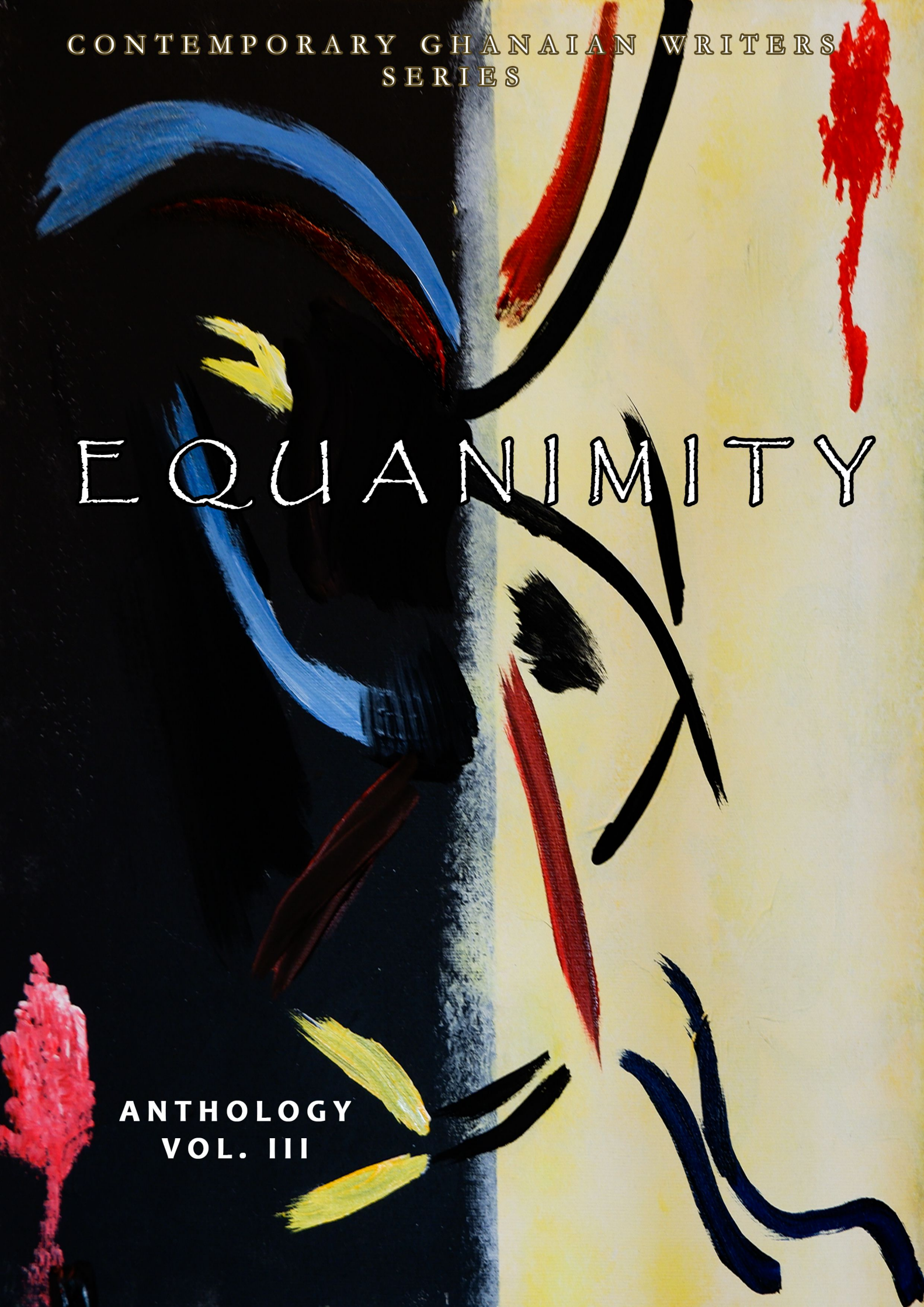


CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN WRITERS
SERIES

EQUANIMITY

ANTHOLOGY
VOL. III



EQUANIMITY

An Anthology of Poetry, Fiction and Non-fiction
Curated by Contemporary Ghanaian Writers' Series (CGWS)

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Preface

It is easy to skim through an anthology like this, graze the words in one swift motion and then, arrive at its end barely touched, as if one did not just encounter its quiet life, its vulnerable truths. It is precisely what makes this collection require your full attention and gentle presence to sit with it; not for any complexities because the language is simple and clean, rid of decorations and cuts straight to the heart of the piece; and not for any elements of dramatization for the poems and stories are flooded with the strength of humanity, an ordinariness of living and of course, all that is striking and disturbing about the human condition.

There are nineteen writers and with each authentic voice, they touch on everything from the bond of family, the fierce portrait of love, power and exploitation as well as the beauty in composure and quietude in the midst of disruption—a necessary read for this unprecedented time. The voices of these writers are unflinching in their confessions and unsparing in what they set out to find. Take, for instance, the interplay between identity and relations in Appoh’s *Conversations with my Mother* where the speaker admits “how I think of this body as not my own” and yet, in their own foreignness, “for the many things I cannot say,/ I would wear them,/ till you can see them clearly.” Or in *Shedding* by Yemofio, when the speaker is so deeply connected to their mother that what is passed on is just as relevant as what is left unanswered: “Who taught you love?/ I do not teach my children what I do not understand”

There is an attempt of speakers wrestling and bridging themselves to the other side, whatever that may be: some clarity or truth or an urgent hope they can only arrive at by interrogating and doing the heavy work of disentangling. What I keep coming back to is how the writing illuminates a collective witnessing through an unwavering gaze—it is a single thread that is carried purposefully on the pages. One will find it in Vanderpuye’s *God’s Wanderers*, a touching letter in which a man recounts tracing his roots back home and it is infused with the threat of racism and also its futility. In Katai’s short story, *Balance*, there is an exposé on government failure, a resistance against police brutality and a private look into a mother’s maddening grief. These are works asking us to not to look away, to make the bold decision to observe and reflect on the world and to actively partake in shaping it for better.

Far more remarkable is the symbolic structure of this collection: it is the third edition by the Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series and it is worth considering what it means for Ghanaians to be writing and owning our narratives, what it means to have outlets like this that believe in

and nurture potential. This anthology is a strong demonstration to what we can accomplish as a people, what expansion we can bring to our schools and libraries. To finally be able to share this with so many readers is, I hope, a mark of continuity for an experience that is not only impacting the country's literary landscape but also setting us up to be an integral voice in the evolving world of literature.

Our own Kwame Dawes has said when we open up and share our stories, we have a responsibility to tell them truthfully and especially, with the same quest for grace and beauty that we see in them. You won't miss this in Peprah-Agyemang's *Firstborns Don't Cry* where the intimate voice of a son in deep sorrow is captured: we see fragile masculinity for what it is and the desperate attempt to shield oneself from feeling what they ought to. Be ready for what Benyin uniquely offers through dialect in his poem, *The Morning that Lied*—it pays a graceful tribute to our own language and boldly positions this work to attain a scope and range that is ambitious.

I have felt some sadness and triumph reading *Equanimity* and, by all accounts, grace and beauty have found their dwelling in these new voices. I hope you can read it with real kindness and a great deal of attention.

Tryphena Yeboah.

How We Mourn Without A Body

Tawiah Mensah

There is a song hovering over our roof.

It stays there even when the rains come.

It holds on tight even when silence dares to shake the very foundation.

My mother, a bed of raging waters, empties herself into her pots

and leaves echoes of laughter in every meal.

There are things we never talk about:

the burial of bodies, of the memories,

the unlearning of joy and the voice that carries it

The breaking down of shoulders that have carried stories

and bore every scar like its own.

I hear little prayers escape my mother's lips every now and then.

that God may find my brother and bring him home-

whole and untouched and ours

But for all we know today could be the day

our doors burst open with a man we barely recognize

with stories of battle wounds his mouth cannot pour.

But there is a song hovering over our roof.

