

Penned in Rage

A Literary Journal

May – August, 2025

Illustrated by Kumbukani Chawinga.

Edited by Bridgette James

Penned in Rage Literary Journal

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About this Edition

Penned in Rage is a literary journal that features original works from underrepresented creatives, encompassing a diverse range of poems and stories that delve into themes of nature, identity, and societal issues. Edited by Bridgette James and illustrated by Kumbukani Chawinga, this May to August 2025 edition includes contributions from various voices, particularly from Nigeria.

The journal is dedicated to presenting unique perspectives and experiences, with the aim of highlighting the struggles and triumphs of its contributors. Each piece within the journal reflects a blend of personal and cultural narratives, engaging readers with profound emotional depth and insight.

Featured Works

"The Mother of My Soul" by Mrs Mahima Tiwari explores the intimate relationship between the speaker and nature, portraying it as a nurturing and protective force that shapes their identity and existence. Nature is depicted as a maternal figure, offering wisdom, comfort, and beauty throughout life's journey.

"And Death Did Not Come For You" by Isaac Aju delves into the struggles of a young individual facing acute teenage depression. The

narrative vividly illustrates the internal battle against despair and the longing for relief amidst familial pressures.

"And What is New About the New Year?" by Olusegun Ajayi reflects on the passage of time and the cyclical nature of suffering, questioning the significance of new beginnings when faced with persistent pain and trauma.

"My Dream Yard" by Chuma Ozemene Nduba Chibogu presents an idealized vision of home, filled with vibrant imagery of nature and the comforts of community, emphasizing the longing for connection and peace.

"Crude Oil, a Blessing or a Curse?" by Okekechukwu Eric Ifesinachi critiques the duality of crude oil in Nigeria, highlighting its role as both a valuable resource and a source of corruption and environmental degradation.

"Feel the World" by Kayode Basit Oluwafemi captures the essence of nature as a refuge from the chaos of modern life, illustrating a personal journey towards finding solace in the natural world.

Overall, this special edition of "Penned in Rage" encompasses some metered and formal poems which were not longlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition 2025.

Featured Poem This Quarter

1. The Mother of My Soul

By Mrs Mahima Tiwari

You ask about my relationship with nature.
Can a child describe what her mother is to her?
She is the breath I do not think to take,
The whisper that calms my stormy heart,
The unseen hand that lifts me when I fall.

She weaves herself into my dreams —
Threads of rain, petals of morning, sighs of the wind,
My sunshine enhancing my glory,
My moonlight soothing my soul.
She is my Himalayas defending me like a father.
My ocean of emotions with its green canopy.
The iridescent hues of my canvas to complete my entity as a
person.

She is the rhythm of my life,
A tune that begins from my veins
And echoes in my aura, spreading vitality to eternity.

Teaching me silence through her talks,
Teaching me wonder and belonging.
Blowing its fragrant winds, it encourages me to blow fearlessly
with my chutzpah.

In her embrace, I forget the weight of the world
And remember the truth of who I am.
She is the Goddess of the poor,
A home for the homeless —
Creating a velvet bed to sleep upon,
And the blue sky to cover them,
With countless bulbs to attract an orphan child.

She holds the weeping sky in her arms,
And weaves lullabies from the murmur of brooks.
She wraps broken dreams in green tapestries,
And sings courage into trembling souls.

In her forests, my spirit finds shelter,
In her rivers, my hopes learn to sail.
Each fallen leaf carries a whispered prayer,
Each rising sun offers a silent blessing.

Her patience teaches me to endure,
Her seasons teach me to trust change.
Her wildflowers teach me to dance without reason,
Her cliffs teach me to stand tall against storms.

She is the ink in my poems,
The music in my silence,
The first and last breath of my being.

2. Nature & You

By Dipo Keshinro

Nature with her blessings we all born to live & survive
As a new baby is born another old star goes down 6 feet
somewhere,
The genesis for the new baby- the exodus for the old soul
Thus, the sky becomes black at the 7th hour in the evening.

Barbaric is nature, surviving in it is blissful-
Raining that puts out the conflagration cause the stress comes
with what we do...
Every second is what matters, what counts in the world of mind
over matters.
Thus, we hope to beat on time, which is a man-made concept.

