



HELD TOO BRIEFLY

*A Prized Anthology on Avoidable
Disaster Deaths*

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Edited by

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ABC4D
AFRICAN & BLACK
CREATIVES FOR
DEVELOPMENT

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To every artist, poet, and storyteller who submitted work to the 2025 Art for Life (Art4Life) campaign, thank you for your courage, your voice, and for transforming grief and memory into powerful acts of public health advocacy across Sub-Saharan Africa.

We acknowledge all the winners and honourable-mentioned artists, all of whose works appear here except for Salvatore Elixir, whose consent we could not get as at press time for the anthology.

We are grateful to Umar Turaki for his editorial insights on this work too. Special thanks to Adekunbi Lardo and Mandellah Josiah, your time, ideas, and dedication as COAL volunteers have been invaluable to this anthology. Gratitude is also due to Servio Gbadamosi, Oko Owoicho, Elizabeth KJ Umoru, Jola Praise Ademola, Hannah Omokafe Dennis, Tine Agernor, and all the SEVHAGE staff for their work on this project.

To the judges, readers, and champions of creative advocacy, thank you. May we continue to hold these stories and the lives behind them with the empathy and urgency they deserve.

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— *Andrew Patience, S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema, and Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim*

FOREWORD

I have always loved creative art and culture. So, when Ms. Patience Andrew, our Avoidable Deaths Network's (ADN) Advisor, told me about the Art for Life competition for the Global Campaign 'International Awareness Day for Avoidable Deaths' (IAD4AD), I was intrigued.

The Art4Life competition, which received part funding from the Leicester Institute for Environmental Futures and part-funding from the Custodians for African Literature, was launched in February 2025 across Sub-Saharan Africa. We have had over a hundred submissions.

IAD4AD is an awareness-raising public engagement global campaign celebrated annually on 12th March and throughout the month. The campaign was launched in 2023 in the city of Izumiotsu in Osaka, Japan.

This is our second year, and we have celebrated this campaign across twenty countries. The IAD4AD aims to raise the visibility of indirect disaster deaths, missing persons, causes, and circumstances surrounding these deaths, and value the lives saved. The anthology of creative photography, flash fiction and poetry from everyday experience delivers this superbly.

I hope you enjoy reading this anthology as much as I did.

Many congratulations to the winners and honourable mentions.



Professor Nibedita S. Ray-Bennett

Founding President & Convenor, Avoidable Deaths Network
Institute for Environmental Futures, University of Leicester

TO HOLD WHAT WAS HELD TOO BRIEFLY IN ART: IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

In the pages that follow, we invite you into a world where creativity becomes both witness and warning. It is a collection of moving art forms — mainly flash fiction, poetry and images divided into four sections: drowning, maternal mortality, silicosis, and snakebite — born out of the 2025 *Art for Life* (Art4Life) campaign and the International Awareness Day for Avoidable Deaths (IAD4AD).

What makes this collection moving, in our estimation, is its immediacy as the pieces are not necessarily abstract tales from distant lands but lived experiences which many readers will relate to. We read of children swept away by floods, of mothers lost in childbirth due to preventable complications, of labourers breathing in death through dust-laden lungs, and of victims of venom who might have survived if only help had been closer. We see homes or metaphors for them in submerged pieces, a hand holding up from deep waters, and a lady smiling after conquering a snake's feasting of her. Mostly, these pieces are held too briefly because the lives within them were, and should not have been, cut short.

The language of the anthology sways between poetry and prophecy, while the general structure is experimental in various places. The flash fiction pieces mostly blur into a painful lyric narrative, while the poems carry the weight of parables. Consider “Playing with Water” by Younglan Talyoung, where boys of Tudun

Wada play beneath the water in a dare of masculinity until the river refuses to give one of them back. Using Hausa proverbs and fluid verse, this poem transforms childhood bravado into a tragic elegy, making language itself an element that is both playful and perilous. Thus, one sees the power of language, culture, and African aesthetics in the communication of a profound moment. Considering most of the works in this collection have local colourations, whether in location, character titles, dialogue, or action, it adds to the reality of what the artists describe or portray, enforcing a post-colonial narrative. This is further expressed in Solomon Obika's "Musings of This Land," where the author's personification of the earth as both giver and taker draws on Indigenous environmental cosmologies, where the land is a living moral entity, and mining is not merely labour, but dialogue and debt. Further, in "Bitten Once...", Innocent Tarojacho Ojo interrogates silence and proximity while lamenting the rural vulnerability that allows a snakebite to become fatal in the absence of timely care.

There is also a spiritual rhythm that hums through the anthology, an invocation of memory, and grappling with the metaphysical while structure forms a basis for meaning too. Sylvia Ohiaeri's haunting "Still with the Sunset," which explores a childhood memory of loss as evoked in the title is testimony of this. The story which unfolds mainly in dialogue and vivid imagery holds the reader from the first line to the last. Similarly, in "Little Bodies", Chisom Nsiegbunam uses the perspective of the rain to narrate a drowning, rendering water a sentient, grieving witness. It is a piece that speaks with startling lucidity and calm horror, weaving environmental neglect and personal loss into a single, chilling current. Dodo Elias Denen's dirge, "Sebastian's Song," personifies the ocean's call as a siren of solace and surrender. The poem's fragmented and drifting structure mirrors the sense of drowning itself. In "Sky Raining Flowers", Onyishi

Chukwuebuka merges grief and dreamscape, writing in fractured lines that mirror the speaker's broken mourning, tracing ancestral bonds that stretch across life and death.

The section on maternal mortality deepens the anthology's emotional register, giving voice to women whose labours turn fatal not because nature demands it, but because systems fail them. Michelle Nnanyelugo's "Red Ribbons" is a visceral portrayal of a birth gone wrong, its language steeped in both tenderness and terror, unflinching in its detail. Elsewhere, in John Ebute's "Zombie", irony sharpens the blade, imagining a woman rising from death to confront the culture and silence that condemned her. Considering the number of deaths attributed to this, as well as the other variables in this work, namely drowning, silicosis and snakebite, one notices the main objective of this collection, which is to not merely report facts but to indict, mourn, and help remember.

The images in between add a visual aesthetic and tell stories in a way that only pictures do. We capture these from the focused lenses and pens of the artists, Jola Praise Ademola, Elias Denen Dodo, Bukunmi Oyewole, Michael Adebisi, Chrisantus Temswang, T. J. Benson, S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema, and Anre John

Every death represented in this collection, whether through maternal mortality, drowning, silicosis, or snakebite, is a reminder that disaster is not always the result of uncontrollable fate. Often, it is the consequence of systemic negligence, policy failure, or the absence of preventable, amenable and risk governance systems. This anthology does not seek to memorialise alone but to awaken emotions to get us to act. Through the intimate and powerful voices of creatives across Sub-Saharan Africa, we see the human cost of inaction, of silence, of delay.

From over 100 submissions, the works selected here which form the bulk of this selection, were judged not just for their artistic merit,

but for their ability to communicate truth with clarity, urgency, and heart. With over 96% of participants encountering the IAD4AD for the first time through this campaign speaks volumes about the importance of this effort. The creatives represented here are not just artists; they are now advocates. They have gifted us not only with their talents, but with their courage to confront difficult themes—grief, loss, guilt, and the politics of survival.

The initiative behind this anthology is collaborative at its core. Jointly led by the Avoidable Deaths Network (ADN), the Custodians of African Literature (COAL), African & Black Creatives for Development (ABC4D), and SEVHAGE Literary and Development Initiative, with support from the University of Leicester Institute for Environmental Futures, the campaign that birthed this volume reflects a broader aspiration, which is to bridge the worlds of public health, policy, and creative expression. As noted earlier, what we hope to do is to tell the stories behind the statistics, to elevate the unheard, and to influence both thought and action.