Sometimes it sounds like my brother,
sometimes, it feels like a hand on my back, a presence.
moving through my being until hope has nowhere to hide.

Conversations with My Mother

Joseph Appoh

A lot got the crow to his mother.

-Arabian proverb

You were the first word we knew,

-Ma,

Perhaps we learnt to speak when we
were spoken into being,

with your mouth you shaped our faces,
molding us into existence with a name.

It was that day you knew, to give life meant
to truly come alive.

I think back to the last time we spoke,

how you managed to string each sentence,
a few errors your stubborn self
wouldn't let anyone correct.

"I still have it uno, I didn't pour it all into you"

you laughed,
your shrill voice, a spear piercing the darkness.

I smiled,

we seldom held conversations like this.

If only I could bear my truths to you,
I would say I've become more
of a man and less of a son,
that my nights are filled with different pleasures,
constant desires to re-live till
sleep comes for us all.

That I think of this body as not my own;
a selfless vessel to serve and never get in return,
to give till you're no more enough,
a dispenser only worth how much it can give.

I think of how hard it is for you to know me,
Like how your mother found it difficult
to know a child in a home where neglect amounts to survival,
and violence is a symbol of love.

There are still many things we both
haven't found a voice for,
but for the many things I cannot say,
I would wear them,
till you can see them clearly.

Edge Dance

Sena Cobblah

A little girl walked at the edge of the large Odaw river

Flailed her arms as she put one step before another her eyes glued to
the little immediate path in front of her swaying- doing a little rhythmic dance unaware that
one slip

and can make this her last

Sometimes I convince myself she did not know the implications of the fall not the
suffocation, chains binding her in the depths of rapids
nothing like the shock of a body losing ground The careless
abandon with which she smiles as feet follow the pattern she had
created

my baby is a careless one with the life she already has

She breathes without the hum of a ventilator and no fever racks her body and weakens her
perhaps she will know of this as it dawns on her her baby brother might finally keep her
Ben 10 flip flops

I wonder where she is now perhaps she learnt to find what she needed in another pawned off
the courage to dance- to keep her feet on a broader front

She may have fallen a few times now she knows

It hurts to fall it takes too much work she will need recovery

She may have traded her guts for a life on another path

broad and without thorns

monotonous

I wish her father taught her how to dance while she bent down to smell the flowers

Genuflection

Abena Awuku-Larbi

Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ,

Et concepit de Spiritu Sancto

1.

The scent of dung hangs heavy in the crowded room

Teeth shine bright from stiff lips pried apart by some muscular ability.

Glasses clink a bit too hard like the microwave at midnight.

No one no one talks about the stench .

Talk! You never ask an African parent “Why” unless you wish to wipe tear-stained hands with sloppy kisses of apology;

Hands that wielded the braided belt that dug gullies in your body

Everybody gets The Encounter. After that, there are things you accept without question

Like how a servant of the people enslaves them

Like how some animals are more equal than others

Like how a man is more human than a woman

Ecce ancilla Domini

Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum

2.

Not the prie-dieu, not the hearth

Not the penis without a sheath

Not the ring in golden glory; hiding the copper that needs to be serviced

Dear God, Father of All

I cannot speak to you unless through him

because I am nothing without him, so he says.

Have my broken body and my tired womb,

see my calloused hands and my untouched brain.

Your son calls himself my Lord, demanding my worship.

Your son calls himself my Love and glories in the sin of hatred.

Who am I to lift a judging eye?

Where lies my honor? Except to say, with exaggerated reverence and sycophantic submission, “Lord and Master, be it unto me according to your word”

Et Verbum caro factum est

Et habitavit in nobis

3.

I become human the way a poem comes to life-

in the dark recesses of the heart, floating about in blissful ignorance of the world outside.

A living thought becomes flesh, yes it becomes a word.

A word becomes a poem when it finds expression, dwelling among others of its kind.

I become a woman the way a poem becomes a being-

under the cover of darkness, deep in dreamless sleep
where bodies of clay become symbols.

The beginning of language

and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Ora pro nobis, Sancta Dei Genetrix

Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi

4.

Let us pray,

We beseech thee, Father of All

That, we to whom freedom of choice was denied,

may by the Passion trapped within our bodies, be brought to the glory of full humanity

Shedding

Roberta Amanda Yemofio

My mother wonders why I am afraid of the dark

When she herself on that 6am peeled my skin

Off the foreign sweat that did not belong

He smelled like hunger

I suppose all men do

“Is he the one?”

My mother wonders if every man I bring home is the one.

You did not move from the space your lover left you

I have become your body Ma

I move when you do

What does it mean to let go?

You do not get used to being left behind.

Every loss is a reminder of the previous

Like when a still born is detached from a wailing mother

And her hollowness tells of a broken camaraderie

Who taught you love?

My mother says:

I do not teach my children what I do not understand.

Love is an alien tongue.

I teach you how to forget, how to be brave,

How to sit in silence like a home does.

No one knows the chaos that goes on in a home.

Between the Living and the Dead

Naa Momo

Kwao had never really liked the solemn hymns they sang at funerals, and so the Presbyterian hymnal remained untouched in front of him. He felt disembodied; unsure of how he was standing, or how he was even conscious enough to register the worn-down maroon carpeting on the dais, the cracked black leather on the empty seats against the wall of the sanctum, or the light-yellow scratches in the warm-tinted wood of the pulpit. His body was present, but the man himself was not.

His sister's smiling face stared back at him from the banner behind the congregation leaders on the stage. He stared at the creases in her nose that forever accompanied her giggles, at her rounded cheeks. He lost himself in her twinkling eyes, waiting for her to climb through the sombre floral wreath framing her face and over the endless list of whoever the fuck was sad that she'd died, over the calligraphy depicting her full name and her house name, "Sweetie". He waited for her to spring back to life and laugh at how distraught he was at her well-executed prank. He'd been waiting on it for the past 4 weeks, and with every day that passed, he became more and more despondent in his realisation that his sister wasn't coming back. Sweetie was gone from the world, from him.

Someone was wailing in the church hall, and he couldn't tell who it was. Kwao smiled to himself, a slight curl of the lip that only his sister would have understood. At their grandmother's funeral when they were teenagers, a stranger who claimed to be a distant relative wailed and wailed for this *asafonukpa* she barely knew, in the presence of her actual family and friends. Later, they found out she had only showed up to get food. She was sent off with a pack of jollof, a few balls of kenkey and some fried fish, because that's exactly what *Mmaa* would have done and the family

knew better than to dishonour their matriarch while they prepared to finally lay her to rest. *Mmaa's* fierce love had taught them how to show up for each other with fervor, and Kwao was absolutely certain that for him, the fierceness of his fevered anguish was precisely what would kill him.

The wailing continued through the first hymn. In the middle of the second hymn, Kwao shifted back into his own body and realised he was the source of the anguished wordless pleas. His attempt at blocking the pain had failed, because he could feel it surging through him right then. . No matter how distressing, there was no way he could stop himself from coming to terms with the loss - his body and pain had connected; two faceless figures sitting in *Mmaa's* guest parlour, chatting animatedly over tea and biscuits. He peered at them through the doorway and they looked over expectantly, waiting for him to walk into the room so the three of them could hold hands and be one again. He drew her white lace curtain closed, obstructing their view of him so he could guiltlessly wallow in his unwillingness to face them just yet.

Kwao felt Jerry shift beside him. His eyes roved the room and blurrily registered the sympathy in the congregation that was struggling to sing over his wails. His knees buckled and his head fell back, but his best friend locked his arms around his torso, like a harness holding the pieces of him together.. They'd been together when he'd received the call. She'd been walking just on the ear of the road to buy some koko when she was barrelled into by one the young boys in the area. The boy had taken a joyride on his older brother's motorcycle and lost control. What was supposed to be secret practice for his dream Suzuki beast had needlessly killed Sweetie, even in the face of his tearful apologies from his hospital bed, then the loss was too unbelievable for Kwao to do anything but nod in acknowledgement. .

