it is

Gikuyu cannot address me by name

Talk must be discussed,

or has the Mugumo¹ become bent?

Which is the house without the three stones for the fire-
place?

A house in which no cooking is done cannot have a fire lit

Put the talk on the fire

Call me Wamuyu or Warigia.

1. Fig tree central to Gikuyu mythology

Size Matters

IVOR HARTMANN

HIS NAME was Mike, and although he had many attributes, a reasonably sized penis was not one of them. In his estimation, the only men or women who thought size didn't matter had reasonably sized penises at their disposal. Mike on the other hand barely escaped membership into the micropenis club at 7.3 cm – fully erect. This didn't stop him from going to MPA (Micro Penis Anonymous) meetings when he was feeling really down.

Mike arrived a little late for the meeting, but soon it was his turn. As he neared the podium, he realised that the thing he loved most about MPA meetings was standing up and saying for all to hear — as he did then.

“Hi, I'm Mike and I have a very small penis,” and instead of being brutally crushed by bouts of laughter he heard in response a comradely chorus of, “Hi Mike!” However, he did love the war stories too, and all MPAs had a plethora of them. He was no exception though tonight he had a different ending to his latest one.

“So last four months ago I met this incredibly beautiful and intelligent woman.”

There were many nods in the group; they'd all been there for having a small penis did not mean you were automatically ugly. In Mike's case, he was exceptionally handsome; standing at six-four with a well, but not overly so, muscled figure, wide chiselled face and sky blue eyes framed by thick, black, unruly hair that made women want to run their fingers

through it.

“We really hit it off, and soon we were dating. She really admired the way I didn’t push to get into her pants.”

More collective nodding, they all delayed sex for as long as possible in a new relationship.

“But three weeks of careful petting and I could tell she was beginning to wonder what was wrong, and eventually asked if I was gay. To which I responded by taking her to bed. Now it wasn’t a complete failure in that at least there was no laughter and scorn...” Mike beamed at the group he could see they really empathised.

“I made sure to give her at least two orgasms before doing the deed. Though I could tell, she was disappointed when I finally did. I held on to the slimmest of hopes that I could satisfy her orally and digitally. Nevertheless, come our second month together she broke up with me. In her favour, she had the honesty to tell me it was because of my small penis, and nothing else...” Mike lowered his head for a moment, stricken by the memory of this last encounter and the many similar ones that preceded it.

“So in all fairness to myself I have decided to cease these futile attempts at normalcy and just be single and celibate. I want to get on with my life without the spectre of this affliction hanging over me all the time... Thank you for listening.”

Mike returned to his seat amidst half-hearted clapping, he could feel they thought he had just given up. It felt like he

was drinking a beer in an AA meeting. Yet he felt free, finally free. To hell with all these years of suffering, to hell with it all, he was just going to relegate that part of his life entirely.

*

The sun slowly boiled to death on the horizon and cast its pathway to heaven on the crashing waves. Mike sighed in satisfaction as he wiggled his toes in the warm beach sand, and twiddled the wedding ring that twinkled on his finger. Five years today, he had put it on for protection of his new-found celibacy and it had worked. Sure, there had been the odd persistent woman looking for an affair, but he had managed to convince them of his strong morals and loyalty.

Life had turned out pretty well since that day of affirmation. There had been times in the first years when he felt quite desperate, but gradually these incidents had grown farther apart and of less intensity. In all it had been much like giving up smoking. He knew he'd always be a smoker, but just didn't smoke.

With this freedom, he had excelled at work, working his way rapidly up the management ladder in a pharmaceutical company. It was in fact his last promotion that had brought him to this beach and the company cottage that lay behind him. With a gleam in his eye and a knowing smile, the company's CEO Ron Bagley had given him the keys to the cottage. "Go enjoy the sea with your wife, you've earned my boy," Ron had said, before slapping him on the back. They of course didn't know he wasn't married, and he had constructed several illusions to prevent them ever meeting her.

The last of the sun died away, Mike rose and walked up the windswept beach towards the cottage. It was quaint and rustic fisherman's cottage in blue and white on the outside, yet stocked with all the latest appliances and styled art deco on the inside. Thinking about what to have for dinner, he decided on grilled sole with fresh mushrooms and wild rice. He'd have to drive to the local grocers for the mushrooms; the sole he'd bought fresh off the boat in the harbour that morning.

He wound the company SUV through hills of beach sand and tufts of grass waving in the wind. Feeling utterly at peace with Beethoven's Ninth playing, he wholly was unprepared for the glaring sign that ravaged his mind. Tied to spindly tree and scrawled in bright pink neon on white board it stated:

PENIS ENLARGEMENT!
100% GUARANTEED!

It felt like a punch to the stomach, of all the places in the world, he nearly cried out, why here? His mind raced and sweat formed on his brow and he gunned the engine to be past it, but just over the next rise, there was another one.

PENIS ENLARGEMENT!
100% GUARANTEED!
1KM

Mike stomped on the accelerator and the SUV bellowed his pain and whipped past the offending sign. He felt shattered,

all his carefully worked on calm reserve spent on the sight of those signs.

Like most men with small penises, Mike had of course tried everything short of surgery to increase his size. He recalled the numerous pumps, ointments, herbs, and pills he had pumped, smeared, massaged, and swallowed, to absolutely no effect except bruises, nausea, and diarrhoea. He used to scour medical journals looking for breakthroughs, had haunted sex-shops and befriended many Chinese herbalists, always looking for the next thing that might have the slimmest chance of working. He lived on hope and spent a large percentage of his earnings on this fruitless task. Yes, he had drawn the line at surgery, but only because he had never read of a successful and safe operation. They had all more or less looked like bloated scar-laden sausages to him, and with such a high risk of losing the little, he had.

The SUV screeched dangerously around a sharp corner and flattened several endangered toads crossing the road. Mike had not noticed for there was another sign.

PENIS ENLARGEMENT!
100% GUARANTEED!
500M

Damn this person! He raged, who in their right mind advertised such a thing in a desolate place as this. One could wonder for days here and never meet a soul. Surely, it can't be worth the bother. His t-shirt was soaked, his mind in chaos, and he felt as though he was in the grip of a high fever.

Mike wrenched the SUV around another sharp corner and felt it slide on sand blown over the road. He overcorrected and the car slid the opposite way before hitting a small bump in the road. The car flipped and tumbled, each landing smashed into the car like a giant's fist. The airbag erupted into his face while the car was in mid-air and deflated just in time for another series of sickening thumps. While he watched the world spin around him, in a way he was grateful as here at least was a final solution. The car at last ceased rolling and on its crumpled roof screeched along in a shower of sparks before coming to rest.

Hanging upside down suspended by his seat belt Mike could taste blood and feel numerous hot sharp aches. The CD had jumped to the propulsive rhythms of the second movement of the Ninth while the GPS navigator implored him to turn around in clipped English tones. Just before oblivion swooped in to claim him, he saw right outside his smashed side-window, another sign.

PENIS ENLARGEMENT!
100% GUARANTEED!
TURN RIGHT HERE!

*

Mike first heard a steady bleeping and could not feel his body. He wondered if he was dead before he managed to open his eyes. A white ceiling came into focus and with it the realisation that he was in a hospital. A petite nurse bent over and looked at him.

“Don’t try and talk or move Mike. You’re in the intensive care unit of the George Hospital. You had a car accident but you’re going to be just fine, you have no serious injuries apart from a concussion, a few broken bones, and some lacerations. You were quite lucky Mike, a Mrs. Themba found you and called for an ambulance shortly after you crashed so you got to us in good time,” said the nurse, and left his field of vision.

The events of the crash came slowly filtering through and he felt a hot flush of shame. How could he have let those silly signs endanger his life? Given the isolation of where he had been was it not for this Mrs. Themba he could have easily bled to death. He vowed to thank her for saving his life as soon as he was able to.

*

Six months later and Mike was able to drive again and found himself once again down the same road to fulfil his vow. The signs were still there, but he felt nothing this time around. It seemed the accident and convalescence had put him back on the straight and narrow. He pulled over next to the last sign and got out.

He could see deep gouges where his car had flipped and scrapped along road. On the shoulder of the road, there was a faint dark red residue where his blood must have pooled; next to a dirt road that wound over a dune between wind-blown black wattle trees. Mike had attained the address of Mrs. Themba from the hospital, and she lived down this dirt

road at plot number 15368.

Driving through an increasingly thick forest, he spotted plot 15368 on the right of the road. It was hard to miss given its sign in the same bold pink neon on white.