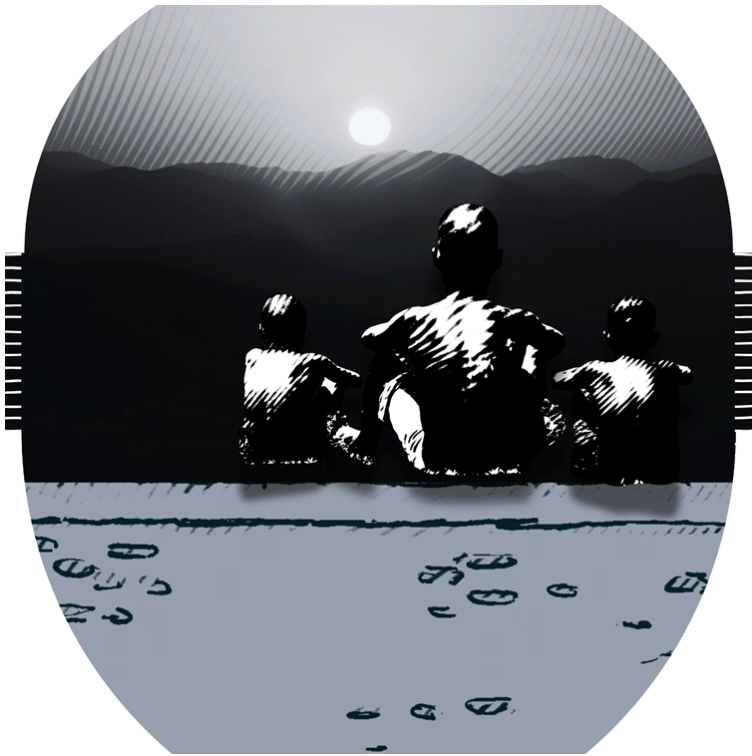
In amplifying youth voices from across the African region, *HELD TOO BRIEFLY* traverses a range of emotional terrains from tenderness, rage, and helplessness, to hope. This is a work to be read, yes, but more importantly, to be reflected upon. It calls upon us all to bear witness, to remember, and to respond. To hold on, not briefly, but with resolve. May the pages ahead stir your conscience as much as they move your heart to action.

— **S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema, Andrew Patience, and Ibrahim Babátundé Ibrahim**



'Still' by Anre John

DROWNING



'This is How It Will Be Told' by Jola Praise Ademola and Elias
Denen Dodo

LITTLE BODIES

Chisom Nsiegbunam

Obeleagu Street burns. The heat trapped in its earth tells of its people—their quick, heavy strides, the nastiness of their faeces and drunken urine in corners, buried beneath the soil. I fall in torrents, pristine, from the sky, only to be met with all this street offers. Haphazardly sloping roads, houses smuggled into every space, unaccommodating drainages that force me through doors and windows—because I'm a flowing element. Inside their homes, they furiously scoop me out.

Drainages built to lead me home are clogged with their rubbish. As I fall, they dump new bags of it, their rubbish, trusting my current to carry it away. They never ask if it destroys me.

As I fight against this tide of waste, a little shoe finds its way in. I have seen many shoes. I push it along as I scamper home, but then—a little leg. A whole little body follows. I try to hold the body, but I am a furious element, rushing down as sheets of rain. A hand comes, searching, desperate. I try to tell it with a strong deluge to run against my current to find the body. But this new body falls into me too—this one a little bigger, carrying two bags of picture books, pencils, and crayons.

I try to hold them, but they slip through, smashing against cracked ceramics, plastics, and rotting food. They gasp, choke, and swallow all the filth I fight against as I claw my way home.

Muddy. Bloody. Flawed.



‘The Will to Rise’ by Michael Temi-tope Adebisi

BLUE, BLUE, BLUE

Pamela Erhiakeme

Footprints on the sand—small ones, big ones. Seashells, rocks, breeze. Bodies clothed by bikinis, shorts, swimsuits; bodies not clothed by anything at all. Droplets of salt water suspended in air; the water—blue, blue, blue. Blue like his body becomes after he drowns.

But before he turns blue, he is tinged pink. There's strength in his legs. He smiles. He laughs. He plays in the water. You toss him in the air.

The boy approaches you. Your sleepy eyes crinkle as you smile. He lies on your chest, grains of sand adoring your bodies. You do not care. His heart beats just like his father's. His skin is glued to your skin. He's your husband, your son is. Reincarnation has never seemed so real until you birthed him.

You fall asleep.

He climbs off you. You do not know when. You are asleep, remember? He walks with his legs, too chubby, to the water, too deep, and it pulls him in too fast. It's quick, slow; loud, quiet. It happens within seconds, those seconds last for a lifetime.

He struggles, he gasps, he fights. But what do three-year-old limbs have against a mammoth body of water? The water, borne of nature, seeps into his lungs, borne of nature. And his heart, also borne of nature, gives up.

And there's the irony—how such a life altering event is quiet when it should be loud; how the signs were subtle when they shouldn't have been.

EPIPHANY

Gift Onobhamiukor

Shall a mother forsake her sucking child?

Moses parted the red sea last week, but
never got to shore. Somewhere in the belly

of the waves, he got baptized. Rod and bones.
Do we award the blame to the innocent hands

of the waves that pushed and pulled his mother's
name at the top of its current? Or do we bestow

the gift of a guilt to the mother who turned her back
on her world to trade tales at the lips of a sojourner?

Shall a mother forsake her sucking child?

Today, the belly of the ocean spat Moses parking.
The voice of his mother undressed the heart of the

heavens and stole tears from its eyes as death laid its
bed and coerced her to lie on it. The villagers held

her existence by the neck and pleaded a chorus
and this poem sang.

But what good can ink on paper do?

When the sails of agony drifted up shore,
not even poetry could shoulder the guilty
music of its epiphany.

PLAYING WITH WATER

Younglan Talyoung

*"na yi nitso na kamo kifi
ko ruwa ban sha ba, jamagé"*

hausa Proverb

to prove ourselves men
as children in Tudun Wada,
we play hide and seek in *rafin maza* beneath water
deep breaths sink head up sink

"boji boji, wanda na kama, nama na ne, naman kura"
laughter sink mouth open sink
the river is made of laughter and sinking children
competing to see who can live the longest under water.

it is all laughter and sinking until sunenna doesn't
come back up for air.
panic sink calling sink
we are forced to seek our friend
who has hidden under the water for too long
we pray to and beg the river to give us our friend back;
and until today, *rafin maza* has not answered
has been filled with enough laughter to cover the world,

rafin maza has become an inferno of silence,
a light cut through the darkness of boys remembered by ache,
a memory that under the pretence of calm water,
there's a long line of voices buried into the depths of its wound.

we, the children of tudun wada cannot become men,
cannot become one with our memories and call it healing,
because,
if becoming a man must be done in water above our knees
we no longer want to hide beneath while we're being sought above.

GRIEF HAS A NAME

Grace Olatinwo

In moments when your world is sliced like paper,
when unseen scissors cut through every possibility—
laughter turns into a hollow lie,
and happiness becomes a fading myth.

Agony settles as the heart's new home,
pain shadows the soul like a constant twin.
In the quiet press of a handshake,
in the lingering warmth of an embrace,
grief speaks softly:

Grief has a name.
Grief is a home.



'Ocean Surge Aftermath I' by Bukunmi Oyewole

NO CHANCE AT GOODBYE

Oluwaseyi Oladunjoye

I

That beautiful clear-sky morning
was the only witness to your struggle.
Its other companion was the calm air
as it shifted,
untainted by your unheard cries.
If only a grey cloud was in sight,
maybe we wouldn't have continued laughing while you choked
as the memories of your happiness slipped away forever.
If only the winds were aggressive that morning,
maybe we wouldn't have continued to fill our stomachs with sweets,
while your lungs filled with chlorinated water
as you grappled to be seen, just for the last time.
If only life didn't leave as fast and death didn't move as swift,
maybe the inconsistencies of our environment wouldn't have been
fatal,
as you waited for the responses that catwalked to help.