Life is monolithic, no absence when Karma visits
Apart from pressure of the storms, the settlers worry about
staying alive
And the natives landlord worries about money to maintain and
secure their property
Yes, different strokes for different folks, is to work hard to be a
property owner.

Getting *the money grip* but don't *ego trip*, be composed like a king
Destiny- to wear the crown like a true prince with his humble
might,

Meant to go far and built to protect his own, within the survival
drift
must make his own thrift, not shrift from the focus to be imbibe
and birth.

With fresh ideas wealth comes from knowledge of experiences,
God doesn't like it ugly, but creativity is experience birth from
disgust
one can't be squeamish to be productive, comes the bundle of
joy that humanity lives on based on beliefs
Is to be productive, reproductive, live up to glories and make the
best nature as to do.

We are all chapters of same struggles, inking our stories with
different fate
Making our bones in delight, of *we news today, stories tomorrow,*
and *history next*
No guts No glory that's who Nature eulogizes first
We hope, we belong to this few. *Salute.*

3. My Dream Yard

By Chuma Ozemene Nduba Chibogu

As though in the oblivion
My eyes behold
A view of what could be
A home
A unique home
My home
My dream home

My ideal home

Like in a trance my being was taken to see
Palm Trees in sonorous order
Running their marathon races around
And around my yard
Enabling their amiable fronds to present
At the music of the winds
Attracting the holiness of the air;
Life giving, fresh and refreshing

The comfort bungalow that could only define
But the beauty of brick walls
Adorned within the enclaves of a jubilant crowd;
The colourful and varied built of flowered shrubs
At the centre
An afro and beautified tree always waiting for nature's comb

Crafted woods smiling to their mud counterparts
Spreading across the vicinity

An artesian well at a corner seats
To welcome everyone that would care
Providing like that water could
While the sun, the moon and the stars always in wait
To peep, cheer and share in joy of the yard
Pets, my valued companions
To obey the rules of nature;
Clamouring around me for joy

Listen as they sing and make a joyful noise
Attending to every emotion and situation
Take a walk into the brick bungalow
And see my mattress made of grasses
Too, a quick glance at my bookshelf
Archives that could perpetuate my life on earth
At the open air, on my Akabo Chair
I would relax and proclaim, This is MY DREAM YARD.

4. And Death Did not Come For You

By Isaac Aju.

You didn't know what was happening to you then. It was later that you will discover that it was called acute teenage depression. It weighed heavily on you, and you did not know what it was. It was greater than a mere sadness, bigger than sorrow, something you did not know how to go about explaining. You just wanted to sleep and not wake up again. Why was that even a hard request?

"God, I'm tired. I just want to go," you would cry in the night, but the next day you would see yourself still alive.

A lot of things were happening in your life, things that seemed to crush your soul. Your parents made everything worse. They did not give you any freedom of speech or space. Almost everything you said and did were critiqued, and you were tagged as lazy, stubborn, disobedient.

You were nineteen, recently out of secondary school, working with your parents, and your whole world was falling apart; there was nothing to lean on to, no one to talk to, no one to make you feel like a normal human being who could be flawed, but still human.

You became withdrawn from people, desired more solitude, and you read books for comfort. A heavy weight kept overtaking your whole body, telling you to end everything, so on that day after a bitter exchange of words with your parents you ran into the toilet with the kitchen knife. You aimed the knife at your stomach. You held the knife rigidly, but you

couldn't harm yourself. You've watched on TV where people took their lives. You've seen it many times in Nollywood movies. Where did they summon the courage to do that? To insert a knife into their flesh?

You looked at the knife in your hand, and you saw hot tears pouring down from your eyes. You dropped the knife on the toilet floor, and you began to weep. You would weep for a complete hour, the tears nonstop. It was the longest weeping period of your life, if one kept an account of weeping bouts. Why was it so hard to leave? You didn't want to be anybody's child again. You didn't want to live again.

You didn't want to continue being in a place where you were always attacked with words. When you were done with your weeping, you came out of the toilet, eyes red and swollen. But death did not come for you after you called upon him. Even the next day, and the day after the next day.

5. Why

by Godsent Okere

Strong stench emanates from the pristine sphere I birthed

Oh! – The cry of Mother Earth

Why do my waters sing and the creatures therein in dearth?