PENIS ENLARGEMENT!

100% GUARANTEED!

INQUIRE WITHIN!

PLOT: 15368

Shit, shit, shit, of all the people who might have saved his life, why did this Mrs. Themba have to be the one? He felt a familiar fluttering of panic, and vacillated about whether to drive through the open gate. He could not see a house as the driveway — two ruts in the forest floor formed from the passage of occasional cars and erosion, more than any attempt to create a serviceable road — plunged deep into the forest before veering sharply to the left and out of sight. He desperately wanted get the hell out of there, but he was not one to break a personal vow so he finally drove through the gate.

After several twists and turns through the thick forest it opened up and he saw a small house ahead in a clearing. It was an old farmhouse with many repairs evident on the rusted tin roofing but recently whitewashed and gleaming in the hot sun. In the land cleared around it sat the hulks of ancient tractors and farm equipment. A pack of crossbreed dogs began barking and rushed down to surround his car. There was a short whistle from inside the house and the dogs, though reluctant, moved away from his car. From a porch that ran along one side of the house he heard a screen-door

squeal open and slam shut.

Mike got out his car, walked toward the house and kept an eye on the dogs. They sniffed the air at his passing, but remained where they were. Under porch roof, he could just make out a short silhouette of someone standing.

“Hello. I’m looking for Mrs. Themba,” Mike ventured as he came closer.

“Ja you are Mike, I have been expecting you,” came a soft voice with a slight rasp, and Mrs. Themba walked into the afternoon light. She was a short stout woman, and looked to Mike like she was between fifty and sixty. She smiled broadly and without warning as he reached the porch embraced him in a tight hug, her head on his chest.

“Good to see you without all that blood,” she said and clasped him tighter. Mrs. Themba smelled of wood-smoke, herbs, and sweat. Mike was overcome with the sensation, it had been so long since someone had hugged him, but he felt his penis stiffen unexpectedly so he broke the embrace. Mrs. Themba chuckled before inviting him inside.

The kitchen was dark, its windows covered in paper and lit only by a few dim candles that glimmered weakly amongst hundreds of jars with strange contents that he didn’t want to peer at too closely. The ceiling, obscured by hanging herbs, roots, and what looked like bones — he was sure he saw a human pelvis or two. Mrs. Themba gestured for him to sit down on a stool next to an old and worn wooden table, the only clear space in the room. She bustled around and prepared some tea, which he was too polite to refuse when

offered and soon found himself sipping.

"I just wanted to come and say thank you in person for saving my life, I'm sure I would have died were it not for you," Mike said, after a few sips of the weird tasting tea.

Mrs. Themba smiled and nodded in acknowledgment, but remained silent.

Mike wasn't sure if it was her silence, the tea, or her maternal presence, but he soon found himself relaying his entire life history, to which she occasionally nodded and smiled. When he had finally run out of words, they sat in silence, a warm and comfortable silence he couldn't remember when he had last experienced with another person.

"You know what the signs said is true Mike," Mrs. Themba softly said after what seemed like hours. "I can help you if you really want me too, but like all things it comes with a price."

"I don't know if I want to anymore, as much as I want to have a whole life, it seems as if I have finally come to terms with my... disability, after all this has happened," said Mike, but deep down a hope was rekindled that he couldn't ignore. "But, what are we talking about here, what would be your price?"

"In money, it costs just 200 hundred rand, but there are other prices attached that you might not be willing to pay. You see I can't give you what you don't have without taking it from someone else. Could you do that, take what doesn't belong to you?"

In that moment, he couldn't decide, it all seemed so far-fetched anyway, unbelievable. He was beginning to think that despite her warm and homely presence she just might be quite crazy. He had done what he came to do, and now he wanted to leave, leave this all behind like a bad dream on waking.

"You don't have to decide now, it's good to think it over Mike," she said and stood up. Once more, she bustled around the kitchen, but this time she sang quietly while doing so in words he couldn't understand, taking herbs and other odd things and placing them in a mortar.

Returning to the table, she ground the contents with a pestle into a fine powder, still singing, and finally tipped the contents into a small brown paper bag that she gave to Mike. "I'm giving this to you now, no charge, you can pay me later if you decide to go through with it. Simply scatter a single teaspoon of this mixture over the food of whomever you choose, and what is theirs will become yours."

Back on the highway driving home to Johannesburg, Mike reflected on how very strange meeting Mrs. Themba had been. He was glad he had fulfilled his vow, but after drinking her tea the rest of his time there seemed rather hazy, were it not for the small brown bag in his pocket he might have wondered if it had been a dream.

Ten hours later, he lay exhausted on his own bed. The city of Johannesburg grumbled around him, a familiar lullaby that soon sent him to sleep.

In a way Mike felt proud he had resisted for so long — nearly a year — though this pride was sourly tempered with the guilt of what he planned to do now. He had organised a large dinner party at his home with the intention of sprinkling a teaspoon of that dubious powder on the food of the one man he knew for sure had a magnificently large penis. He had spied it out in the gym showers he had forced himself in for this very purpose, despite the looks he received. Though his encounter with Mrs. Themba seemed like a lifetime ago, the nagging thought that there might be a chance to resolve his dilemma, even though he had great doubts in the powder's actual efficacy, had proven to be a temptation he couldn't resist in the end.

The dinner was going well, when he slipped into the kitchen to help serve the main course even though the caterers assured him he need not. Quickly he slipped out the bag and sprinkled what he judged was a teaspoon's worth onto one of the plates. He carried out two plates, carefully noting which was the adjusted one and placed it before his victim.

The party continued late into the night, and as he said goodbye to the last of the guests, he couldn't help feel the queasy sensation of excitement in his stomach. What if it actually works he thought, and the tension of that slim possibility drove him to several glasses of single malt. He couldn't remember if she had said how long it might take to work, and reached inside his pocket to see how much of the powder he had left.

The bag wasn't in his pocket, and excitement turned to fear

as he rummaged through all his pockets, then the whole flat, until finally he found it in the dustbin, empty of the powder it had once contained. The caterers it would seem had taken his lead in the sprinkling.

*

While Mike waited his turn to speak, he recalled going back to Mrs. Themba to solve the problem. He should have guessed when he saw no signs on the road, and was horrified when informed by the new tenants that she had died over a year ago.

“Hi my name is Mike, and I have a very large penis,” said Mike, as he shifted uncomfortably because his penis rubbed against his knee, and ankle.

“Hi Mike!” his new group, LPA (Large Penis Anonymous), heartily greeted him.

“Last week I met this incredibly beautiful and intelligent woman...”

LUST /3
KEMI AKIN-NIBOSUN



Tales One Shouldn't Tell Often

SU'EDDIE VERSHIMA AGEMA

Inspired by H., poet and friend

THERE IS this tale men bear
that boys never hear

It really should be told
everyone old
enough to have learnt
the pleasure not usually taught
for which many of our souls in hell rot

An old friend told
of how the Creator
found perfection in made man
then angered somewhat
thought of a hex
and blessed man with sex

He smiled back heavenwards
the hunger and thirst sucking man up
the better
to drink of the pleased well
of v's heavenly hell

*Urges to be heard
monsters to be fed*

The rod
takes the place of our Lord

This is one grim tale you would never hear him
tell his child...

At the tale's end, he smiled
the burden aging him somewhat sore
till the pleasure released him once more.

trust

SOPHIA KANAOUTI

I WANT to be in your hands

I want to be naked under your hand. Shiver under it

I want to be had by you

I want you to touch the inside of my legs.

My waist

My arms

I want to tremble under you and not be able to trust my legs
to stand, nor my waist to keep me upright, nor my arms to
feel the weather around me

When I don't trust myself

I want you to take me, for granted, and don't ask

Don't ask if

I love you

I want you inside me.

Imperfections

CHUKWUKA NWAFOR

“Have no fear of perfection, you’ll never reach it.”

- SALVADOR DALÍ

IN THE presence of readily inquisitive guests, in the heat of an ongoing conversation, Ginika abandoned me. But since the earliest days of her NYSC trips to the village, there had been signs of a different woman—steadily emerging—and warily securing its way into my mind. We had both known it for some time and quite clearly, that she preferred the serene remoteness of rural life to any sort of convenience that Lagos might stand for. I was never opposed to that. So it was hardly any surprise when she opted to serve out her one year of patriotic service to the country, as a lab assistant at the newly built maternal hospital—a short walk from our village home. But even so, it has remained an impossible task for her to be satisfied. And now she wants me there with her too! As though I had nothing seriously planned to achieve with my own life, rather than taking in the same repulsive, hospital odor with her—all day—and curdling-up malaria-shriveled children? Perhaps, the subtle ways of insanity is what she needs explained to her once again, if she’ll ever listen.