II

Now that you are gone,
our confusion knows no bounds.
"You were just here," we think.
"Just now..." .
Now that you are gone, these feelings make us feel like frauds,

'cos you don't get to feel anything.
Now that you are dead,
the 'if onlys' don't end, they are forever tangled.
The 'whats' don't stop, they never get answered.
They strangle us out of breath and peace.
Now that years have passed,
your thoughts don't haunt us everyday;
on some days, we get joy wrapped in a mirage.
We have replaced constant pain with constant guilt,
with our epileptic struggles, we try to feel better at your expense.

III

On nights that we can close our eyes,
we dream of answers that never come—
why it happened, how it could.
We see your smile, just before it fades with pain.
in the water that was your solace just before it became your coffin.
Our fears don't only come from our tragedy, they come from our
reality,
A possibility that a re-happening (that we can't even bear),
might still not be enough to keep you here.
We hope for the miracle of time travel,
to reverse your suffering and turn off ours.
That you wouldn't have needed to say goodbye,
Missing out on the many chances at life that was just starting.

We wonder at our fault,
an unending cycle till the 'ifs' jolt us awake.
For a moment in our confusion, we hear you scream,
But as we listen, it's just loud silence,
the calm air holding its breath,
and our constant witness, the beautiful clear sky.

LOSS PROBABILITY

Alfred Olaiya

If only our house could be saved from the
teeth of this grief eating into its corners
where your portraits are stricken by wet shadows.
We are all being eaten, too,
eating at the dining table with your chair empty.
We are being stricken, too.

If only mother had not said your name —
It popped out with grizzly, liquid pictures
of you, running down her cheeks and
I notice how it has become sour just
like the taste of your absence.

If only the river down our street had learnt the lightness of your feet
like the floorboards in those theatres where
you bent the winds into your loins with your dance-moves.
If only it was the innocence on your fingertips that slipped
— and not your feet! —
into that unfriendly pull of fiendish billows.

Punctured breaths, punctuated by
ellipses of soundless echoes.
Livid limbs wallowing in grim levitations of struggles
as the colour of sunset convulsed in your eyes into a bleak twilight.

If only my shadow had darkened the face of those waters
before they swallowed you up in gulps.

If only if only...

If only the bubbles never stopped,
if only your heart never stopped.

HOME LEFT WITH HER

Summayah Fahm

Home was her presence—her laughter and encouragement,
It was the way she smiled, the taste of her morning pancakes,
And the aroma of soup bubbling softly on the stove.
Home was the lingering scent of cinnamon and rain.
But then the air grew heavy, tainted with something bitter.
Whispered prayers floated out through glass windows,
Her footsteps became faint,
Then someone pressed mute.
And one day, she was gone—just like dandelion petals, she drifted
away.
But not only in the way bodies disappear,
Also in the way pain unravels a home,
Turning laughter into silence and love into memory.
The house stilled—grief seeped out of the walls,
Melancholy lingered in every corner.
The walls began to crack under the weight of her absence.
She left, and somehow, home left with her.
The house still echoes with laughter, but only in memory's voice.
The once bright colours now look hushed.
The place that once offered warmth now feels cold.
And so, we learned to live like shadows.
If home is where the heart is,
Then where do we go when the heart is no longer here?



'Ocean Surge Aftermath II' by Bukunmi Oyewole

SEBASTIAN'S SONG

Dodo Elias Denen

(To be read before $I = k(D)$)

It's like floating, but here you feel the weight of every atom sharing space with you. These hands are your feelings holding on, lest you break for the surface where the air is lighter than the pressure of the songs that lull you to the depths.

Siren,

Not a woman, nor fishtails.

You know these demons, you shade each face.

Their names are every phase of rainfall- each drop that makes the ocean where at last you find your home.

Stranger,

There's no buoy, ain't no anchor for the ship unknown! Beneath these skies we yield to the quiet of a solitude that knows our names, and give in to the voices that have stood through time with us, and we cede to the suggestion when they lead us to the Blue.

Semper,

The Blue will never let you go, the Blue forever holds you so, the Blue will have her fill of you, the Blue in you and you in Blue. And for the first time and your last there is a place where you belong.

A BUBBLE'S ECHO

Abiola Deborah

A loud noise fades into silence,
A preventable cry, unheard.
A silent scream, a bubble's echo,
Hands reach, yet none dare to stir.
Beneath the sea, lost and unseen,
A simple jacket could have saved it all.

Now, like Eliot, death by water claims its silent toll.
Like Phlebas the Phoenician,
This body rests beneath the waves,
Unmarked, forgotten, in the deep,
With no hope of rescue, no whisper to find.

One must feel the pain to understand its weight.
It is through sorrow that wisdom blooms,
A lesson carved in the heart's quiet ache.
Would you suffer loss to find the truth,
Or guard your soul, and let the wisdom come without the wound?

To love with depth, and to those who could have saved,
To those whose lives are lost beneath the tide,
To those who could have walked on fields so wide,
To those who whispered, drowned in water's grip,
To those who swore to return, but couldn't slip

Back to the shores where they once did roam
I leave this jar, a vessel for love, to call home,
Filled with hope, a dash of life, and a foamy embrace,
A promise of warmth, in this quiet space.

LITTLE SYNDICATES OF POSEIDON TO A DROWNING RIVER

Henry Opeyemi

Flooding through the cathedral.
the holy ghost. of psalms purifying

the dirt in the water. the ghoul misplaced
a body in the city's throat. thin linear

ropes drawn across shorelines. into
the blueness of the ocean. all these years,

dreams ain't farfetched from liquid
it's what we are. It's what I will return to.

A sprouting of gunfire from Gaza. the
war is always within. God created it on

the third day. on the very creation of
soil into man. this unsang lineage in

earth's first pronouncement. of arts and clouds mooned for graceful
grassiles,

dripping mortals. & the other offspring
that came from light. This is how to flame.

to not leave the city thirstiness on fire,
in the holy hands of penury that stays

afloat, that calls the unseen by a name.
till it embodies a drought, a tombstone

of hunger. of children luring over
wood logs of inherited past. their little

lives appeared broken, holy, grotesque.



'Benue' by T. J. Benson and S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema

MATERNAL MORTALITY



'Rain' by Jola Praise Ademola and Elias Denen Dodo

RED RIBBONS

Michelle Nnanyelugo

When the baby finally came, there was no celebration. Only the sound of blood hitting the floor in wet gruesome splatters. Too much. Too fast. Kambili's labour started in the heat of Abata's scorching sun, a blistering burn that rustled through her faded yellow gown. The fabric frayed from years of wear stretched thin over her swollen belly like a second skin. It smelled of bar soap and uncertainty. It was her third. She had done this before, like every other birth. The slow mornings draped in the soothing beams of nausea, the flush in her navel, fatigue folded neatly in a basket like baby clothes and death swaddled in her palms strumming her belly into unsung lullabies.

The hospital walls, coloured by sickness, peeled with neglect. In a dim, long room with rusted bed frames and sunken mattresses, a rickety fan whirred, barely moving the stagnant air laden with antiseptic, sweat, and the scent of death. Kambili lay on one of those beds, legs spread, trembling, labour dragging on for hours, her pupils, heaving like a dying flame.

The midwife's face sagged with exhaustion, eyes dilating with impatience as she muttered instructions that stank of urgency. The placenta had partially detached, causing the haemorrhage. The bleeding came, unexpected. The way a body sheds remnants of what it no longer needs. It began as a trickle, before surging into heavy red tides, like a river breaking its banks. Until, finally, there was nothing left. Only red ribbons.

ZOMBIE

John Ebute

If the dead could talk, the woman-just-turned-cadaver would have screamed at the nurse wheeling her out of the ward to stop. Then she'd crawl out of the bed which had cradled her frail frame since the previous morning, not minding the horrified look on the faces of her husband and the nurse. She wouldn't hear when the nurse runs out, shrieking, "Zombie! Zombie!"