"Chale, Kwao. Aknor, aknor. You dier, cry." Jerry was worried. There was no telling if his friend would ever survive this loss. He knew how close the siblings were. Since he'd met them in primary school, they had been inseparable. He saw how much more they leaned on each other when

their grandmother died, and realised even then that there were parts of his best friend that he would never reach because he only gave them to his sister. . It was a struggle for Jerry to comfort his broken friend who seemed to be so numbed from shock. Everything became a murmur to Kwao as he retreated into his mind.. His consciousness found comfort in their grandmother's home-- where they had grown up, and every corner held a memory of them and their bond. Here, things were untouched, perfect. Far away from the cold hospital morgue, far from the musty church; he could be a prepubescent troublemaker, plotting innocent mischief with his sister, his favourite co-conspirator.

Sweetie walked out of her room munching on an apple. He looked up at her and smiled as she joined him at the dining table. At least here, away from the mourners and the reality of life now, he could give himself the permission to feel something akin to joy.

"Do you want some?" she asked teasingly, extending the half-eaten red orb to him. He leaned forward to bite, and she withdrew her arm and put the fruit to her own lips. After a satisfying crunch, she teased, "Sorry." He couldn't help but laugh, because who the fuck was he going to do these silly things with now?

"Oh, Sweetie. So you too, true true, you've left me here?" She saddened visibly and lowered the browning apple core to the table. After chewing the last of it, she reached for his hand.

"I'm sad too, that day I was going to get you extra koose and everything! But think of it like this; I'm gone so now you can do everything you need to, and you won't have to worry about me being alone. And I got to this side first, so I can prepare your room and things for when you get here too. I'm even going to see *Mmaa* tomorrow. She was so excited when I spoke to her earlier." She paused for a beat, and then encouraged, "It's not all bad, okay?"

Leave it to her to find the upside for him even when she wasn't with him anymore. He felt her tap his hand and push it a little bit. "You have to go back and face the things, babe. I know it's hard, but you have to."

He nodded tearfully in agreement and got up from the table. As he phased out of his mental sanctum she dissolved into fog, shouting, "Don't make that face! Ugh, you're so sappy!" He walked past the white lace curtain he had drawn, whispering his last direct declaration of love to her as the organist played the last chords of the third hymn. He felt his body still, and something akin to peace—or resignation—wash over him. And then, his wailing stopped, and all was silent.

Like Water

Roberta Amanda Yemofio

Before you let me touch you

Know that I am a crashing wave

Love me accordingly

My wings got burnt in the fire my father lit with his cigar

And so ashes met river and 'stay' became synonymous with 'escape'

Love me accordingly

I would let you hold me but

The men who took turns warming my heart, bit pieces and called me bitter.

And have you ever cradled crashing waves to sleep?

Maybe you do not meet the criteria

Before you allow yourself to love me,

know that an anchor is not good enough for this body.

I will flow in the parts of you that need filling

but do you have the strength to make me stay?

The Morning that Lied

Kwabena Benyin

Morning has spoken to me, he said things would be promising today.

Ɔ'san ka kyere me se, Ɔ'de me totrobento no be bere me

Nanso, me nyane'e no mante ne ho mpanpan biara.

He lied to me. He lied to my face in my precious dream.

W'adada me wo me daeso no mu.

If someone had told me Morning would lie, I would disagree.

Nanso se nnye saa na me ne wo hyehyee me daeso no mu

Efise, wo ka kyere me se okyena anopa hema wo de me totrobento no be bere me.

Haven't you learnt enough of my loyalty, my truthful words, my fulfilling sayings?

Se me ne wo mienu nim se nea me ka biara no me ye. Nti afei aden ne akyinnye yi?

Nnye saa nsem yi na wo ka kyere me daeso no mu—nti saana wo redada me?

He knows it.

He knew I needed my vuvuzela to awake the birds in my garden

who sing sweet melodies to my ears each morning.

He always knows.

When morning comes, I sound it in a solemn manner,

So its vibration will run through my stomach and quicken the worms thereof.

Let me send a loyal person;

This time, I'll look for Evening,

I'll speak sense into him. I'll make him send my words to Morning.

Evening is not like morning; he keeps his word.

Nti, me soma Anadwo—

Na afei deε, meka me nsem nyinaa krataa so, na ma se Anadwo se,

Ɔ'du nkwantinfi na ɔ'ne ne nua

Anɔpa di nhyia a to no nkra se mese megye me totrobεnto no ayε adeε—na m'akoma te.

Lung Fish

Ernestina Edem Azah

Excess is excessive. Be cooled in water, not air.

Don't breathe. Drown. —Jamaal May

Floating in bubbles

we push our faces up-
up and out for water.

For drowning exists

in air too.

Up and out for water,

we soak our matter.

Hopeful that air

is what we need
to stay afloat.

Drowning in air

amidst bubbles of beings

Silent screams

Consumed by air

We only find you

Dead.

Another pushed out

from a fluid home

of contracting uterus

and tearing vagina,

eager to down air only

Fills up your spot

Completes the universe

Learns to think of water

As a drowning agent

While air gulps her down.

And while air sucks her life,

she accepts it without censure.

Thinking to stay away from water

since she believes drowning only exists in water

but she wakes up

Dead.

Her Last Prayer

Abena Awuku-Larbi

Our Father in Heaven

Let this cup depart from me

See! They bring sticks and throw stones

because I am a dog with no home.

They hurl words and draw spit from unwashed throats

because I was born in the pen with goats

But,

forgive their eyes which were trained to see the poverty
that wraps my body as the witchcraft that binds their glory

Our Father in Heaven

Accept this gift of life I have no desire to offer

I place on this altar of murder torn flesh and crushed bones,

The thorny crown of my old age.

Here, take my broken spirit too

pummeled flat by hands that glory in the sin of hasty judgment.

Ah! The devil that hides in sheep's skin can now be seen with the naked eye!

But,

Forgive their eyes which were trained to see the poverty that wraps my body

as the witchcraft that binds their glory

Our Father in Heaven

When I get to the paradise they tell me exists

Welcome me, would you?

For I am your daughter too

The Body

Success Agbenu

The body sheds tears for a lot of reasons

when it's afraid or sad or happy.

My body cannot remember the last time it shed a tear.

Even though it still has fears as dark as the melanin that covers it,

even though it has sorrows weightier than ocean water,

even though its delights never seem to hover around for long.

My body always seems to forget how to shed a tear

even when it should

like a senile man who forgets his children's names.

They say God's tears are the rains that nourish the earth with life,

like water nourishes the body

but what is the body

if not a piece of earth we take and aren't content with?

I love the body within which I steal breath into.

I love the body, this body which I'm only a part of.

I love how it has all your attention.

I love how it is unappreciative of me.

I love how it makes a fuss about my flaws.

The body is the narcissist nobody notices

This body that has more control over me than my desires, I love to call my home.

And just like every home appreciates its wearing,

I've learned that mine has its own tracks

that lead me through every scar and hurting,

back to my body.

Balance

Hillary Katai

"Your son is dead."

She had dreaded hearing this although a part of her felt it was inevitable. She still chose to be hopeful that such evil wouldn't befall her. How were the weapons fashioned against her prospering? Fiery darts launched at her were clearly not missing their target and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Folake had set off early for work that day to avoid being reprimanded by her boss for any lateness. She wouldn't even think of choosing the latter. That is what happens when you have a choice but don't have a choice. Quite frankly, she disliked her job. Her boss was a potbellied man in his late forties. In her country, being potbellied signified wealth and affluence. The bigger the belly, the greater the wealth. If she had to interpret this on a graph, that graph would have sloped upwards, indicating the positive relationship between a protrusion and wealth. Everyone at work called him uncle Ojo. He was friendly to whom he thought was deserving of it. He smelt like money and could smell money. Like a bee, he cleaved unto any flower heavily laden with nectar. The sight of him disgusted her.