My father once had it painted boldly in bright-blue letters, above his solid bedroom door that: NO ONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR PAIN, IF YOU FAIL TO CALMLY BEND IN THROUGH THE DOOR. And for some odd, dire reasons, I have come to understand that he must’ve meant the same wisdom, also, in remedy to such cases as my wife’s. For though I would readily go any length in getting her to understand my grounds, I have found it aids nothing any longer. Partly, because she has grown such discourteous manners towards me and everyone else, who ever considered her approachable. And perhaps, it results from certain

charitable tendencies that I once thought were natural to her person, but have revealed themselves to me at this point—as nothing but warped virtues.

Now I couldn't enjoy a meal or two without someone murmuring behind my back, about some motherless child endangered by one ominous disease or the other. It would be on every body's lips by dawn—of course, that I abandoned my wife to a measly life in Ajali, even if I stayed up all night thinking about it.

And who knows, soon enough some silly fool might even find guts to say things to my face—all because an insatiable woman wants to be pleased. She had merely returned this time to attend a book release party and because I promised to come along to an Enweonwu exhibition. I had voiced nothing about my seething disgust for such useless pass times as art exhibitions. Needless to say, she was aware that I felt all painters were nothing short of impractical whiners. Yet I never turned down her invitation. And rather today—in return for all that effort at leniency, she considered it a well-fitting act to storm out on me in the presence of our guests, Egbuna and his fiancée, Munachi.

Slowly, I had risen up from my seat afterwards, clearly stoned and speechless from the whole situation. From their still stoic faces, there was no question that Egbuna and his fiancée sensed the bitterness that was baring itself on my forehead; because I shortly began to smoothen it, as I was prone to do whenever discomfited. The dim-green light flowing through the room, further heightened the tension by casting a staid, bulky shadow of myself onto the brown marble table beside me; as I wondered right then, if I was really doing the expected thing.

It was fairly midnight. I still had to drive Egbuna and his fiancée back to their Lekki home, as promised. While I drank

up the little spirit that was left in my glass, for some reason, Ginika's mauve-colored purse caught my attention. Perhaps, it was how it lay carelessly on her favorite wool-couch, like a proud sleeping child, that netted my interest. Maybe, that was what I'd meant to admire. But then I was steered off my thoughts by Munachi's thin voice.

"So...what are you waiting for, Kaine? You have made me ask the question, so just spill it. What was all that supposed to mean?"

Our eyes nearly met. But then questioningly throwing open her palms towards me, she was speechless once again. Egbuna had been so busy with his phone for a while, that I could fairly guess he was doing nothing serious. I began to feel suddenly responsible for everything that had just happened, even as I battled myself for something else to say.

"Sometimes, I really wish I could say this was uncomplicated, Muna. But...you know better."

Not knowing what else to let out, I had said what I said. My mind, at that point, was nothing short of an unintelligible space.

"I should drive you guys home. It's late." I said.

She knew better. Well enough, to know that I was merely trapped in a helpless throe of ego with myself, right then. She simply sighed and shrugged her shoulders, somewhat mechanically like a badly rehearsed act. I knew right then that I would have to explain myself someday, even if it was some months later. When we left the room, walking towards the garage, there was a heavy slam of the bedroom door—as it landed on its iron-panel. Our attention being seized, there was an eerie and trappable silence afterwards. In fact, for a moment no one seemed eager to move.

Then with some courage, after few seconds, Egbuna was able to mutter few words under his breath.

“Ginika has changed. I believe you should have something to say to her about all this, Kaine. At least, before she returns back to Ajali.”

He continued on as we slowly approached the garage.

“Maybe it’s time you went and witnessed for yourself, what has made your wife into a Red Cross of her own.” In my mind, I comfortably spat at the misery of those two words. What sort of people paraded themselves as life savers even at their own life’s risk?

Munachi had found a Majek Fashek album from the compact disc pile that lay in-between the two front seats. It was a signed copy by the artist from one of the last concerts he played in the late 90’s. I had forgotten I owned the album. Soon enough, the car was possessed with Majek’s visionary voice as he sung “Send down the rain...oh...jah send down the rain.” Egbuna shortly began humming to the song, after he realized I wasn’t making any conversations. And then, it slowly occurred to me that Majek was reputed to have come up with that song, during a time when Nigeria reportedly suffered the worst drought in its modern history. It’s also remembered that following a notorious performance of the song at a Lagos stadium—after which it was rumored that the drought magically came to an end—the song had raked up staggering sales across the continent. It quickly became a national creed; to the point that certain churches incorporated its melody into their accepted hymnals, declaring it a prophetic mantra for all men.

As we drove past the German Cultural Center on Ozumba Mbadiwe street, I began to get a feeling that Ginika had been right about something. But just what it was, I couldn’t

quite piece together. I might be a man of many stories. But certainly, mine would belong with the most probable stories of all stories. I drive a Mercedes Benz S-Class and live in a house of my own. Perhaps, it is the comfort that she has come to loathe. Or rather, it could be I who now loathes my own comfort. September will be making it yet another year, since we both began trying to conceive. And even though it hasn't been the most wonderful thing to reflect on, certainly, I still stumble upon the idea at many mid-points in my contemplations.

Egbuna have long toned down his throaty humming and Munachi seemed quite relaxed, except for the sky-fixed eyes that appeared to be piercingly searching the night-sky for something deep—and almost giving off a philosophical image of her person. We were soon on Kayode Street. It was as usual, bathed and decked-out with a million bright lights, like the whole of Lekki was known for at nights. The shimmering rainbow of flower beds that neatly lined its entrance, easily brought to mind, the fabled gold-paved streets of afterlife utopias. Except, this was a very Lagosian vision of it. Perhaps, such an aesthetic order explained the popular belief throughout the country that a better number of the people who came to Lagos with their souls intact, would eventually end up losing it. I am yet to fathom what wisdom lie in those words, since Lagos itself, remains a city of the soulful. At least, I believe it to be so. For what could be more soulful, really, than finding oneself at the very center of the ubiquitous but unique energy of Lagos? Perhaps, the depth of the saying simply evades me.

I was about placing down my hat on the passenger seat to grab Egbuna's extended hand, through my window, when I sighted Munachi yawning mindlessly into the breezy Lekki air. We both smiled childishly at each other as our eyes met. Then planting one of her arms onto her waist in a somewhat commandeering manner, she told me that I was so lucky she

didn't fall asleep in my house.

"Else, I would've brought you and Ginika to pious order, since you both think you're still boys and girls...okwa ya, isn't it?"

I smiled. It was easy to tell she needed a nap; she spoke with eyes that were rather too sleepy to be serious and like every other time, it felt funny listening to her speak. On my way back home, Ginika called. I impulsively found myself wondering if it was merely out of guilt, that she had called.

"When are you coming back home?"

A clearly wanton sigh followed the question. It was becoming harder, day after day, resisting annoyance from her growing desensitized manner of speech.

"I'm on my way home. Already." I said "Is there any problem?"

Silence.

"Nothing!" She thundered back.

A crackling sound was emerging from her side of the phone. I knew she was bored already; curled up and salvaging her prized short-bread cookies, as usual.

"Ginika...are you there?"

Another long silence. And then the beeping sound jolted my ear.

Shortly before placing down the phone, it occurred to me that she had merely called to sense how annoyed I might still be from her earlier actions.

The rest of my drive home was ridiculed with thoughts of her; not merely from of all that took place earlier on. Rather, it was all resulting from a feat to understand a companion who spins numerous lives, yet never successfully became any of her cherished molds.

When I got home, she was childishly cupped into her favorite couch, heavily asleep and far away from all the misery that must've included myself.

The Enemy Within

Submitted by TIMIDI DIGHA. Based on a true story; all names have been changed but the story is told using the words of the victim (with little omissions for protection purposes and with her permission).

MY NAME is Adah, I live in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. I am eight years old and in primary four. I was molested by my uncle.

My uncle, Uncle Andrew, is my father's younger brother. He came to stay with my parents after they got married, so you will be right to say that I grew up in his arms, that he was a familiar face, that he was always around. Uncle Andrew is, was family.