Instead, she'd approach her husband, and with a cold tone she'd been forbidden to use on the man that paid her bride price, she'd demand of him why he'd dared to look at their daughter with an accusatory sneer. She'd show him the scars burned into her flesh by a similar stigma.

Her own mother had died birthing her, and she'd believed the story doled out to her that she'd killed her. She'd waited all her life for karma's just sword to find her neck. And when moments ago, after heavy travailing, she saw death's face, she'd taken it as her karma.

But there's a clarity that death brings. She intuitively knew that it was all the people that had watched in silence as a thirteen-year-old was married off and allowed to conceive almost immediately, and not her, that should be blamed. She also knew that her husband's refusal to allow her to partake in the family planning programme had left her body too weak to support another foetus. No, she wouldn't allow this to happen to her daughter too...

If only the dead could talk.

02.01.23

Kondwani Bwalya

Kitwe is a cold and wet wasteland when January the 2nd comes
creeping in past midnight.

Through a storm, that stretches from home to Chililabombwe,
Leaving that Copperbelt skin soaked,

In precipitation, and the tears of my kinfolk.

Last night, my sister lost a war she was never meant to fight alone,

Last night, my sister fell apart like a salt statue left in the rain for too
long,

An abortion that took her own life.

And this morning, she turned our family into a convoy of Tonga tribe
funeral songs.

My mother sings about her daughter's end

My father sings about the loss of his best friend.

Both burdened by the looming thought that we stand over her
tombstone today, because she was too scared to face them.

Nobody says it out loud on the ride home.

But how many graves must claim our sisters before we start the
conversation?

THE FLOWERS FOR THE GRAVESTONES

Samuel Leumas

Some names won't be animated
Like the histories forgotten, these
didn't touch the space or play with time.

Some maidens never became
They never flowered like Hebrew women
Or inflorescent as floral florescent.

Some places gave owls a role
The wolves a moment to howl
And bushbabies saw the apparitions leaving

In my village, the huts became silent
The bright eyes of Ugomma, the pride of
Ikenna, evanescently lost.
We never heard the cry of the mother
Or the baby.

BORN OF BLOOD

Audrey Mulamba

Between pain and prayer, she waits—
a young mother in the making,
fear a storm treading water in her eyes,
her life wagering on the pendulum's hand.

Four walls, still and silent,
bear witness to her lament,
offering nothing but the soundtrack
of beeping machines.

Help moves like shadows,
draped in white—slow, of little concern.
This is not their calamity waiting to happen,
It's beyond their human hands anyway.

But curse these lips that dare call this fate,
for fate cannot seal her doors just yet,
Crash that fate that tries to steal the midwife's hands,
Fate that cannot make life a privilege rather than a right.

At least not for her little one.
For out of might, she drowns
in the red river of birth,
surrendering her light

so another may rise.

A triumphant smile gracing those lips,
That wail, unashamed,
before it all fades to black.

Tell her child, if they ask,
that she fought with heart,
And every last breath—
that though life was not kind,
but she was.

The world let go,
but she never did.

SILICOSIS



‘Face of Heaven’ by Jola Praise Ademola and Elias Denen Dodo

A RACE TO DUST

Kehinde Adedayo

You drive seventy kilometres every day, yet you reek of alcohol most of the time. Those breezy rides are at odds with the persistent cough, the gasps and the irritation gradually bleaching the pigment from your skin. Only four months ago, you were that ebullient man at the cement factory where you work. You had come home and parked your car, hoping – as usual – to have a meal filled with vegetables for dinner, the routine Made prescribed, and to retire for the day only after your wife had served her intimate dessert.

“Our doctor called earlier today,” her voice trembled as you lent your hands to unstrapping the strings that held her cups firm. “He wants you to find a new job.”

“Ohhhhhh. Let's talk about this tomorrow, darling.”

You were only halfway. There were days your job took a grave toll on your health, urging you to resign, but the thought of your youngest child's school fees always pulled you back. It never promised not to whisk life away from you, but on weekends you let yourself slip into the blare of rumba and juju from your home theatre. You hummed the lyrics, the notes lightening the burden nestled in the nave of your heart. You supplanted your fraternal duties for worship in that sacred place.

And if today *is* one of those tormenting moments—the wheeze, the cough, the tightening in your chest—your hands tremble, your car shakes, veering off the lane. And there, in a pool of your own blood, you park...

THESE MEN

Juliana Agomuo

These men are set for work as early as 4 am, before their children groggily awake from bed to prepare for school, before even their wives begin to heat tea for breakfast. And while the darkness of an early morning holds its rich blankness as cramped shadows, these men carry shovels and head pans over their shoulders, heading into the devil's own mouth.

The dust ascends like magic as they clinch the first strike of granite, an arcane haze of ashen particles lunging fistfuls into their nostrils, an onslaught of brutality. These men continue in this rhythm throughout the day for they know no other way. The dust shall swarm their mouths while they yawn from exhaustion. It shall crush their lungs as they halt to catch their breath. The labour affords their daily bread. It affords them shelter, clothing, and purpose. So, they must do this, they must earn this pay to keep on living.

Soon, the body gives way to one in a million of its numerous flaws. A hitch in the breath. The heartless hacking of the throat. The sputum, a fuzziness of unimaginable blood clots. The lungs metamorphosing, thickening, and stiffening, lacking the proficiency for pressure.

These men have become scarred, bedridden, and struggling to enforce the simple art of breathing. These men own nothing more than an eroding force, the poison of dust ascending before their starving eyes like a miracle, this last strike of granite that will hurl them to an early grave.

WE WILL BE HAPPY IN DEATHS

Abdulrazaq Salihu

To mirror the dead, you must leave a life
In the constitution of memories—

In the parliament of attachment
A door must sit open before the chaos of beauty.

I sat at the outskirts of a garden filled with flowers,
My breath came into me, dark as smoke

The way a thread goes into the body of a needle—
Effortless as passion into a spark.

My eyes, blue, because before I was here again,
I was here in the skin of another life,

Republicans invincible in the visible
Absence of light.

Rebirth gave my skin a darker shade—
pristine as gold & it's a thing

Of beauty to be born, again in the palms of
What killed you. At Sarkin Pawa, none of my

Previous friends could see me,
I was now another man in the exile of familiarity

all my indigo scars, small, like pills
do not leave me. Realization bumbled like

Lemons cut with a rusty knife, and I know I've
Lived here, even just for a second of my other lives

But memory is a delicate thing, thin enough
To escape the mind & in all fairness the places

I could call home have left no breadcrumbs for me
I will learn to be swifter across bullets.

Will be tougher at wounds in the presence of blood.
Because to mirror the dead you need a motive,

Strong as an infant's grasp upon a finger.
A reason to be this lucky and cursed, an alibi, damned as

Death. A memory to topple all your memories
With greater sadness. Look how miserable you are —

I tell you; rebirth is no greater joy than illusion. I tell you,

Death will not let you live, but to mirror the dead
You need death, consistent enough to always hold

Your cold hands, and walk you into silence
Purple as a mist.