Before she left for work, she baptized her son with holy water her priest had given her. She did so religiously, every single morning. That morning was especially important. Her son Ola had been actively involved in the ongoing protests. Even though she pleaded with him not to, he insisted it was for a good cause: To end the reign of the locusts that had so much plagued them. It baffled him how the agencies that swore to protect the citizenry ended up being the same agencies the citizenry

had to protect themselves from. To him, it was more than a fight against police brutality but against the government and corruption. He couldn't understand why palliatives meant to cushion the suffering masses during the pandemic were hoarded by the government. The pandemic was hard enough as life had literally come to a standstill. Money was hard to come by, and hoarding what was meant to bring relief to struggling families was adding pain to injury. To him, the real plague was the government. He knew to relent would be to ignore the happenings around him. He couldn't intentionally choose to be oblivious. That day, as his mother quickly sprinkled Holy water on him while chanting a religious song as explicitly instructed by her priest, he was determined to make his voice heard in every corner and ally, for God and country.

On her way to the door, Folake turned and smiled at him before closing the door behind her. He reminded her so much of her late husband. Ola had grown to be more and more like him with each passing day. His dark hair, massively chiseled jaw line, and his broad chest. She sighed. "Why did you have to leave me to raise him on my own?" she asked the heavens.

Ola's father gave his life for his country on a peacekeeping mission, the cause of his death still unknown. She quivered and quaked the afternoon she heard the news of his demise. Her hair was now greying and the creases on her forehead now much more evident. She was aging earlier than nature would have wanted her to. She wrestled everyday with her in-laws over the properties of her gone husband. She wanted to give up. Having to provide for a son and having constant feuds with in-laws weighed heavily on her. Or perhaps she should have married the chief imam's son who had expressed interest in her? She chose not to because she preferred a believer, and she didn't want to be unequally yoked. If she had said yes to him, her story would have perhaps charted different waters, calm waters. Not the turbulent ones she now faced. She couldn't call it a storm over paradise, for there was no paradise to begin with. Her parents would have rather she married

someone with money but to their disappointment, she chose love. She got married to love without their blessing.

Perhaps that was why she toiled, for she had not their blessing. She knew that in her toil lied a blessing; Ola. Her accursed blessing, her gift in her pain. She was proud of the man he was becoming. He did his best to fill the shoes of his gone father, striving to provide for the home, working alongside studies. He gave her a reason to push forth, and for that, she was grateful.

She was in the office that day when a curfew was announced. This was a ploy by the government to get the protestors off the streets. The curfew was to take effect from six that evening. She looked at the clock on the wall. It was a few minutes past four. She calculated the distance and the time it would take to head for home. She factored in the protests and the fact that roads will be blocked. She decided to wait it out in the office until restrictions were lifted. She called Ola to check in and find out his whereabouts. She couldn't get to him. She took in deep breaths and decided not to panic. "His phone is probably dead.", she said to herself. Her colleagues at work also checked in on their families. She's pretty sure they've factored in the time it would take to get home and have decided they'd rather wait it out in the office as well.

The sun was setting and she began to feel anxious. The office duplex was on lock down.

"Shame on this government. Who announces a curfew on such short notice? Why is it hard to listen to protestors who are demanding more than bare minimum from the agencies that swore to protect us? This country is worse than a joke."

She couldn't really contribute much to the conversation of her co-workers as she was thinking about Ola. Where could he possibly be? Was he safe? She said a silent prayer but her mind was still not at ease.

A few minutes after that conversation, news of protestors being shot at reached the office. The lights at the Lekki tollgate were switched off and peaceful protestors were being shot at. Her heart

began to race as she thought of the worst. She hoped her son wasn't in the wrong place at the wrong time. The curfew wasn't in effect yet as it wasn't six. Even if it was, was that justification to open fire?

Later that same day, a list of the protestors that were shot at was made public in the late bulletin of the news. The lives of sons and daughters, the fruit of a mother's womb, ended in such an inhumane manner.

She sat alone in a corner in silence. The silence was broken when uncle Ojo approached her to say, "Your son is dead."

She's running mad. Her joy and hope snatched from her. The only person who kept the pieces of her life together was gone. Her reason to stay afloat was gone. Now you ask her of balance? How would she find balance? This has been a period of exposing and revealing. A period where intents and governments are exposed for what and who they really are. An uprising occurred in her country, which took her son along with it. A government living on the largesse of society felt that alone wasn't enough. That government decided to take her son too.

To hell with uncle Ojo for having no ounce of professionalism in breaking such news to her. To hell with her love to a man. A man who fought for a country that knew not his name or his sacrifice. To hell with her parents for deciding to withhold their blessing from her. Damn herself for having given in to love instead of money. To hell with her in-laws who would let her deceased husband turn in his grave. To hell with her country for being hell on earth. Even though Ola just passed, she blamed him for getting involved in a state that had not a care for him or his future. A state that thought it wise to silence him with a bullet in his chest.

How does she find balance? She continues the fight. Though she'd have rather he hadn't joined such protests, she wants his legacy to live on. She will be his voice that shouts, "End police brutality." She will be his fist that was raised in the air as he paraded the streets. She will be his smile to others who

have lost a great deal in this fight. She will be his hug to others wanting an embrace. Above all else, she will be his hope. His hope that things could be made right. Relenting now would mean he died a foolish death and she will have none of that. Her son's blood cries from the ground. She will demand accountability from her state. She will demand justice. For the first time in a long time, she feels a surge through her body. The last thing she wants is sympathy. For once, she feels she's aware of her purpose. She knows her existence is bigger than she is. For this, she's ready to give her life. You may feel her mental health is being compromised. Far be it from that. The memory of her son and what he stood for lurks in her mind. That alone gives her the strength to move on and fight. Yes, she has lost a great deal, but what she's about to gain outweighs her losses. A future unwritten awaits her. She's the author of her future and she owes it to herself and her son that the chapters unfolding be nothing less than the best. She's going to keep in between the lines, not veering off the road, and take life a day at a time. Baby steps and short breaths, that's progress, her balance.

Tipping Scales

Henrietta Enam Quarshie

I carry my hurt and slash open a poem and bury it in there.

I did not stand on two feet and wobble and blame physics,

Instead of the common sense of needing both feet for balance.

I juggle the choices

Then I fail to pick me up again and again.

I toss caution and dare fate to catch It

Life is a disappointing lover

And I— a sucker for pain

On some days I give an offering of self-sabotage

In all the ways I try to feel life coursing through me

Sometimes the scale barely tips to me and won't stay long when it does.

I feel I'm alive because I have not yet made it to the boneyard

Taking living as an antonym for dying

But there is resolve—

I bend

I break

But for what it's worth—

I am still here

Dear Taadi Girls

Abena Awuku-Larbi

1.

Dear Taadi Girls,

We still stand at the gate with the fervent hope that you would come home.

Oh the joy! To see you skipping down the road that leads you to Mama's heaving bosom.

We still think of you

and what it means to be woman and Ghanaian...whose only protection is her constant wariness.

We still have our heads trapped between sweaty palms

and we ponder over how a woman's only redeeming feature is her viability for political optics;

a fluffer for the impotent, a barbell for the strong.

2.

We kneel before the Black Star for you,

the gravel wet with salty libation.

The sea envies the water we have made for you.

We kneel with the knowledge that the Big Man's uniformed snipers will come running shortly –

filthy hounds from Hell!

Ready to blow our heads into a splatter of blood and grey matter.

Hit the blunt! I can hear the sound of the feet tapping in the distance.

As the disembodied voice from their radios blare "take all of them by force"!

We, as one surrender to the high that wipes away desperation

The high that will reset the system

The high that blends into the biting winds

Winds that would sweep all over the world carrying the intensity of our desire

that our daughters would come back home.

3.

What is a virus that only eats the skin, barely grazing the soul?

What is a bullet that only tears apart the heart's tendons and cannot capture the soul in its grip?