Uncle Andrew helped around the house but mostly he took care of me. He was in charge of me; my parents put him in charge. He was always there at the school gate to pick me after closing time. He carried my bag, held my hands as we crossed the roads. He taught me my homework; you know how to calculate decimals and fractions. Uncle Andrew fixed my lunch, he even knew my best food "Indomie" and on special days, he cooked it my special way; with onions sliced in it with a little butter. He supervised my washing, made sure I washed the important parts of the clothes; the armpit region of my blouses, the crotch area of my pants and underneath my socks. He made sure I had siesta; he played and watched TV with me till my parents returned from work in the evening. Uncle Andrew was more than an Uncle, he was a friend, the big brother that I did not have.

My parents sometimes travel out of Makurdi. When they do, Uncle Andrew is my guardian. Mummy and Daddy were sure that he would take care of me. That's what he has done since I was born; take care of me and the house. He took good

care of me, and did some other things.

It all started when I was still seven. My parents had travelled early one Saturday morning leaving me with Uncle Andrew. I wasn't feeling too well so Uncle Andrew had to bathe me. While bathing me, he put his hand in my private part. Cleaning my private part, the bending and washing below is not strange, The way Mummy does. This washing was different because he also put his finger in my private part. I didn't think much of it because he was bathing me.

My parents were to spend ten days out of town. Two days later, he came to sleep on my bed. You see, we often sleep together in the same bed especially when we have guests who had to sleep in his room or whenever I sleep off while watching the television in his room. That night was different; my uncle touched my body; he touched it in a way that I felt was not right. He ran his fingertips through every part of me, then, he fumbled hard with my buttocks. Then he sucked my breasts; he bit my nipples. It was very painful because they are just growing. They were still hard like unripe lime. He left his spit all over my night dress.

That night I had many questions in my head, I did not have the liver to ask, not him or anyone else.

The next day, he repeated the same thing, with other painful things. He put my hand on his penis; it was big, strong and scary. He told me to rub it. I refused. I was scared. My Uncle Andrew kept saying he will not hurt me that I was his baby. He told me it was what 'Uncles did to their babies they really love'. I believed him. He told to imagine that I was eating cucumber. Then, he forced my mouth on his hard strong penis. He begged me to suck it, lick it like Chupa Chops without the stick. Then, something came out of it. It smelt like JIK that mummy used to soak my stained white clothes. Uncle Andrew was just looking, breathing heavily.

He thanked me. He told me I was the best, that he will love me forever.

The next morning, he told me not to tell anyone because they will not understand; they will be jealous of our love. Uncle Andrew bought me things every time and sometimes stopped me from going to our neighbour's house. Every day from the day he started, he did many things, many of them I cannot remember. All that I remember is my Uncle's voice begging me and the pain.

When my parents came back, I told them I wanted to ask them a few things. To ask them if this was normal, if it was ok for Uncle Andrew to touch me the way he did, if it was normal that I did the things I did. They said they were tired, that I should wait till the next day. Next day came and they told me to ask Uncle Andrew. I could not do that. Anytime I try to ask, my parents especially my mother will tell me to wait till tomorrow, there was always an excuse. I have headache. I have to go to the market. I have to prepare your father's delicacy. You see that I just came in. have you done your homework? You this child and your questions. When will you stop asking? Mother had an endless list of reasons not to listen.

Two days to my eighth birthday, it was a Friday, I remember. My Uncle repeated all he had been doing, BUT this time, he put his penis inside my private part. It hurt so much. I begged him to stop. I shouted and screamed but I don't think anyone heard me. He covered my mouth with his palms. When he finished, he told me he loves me and that I shouldn't tell anyone because no one will believe me.

That night, I became sick. Goose bumps all over my body. The heat came from inside my stomach and spread outside too. It was fever, my mother said. Fever caused by the fear of turning eight. My stomach, private part and legs hurt so

much; I knew I was not growing older. It was Uncle Andrew. He was the one they sent to buy me drugs to treat my “fever”.

The next morning, I was still very hot. I couldn’t even stand well, it was as if his penis was permanently stuck in there. The pain was biting, like I was being bitten by many termites at once or that pepper was there. My parents didn’t travel because of my birthday, so they took me to the hospital. At the hospital, the doctor asked how I was feeling, when I started feeling sick and the parts of my body that ache. After I answered, the first question she asked me was if anybody touched my private part. Before I could answer, my mother answered ‘No! She is well taken care of’. The doctor asked me to go to the laboratory for tests. The tests proved I had been molested, they found some whitish things (sperm) in me.

My parents cried! I cried!

The doctor asked me to remove my pants, when she looked at my private part, she too almost cried. I saw the tears right there on her eyelids, unable to fall. Just hanging there. She told my parents to come and look at it too. My mother screamed, she removed her head tie, put her hands on her head and cried. My father couldn’t look at it well. He looked once and turned away. The doctor was very angry with my parents; she said it was their negligence that caused it. My mother asked me who did it. I told them It was Uncle Andrew.

My parents shouted ‘ANDREW!!!’ and asked why I never told them. I told them I tried and reminded them of all the time I tried to get their attention to it. I reminded them of the many times they were too busy to listen, of how every time Uncle Andrew was around, of how he said that no one would believe me. I told them that I was afraid.

The doctor gave me some drugs and told me to rest, that she will come with a lady I will like to talk to. I got home tired but I remember my father crying and shouting at Uncle Andrew to leave the house that he didn't want to have anything to do with him. My mother held me and cried, saying she was sorry for being too busy.

The next day, Sunday-my birthday was a sad day. I slept in my parent's room. When I woke up, they were looking at me, I am sure they didn't sleep. I am sure they cried throughout the night. Their eyes were swollen and red.

By 10am, our doctor came with a lady. The doctor says I will have an operation once the pain reduces. The lady talked to me alone (first). She said things that made me laugh. She asked me questions that made me cry. She told me to pour all the anger out on paper. She hugged me. She said that I was a strong girl, that I should not believe anyone who says "a girl is weak." She then talked to my parents; then she talked to all of us together.

She said the first step to recovery was to let out what I feel (vent whatever emotions you may be feeling). I have cried, I am tired of crying. I asked Auntie Timi-that's her name questions too. What did I do to Uncle Andrew for him to do that to me/

The second step is to talk about it. That's why am telling my story.

Auntie Timi says, 'Anybody can abuse/molest another, no matter the type of relationship between them.'

Please pray for me as I try to recover from this and protect a child next to you.

Notin' Do U

DONALD MOLOSI

YOUR MIND is philosophy
your loyalty epically stays in love
and you love me in a way that
safely feels something like 'prophetic'
you see things in my soul
that elude my ordinary eyes
and i can feel it deeply when we talk
it is in the way you casually lean your body
towards mine and then talk half-asleep
it is in that unutterable way you look at me when no one is
around
it is in the sweetly serious way you say we should
talk a lot so that we don't float past each other like space
men
but rather grow together entwined
i like it when we talk and your delightful mind
sparkles in conversation and your short white teeth
reveal a sweet rare smile behind full dark lips because simply
put
when we are together notin' do u
you are now pressing hard against me
and in your face i see
a fineness raw exciting yet gentle
all in one deliciously dark square-jawed face
for there's a fluid storm rising and billowing like harmattan
behind your pair of marble eyes.

CHILD MOVEMENT
KEMI AKIN-NIBOSUN



To Mow:

A Suburban Cautionary Tale

KEVIN RABAS

SOMETIMES STAN believed the whole block could hear his thoughts when he mowed. And if this were true, and if Brad were listening, he might have learned that Stan wanted his wife, coveted her—and that his wife also wanted Stan. Brad might have learned this when Stan turned a corner wrong in the rider and made a half circle in Brad's lawn, then went on to curse the world and asked Gwendolyn to forgive him. She was at the window, and her look said "You'll always be forgiven. Just take me with you some summer, and let's leave this place and never look back at these thin children and these golf-course-shorn lawns and these manicured bushes, cut into vase shapes and squares, this tamed forsythia, and these mailboxes upon mailboxes all set into perfect rows."

Undergarments and what's beneath are meant to burn for much more than all of this—and kisses can mean everything if anything might come of them, if everything might be lost in a moment. Running and traveling with a lover proves this. Danger always leads us to better meals and better sex. And we could all use better sex. Communion just won't cut it. The divine has always been inside us—and sex is just the way to release it. At least this is what Stan thought.

Stan got out the push mower and tried to round out the curve that held Stan's yard to Brad's. When Stan was done, it looked less like a half donut or a crop circle and more like the fringe of a skirt. Gwen might like that, Stan thought. He shut off the mower and went to Gwen's door.