MUSINGS OF THIS LAND

Solomon Obika

I see them
young and old
kith and kin
with tools in hand
dogged in boring holes and burrowing their way in search of freedom
from the stifling hands of penury.
Someone should have told them that when you pounce, break, and
erode my rocks in quest for gems
I transmogrify into the potter's rot
swirling and wafting my way into their nostrils
travelling through the tunnels of their windpipe and latching onto
their lungs till it is pockmarked with freckles of silica
throttling their breaths and
sealing the air passage with soot and then breathing becomes a dread.
Do you see the similarity in our modus operandi?
How we take from each other
you, my wealth
and I, your health.
I have a request to make,
it is one that I try to tell but their ears only have room for the
thwacking jerks of spade on soil, I try to show them but their eyes are
spellbound by the flapping wad of notes flaring like confetti from
gold, tin, limestone and columbite.
I bellow, stagger, and sink holes

to jolt them into the clear view of reality
but they're enthralled by neglect as it fills them with the prospect of
wealth amidst the treacherous gaze of impending doom.
So please tell them to take stock of the frequency of their breaths,
to compare and contrast between the smooth inhale of before and the
jagged exhale of now, to see how the coughs are becoming too many
morphing into mid-ocean ridges
where the smooth sailings of joyful tales about their gains crumble as
soon as the stream from their lips.
Tell them that I do not intend to be a hideous glutton but sometimes
the prize for my gems require more than sweat and tears.
Say that I do acknowledge their quest for a better life,
prod them to use respirators to sift the air they breathe in my
burrowed tunnels and clad themselves with the life raft of best
practices.
Make it known to them to hearken to the laws of the land so that the
legitimacy of their claims will breathe confidence in their actions
when it sits on the scale of thermis.
Let the young know that patience is the youth's vantage point and
education is the tool with which they seek remunerations and
emancipation,
tell the people that to continue to unearth my gifts
they must live,
to continue to harness my wealth
they must thrive,
to enjoy the dividend of their gruelling toil on my soil
they must choose to remain alive
all hale and hearty.

THE LACUNA

Lois Shamu

The bleak part of reality is the inaction to make waves in safeguarding
lives

I have a story diary that merits contemplation

The life book is perforated with dark chapters.

It's futile to fold hands,

When physical agony is dismantling many lung anatomies

Of a contingent of individuals.

Many, laid to rest, heard about a number and witnessed hundreds

Succumbing to lung cancer and other respiratory infections

In a bid to earn and survive,

Workplaces- mines, sculpting and construction zones- a menace

Beast!

Toxic gases and dust particles adversely lubricating veins,

Yet no interventions and prevention sources are ingrained

To obliterate all paths that generate traumatic suffering.

A sombre cry is markedly painted in bold inks,

Statistics envisaging an upsurge in humanity loss,

Yet, we choose to grab a glass of wine.

Why not amplify the voice and participate in saving lives?

It's an exigency to efface this blindfold mentality enfeebling

Us to remain passive.

It's so glum, the sun is dusky

Petals of life - no glistening
Petrifying scenarios!
Wri...th...i...ng.

Life experiences must affirm narratives of healthy
Souls not disoriented and fatigued bodies.
Let's raise awareness at workplaces, disseminate the word of life
So that workers can master the art of living and working safely.
It's no longer an issue painting workers,
But concomitantly a lacuna that demands a circle of thoughts
Health practitioners stand and reach out to communities, workers
And employers so that they will not turn a blind eye on matters of
safety.
It's everyone's duty to save, advocate, campaign
Through any alternative locus.
Let's use the social media space, print and media space to design
All forms of knowledge encapsulating the optimal foods for body
building,
Protective clothing and viable operational systems.
It's not abstruse but merely a process that draws concerted efforts to
Fight silicosis.
Action is all that we need to transform the truncated horizons.

SNAKE BITE



'Beyond the Bite' by Temswang Chrisantus Naanlong

NO ACQUAINTANCE WITH TOMORROW

Solomon Idah Hamza

The family of six worked on the farm until about six that evening, until the sky turned the colour of bronze, until Arinda looked up at the sky and told his wife and four begrudging children to gather their tools.

"We will continue with the weeding tomorrow," he said. "The rain is already on its way."

Ikuchi, the eldest child, stretched out his hands to pick up a cutlass half-buried in the grass and gave out a cry. His parent ran to him. Ikuchi showed them his arms with four marks like full stops. Arinda's eyes darted like a suspended pendulum and saw the snake slithering away, fleeing from its damage. Arinda struck it on the head thrice. Then he cut off the head, which he would grind on a stone to reduce the potency of the snakebite.

Arinda carried Ikuchi at his back while Adantsi, his wife and the other children followed closely behind. Adantsi kept calling Ikuchi's name, begging him not to close his eyes. They got to the village clinic drenched in their sweat, only to be told by the nurses that they had no vaccines for snakebite. Blood was already dripping off Ikuchi's nose, and his pupils were rolling backwards.

Arinda pleaded with them for a miracle, but the fate before him was beyond his faith. By the time the specialist arrived, Ikuchi's body was as still as a lake at midday, his eyes fixed to the sky.

STILL WITH THE SUNSET

Sylvia Ohiaeri

That night, the sun set with my brother, but when it rose again, he didn't.

It was sunset. We were playing behind the rocks near Grandma's farm, when Seyi let out a shrill cry,

"Snake! Snake!" He clutched his swelling, purple ankle.

Grandma arrived in an instant, pressing her hands to the wound.

"A poisonous viper," she whispered. Lifting Seyi to her chest, she ran toward the hut she never let anyone else enter.

Inside, she opened a special pot. I peered in and screamed.

Mummy Kehinde, our neighbor, hearing my screams, rushed in.

"Kilode, Omo mi?!"

"Grandma has a snake?!"

To my dismay, she smiled.

"That's how it's done, my daughter. The cobra's venom stabilizes the viper's venom. Come and watch and learn, you hear. Grandma is wise."

She held my hand, leading me back into the hut. By now, Seyi was convulsing terribly.

Grandma stood frozen.

"Grandma! Mummy Kehinde! do something! Please!" I begged.

"Ah! Grandma, this has always been our way! What's happening?!" Mummy Kehinde cried.

Grandma's eyes darted between Mummy Kehinde and Seyi.

"I... I don't know o. Mogbe! Mogbe!" She panicked, pulling her

wrapper and jumping frantically.

"Grandma!" I called out.

"Eh! Omo mi!"

"Hospital!"

"Ei! Hospital!" she repeated.

Seyi jerked one last time. Then stillness.

"Oluwaseyi! Ahhhh!" Grandma wailed.

In that moment, I was like a 10-and-a-half-year-old adult, thinking of how careless Grandma and Mummy Kehinde had been.

And many mornings after, the sun will always rise, but without Seyi.

BITTEN ONCE...

Innocent Tarojacho Ojo

Kunle had been bitten once
Mole, bitten twice
Ojo, has seen—two die
One, an image—begging alms

Didn't the Holy book say, "He'll only bruise
your heel"? As I waited the stump
to bud forever; I doubted so much
the next line—"... you will crush his head"

For what good is a trophy when
you have no hands to lift them?
What is the essence of a carcass on a pole
with no power to give life?

We are consoled by blooded cutlasses
but how much blood can make up
for our trespasses?

Not the thought of extinction!
But why should eggs be found around our legs
bushes of the wild around the mild? And if
we be wild, we should grow tough skins as well!

But for the rural, vulnerable man
shield your skin and as well your kin—
teach them to be wary, for snakes herald
much more than mere lies

Spit burn with no burns
Hurts from no sprain
Scars forever fresh
cos too much is lost—to be forgotten

An arm, leg, friend—a loved one dead
And aside us to remember, they don't
make the headlines, just some number
in a time line; though fatal—termed minimal

Then tell that to the two dead
their family, friends
and their kindred
and us all, that can't count the cost

Kunle, had been bitten once
Mole, bitten twice
Ojo, has seen—two die
him, an image begging alms

If one's shot at life is one's proximity
to a mere shot?
Then let's make the distance short

From my grandma's farm
the urban city ground

the Rocky hills of Oke
We all should have a shot at life

Lest a mere "bruise", to our heels
bring us to our knees and lower
cos we were too far back to be aided

Kunle had been bitten once
Mole bitten twice
Ojo saw—both die
him, an image begging arms

For even the story he tells
He's unable to pen
Cos too much is lost—to be forgotten.