It is rebellion that brought us this far

It is rebellion that will bring us home

Love That Spells Home

Tawiah Mensah

For so long you have run away from anything that smells like home only to wake up in the arms of your father.

In falling in love they say to take your head with you and watch your heart sluggishly follow because men are creatures with no backbone who cannot read a stop sign.

But what is love without a tumbling down of Jericho's and little butterflies that leaves you drunk and empty at the same time.

Today I hope you dance wearing your heart like a sleeve.

That your laughter rings like church bells on Sunday morning and awakens the darkness in places you do not care to mention.

Scalpel

Henrietta Enam Quarshie

It's 2:00am

Somehow you are awake.

You question your consciousness at this time.

There's a stench of blood

heavy in your throat.

Your heart drops like your insides are goo

To-do list:

- Wake up; 6:00am
- Don't die before 8:00am
- First surgery

Blood. Burning flesh. More blood.

Is this your bed or a theatre bed?

Clink!

The scalpel from last night's practice falls off your bed.

You rush to stop the bleed from your little toe. Blood. More blood.

It's 4:00am

Yawn.

The day opens up its mouth and swallows you whole. Like always

Firstborns Don't Cry

Barima Peprah-Agyemang

The sky looked bleak as I stepped out of the house. It looked like it was going to rain soon. Just perfect.

"Come on, Kofi, let's go," my Uncle Kwame said softly. His old-man-aftershave-smell reminded me of Da. He was the one sibling who had mirrored Da in everything, from looks to educational pedigree. For years, he had served as Da's right hand man in his enterprises, the one guy who wouldn't steal from him – a true rock. I felt him push me along with his palm as he led us towards the gate. I straightened out the crease in my long-sleeved black shirt. Da always hated shirts that weren't ironed well. He always did say his Prempeh College training would not allow him to wear clothes which had not gone through an intensive ironing session with a significant amount of starch.

Outside, a group of elderly women, probably one of the many family relations I was supposed to know but did not, were wailing loudly. My sinuses started to feel hot. I knew what was about to happen. I bolted into Uncle Kwame's car. I was not about to embarrass myself. Nobody had to see me cry. If I quickened my pace, looked away often and held myself firmly together, they wouldn't know.

The car started moving, with Ebo, Uncle's longtime chauffeur at the wheel. The sound of the air conditioner filled up the uneasy silence in the car. Soon enough, we were on the main road, heading towards the venue. I saw posters plastered on the streetlights that lined the road. Nothing really out of the ordinary on most days, but this time, Da's smiling face was on them with the words

“A Call to Glory” next to them. Glory my foot. If he was here, he would say no “glory” could be better than an afternoon in the Stellenbosch villa, sipping wine and reading a good novel.

The car sped past Amina's Koko stall. Dad and I would've been there right now, swapping jokes with the neighbours as we get hot Koko from Amina for Saturday breakfast. I sight Ntim arranging the newspapers and mags at his stand. On any weekday, Da would've stopped the car to get his daily newspapers and the magazines available. I would thumb through them all whilst listening to the usual Daddy Lumba playing in the car.

My sinuses started burning again. No, no firstborns don't cry.

I take the tribute out of the file I've been holding and try to read over it. The lines keep merging. I try it again. It's worse.

I look out the window again and see the familiar spires of the Presbyterian Church. Those spires used to give me reassurance that I was about to enter the belly of God's House. Now, it filled me with anxiety.

The car pulled off the road and meanders towards the church. It comes to a stop at the entrance. A relative I have never seen before opens the door and attempts to hold my hand. I slap it off immediately. I am no invalid. Without waiting for anyone, I bound up the stairs and entered the inner sanctum.

Everyone and I mean everyone is here. From my thieving uncles, who I regard as traitors, to the nurse who looked after my father in his last days.

I take a seat in the third row. Our favourite row. It was from there we could bask in the sweet voices of the choir singing the Presbyterian hymns so melodiously. It was also where we could get a good view of the church elders sleeping so we could sneak laughs during the sermon. The coffin lays ahead. People swarm about it with pious faces: hypocrites, every single one of them - the

ones who stole from him, the ones who betrayed him, the ones who exploited him, pretending as if they care.

“The family can come forward now,” I hear the priest say in his sonorous voice.

Uncle Kwame appears by my side. "You need to see him one last time."

I look up into his face as he says this and see pity in his eyes. I am getting sick and tired of seeing that look. "Come on, let's go," he says as he taps my back with a tad of impatience. I don't want to go, but his insistence was infuriating and I wanted to get it over with.

I stand up and start edging towards the coffin. My eyesight starts to get blurry. For God's sake, firstborns don't cry! I tell myself. The burning persists.

I was so close to the coffin I could stretch my hand and graze my father's cheek. He doesn't look dead; he has that look on his face when he takes his afternoon naps. There is one difference, though.

I don't see his chest heaving. A chill with a ferocity I have never experienced before passes through my entire being. My God, wake up Da wake up! You can't just up and leave. No no no!

I feel something roll down my cheek.

A Mother's Anger

Success Agbenu

My mother's heart vents on most quiet mornings to the wind.

To the wind for the first time, my mother says prayers she has always held back.

She has always held back her anger in a soft voice that cannot cut unless broken like glass

My mother believes in the god that made her

voice the moral compass in a house of distrust.

But I've come to believe in the sun,

as much as my brother believes the ocean is just another dead body

as much as my father believes in the stories the sky tells him.

And in this story, there's a king brave enough to listen to the anger in my mother's soft voice.

Living with Fear

Akua Adjeiwaa Asomani-Adem

My whole life, I have been a girl who was afraid. “You got it from him,” my mother says of my father, whose own fears I have recently written about. With what is now known about how genetics and environment shape who we become; I have no doubt that at least some of my fear is inherited. From whom is a topic I will debate with her another day.

In elementary school, this fear was a constant presence on my walk to school with my cousins, knowing that some minor infraction during the day could earn me lashes from my teacher. The fear was even more pronounced in class four, when as a new student at a school in Teshie, I soon started to dread going to school in the mornings because of the math mental drills that were accompanied by a cane if your answers were wrong or did not leave your mouth fast enough. By the time I was in junior high school, the fear was omnipresent, yet only manifested in periods when I had reached my tipping point, when I would either yell at other kids in my class or cry over what seemed like minor issues. “I used to be afraid of you,” a boy from my junior high would tell me years later. At home, I was highly irritable. “You’re so angry all the time,” my mother said back then. “You’re too emotional,” was another phrase I heard more than once. My fear existed as a tightness in my chest. A tightly wound coil that, try as I may, I could not loosen. As a teen and in university, friends would jokingly rag on me for being so uptight. “Principal” and “headmistress” were among a few nicknames that I earned from my inability to relax. Even more crushing was realizing that my very young brother, who I wholly adore, was starting to pick up on my difficulties letting go of the small things. To their credit, my family and friends were very accommodating and held space for me

in ways I never really thought about until recently. “If I could only loosen the coil a little bit,” I frequently thought. Despite all of the evidence and two panic attacks in the space of three years, I did not think of myself as someone needing to seek help. After all, I was still going through the motions of a fairly successful life, even completing my masters in Psychology. I did not fit the archetype in my mind of the kind of person who deserved a therapist’s time.

Then came 2017. The start of my unfunded PhD program and being unable to secure a job after weeks of searching sent my fear into overdrive. In addition to the fear, I started to think about what it meant for me to occupy space in the world. “Maybe I don’t deserve to be here,” was one that popped up frequently. How worthless I was, taking up space and making my mother have to bend over backwards to support me in an expensive program when I was well into my 20s. Around me, people that did not know me very well commented on how well I was handling the no-funding situation as they watched me go through the motions of succeeding in class and volunteering for extra-curricular activities. Yet, in my quiet moments, I was still engulfed by my fear and despair, convinced my family’s life would be better without me in it. While I was having these thoughts, I still did not think I deserved therapy, having started and quit the last few months of 2017.