It couldn't hurt now to ask for some sugar. For his tea, he rehearsed. For his tea. Isabella, his wife, never made him tea; Stan knew this well. He would make it himself, and he would first stack the ice cubes halfway up the inside of the glass, just the way he liked it, "half and half." Stan liked that phrase, part milk and part cream, part regular and part dream.

Gwendolyn opened the door.

The Goat That Eats Meat

BRIAN BWESIGYE

“HE DOES MEN.” Syson said as he tapped Medius’s shoulder. “No surprises, his looks tell it all”, Medius said. Jim, oblivious of Medius’s and Syson’s banter was involved in a different conversation. He threw his arms in the air as he spoke. When he laughed, his pitch reverberated with a wave that seemed to sweep his entire body off the seat like a nylon blouse hanging onto a drying line being blown here and there by a weak wind.

Medius wished she could hear the entire argument Jim was making. She could only catch a few words. Values, Utility, Originality, Difference, Exclusivity, a few more words, as Jim sometimes spoke a bit loudly; the breeze at The Lawns blowing the words in Medius’s way.

“Let’s go’, Syson was almost barking. As the two left, Medius could not forget the man who *did* fellow men, as she had been told – the man whose discussions had sounded and looked as emotional as profound. A spark of curiosity in her chest had lit a fire of interest and she thought that this man could be worth nothing. Something special about a person being different, unavailable, was gnawing adventurously at her.

Jim wore trousers like any other man. Normal shirts. His voice was softer than a typical masculine voice. His voice was weak without the movement of his arms and eyes, or so it seemed, for he never talked only with his voice. But he could communicate with his walk. He could indeed compete at a beauty pageant.

“The hearts have their own language,” Jim and Medius were flirting on Facebook. How witty. Cheeky. What an addictive

flirt. Every line from Jim seemed loaded with testosterone. She did not know how exactly to react. Was he being real? How could he desire a woman as his lines suggested? He was being a flirt, an addictive and addicted one. That was all, she told herself, but found that she needed his attention more and more. Whenever the chat-window blinked with his presence, her heart skipped a beat, a ray of anxiety scurrying through her body.

“How about an evening at the Lawns by ourselves?” There was no will to resist. Why resist? Syson, her boyfriend, would have no problem with it because Jim apparently did men. No possessive boyfriend would mind such a harmless male friend around their partner. But risk-taking was not Medius’ art. She would not tell Syson in case his legendary insecurity had no boundary.

Out they went. Not once. The company was mutually rewarding. Great conversations, touches here and there, warm and long hugs, harmless pecks and lots of sweet nothings. Then one evening was swallowed by the night and The Lawns extended into his flat. The evening ended in the morning. He kissed her out of her sleep, and she woke to the reality of being naked in his bed.

As the reality sank, her mind became pregnant with a certain question. The question had always been there, always in the background. As he thrust his energies in her that night, the question had temporarily ebbed away. The question now returned from its hiatus with gusto. ‘Are you gay?’ She rehearsed the question several times in her head, wondering whether the three words were not rude. How else could she ask without sounding stupid? She was becoming pen-sive. Was he reading the question from her puzzled face? He kissed her on the lips and she felt embarrassed that he had. Courage eluded her.

That night repeated itself several times. Every innocent meeting for a drink always ended in the bed; and the morning after, she could not muster the courage to ask. Courage returned when Syson accused her of cheating after finding a suspicious message from Jim in her phone. 'He is gay', she said as she combed all her remaining belongings from his house.

When You Go Down On Me

MEL THOMPSON

I FEEL your eyes penetrate to the core of my heart
and linger there imploringly, wanting to know
how deeply I love your mouth and throat

And when I feel my hardening cock slip
into your throat, and your mouth wrap
around it clear to my abdomen

it feels as though all of the women who rejected me
have lined up to give me a blowjob with you
Every part of my thorax feels the accepting warmth

move up and down my cock in tender waves as you move
your lips and head back and forth, up and down
over my loins And when you gently press your fingers

into the tender space between my balls and my anus
I feel that I am embraced by the divine mother Herself
and for that short time, I love being at your mercy

As your lips press harder at the head of my penis
and your tongue swirls around it as you suck
it seems as if more and more of my insides

are being pulled into you, and that we share
the same organs and genitals And when your
teeth, ever so gently glide across my foreskin

it's as if you are tearing into the flesh of my soul
completing the circle of life at the center of the world
bringing me, a homeless man, back to the land of the living.

The Prodigal

RAM GOVARDHAN

INDRANIL HAD not visited Kajori's brothel in a long, long while. He never felt like calling at the upmarket bordello ever since he wedded Laboni two years ago. Until he stumbled upon her, he hated, the most emotionally draining of all locks: wedlock. Now that Laboni was out of his life, his fingers craved to knock on the whorehouse but he knew the timings; no one was entertained after midnight, even if it was a tycoon or a minister. Like thirsting honeybees, businessmen, bureaucrats, and lawmakers plunged on nectarous Sonagachi from all over east and north-east India. Though he dwelled in Beadon Street, just a stone's throw from Sonagachi; it was still too late as it was almost the witching hour. He grudgingly reconciled to the reality that he could sleep with no one tonight. Though he kept popping in pills, he could not drowse until wee hours, alone. All alone.

It was two years ago to the week that Indranil had lent a hand when Laboni tripped on the escalator at Kolkata's ritziest mall, South City. As she waddled, he lugged all her shopping-bags to the coffee house. Holding her swollen ankle, she began sobbing; Indranil tried to calm her by putting his arm over her shoulder. To his utter bewilderment, within minutes, she turned cheery and, coming out of introversion, sought another mug of coffee. While sipping, she struck someone as being the epitome of all the elements of his dream girl. She was demure, mild-mannered and, even though she wore wearing low-hip jeans and raffish mascara, she looked like a fetching family girl; all three traits, he reckoned, were quintessential facets of a perfect Indian wife. "Mascara and rouge on cheeks?" he asked and answered himself, "Oh! It's nothing but peer pressure." As he scanned every one of her physical, facial features, it was apparent that she was a rare beauty, no, surely, a great beauty.

No, undeniably, Laboni was one in a million, her looks would daze the proletariat that swarms bustling streets of Kolkata. What's more, her voice had echoes of mellifluous Lopamudra Mitra, his favourite vocalist. That was that.

While sipping, squinting at him, she sensed that he was the most striking man she had ever met. If Indranil's sharp features, debonair flair impressed her, what decisively swayed her in the end was his ponytail that swung in ways she found irresistible. She instantly felt like caressing the tresses but deferred the vehemence to a more intimate state of relationship. He had her dream tone of voice between tenor and bass: baritone. "This guy's vocal organs could make Amitabh Bachchan and Kishore Bhimani and Kabir Bedi envious," she concluded. And, even before they finished their coffee, something magical supervened that was by no means P.C.Sorcar's forte: love. Of course, as they could establish right away, it was love at first slip, first sight. They took to each other so much that few weeks of live-in arrangement necessitated consummation of marriage at Arya Samaj and, and, yes, registration with two witnesses. Suddenly, they were universally accepted as man and wife conferring legitimacy on their potential offspring.

Their conjugal bliss lasted eight months. Every night of the ninth month increasingly exposed the hollowness of the institution of marriage. Mired in centuries of superstition, matrimony was an incongruity that contemporary, fast, young India could do without. Living-in seemed more civilised and greatly suitable for the terabyte era; besides, when things went wrong, no one was liable by law and surely not liable for each other's debts or sundry obligations. Nuptials proved to be a mutually agreed bondage in which both parties practised sadism of the utterly odious order that could stun even Marquis de Sade.

But the greatest disaster for Indranil was that, unlike the master that he was, sex for Laboni was one of those things that needed few minutes of night time purely for procreation and, as marriageable Bengali women are handed down along with family jewels, just to keep the man from straying. Even after nine months, she was in the state of Eve, a state before sexual knowledge. Acquainted with numerous prostitutes over several years, in matters of sexual prowess, Indranil considered himself more informed than what Maha Rishi Vatsyayan's Sanskrit treatise, Kama Sutra, encompasses. Over several months, he began giving instructions to wide-eyed Laboni on ways to take pleasure in sex. But, to his utter disgust, Laboni simply lay under him like a doll, unmoved and insensitive, every time.

"Don't lie like a Marwari woman, be forthcoming, alive," Indranil yelled on several occasions. She tried her best but miserably failed to play it by the ear or be as unprompted as him. After few days of abuses, he began throwing things at her, many a time, inflicting grievous injuries. Then the only feeling he harboured in such circumstances resulted: he could not stand sight of her.