SKY RAINING FLOWERS

Onyishi Chukwuebuka

(A grave is not an end, but a doorway where the wind howls secrets no living ear should hear)

My Brother's Cousin// was bitten by a black mamba,
a night before he turned nine// the night was licking
through our doors in search of gold// & myers,
across the land// of the living
& the dead// I should have
believed you brother when you//
said heaven gave you
all the answers to//
our family tears—sweetheart.
But I have realized one thing:
//flowers do not// grow
everywhere// except that every
where,// flowers do grow. &
now I know the cities that//
want me.// It's the reason
I am still afraid// to confess it.
Because I, too do not yet
know// the cities that want
me without my whole body
being involved.// Mother,
I wish to sit with my// children &

grandchildren// & someday be able
to sing for them// to trace their
surnames
in the lights
of tomorrow //
& be able
to bring back
memories//
to the millions
of souls we lost
in this fight.
Outside,
August arrives//
& the dry season
is already here,
// behind us Cousin Brother.



'Double' by Anre John

CONTRIBUTORS

Abdulrazaq Salihu (TPC I) is a Nigerian writer and performance poet. A member of the Hilltop Creative Arts Foundation, he has received residencies from IWE Nigeria, Frances Thompson Writers studio and is a 2025 Fellow at the LOATAD Black Atlantis. He won the Masks Poetry Award, LAP Performance Poetry Prize, SOD, BKPW and poetry archive contest. He's the author of *Constellations* and *Hiccups* and has his chapbook *Quantum entanglements with notes on loss*, forthcoming with Sundress Publication 2025. He has his works published/forthcoming with *Palette Poetry*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Uncanny*, *Bacopa Mag*, *Strange Horizons*, *Stachion*, *Consequence*, *SofloPojo*, *Bracken*, *Poetry Quarterly* and elsewhere, He tweets @Arazaqsaliu and instagram: abdulrazaq.saliu

Abiola Deborah is a passionate poet and graduate of Adeleke University, who finds meaning in life through verse. She looks forward to growing engagement with her work and sharing her poetic voice with wider audiences.

Alfred Olaiya is a young poet, spoken word artist, and aspiring novelist. He has authored several compelling pieces and has been frequently published in the monthly journal of the English Writers Association (EWA), FUOYE chapter. His work has appeared in the *Best New African Poets (BNAP) Anthology*, *Poetry Archive*, *Decades of Nine*, and the *Thrills Anthology*. He was also named second runner-up in the 2022 *Spring Poetry Contest*.

Audrey Mulamba is a budding Zambian writer whose stories explore the intricacies of love, identity, and resilience. Her work has received international recognition, with her short story shortlisted for the 2024 *New Zealand Writers College Short Story Competition*. Audrey is currently working on her debut novel and remains committed to creating narratives that resonate with both local and global audiences. She lives in Ndola, Zambia, where she continues to explore the transformative power of words.

Bukunmi Oyewole is a travel and documentary photographer whose work highlights contemporary African realities, aiming to preserve experiences for future generations. His passion for photography and eye for compelling visual narratives have earned him features in various magazines and exhibitions. Bukunmi served on the jury for the *Wiki Loves Africa* photography competition in 2021 and 2023 and is a member of the African Photojournalism Database (APJD), a project of the World Press Photo Foundation and Everyday Africa. He is a 2021 Creative Fellow Alumnus at Amplify HQ (a COVID HQ Africa project), and a recipient of the *Lakehead Arts Integrated Research Award* (2022), which recognises excellence in art as research and education. Bukunmi also participated in the *Africa24Media Storytelling Fellowship* (2022) and received the *RCE Recognition Award* for the 2022 *Youth Biodiversity Art Challenge*, hosted by the Global RCE Service Centre at the United Nations University, in partnership with UNESCO. In 2023, he was recognised by Wikimedia Nigeria for his role as a jury member for *Wiki Loves Monuments in Nigeria*. A lover of books and travel, Bukunmi is constantly seeking new ways to document and share stories through photography.

Bwalya S. Kondwani is a 24-year-old creative writer from Zambia's Copperbelt Province, known for his evocative storytelling and spoken word poetry performed under the alias *Quazar*. Born and raised in Zambia, he has gained recognition through contributions to several short story anthologies. His writing vividly captures Zambia's landscapes and culture, offering readers a distinctive lens into the country's social and natural environment. His work has been featured in both local and international literary magazines. He contributed to *Centennial Reflections: Celebrating the Life Legacy of Kenneth Kaunda* (Sotrane Publishers) and wrote the lead story in *Myaambo's M'zimu Wachikondi* anthology. Bwalya is also a medical student, balancing his academic pursuits with a deep commitment to literature.

Chisom Nsiegbunam is a Nigerian prose writer whose work explores the fragility of human emotions and relationships. She has been a fellow at the inaugural *Idembeka Creative Writing Workshop* (2024), the *SprinNG Writing Fellowship* (2023), and the *KAP Film and Television Academy* (2022). Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ubwali*, *Eunoia Review*, *Afritondo*, *Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *Ma Kẹkẹ*, *Spillwords*, *African Writer Magazine*, *Punocracy*, *Aayo Magazine*, *Writers Space Africa*, and elsewhere. Outside of writing, Chisom is a fashion illustrator, tea enthusiast, and a student of Environmental Health Science at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Dodo Elias Denen is a Nigerian poet and literary enthusiast whose work examines identity, human rights, equality, feminism, romance, and sociopolitical issues. His poetry and essays have been published in *Writers Space Africa*, *Stripes Literary Magazine*, *Too Young to Marry Magazine*, *Writers Unite W/EO*, *Storytellers Nigeria*, *The SEVHAGE Review*, and on Medium. His poem *The Crest of Sanguine* was

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Grace Olatinwo (she/her) is a dynamic writer, poet, and voice-over artist whose life and passion revolve around art. Her work, known for offering hope and comfort, also explores deeply emotional themes that resonate powerfully with readers. Grace's creativity spans diverse domains, with themes often grounded in African cultures and universal philosophy. Her writing is shaped by a foundation of research, experience, and insight. She studied English and Literary Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Connect with her on Twitter @Graceolatinwo1 and on Instagram @grace_olatinwo.

Henry Opeyemi is a graphic designer, photographer, sign language interpreter, chess enthusiast, and poet. When he is not writing, he teaches children with hearing impairments how to play chess. His greatest motivation for his *Art4Life* campaign submission, featured in this anthology, is a real-life drowning incident involving his cousin.

Innocent Tarojacho Ojo is a Nigerian poet, public speaker, and social entrepreneur. Through his art, he seeks to address pressing societal issues in his country, across West Africa, and throughout the African continent.

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Juliana Chinaza Agomuo is an avid reader and writer, Igbo by heritage, and Nigerian by nationality. She is a lover of animals who has been passionate about storytelling since childhood and is particularly drawn to speculative fiction rooted in African traditional realism, as well as mystery and psychological thrillers. She was longlisted for the 2022 Kendeka Short Story Prize for African Literature and named runner-up for both the 2023 Best Okereke Prize for Short Fiction and the 2024 K & L Fiction Prize. She believes in the power of creative writing as a scientific and imaginative tool for reimagining our world.

Kehinde Adedayo is a poet, teacher, aspiring novelist, and postgraduate student in the Department of English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He has a keen interest in narratology and is an astute observer of the natural environment. His literary pursuits often emerge from contemplative moments, and he is passionate about enriching the literary landscape with profound reflections on human–nature interactions. His debut poetry collection, *Lyrics from the Vault*, was self-published under the pseudonym Simon Fred and is available on Amazon Kindle.

Lois Shamu is a devoted poet and scholar. Her creative works engage with themes that explore the essential frameworks of human

existence. She is driven by a desire to inspire transformation across diverse aspects of life. For Lois, art is a narrative locus—an imaginative space from which to reconstruct and re-envision lived realities.