In summer 2018, things came to a head when I thought for the first time about how I could take my life. While brief, the thought scared me enough to make an appointment at my school’s counselling center. Through 2018 and 2019, those kinds of thoughts became more frequent. Driving on the highway, the sight of roadkill would send me spiraling. What was the point of life? Did those animals have family who were mourning their absence? It killed me to think that those animals had, in the moments before dying, no awareness they would die that day. These thoughts gave more impetus to my thoughts about dying. Since I could not envision a future, maybe I could take control and die now. Over time, in therapy, the thoughts slowly became less frequent, though still present.

My fear, however, still remained. More than one time, we had to begin my session with deep breathing because I rated my anxiety at a 6 or 7 out of 10.

“Consider seeing a psychiatrist,” my therapist recommended, towards the end of 2019. Still, I said no. Thankfully, he put in a referral anyway, giving me the option to follow up on it if I ever needed it. I did not take him up on it until months later, when I had a panic attack in a class where my professor incessantly expressed racist and sexist sentiments. The panic attack was an awakening, mostly because it happened in public, with people who had no idea about that side of me. Finally, I admitted the problem might be larger than I previously thought and scheduled an appointment with a psychiatrist for the beginning of 2020. To this day, I still think back to that hour and how much that decision has shaped my experience of 2020.

“You have what is known as a *Generalized Anxiety Disorder*,” he said, after minutes of questioning me about information he had gleaned from my therapist’s note. Suddenly, it felt like my whole life made sense. I had lived with fear for so long that it became my normal. In the minutes that followed, he outlined my options, one of which was medication. I left his office excited by the prospect of no longer having panic attacks. It was not until a week later, when I felt the benefit of this pill for the first time that I understood how differently I had been experiencing the world before. It finally made sense why my reactions had seemed unusual to the people around me.

For the first time, the tightness and the coil in my chest were completely unfurled. That semester, I no longer needed to doodle on the sides of my notebooks to help me stay present in class. I also did not feel like I was going to physically break down at 5 pm each day. I finished assignments quicker because I did not have to read several papers to feel confident enough to write one line. I played games at parties with friends, something which I previously refused to do because I found competition too stressful.

Although I am saddened by the devastating impact of Covid-19 and the different pace of life we have had to adjust to, the switch to remote working has helped ease my fear even more, because I am interacting with less people, which requires less social energy and equals less anxiety for me. I am also able to complete my myriad obligations with less stress since most of it can be completed from home, limiting my driving between obligations, which sometimes exacerbated my anxiety because of sirens and sudden movements of other cars. At this rate, I may even consider watching a horror movie one of these days. What is strangest about the year I am having is to think that the start of finding balance for me was the three words *Generalized Anxiety Disorder* coupled with one small daily pill.

Now, I am learning to balance how vulnerable to be with the people around me. As someone in the mental health field myself, it is important to me to normalize psychological disorders. For me, this has meant disclosing my diagnosis to people dear to me and talking about instances when I feel anxious to encourage others to seek help when they need it. Yet, there is a certain vulnerability that comes with disclosure. My anxious brain questions whether people I love will see or treat me differently and whether people are tired of hearing me talk about the ways in which I navigate the world. Whatever the case may be, I hope to continue to share my journey with the people around me. My name is Adjeiwaa, and this year I have found balance by understanding my anxiety disorder.

Sojourners

Emmanuel Nii Attram Taye

So here we stand

at the crossroads.

In the planes of life and death,

in the dimensions of existence.

Our only desire is to see the sun rise again.

Forget about the gold along the shore,

the yellow threads from the sun are enough, for today

We just want to live...

Long...

Longer than today

So here we sit

on our bottoms

in the companies of those we shun so often.

Trying to make awkward conversation,

discovering beauty in fellowship

and human interaction.

For some, isolation is the new normal

and insulation; white tents and transparent tubes.

We don't want what belongs to Caesar.

Take it all if you will, but give us the bliss of proximity

not social distancing.

We just wish we could...

touch...

one another.

So here we cry:

Save our souls.

Mayday! Mayday!!

But the watch tower itself is plagued.

Who will come for us?

The storm is tempestuous

and the lighthouse has lost its shimmer.

Forget about the treasures of the ocean

we just want to reach...

the shore...

safely

So here we smile

in optimism.

Sheer hope, fragile hope

We see the gloom

yet we try to overlook it.

To catch a glimpse of the silver lining the dark clouds.

Will the sun rise again?

Forget about the burn on our skin and the pungent sweat.

We want to revel...

in the kiss...

of the sun's radiance once more.

God's Wanderers

Nii Sackey Vanderpuye

This was written by an old, homesick clergyman who yearns for a home that he has never known.

Dear Uncle,

My origin story spins a tale that not even the cleverest of writers can fathom. My parents stowed away on a cargo ship that was bound for London in the year 1918. Per my father's account, they were huddled up in the cargo hold for nearly a month, surviving on cocoa beans and the water that condensed on the windows. To the detriment of their scheme, they were discovered before the ship reached London and were consequently cast off at a port in Serbia. In the years that followed, my mother and father lived and worked as surfs for Oligarchs. I was born four months after my parents were cast off – as a matter of fact, I was one of a pair of twins; however, my twin never made it past three days. I cannot tell for sure if my twin was a boy or a girl – for my father neglected to observe the sex of his newborn babies – but I digress. My mother proceeded to have five more children in quick succession, of which three died before reaching puberty. My mother died of consumption before I turned six, and now I can scarcely recall her visage. I quite recall my father selling my mother's corpse to a scientist who studied anatomy (a fact later corroborated by my father). I vaguely remember him selling the bodies of two of my three deceased siblings to that very scientist. The scientist, Dr. Smirnov, was like a vulture, visiting our household whenever someone died; however, his monetary compensations afforded us a decent living. When I turned ten, my father

sent me to live in the parish house, under the guardianship of a German Missionary – therein lies the first in the series of oddities that are my life.

You see, although I grew up in Serbia, I am incapable of speaking a word of Russian. Probably because the whites preferred our kind to keep to themselves, but the German Missionary (Brother Tobias) was unlike the Serbs. I remained in the parish house till I was 21, and in those years, I learned to read and write both English and German. Before that, I only spoke Akan since that was tongue my mother spoke in my infant years (Later, following her passing, father would unsuccessfully try to change languages from Akan to his native language, Ga). I loved Shakespeare, and I felt Plato was overrated, I also learned woodwork, arithmetic, and music. A week after I turned 21, brother Tobias succumbed to botulism and was succeeded by the rather hostile Father Ralph. No sooner was I cast out of the parish house to fend for myself.

Father Ralph sent me packing with my scarce belongings, old robes, a pair of boots, some rye bread, resins, and an atlas from the first world war. I managed to sneak out a letter of recommendation brother Tobias had written for me before his death. He assured me that the Catholic church in Germany would commission me for missionary work based on the words of his recommendation, so I set about my trip to Germany to become a missionary. But before that, I went in search of my remaining siblings and my father. I found my sister Adoma, and my brother Adotey, they still lived in the shack we were born in. Just like my parents, Adotey and Adoma worked as laborers, either tending to crops or sheering sheep. They were married and had a young son, barely three months old. We spoke at length in Akan and shared their dreams to save up enough money to return home to Accra – the beautiful land father so dreamily spoke about. Because I was dressed in Brother Tobias' old robes, they thought me a priest and requested that I bless their son, I hesitantly obliged, explaining I was merely in training to take up the priesthood. I blessed my young nephew and performed the sacrament of baptism; I prayed in German (for fear of offending my siblings) that

God would not hold his parents' crime of incest against him. You would have to forgive my account of the dialogue that ensued thereafter, for it has been nearly two decades since, and it was done in a language I cannot write.

"Papa is on the run from Dr. Smirnov; he sold his corpse premortem for 60 rubles. And he is under the impression that the doctor wants to kill him and claim his purchase" Adotey said, rather whimsically.