"You are unsuited to be a wife...you are a zombie...unfit to be a woman indeed," he bawled. He felt like butchering her to smithereens, burying hundreds of bits in the backyard. Flying into a rage, sighing for his happy-go-lucky past, one thundery moonless midnight, he bullied her out of his house with her bags, once and for all. Laboni walked away, in silence, with a nine-week old foetus inside her womb; tears trickling in slow motion. Indranil never came to know of the pregnancy. That was almost six months ago.

Soon after she left him, he overheard that she was dismissed from her job. Then the news was that she was living with her ailing aunt, who remained single all her life, in Diamond Harbour. Then someone said that she was working for a grocer for pennies in Basuldanga village, east of the anchorage. Four months ago, one of Indranil's friends had spotted her at

Laboniat Howrah bus station looking too skinny, shaggy and in ragged clothes. That was the last he had heard about her. He loathed recollecting all this stuff and he despised those who delivered such hopeless updates to him.

Nonetheless, when the wake-up call shook, oddly, he called out for Laboni. Uttering her name, he reflected, was ill-omened. Resolving to forget all about her forever, he recalled that he had a crucial presentation slated for noontime and he tried to prod himself up. But his body ached for something else. The slides were not even half finished; at the moment, he hated even booting his laptop. All he needed was a woman in his lap, at once. Period. He could not wait. Four months was too long a time. It was sort of a record that he had not touched a woman in hundred and twenty days! "Hundred and twenty...oh my god!!" he exclaimed. It was excruciating. His boss could wait.

Kajori, after hawking into a gleaming brass spittoon, throwing a toothed grin at him, quipped, "Long time no see...married? But the services my angels dish out are unimaginable for wives. Indian wives, so-called paragons of virtues, do not satisfy their men, they satisfy other men; most treacherous cows on earth. Welcome home."

Kajori's size had spread so much that he abruptly aborted his hugging motion. Realising his predicament, she offered her cheek; he put his to hers. Plucking a thousand rupees out of his hands, running eyes from his head to toes Kajori said, "You seem to be too removed from reality. Are you aware of the rate of inflation my darling? Prices of everything humans need have skyrocketed...including condoms." Even before he could take out couple of more bills, Kajori, in one clean jerk, snatched his wallet, emptied it and slipped the notes into her blouse and brassiere that seemed beleaguered under the tonnage. "Any special damsel?" he asked.

"Every one of the lasses you knew has been dumped and the present lot is fresh, luscious. Patrons do not stand old, stale stuff these days," said Kajori.

His heart raced. She could discern impatience in his eyes and she hazarded a guess that he had not touched a woman in months. And, importantly, she had just spotted his international silver card. "I have a stunning parrot especially for you but she is pricey...perhaps too expensive for you to afford," Kajori baited Indranil.

"Nothing is unaffordable if it is worth it, nothing can be out of my reach," he boasted.

"Believe me, she is untouched, one of my agents had brought her and she was a beggar utterly gaunt when she arrived. Just two months of nutrition has transformed her into a dazzling butterfly. I have never seen such a succulent apple all my life and, don't forget, I have seen some of the best chicks in the business but she is symmetry at its best," lured Kajori.

"What's the reserve price?" he asked.

"My sugar-candy, you know the asking price of young, golden ducks," said Kajori.

He could not curb his instincts anymore. "Will be back in ten minutes," he said and rushed out like a sprightly drake snapping his lips. He ran all the way to the ATM and withdrew all that was there while the sentry was snorting away his domestic blues on an armless chair, chin resting on his chest.

The crisp thousand-rupee bills delighted her, "My unique parrot is all yours honey." She ushered him through the narrow, winding stairs to the third-floor suite that was out of bounds for amateur philanderers. As he entered, he was mesmerised by the misty lights that illuminated the classical feel. In the sitting, he appreciated intricately carved sofa and armchairs of the same design. Tagore's neatly framed paintings hung all over the suite; the portraits enhanced the ambience and, as Kajori supposed, perhaps heightened the

overall experience of her clientele. Perhaps. She quietly left the suite.

Inside the splendid bedchamber, a woman, in a glimmering sari sprayed with glitter dust, stood by the bedside, biting fingernails. From the sitting, under the shadowy light, the woman looked more than gorgeous. "The whole thing seems to be absolutely worthwhile, worth all the money," Indranil told himself.

As he leaned towards her, she drew a veil over her head. He was dumbfounded to see her giggling behind the shroud. This was not the conduct one expects after paying all that one had. Then she chuckled for a while and, even as he continued to be shocked by the eccentric manners, began tickling him. Even before Indranil could recover, then, in a flash, like a stiff perfunctory toy, she lay on the bed and beckoned him. She remained in suspended animation for minutes. Then and there, he heard her snoring. He went to her and stood mutely for a while not knowing what would be her next weird move. He saw features very similar to Laboni's. Then he saw the tattoo 'IC'—for Indranil Chatterjee—on her arm. Yes, she was his Laboni. She continued her snort. He began sobbing for the first time in his life.. But this Laboni has gone mad. All of a sudden, she jumped out of the bed and, even as he was crying out her name, without recognizing him, she was clapping, hopping. She continued tickling him but he sat on the bed for a few minutes, unmoved, crying and cursing himself. He then, holding her by hand, while she resisted, dragged her downstairs to talk to Kajori. When he told her that she was his wife, she yelled, "Stop bitching, every bastard does this...I cannot run my business if I have to give away my precious maal just like that." Indranil presented a stamp-sized snap taken two years ago. Though Kajori could make out the truth, she cried again, "Don't show me crap. Leave her here and get going."

Kajori heaved Laboni inside and asked her burly eunuchs to shove Indranil out.

Three days later, with the help of police, Indranil redeemed Laboni from the clutches of Kajori by paying a lakh of rupees. That happened about six months ago. While the doctors were quite gloomy, Indranil was too sanguine about bringing Laboni back to normalcy. While waiting for the great day to dawn, at present, he helps Laboni in emptying the bowels, brushing, and bathing. These days, he prepares all his slides after putting Laboni to sleep, around midnight, every night.

LUST /2
KEMI AKIN-NIBOSUN



Aling

SHAYLA HAWKINS

OUR EMBRACE has become its own wheel and world
a two-bodied braid of bone and fire
At your touch the scroll of passion unfurls
Our embrace has become its own wheel and world
chakra and flesh into the chasm hurled
Of love and excruciating desire
our embrace has become its own wheel and world
a two-bodied braid of bone and fire.

Night Fisher

SHAYLA HAWKINS

YOUR EMBRACE
full as an ocean
seals me
in its liquid skin
Your hand
a bluepoint knife
slides open my legs
And you
the night fisher
cast a net
of your fingers
over me
until
glittering wet
like an oyster
lifted from the deep
the soft shell
of my flesh
parts and spills its
salt-sweet musk
into you
like twilight rain
on the sea.

Two Sides of A Coin

ERNEST ALANKI

SOMETHING ISN'T quite right in my brother's voice. It's Saturday - we're on the phone. His call came at breakfast; scrambled eggs, toast and coffee. He's talking like a convict on the run - jittery, guarded and mysterious.

We talk about the storm that has crippled most of the power supply lines in Northern Sweden, promising several villages days of dark ages and leaving a few people and perhaps more dead.

He tells me, "It's disgraceful to let yourself be killed so recklessly."

"Show some emotion, psycho," I say.

"I don't know these people ... they don't know me, so I can't be bothered."

"Are you insane?" I tell him I meant every word of it.

"Not quite ... at least not yet."

"Sounds to me like you're rather far down a lonely track to a loony bin."

"They should have heeded the warnings and stayed inside, that's what I'm saying."

I tell him a 64 year old woman and her golden retriever were crushed by a tree in their home while asleep. I expect that to put some reasoning into his head, if he isn't quite insane as he says.

He says, "They should've been smart enough to stay alert until the storm blew over, before they went to sleep."

I push down my frustration with a sip of tepid coffee. What do you say to someone who talks and thinks like that - especially if he's your identical twin?

Afterwards, I make sure I mention the world economic downturn, just because every media outlet in the country is yapping about it. I didn't have much in the banks to work up too much sweat about the whole issue.

"President Bush and his cohorts ... see what has hap-

pened to the world economy?" I'm careful how I say this. "I don't see how you can blame this on one man." My brother is a staunch Bush supporter. I find his allegiance strange because I don't know anyone else in Sweden who likes the guy except for his silliness.

"I don't know. He's a clown nonetheless," I say.