Michael Temi-tope Adebisi (known professionally as *Mike Wheeler*) is a fine-art photographer from Ilorin, Nigeria. His work explores identity, cultural reflection, and the human experience, often characterised by expressionist, surrealist, and minimalist aesthetics. Through layered symbolism and experimental techniques, he captures deeply evocative narratives. His photography has garnered international attention, with features in festivals, journals, and galleries such as *Chestnut Review*, *Blue Marble Review*, *Spellbinder*, *Ake Review*, *Snoozine*, Canvas Gallery (New York), Superlative Gallery (Bali), ETH Safari (Nairobi), and NFC Summit (Lisbon). He currently resides in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Michelle Nnanyelugo is a Nigerian poet, spoken word artist, and storyteller based in London. Her work engages with themes of identity, social justice, body image, and cyberbullying through the lens of artistic advocacy. She has been featured in *Genti Media*, *Punocracy*, *Kreative Diadem*, and *Libretto Magazine*. An alumna of the Spring Literary Movement, Michelle uses her performances to challenge stereotypes, amplify marginalised voices, and ignite meaningful dialogue.

Oluwaseyi Oladunjoye is a Nigerian writer whose creative inspiration stems from personal experiences and observations of the world around her. At present, she primarily writes poetry and short stories. Her work is shaped by the passion and depth with which she engages the world. She currently lives in Nigeria.

Onyishi Chukwuebuka Freedom is a Nigerian poet, essayist, and music enthusiast whose work delves into identity, exile, and cultural memory. He holds a degree in English and Literary Studies from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he also served as Publicity Secretary for *The Muse* (No. 51). His poetry and essays have been published in or are forthcoming from *Eye to the Telescope: (non)binaries*, *The Port Harcourt Literary Review*, *Wherein the World Magazine*, *The Biochar*, *Strange Quark Press's Cosmic Quest Anthology*, *The Nine Muses Review*, *Poets in Nigeria Initiative*, *EveryBody Magazine*, *The Muse Journal*, and the 2025 *Hidden Peek Press Artist Spotlight*. He was named Best Poet of the Month (March 2024) by PIN's Yearly Anthology. Committed to amplifying marginalised voices, Onyishi also fosters literary dialogue. He currently resides in Enugu and tweets @Bukaty33612.

Pamela Erhiakeme is a Nigerian writer and registered nurse whose love of reading deeply informs her writing. She aspires to evoke in readers the same emotions she experiences with a good book. Pamela won first place in the *Once Upon a Teen* Flash Fiction Writing Competition (2023) and the *Short Fiction Contest* by *Under The Madness Magazine* (2023), among other awards. She is an alumna of the 2024 Idembeka Creative Writing Workshop.

Samuel Leumas BlueAdonis is a prolific writer whose work resonates with themes of love, nature, and celestialty. He explores the beauty of melancholia and the poetic connectivity of human emotions, often linking them to spiritual expressions of the soul. His poetry has been featured on numerous platforms including *Authorpaedia*, *Poets in Nigeria*, *Shuzia Blog*, and the *Place of Love Anthology*, among others. A member of the Port Harcourt Literary Society, Samuel is a well-travelled poet whose artistic journey was

profoundly influenced by meeting Chijioke Amu-Nnadi. He is a multiple award-winning poet, winner of the *Tor-quality Remembering Home Poetry Contest*, the *Shuzia Blog February 2021 Poetry Contest* (themed "Love"), and co-winner of *Pearl's Anthology*.

Solomon Idah Hamza is a Nigerian writer whose work explores the intricacies of life, particularly those moments that prompt reflection by day and restlessness by night. He is the winner of the *Ngiga Prize for Humour Writing* (2025) and the *Afristories Prize for Horror Flash* (2022). He was shortlisted for the *Enugu Literary Society Prize* (2024) and longlisted for the *Kikwetu Flash Fiction Prize* (2023). His writing has appeared in *Brittle Paper*, *Salamander Ink Magazine*, *Isele Magazine*, *Olney Magazine*, *RoadRunner Review*, *Shallow Tales Review*, *Illino Media*, *Ice Floe Press*, *Agbowo*, *Afritondo*, and elsewhere. He is active on X (formerly Twitter) @ST_hamza001.

Solomon Obika is a poet, writer, and student. He has collaborated with *Search for Common Ground* in advocacy efforts promoting freedom of religion. His poems have appeared in *Ake Review* (2024) and *Brittle Paper's Festive Anthology*. Solomon uses poetry as a medium for self-expression and to contribute positively to society.

Summayah Fahm is a young Nigerian poet and writer whose work is raw, emotive, and deeply personal. Through poetry, she explores life, emotion, and the silent struggles that often go unnoticed. Her writing reflects her lived experiences, weaving pain, longing, and self-discovery into verse that resonates with others. For Summayah, writing is not just a passion—it is a way of understanding the world, of speaking when spoken words fall short, and of finding beauty in the darkest places. She also dabbles in graphic design, creating visual expressions that complement her storytelling. Fascinated by the night

sky, she finds comfort in stargazing, where the vastness above reminds her that there is always more to dream about.

Sylvia Ohiaeri is an early childhood educator, short story writer, book reviewer, and read-aloud artist. Her stories often explore themes of humanity, love, family, community, resilience, and healing. She has extensively reviewed titles such as *How Butterflies Are Made*, *All My Dreams Are Real*, and *Across the Gulf*, among many others. Passionate about the evolution of short-form storytelling, Sylvia constantly seeks new ways to push its boundaries. When not teaching or writing, she enjoys reading, long walks, travelling, and experimenting with new recipes. 'Still with the Sunset' is one of several short stories she has written. She currently lives in Jos with her family.

Temswang Chrisantus Na'anlong is a photographer and educator from rural Nigeria, driven by a passion for storytelling and a commitment to amplifying the voices of his community. Born and raised in the village of Piapung in Mikang Local Government Area, his humble beginnings shaped his deep appreciation for the quiet, profound stories of everyday people. Through his photography, Na'anlong captures the beauty, resilience, and hope that characterise life in rural Nigeria. His work stands as a testament to photography's power to inspire, educate, and connect people across cultures and borders.

Younglan Talyoung is a multi-award-winning performance poet, veterinary medical student, community developer, and student union leader. He has performed at major festivals including the Lagos International Poetry Festival, Abuja Literary Festival, Benue Book and Art Festival, and HIASFEST Minna. Younglan has collaborated

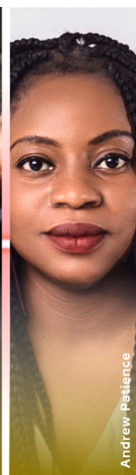
with organisations such as *Search for Common Ground* and *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, among others. His poems have appeared in *The Kalahari Review*, *Nanty Greens Magazine*, *Plateau State Tourism Magazine*, and *The Borderline Magazine*. A committed artist and changemaker, he seeks to spark dialogue and drive positive transformation. He coordinates the Tudun Wada Community Library and is a *Bada Murya Fellow* with the MacArthur Foundation. Younglan writes from Tudun Wada, Jos, in the company of his cats—Raven, Ragnar, Ripple, and Riley. Twitter: @Younglan_tal.

Jola Praise Ademola is a documentary photographer, multimedia artist, poet, painter, and social development advocate. A Mass Communication graduate from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, she integrates art with advocacy to amplify the voices of young people, women, and marginalised communities. Her work has earned recognition at the United Nations General Assembly and through initiatives such as the UNGA Art for Advocacy Youth Contest. A UNICEF Young Influencer, Jola serves as Programmes Officer and Digital Arts Curator at the SEVHAGE Literary and Development Initiative, and as Digital Arts Curator for African & Black Creatives for Development (ABC4D). Her practice combines photography, painting, poetry, and digital media to tell stories that inspire dialogue and social change.

TJ Benson is a Nigerian writer and portrait photographer whose work has appeared in several online journals like *Jalada Africa*, *Expound* and *Bakwa* magazine: in print magazines like *Harvard's Transition Magazine*, *Saraba's 'Transitions'* issue, *Catapult* and more recently *Gay Magazine* a partnership between Roxane Gay and Medium. He was the first runner up for the 2016 Short Story Day Africa Prize themed 'Migration' and a two time writer-in-residence at

the Ebedi Writers Residency Nigeria. His collection of short stories titled 'We Won't Fade Into Darkness' was shortlisted for the Saraba Manuscript Prize in 2016 before being published by Parresia House in September 2018 and has appeared on many best debut lists. He is also the author of the novels, *The Madhouse* and *People Live Here*. He tweets @tjbenson_ and you can follow his work on tj-benson.com.