I visited with them for three days. And believe me you, those three days were agonizing – I struggled to suppress the impulse to judge their choice to live as husband and wife. When they were in fact, brother and sister. On the day that I departed, Adoma walked with me along the path that led up to the main road. For most of the journey, we walked in silence – until we reached the point where we had to say goodbye.

"I know you do not think much about my decision to live with our brother as husband and wife, but I pray your understanding and God's forgiveness for we are all we have in this cold, frozen wasteland," said Adoma

"I understand." was my only response. We embraced, and I departed. That was the last time I spoke with my sister. I would later be informed by a letter from Adotey, 12 years thence, that she fell ill and died on their voyage back home to the motherland.

I traveled 700 miles from Latkovac through Zagreb, then Vienna, then Belgrade, till I reached Hamburg in September of 1943. Based on the locale, I either traveled by train, or by horse wagon, or by horse-drawn coach, boat, or on foot. And although I was physically exhausted upon reaching Hamburg, I was delighted at the prospects that awaited me in Hamburg. I wasted no time in finding the Diocesan head office of the catholic church in Hamburg and presented my letter to Friar Thomas, (as instructed by Brother Tobias).

On the 12th of September, four days after I arrived at Hamburg, I was admitted into a baroque seminary in eastern Frankfurt. I must say, this was done with many compromises, for unlike the other men in the seminary, I had to take lessons from the corridor and work in the kitchen as a kitchen boy, and also work in the automobile yard, well, because I was unlike my seminarian brothers, in terms of color. But this arrangement did not bother me, for I had come to accept I was not born equal to the white man – I was in fact, God’s thoroughbred. My skin did not blister under the sun, I was stronger and more resilient, and most of all, I was wise enough to know that it is impossible to confer worth on a human being because of his race.

In the four years that followed my admittance, I lived and learned as a second-class human within the walls of the seminary and was due to graduate the most excellent student by the end of the fifth year. After which I was to be commissioned as a missionary to serve in either Aboriginal Australia, or South America, or in Africa. I prayed and fasted for providence to favor me and discharge me into the service of my motherland, Africa.

As fate would have it, providence would conspire against me, but before that grim tale unfolded, a young mulatto woman who had come into the employ of the seminary’s warden caught my eye. She was a year my senior and was of English and Sudanese descent. She worked as a maid in the warden’s bungalow. I courted her and wore her down with marriage proposal within two months, my passions for her raged in every fiber of my being, from mind to my heart to loins – I was consumed.

In February of 1949 I was commissioned as a minister and a missionary under the Presbyterian church – while I had set my sights on a catholic priesthood, I was black, and in the opinion of our revered pontiffs, could not be a priest – “for the lord abhorred my hue.”

And so, that same year, I set off to post with my wife and all belongings – all of which fit into my traveler’s portmanteau. My destination was somewhere in bucolic Australia, a town called Tasmania.

Our voyage to Australia was difficult; it lasted for two weeks, within which my wife's reservations about being a missionary's wife fully registered, but alas! It was too late to turn back. Obviously, she was no Jane Eyre, yet, I made do. We arrived in Australia in the company of some gypsies who were heading our way; as we journeyed from the port at Victoria to Tasmania, my wife developed a rather close yet innocuous (apparently) relationship with one of our travel companions. We settled into our lives at Tasmania rather quickly, and although it was hot and dusty, we made a beautiful homestead for ourselves in the parish yard. Our gypsy friends settled in the main town. And while a significant number of my parish was white, they regarded and accepted me with kindness. My wife bore me four children, two sets of twins, in quick succession. She no sooner disappeared with her gypsy friend and the entire gypsy caravan, abandoning me with our four children. I did not read the letter she left behind, for I knew she could neither read nor write and also for fear that I might gain sympathy for her cause. I never searched for her, and I didn't grieve her abandonment. I only continued to discharge my responsibility as a minister, and with the help of my congregation, I raised my four children.

It has been twenty years since, and my four children have grown – I must admit, all four of them do the Norman name proud. My first child, Dorothy Akyaa Norman (named after my mother) is studying in anthropology at the University of Melbourne, her twin sister Kalysa Norman is the teacher at the elementary school here in Tasmania. Then there is Tobias Odotei Norman (after brother Tobias), he is under training to be a priest in Rome, and his twin, Claudia Norman is my warrior princess, with a spirit as strong as Yaa Asantewaa's, she works as a reporter, covering the Berlin wall, and before that she was a red cross nurse on the battlefield during the Vietnam war.

I write not to engage your pity but rather to elicit your sympathies and pray you to count me among your sons. I live in a parochial world, one that demands that I dedicate all my time to my flock, I, therefore, pray you to sympathize with me and understand I cannot adjudicate what would become

of the days hence, but if God wills it to be so, I shall depart from these hostile shores and return home to the land of my ancestors, but until then, may the peace of our Lord God be upon you.

Your Son, Reverend Moses Papafio Norman.

Sleepy Peace

Priscilla Eyram Abodeka

1234

Let the calm wash over me

Can I sleep already?

1234

Slow breaths; in, out, in, out...

Clear your mind girl, you have to sleep

1234

Imagine floating on the clouds

Tune out of this world

1234

Ignore them, ignore the loud voices you hear

Let your counting drown the cries and gunshots

1234

Drift off my dear, drift off into your heart's-ease

Find that special place; where the breeze kiss your cheeks in slow motion

Where the fragrance of the flowers soothe you

Where all is quiet.

1234

Bask in the joy of your imagination

Pray they don't break into your safe haven

Away from the chaos all around you and where your mind makes you feel grounded.

1234

...

...

Foreign

Nii Amarah Amartey

The best time to go to Osu is after 5pm. The traffic is heavy and cars are barely moving so you don't have a hard time crossing the streets. The hawkers too are sore from walking under the scorching sun to call out to you. It is also a good time for an office wear fashion show. And of course, what other moment to connect with your diasporic friends who work in multinational corporations.

As she walked briskly past KFC, she could hear a man hissing at her and murmuring in Twi. She only made out 'Ohemaa.' She turned and asked if he wanted anything. They stood some 4 feet apart so her already shrill voice was more annoying than usual as she had to shout. He caught her southern accent and noticed she was American. He came close and started speaking English. This was not the first time a random man had approached her on the streets in the creepiest way. It was not the first-time onlookers just watched as a creep tried to grab her arm and draw her closer. But it was the first time that she was swinging her water bottle and threatening to smack a man with it.

"You people are treated poorly in the white man's land but you come here and flex us. That's why they are killing all of you." He said with a smug. She froze for a few seconds. She felt completely defeated. She couldn't believe she was being told this, to her face. She never imagined that those who were famous for being hospitable people could also be this hurtful with zero provocation.

This was not the first time that someone from the motherland used the death of her kin and kith as a punch line. It was not the first time she felt alone and foreign on the land of her ancestors. It was just yesterday a group holding a peaceful vigil in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement was brutalized by the police. They were standing up for her kind and folk at home and see how that

went. What happened to George Floyd could have happened to her and Ghana Police would have stifled protests.

Now sitting silently in the back of the Uber, she dialed her big brother's number. She hoped he had returned from the protest in Houston. She hoped that he covered all his tattoos and adhered to covid-19 safety protocols. She was filled with guilt for not being there. He would say the same about Osu today.

(i n) b a l a n c e

Sarah Faakor Kokui Toseafa

does life thrive in disequilibrium?

they say some things are better when they are slightly imperfect. that's why the whole onion in a pot of stew is sort of pointless as compared to the one that has been chopped into smaller pieces and scattered hither-thither in a sea of thick red sauce. scales are supposed to be the epitome of balance but if they could speak, they would tell tales of the heavy burdens they carry.

and have you ever seen a see-saw perfectly at midpoint before?

entropy, the chemists call it - the degree of randomness in a system. if everything were perfectly balanced, then nobody would try to cut in front of the trotro driver, but because it isn't, the person trying to shave a few minutes off the lateness looming large before him will try to cut in front of the trotro driver, who will get incensed and park the car (which, let us not forget, is on its last legs anyway). he will then hurl invectives, often in reference to the genitalia of the mother of the offender, who will also, quite understandably, not take the abuse sitting down. so, to the background music of shouts from the passengers of the trotro, blaring horns of irate drivers and street-side preachers, they slug it out until a policeman intervenes.

i have come to see that balance is a myth of sorts. that might explain, in part, why i once loved a man with a smile that had a diastema whose beauty (to me, at least) lay in the fact that it was slightly off-center—

disequilibrium

this is to say there's beauty in the chaos, warmth in the entropy, there's joy amidst the pain.