"Tell that to the American people who voted him into the office of the most powerful man on earth."

"Why are we back to this debate?" I ask.

"Ask yourself."

"Screw it," I say.

"Screwed!"

"The voice has a way of telling its story ... something you want to tell me?" I prompt Marcus to tell me why he called, since nothing can humour him.

"Huh, what voice?"

"Screw it!"

"Screwed!"

We hang up.

What's the matter with him?

Before I finish this thought, the phone shrills and incites the hair on my skin to protest. I put my coffee on the top of the hardwood table and snatch the receiver.

"Jeremy," I say my name.

"It's Marcus, your twin brother."

"I can hear that ... so?"

"I don't know what to do with myself," he says.

"What do you mean you don't know what to do with yourself? Take a shower, eat something ... it's a damn fine Saturday morning and Mamma Mia is playing at the movies."

"I say very mean things to Megan."

"Ok, I wasn't about to suggest you do that," I say.

I can hear Marcus breathing hard over the line. It feels hot and very close.

"My mouth runs like rain," he says.

"Fix it."

"What do you mean by fix it?"

"Zip it up," I say. "You make Mike Tyson seem like a saint."

He giggles and says, "Last night I told Megan we need a break."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Show some emotion, psycho."

"What's wrong with that?" I repeat.

"Everything, Jeremy. Everything! I'm supposed to love this woman, not hate her."

"I appreciate your telling me, but as you know, I'm no counsellor on these all time big issues of the heart," I say.

"I didn't say you were." He laughs, which is good.

"Why do relationships fail?" I whine. "Why do we get bored with someone even when it all started off well? Why do we lose track of the beautiful things that brought us together, in the first place? Why do things just fade and pale into despicable nothingness?"

"You're asking me?" my brother says.

"I just did," I say. "I may have bagged thirty-two years of life, but I'm still single like a shipwreck rotting at the bottom of a black ocean."

I hear the clock over the fireplace bashing time in my head.

"I'm absolutely sure everyone has someone they love, endlessly," I say.

"Who'll that be for you?" I hear the mockery in my brother's voice.

"Mother."

"Mother?" He bursts into sudden laughter that startles me.

"Seriously. The thought of the possibility of not loving her nauseates me. Remember how it was like growing up in Cameroon?"

"Good times, crazy times." His voice is warm.

"Remember how we'd fight the other kids to a bloodied end, just because one of them said, 'Yo Mamma?'"

"Yeah." There's nostalgia in my brother's voice.

"Would you do that for Megan?" I ask.

The humour bubbling four hundred kilometres over the phone line disappears somewhere in the cables.

I tell my brother, "In every relationship we need space. The best we can do is ask when we need it."

"This is common knowledge." The mockery returns.

"I'm trying, don't you shit on me," I say.

"That's why you are my brother," he says.

"Well, don't run ahead of yourself. In any case, you need to work every cog in your wheels to keep the fire in your relationship going ... sort of like when we fought for mamma."

"I'm too damn lazy," Marcus replies, his voice distant.

"There you go!"

"Hey mister, I'm not alone here!" What about you? It's easy for you to sit there and dispense pieces of advice. It sucks to be at the receiving end."

"Which makes it a bad time to be at the giving end," I say.

*

My longest relationship lasted two years. It only did so because Janet lived in London and I in Stockholm at the time. When she moved to Stockholm it went to hell in the space of a month.

Marcus is the one who always is in a relationship. Two years ago, he came to me almost in tears — he'd found his other half, his Madonna, his Aphrodite, using other descriptive words I'd never heard. Later that year, while on a trip to Cameroon, he came close to turning me into a jealous skunk, with his frequent utterances of how much he missed Megan. The conniving bastard almost deserted me and the trip to return home to Megan.

When he got back, he was going to have that baby she'd been nagging him about. Marcus is such a great planner — always making plans that become the grave in which he

suffocates. On the contrary, I'm always without a plan, which explains why I never see further than a few inches into the journey ahead of me.

*

"Either way, we both have our demons to fight," I say, going back to our conversation that morning, my coffee now cold on the table.

"Grown up life is crap!"

"Well, you guys are still together. That's a good thing."

He grunts and says, "Now to the big question."

My hearing sharpens.

"What is happiness?" my brother says, tossing me off guard into a sudden wild storm of confusion.

"You may need to see a shrink, Marcus."

"You're my shrink ... what's your opinion?"

For the first time my voice gets stuck in my throat.

"Well," I say at last. "I don't have an answer for you. I'm looking for one myself."

He grunts again.

*

My brother got married to Megan a while after that haunting phone conversation. He called me a few days after the wedding to express some kind of gratitude.

While he's at it, he says, "Not that you said anything meaningful when I had my doubts about Megan, but sometimes we just need someone to listen to us ramble to feel good about ourselves."

"Soulless, selfish prick!" I chew the words and spit them out like a naja naja cobra.

*

"It isn't my decision to become an uncle," I tell my brother a few months after Megan gives birth to their son, Daniel. "But these days, I talk about kids ... a lot, at lunch."

"In the end, it's our collective responsibility to help

each other through life's Herculean ways ... at least I taught you something," my brother says and chuckles.

I bite my lip.

"People who are silent usually don't have opinions about anything," Marcus says when I don't say anything.

"Hopefully that explains to you how I feel about you right now."

"You're the one who's silent, Jeremy, not me. Silence explains nothing," Marcus says.

"That's because you can't listen to anything beyond the beat of your own trivial heart. Well ... triumph in your folly."

"Folly is a thing for country lads, Jeremy. Besides, my heart has never been afraid to be trampled upon, though it never would allow such insanity to happen."

"Then you must be that country lad," I say, "Wary of cleverness, static in his ways like a stubborn donkey and wrinkled like an unpalatable raison."

"What do you say to someone who has contrasting opinions from yours, but lacks the guts to say so to your face?"

"Silence is strong will, I dare to say," I say.

"I'm a certified neurologist, Jeremy. I thought talkative journalists like you always have something to say ... Jeremy."

"And yet you talk as if you just discovered my name?"

"What do you mean, you've always been Jeremy?"

"Well ... your inability to comprehend me proves you are a country lad ... not that I approve of your indiscretion toward country lads ... utterly rude of you."

"You're a waste of my time, Jeremy."

"I thought you called me, Marcus," I say.

"So you could waste my time?"

"Which is why I was silent, so as not to waste your useful time, Marcus," I say.

Marcus groans and says, "A true brother will advise you to chew gum when your breath stinks."

"I don't know about you, but I don't have bad breath, Marcus," I say.

"That's not what I mean."

"I know just what you mean ... just fine ... Marcus," I say.

"Stop saying my name ... as if you just got to know me," my brother says, his habitual monotone up an octave.

I get my chance to smile at last. "I'm going to have coffee now," I say, "And think about nothing."

"Have a good thinking about nothing time ... it's a good occupation."

"Especially after a phone call from you," I say.

When, we hang up.

*

I vow not to talk to my brother for the next year. In the process of vowing, which I did many times, I drink three cups of the blackest coffee possible, while attempting to think about nothing.

In the end, my brother's words on collective responsibility subvert my determination to forget our bitter chat. I reflect on how I seek happiness with such passion that it was the dream I went up with from bed and return to bed still dreaming of, but how this internal determination is often undermined by external circumstances, outside my control.

It could be a nostalgic scent of a crushed rose, which reminds you of a girl called, Rose, who could have sold her heart for a penny only to be with you, but whose credentials you considered too short. Or the smiling sculpted face of a brown girl, called Lilly, to whom you could have sold your soul for nothing, but who found your credentials too long. Or an unpredictable girlfriend and a bouquet of flowers she presents you, for no reason other than that her heart is confused - the one you find the next day scuttling away with your best friend, Joy. Or that enduring wife, who's your work colleague, in whom you are secretly in love, in your spare time and in your busy time - the woman who despite her husband's shorting comings, offers him nothing but care. The one who tells you she desires to beat some sense into her

husband and leave him to waste in a landfill, but refuses to do anything about her dilemma.

Each morning you squirm at your desk, upon seeing the veil of sadness stencilled like dry seal on her face. Or it could be a neurotic twin brother, who's also a neurologist, who thinks he knows everything about life, and that your becoming a journalist is a complete waste of your life. That notwithstanding, the brother whom you love the most, whose son, your nephew, is your Godson. The Godson dearest to you like the son you don't know, because you don't have one. Or perhaps, it could just be the elusive good feeling of simply being part of these whimsical uncertainties on the thoroughfare of life, the journey you embarked upon with no idea as to your destination.