The Team – JUDGES & EDITORS



Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim is a writer and editor currently based in the UK. He won the Quramo Writers' Prize in 2022 and was selected for the Best Small Fictions anthology in 2024. He was a finalist for the Faber Children's FAB Prize (2023), the Miles Morland Writing Scholarship (2022), the Masters Review anthology prize (2023), and twice in the Moon City Short Fiction Award (2022 & 2023). He has also been longlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize (2022), the Laura Kinsella Fellowship (2022), and the Dzanc Diverse Voices Prize (2021). He has multiple nominations for both the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net. Ibrahim is the editor of the Journal of African Youth Literature (JAY Lit).

Emma Kennedy is a passionate artist and small business owner specializing in hand-lettered designs, watercolor, and mixed media

art prints. Alongside her creative work, she serves as an Assistant Psychologist, supporting adults with learning disabilities. With a lifelong love for creativity, Emma finds inspiration in the people around her and strives to craft art that reflects the beauty of everyday life.

Su'ur E. Su'eddie-Vershima Agema is a multiple-award-winning writer, editor, cultural advocate, and development practitioner. Among other prizes across genres, he has won the *Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize* (2014 & 2022), the *Mandela Day Short Story Prize* 2016 and was a finalist for the [NLNG] *Nigeria Prize for Literature* (2022), Africa's most prestigious literature prize worth \$100,000. He has also been nominated for prizes such as the *SDGs Short Story Award 2021* by the Economic Commission for Africa; the *Wole Soyinka Prize for African Literature* (2018), the *Abubakar Gimba Prize for Short Stories* 2022, *Saraba/PEN Nigeria Poetry Prize* (2012), and the *Association of Nigerian Authors Prize for Prose Fiction* (2014). Su'eddie heads *SEVHAGE Publishing* and its sister charity, *SEVHAGE Literary and Development Initiative*, while convening the annual *Benue Book and Arts [International] Festival* (<http://bbaaf.com>) domiciled in Nigeria and England. He is also the Managing Editor of the notable poetry collective, *Konya Shamsrumi*. He also sits on the editorial team of *Cons-cio Magazine*, a global literary magazine produced by *Authorpedia/Words Rhyme & Rhythm Publishers*. Agema also convenes and administers the *SEVHAGE Literary Prizes*, a collection of different prizes across various genres. He blogs at <http://sueddie.wordpress.com>, is @sueddieagema on various media channels and also @sueddieofficial on Instagram.

Vanessa Chisakula, popularly known as *Vanvan*, is a multifaceted Zambian artist who harnesses the power of art as a compelling

medium for advocacy. She regards creativity as the essential thread that intricately weaves together the spheres of art and social justice. Her writing serves a dual purpose: to heal societal wounds and boldly voice truths that challenge the status quo. In 2023, she was honoured with the Africa Podcasts and Voice Award (Rising Talent in the Poetry category) and has been featured on a range of platforms including *The Guardian*, *BBC Focus on Africa*, and *Afro Women Poetry*. Her advocacy has taken her to global stages such as CSW66, the UN High-Level Global Conference, the Southern Human Rights Defenders Summit, the International Fundraisers Congress (IFC), the Africa Health Agenda International Conference (AHAIC), the WHO-AFRO's 75th Anniversary Commemoration, and the Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA). Vanessa is a MILEAD Fellow, a CIVICUS Youth Action Team member, and a Youth Leader for Nutrition under the Civil Society Network/Scaling Up Nutrition. She is also co-founder of Word Smash Poetry, a movement that promotes youth participation in governance through the arts. Her celebration of African identity is reflected in her 2020 poetry chapbook *Africana*. She has also been published in the *Women Scream Anthology 2020*, featured in PePeta Africa's *Our Voices* digital booklet, and is the writer and performer of the multi-award-winning poem *Her Place*, which powerfully advocates for women's rights.

Anre John is a mass media specialist, photographer, author, and host of *The World Tomorrow* podcast.

Andrew Patience (AP) is a poet and international development professional passionate about social justice, education and youth development. She uses spoken word and reflective poetry to explore themes of spirituality, identity, resilience, and justice. AP is the founder of *Custodians of African Literature (COAL)*, an Africa-based

nonprofit that promotes the use of creative arts as tools for social change. Her spoken word album, “*I Am*,” addresses critical social issues through powerful storytelling. She has been featured in the 2019 edition of *Raw Art Review* and has performed on platforms including the African Union GIMAC Summit (2021, 2022), IBM's *Human Code* (2020), the U.S. Department of State (2019), the Global Pathfinder Summit, and the University of Massachusetts Boston, among others.

WINNERS OF THE ART4LIFE COMPETITION 2025

(Listed according to categories)

DROWNING

Winners

Chisom Nsiegbunam (Flash Fiction)
Bukunmi Oyewole (Photography)
Onobhamiukor God's Gift (Poetry)
Talyoung Younglan (Poetry)

Honourable Mention

Pamela Erhiakeme (Flash Fiction)
Michael Adebisi (Photography)
Adebanjo Abiola Deborah (Poetry)
Alfred Olaiya (Poetry)
Elias Denen Dodo (Poetry)
Henry Opeyemi (Poetry)
Grace Olatinwo (Poetry)
Oluwaseyi Oladunjoye (Poetry)
Summayah Fahm (Poetry)

MATERNAL MORTALITY

Winners

Michelle Nnanyelugo (Flash Fiction)
Salvatore Elixir (Poetry)

Honourable Mention

Kondwani Bwalya (Poetry)

Samuel Leumas (Poetry)

Audrey Mulamba (Poetry)

John Ebute (Poetry)

SILICOSIS

Winners

Kehinde Adedayo (Flash Fiction)

Abdulrazaq Salihu (Poetry)

Honourable Mention

Juliana Agomuo (Flash Fiction)

Lois Shamu (Poetry)

Solomon Obika (Poetry)

SNAKEBITE

Winners

Solomon Hamza (Flash Fiction)

Onyishi Chukwuebuka Freedom (Poetry)

Chrisantus Taanlong Temswang (Photography)

Honourable Mention

Sylvia Ohiaeri (Flash Fiction)

Innocent Ojo (Poetry)



HELD TOO BRIEFLY brings together the winning works and honourable mentions from the Art for Life (Art4Life) campaign 2025, a competition that called on poets, storytellers, and photographers to illuminate the silent tragedies of avoidable deaths, as a commemoration of the 'International Awareness Day for Avoidable Deaths.' Through powerful words and striking visuals, this collection bears witness to lives lost to drowning, maternal mortality, snakebites, and silicosis; tragedies that didn't have to happen. But beyond the sorrow, these pages speak of resilience, remembrance, and the urgent need for change. This is a call for reflection, to awareness, to action, to hope...and more...because no life should be held too briefly.



Edited by multiple award-winning writers, S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema, Andrew Patience and Ibrahim Babátundé Ibrahim, this collection features contributions from Temswang Chrisantus Naanlong, Anre John, Bukunmi Oyewole, Michael Temi-tope Adebisi, Chisom Nsiegbunam, Michelle Nnanyelugo, Solomon Idah Hamza, Kehinde Adedayo, Pamela Erhiakeme, John Ebute, Sylvia Ohiaeri, Juliana Agomuo, Gift Onobhamiukor, Younglan Talyoung, Abdulrazaq Salihu, Onyishi Chukwuebuka, Kondwani Bwalya, Solomon Obika, Lois Shamu, Samuel Leumas, Grace Olatinwo, Oluwaseyi Oladunjoye, Audrey Mulamba, Summayah Fahm, Dodo Elias Denen, Abiola Deborah, Henry Opeyemi, T. J. Benson, Jola Praise Ademola, and Innocent Tarojacho Ojo.