To Be A Tree

Success Agbenu

to be content is to be like a tree

that is to be pleased with air and water.

but to conceal the reaction of your lungs and throat

and be completely still,

like a tree.

to be like a tree with a broad crown and skin dark as night

and roots that have tasted the history of the forest is to be looked down on by the soil that is
your home,

like a bad name.

to be like a tree is to accept that you're forgotten

but only in harmattan.

to remember your strength comes from how long you've stood unwavering, unfazed and unafraid
to be

like a tree

to be content is to be like a tree

that is to appreciate your time with the sun

and vent your problems to the moon.

These Days Are the Hardest

Tawiah Mensah

For most days the only way to feel is to throw a knife into your skin and pull till the truth comes spilling like rage.

Sometimes the body wages war and all you can do is watch till the fire burns out.

Every time the TV comes on there's another you trapping his breath in-between his words.

You see the fear pounding in his heart and pain is laced behind each curse he throws out.

These are things I know:

That God, in breathing into you, sent a fire ripping through your skin.

There is no poetic way to write about death or a loss caused by people you give your power to.

Where do we begin in pulling out the rot?

Which prayer to say first?

A mother who left home without saying goodbye?

A brother with groceries on his return?

A child whose last imagination was a roller coaster filled with candy?

These are things I know:

That in making you, God did a little dance with his hands in the skies,
giggling, his head tilted to the side.

These are things I know:

That we are dripping honey and everything gold.

Contributors' Bio

Tawiah Mensah is a graduate of the University of Ghana, where she double-majored in French and Political science. Her interest in writing stems from having to find an outlet, when crying just didn't seem to be enough, and breaking things seemed too pricey an option. She has written and shared many of her poems and write-ups on her social media and blog. Tawiah Mensah is particularly passionate about women being able to fully love themselves, choose themselves, and being free from societal expectations to be nothing more but themselves.

Joseph Appoh is an emerging writer from Ghana who usually writes under the pen-name " Jay Appoh." he often describes himself a " a young lad trying to make sense of the world one word at a time." A finalist for the 2020 Samira Bawumia literature prize, his works have been featured in Tumtumdark portfolio and other independent anthology publishers. He is currently based in Accra, Ghana.

Sena Cobblah is a Ghanaian writer and customer experience enthusiast. Partial to poetry, her work has been in Anthologies for Tampered Press, Independent publishers like Jay Kophy, Kalahari review and an anthology of short stories set at the center of Accra for the Ama Ataa Aidoo Center for Creative Writing. She practices being anything else but a writer on @sena_cobblah on twitter.

Abena Awuku-Larbi is an Advocate and Senior Associate Trainer at Global Platform Ghana; the youth hub of the ActionAid Global Federation, working for a world free from poverty and injustice. She has been the lead trainer/consultant to the organization on several of its projects, including Artistic Activism, Climate Justice & the Green Deal, Ratifying ILO 190 and Zero-Tolerance for Gendered Violence. Using the power of words as a tool, Abena dedicates her time to offering independent support to those who feel they are not being heard and to ensure they are taken seriously and that their rights are respected.

Roberta Amanda Yemofio is interested in poetry and whatever makes the world better. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor's Degree at the University of Ghana, reading Psychology and Philosophy. You can find her on twitter @iroberta_amanda.

Naa Momo has been many people over the course of her short life, with 'writer' being the longest standing. When she's not playing with her hair, she's dedicating her craft to documenting tenderness, and to pointing out all the little moments that make the big picture worth the look.

Kwabena Benyin is a student writer, and resides currently in Accra. He writes poems and stories in both the Local language and English. More of his works can be found at [aswrittenbybenyin.home.blog]

Ernestina Edem Azah is a public health nurse in her mid-twenties. She lives in Debiso, Bia Region, Ghana. She has been published in Writers Space Africa's magazine.

Success Agbenu is a young poet and writer who resides in Accra. His poem 'Cancer' recently featured in The Young African Poets Anthology which was curated by Ernest O. Ògúnyemí and edited by I.S. Jones and Nome Emeka Patrick.

Hillary Katai is pursuing an undergraduate degree in International Business at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. She is enthralled by the art of storytelling. She was previously a member of the Multi TV essay competition's top ten cohort. She was also chosen to compete in a creative writing competition on behalf of her department. She hopes to one day work as a professional writer.

Henrietta Enam Quarshie is currently a medical student at the University of Health and Allied Science. She comes from the Volta region of Ghana where she lives in its capital, Ho. She has been published by kalahari Review magazine, African Global Networks, Praxis magazine, Tampered Press and in anthologies: To grow in two bodies and The Big Yellow Post. Some of her works have also been rejected elsewhere for how else would there be balance? She writes micro poetry on Instagram under the pseudonym Poetbyimpulse. Twitter handle @HenriettaEnam

Barima Peprah-Agyemang is a Business Administration student at Ashesi University, writer and Co-Founder and Director of Akensie, a gaming startup for Ghanaian History and Pop Culture. He is a proud resident of Sunyani and traces his roots to Sampa, both in the Bono Region of Ghana.

Akua Adjeiwaa Asomani-Adem is a School Psychology PhD student at Indiana University Bloomington. She has a minor Twitter addiction and a fondness for chocolate ice cream. She's also an ardent believer in the superiority of brunch food. When she's not checking her timeline every 5 minutes, she enjoys trying new Chrissy Teigen recipes, reading children's book, and watching reruns of comedy tv shows. She also relishes the time she gets to spend assessing and providing intervention services for children and families as part of her training. Her research interests surround understanding and enhancing children's reading and writing motivation.

Emmanuel Nii Attram Teye is an avid writer and ferocious reader. He started writing during his time in Labone Senior High School where he represented the school at debate tournaments. Emmanuel placed second in the Indian High Commission national essay writing competition. He has since won best adjudicator at debate tournaments including the Vice-Chancellors debate tournament at the University of Ghana. Emmanuel is currently a PhD candidate at the University

of Ghana and is writing his first novel. He's passionate about youth development and plans to use his writing to address societal issues pertaining to the youth.

Nii Sackey Vanderpuye is best described as a restless soul, convinced he can do anything he applies himself to. He's an engineer by trade and when he's doing his part for grand capitalist machine, he's busily scribbling - trying to keep up with his wild imagination. He mostly writes short fiction. Two or more stories a week to help him sharpen his writing. And once his skills are sharp enough he plans to retire early and write full time. The goal for him is to be like Hemingway (of course, minus the macho posturing and the self-inflicted gun wound.)

Priscilla Eyram Agbodeka, a Ghanaian fourth year medical student at the University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Ghana. I am a purple lover and I love to listen to music. I also like reading or writing poetry during my spare time.

Nii Amarah Amartey is a content producer, events manager and personal life blogger. He lives in Aburi, in the Eastern region of Ghana.

Sarah Faakor Kokui Toseafa is a fifth-year medical student from Ghana who loves to write about love (and by extension, heartbreak), her faith and her journey through medical school. She writes as Sarabelle or just -S. Sarah is also an Ama Ata Aidoo Short Story and Samira Bawumia Literary Prize finalist. When she isn't writing and isn't on the wards, she is either watching make-up tutorials on YouTube, listening to classical music or catching some well-deserved shut-eye. Some of her other work can be found at mssarabelle.wordpress.com or [@sara.akoma](https://www.instagram.com/sara.akoma) on Instagram.