Exhausted, I empty my head, make myself another mug of black coffee. Gazing into the smouldering luminous dark liquid creating ghostly whiffs in the still air, I return to thinking about nothing, sipping the coffee, which begins to jar my nerves like a carpenter and his hammer. Through the open window, across the garden sprinkled with blooming flowers, up to the summer sky, I catch a silvery plane cruising away in the blue clouds.

I tell myself: *at least I'm here now. Tomorrow may be different.*

Love's Microtales

LORE ADEBOLA

[1]

IT HAD been twelve years since we last saw, Bolu and I. Twelve years since the vow and since the night. Twelve years since I lost my love promise. Yet seeing Bolu again made it seem like only yesterday. I noticed wryly, as I always do, the irony at work. Time had changed my yesterday, making it desirable.

[2]

Bolu once told me that love between two people was for the self-destructive. Of course Bolu became my definition of self-destruction; or perhaps not. I had promised not to love; not to feel; not to let the story of my parents become my story. I would eventually make a vow that was stronger than my promise but till I knew Bolu, that promise was all I had. The promise was a child, the vow was aged.



BOR 'N' GAY
KEMI AKIN-NIBOSUN



At The Suicide Galleria

CLIFTON GACHAGUA

ONE CAN play the marimba to
the stammering of your letters
How inappropriate, you ask me,
is it to quote the nude marquis?
In the distance, coming
toward me, waving the tubercle of lips
a secret revolution
Iris veneer, hanging whips, coming
I have learnt to read you the (coming) journal of sex medicine
From the very thin veneer, my Szpilman fingers
in your miracle of birth.

A Genre of Isolation

CLIFTON GACHAGUA

THE GREAT revolt of night
against the sum of my homosexual tendencies
Rage

A ritual dichotomy of limbs
your body needs to forget
dream catching my voice between your thighs

Salt
on the window pane
you teach me how to lick memory.

Collage of Sexuality

PUBLISHING NOTE

SOMETIMES SEX is a word, sometimes it's not. Often it's a question, an exchange, a protest, a dialogue. Often it's a state of complexness. Sex is both body and soul, presented in visual and textual terms. In this issue, where we have succeeded in collecting mostly sex-themed writings, outlooks range from the vulgar to the pious, from the introspective to the blasphemous. And that's because our reading of sexuality must necessarily transcend boundaries, whether visible or imagined.

Especially because we make *Saraba* within a socio-cultural context of silence. This silence is the fact of anonymity, the fact of name-swap, as we see in Adah's horrific tale. How can we resent this silence, this pursed lips? How can we begin to talk about sex in defiant terms? How can choice in sexuality be read? Macharia and Hartman extend this complexity, even Bwesigye. What even, they ask, is sexual difference? There are certainly more questions here.

And what is a sexual body? What, in simpler terms, is a body? Kemi Akin-Nibosun jabs these considerations at us, presenting photos that utilizes the anaglyphic effects of 3D cinematography to create depth and form. When we commissioned her, it was with the knowledge that she is developing a way of seeing that tastefully intersects conceptual art, performance art and photography.

Each new issue of *Saraba* is presented with the feverish hope that there's a reader in a small corner of the world who will recognize the fact of life in the art we present. And if sex – and a conversation about sex – isn't a fact of life, a temerarious and indisputable one, we have published this issue on a woeful premise.

EMMANUEL IDUMA & DAMILOLA AJAYI





Contributors

Born in Kenya, KEGURO MACHARIA is an assistant professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Maryland, College Park. He belongs to the concerned Kenyan Writers Collective.

All her life, Kenyan-born NYAMBURA KIARIE has had a passion for the written word and the telling of stories. She is passionate about exploring the politics of psychology in the struggle for voice and identity: the powerful inner stories of minority voices capturing women and children. Struggling with Lupus for most of her life, she is a spirited advocate for people living with Lupus, and writing has been for her a powerful catharsis. God is her Muse of muses and words give her wings to fly, to scale the heights and they are the footsteps to her dreams and to God.

IVOR HARTMANN is a Zimbabwean writer, and author of *Mr. Goop* (Vivlia, 2010). He was nominated for the UMA Award ('Earth Rise', 2009), awarded The Golden Baobab Prize ('Mr. Goop', 2009), and a finalist in The Yvonne Vera Award ('A Mouse amongst Men', 2011). His writing has appeared in *African Writing Magazine*, *Wordsetc*, *Munyori Literary Journal*, *Something Wicked*, and *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, among others. He is the editor/publisher of the *Story-Time* literature magazine, and co-editor/publisher of the *African Roar* annual anthology, and is on the advisory board of *Writers International Network Zimbabwe*.

SU'EDDIE VERSHIMA AGEMA is an all rounded writer and development enthusiast. He has published two collections of poetry: 'Second Collection: Shrine Tale' and 'Apology.' Agema blogs at <http://sueddie.wordpress.com> and has an active web presence

SOPHIA KANAOUTI is Greek, with a PhD in Cultural Studies from Cardiff University in the UK. She is an affiliate of the Athens University Research Institute of Applied Communication, and also works as a journalist.

CHUKWUKA NWAFOR is a literary and gnostic contributor at Dickinson State University. His poetry and short-fiction have appeared in literary e-zines and publications such as Drumtide, Odinani' and Impressions, among others. His first book, *An Effigy of Beatification: Stories*, is currently in the works.

DONALD MOLOSI is a US-based, Botswana-born actor-writer. He wrote and performed a number of one-man shows which premiered off-Broadway including the noted *Today It's Me* (2010) about the first African to publicly declare he had AIDS, *Philly Lutaaya and Blue, Black and White*" (2011) which earned him both a Best Actor Award at the Dialogue One Festival and a Best Solo Award off-Broadway. He writes afrocentric poetry and fiction and is currently working on a poetry collection articulating African identity within the continent as well in the Western context.

KEVIN RABAS co-directs the creative writing program at Emporia State University and edits *Flint Hills Review*. He has three books: *'Bird's Horn'*, *'Lisa's Flying Electric Piano'*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner, and *'Spider Face: Stories.'*

BRIAN BWESIGYE was born in Kigezi, South-western Uganda in November 1987. He graduated in Law from Makerere University in 2011 and is now doing a Human Rights LLM at Central European University, Budapest. His book *'Fables out of Nyanja'* is published by Kushinda.

MEL C. THOMPSON is a publisher, performer and spoken word artist from the San Francisco Bay area who was also a radio personality and composer of Buddhist hymns. His latest book is a prose work called *"Tales of Zen Buddhist Scoundrels."*

LORE ADEBOLA is falling in love with art.

RAM GOVARDHAN'S first novel *Rough with the Smooth* was longlisted for the 2009 Man Asian Literary Prize and published by Mumbai based Leadstart Publishing. His short stories have appeared in Asian & African journals. He is currently scripting his second novel and a bunch of short stories. He works with GfK (Middle East), Dubai, UAE.

SHAYLA HAWKINS won The Caribbean Writer's 2008 Canute A. Brodhurst Prize in Short Fiction and the 2010 John Edgar Wideman Microstory Contest. Her recent publications include poems in *Pyrra*, *Magnapoets*, and *Taj Mahal Review*. Her first book, *Carambola*, is scheduled to be published in fall 2012. She lives in Michigan.

ERNEST ALANKI was born in Cameroon. He lives in Sweden. His works have or will soon be featured in literary journals including: *The Journal of Microliterature*, *Dunia Magazine*, *The American Mensa Writer's Ltd. Magazine (Calliope)*, *Big Stupid Review*, *Subtle Fiction* and *Ngoh Kuoh Review*.

CLIFTON GACHAGUA is a filmmaker who is currently reading a biography of Fellini and going through French films. He just quit his job the other day so that he can have enough time to write. Clifton is also hopelessly in love with a Hausa woman, last seen in Kano, who will not return his calls.

KEMI AKIN-NIBOSUN was born on the 2nd of March 1991 in Lagos State, Nigeria. She holds an advanced level diploma in Photography and Art from Barking Abbey Sixth Form, London. Since leaving school she has been mentored by various artists, including independent fashion designer Samia Malik (ihtgw label), Tomorrow's Warriors Jazz Orchestra and Central Saint Martin's summer tutors. She was mentored by photographer Lucy Azubuike, and courtesy of the Invisible Borders Trans-African Photography Project she has presented her work at the Peace Ground in Khartoum, Sudan and the Gebre Kristos Destre Centre in Addis Ababa as well as the group exhibition at The New Museum of New York.