Where are my herbs, shrubs, trees - I see deserts everywhere

Beads of sweat trickle down round me from the melting cool I
continuously try to buffer

Even the firmament I created suffers

Most importantly, where's the life I gave to your neighbour for you to
nurture?

I am Mother Nature,

Save the world.

6. The Core of Nigeria

By Ahmad Rufa'i

Take my hand; let's slip into Nigeria's heart.
Where Sokoto's sun crowns my baldness, fierce as Sango's fiery art.
We shimmer in rivers of crude, where harmattan winds do sigh.
Loamy spirits dancing in whirlwinds, ancient skies do cry.

In Ilorin's whispering villages, I spin to the Oriki's song.
Each trill a praise, each wingbeat strong.
In Nsukka's evil forests, the talking trees call my name.
Their roots weaving riddles from earth, ash, and flame.

September rains drum Ogene beats across Lagos's seas.
Silver-tongued tides chant stories to the listening breeze.
In the grasses, crickets call on Ogun's iron tongue.
While lions of the Yanakari roar the unsung.

Joy floods my chest like a Maiduguri's storm.
Tossing me weightless, wild, and warm.
In Asaba's savage cradle, my soul snaps free.
Bound to Iroko's roots, to rivers, to crooked trees.

Osun's sacred groves anoint my skin with river lore.
The young mermaids weave their magic on the forest floor.
Odenigbo's Python's guard old shrines of stone and bone.

Jos's scarred mountains sing their secrets alone.

Cross River's rainforests whisper like Anansi's tales.

Threads of stories riding misty, unseen trails.

I follow the Niger's silver tears as it murmurs and bends.

Crooning myths of beginnings, middles, and endless ends.

Take my hand; let's whirl like masquerades in dusty squares.

Our feet a heartbeat, our laughter filling broken air.

In Kafancha's sparse wild, I am the hawk, the drum, the game.

7. Stampede

By Buoye Oluwatosin _Toye

I see the shining sun, the beaming light.
The smiling moon looks cool and beautiful.

I behold the bright smile of the crowd,
as it meets with the rays of the sun.

Their smile makes the day colourful.
The touch of the warm hand,

smile of the soulful - a friendly dog,
the clapping of the helping hand,

the crowd runs to see the hand,
as fans long to behold a celebrity.

I see the crowd surrounding the open hand
to tap from its emitting light.

The dripping love of the big heart
cools the hot headed, like morning dew.

The crowd gathers around the big heart,
to cool their hot head.

On hearing the arrival of their loved ones
the crowd cuts in with smiles on their faces.

Their faces brighten up like a lightened candle
On thinking about the enriching morning sun,

the rising of the spectacular smiling moon,
their cheeks go red as iron rod tried in furnace.

As time passes by, the hard part begins.
There comes congestion,

everyone in haste trying to escape.
All running to the same direction,

like ants trooping into a hole.
The anger of a pet has been revealed.

The teeth of a sheep has pierced the skin.
The sun stretches, everywhere turns as hot as hell.

The room - sombre, everywhere
becomes as dark as 'an inner room.'

The big heart has been broken.
The sheepcote has been broken down.

Patience has been taken for weakness.

Kindness has been taken for feebleness.

Let the crowd plead, let the crowd kneel
but they resist. The crowd runs away

for safety, looking for a place to hide
& I ask, *Where can't nature find you?*

8. And What is New About the New Year?

By Oluwasegun Ajayi Samson

Time and tide wait for no man. Lie.

See how swift time flies. A big fat lie.

Like a snail climbing Mount Everest, time crawls when you're sad.

Pastor Sina said Faith is an eagle that soars on the wings of patience.

True.

After what seems like eternity, we've mounted twelve (12) ladders with
thirty one million five hundred thirty six thousand (31536000) steps.

The weary hand-down clock on the crumbling wall strikes twelve (12).

And what is new about the new year? The same fizzling lifeless spirit,
the same heart-wrenching ache, the same soul-piercing pain, the same
haunting memories,

the same lingering trauma, the same gauze tongue in a parched mouth,
the same breathless

bedridden body on the cold gurney. The calendar has changed and so
does the colour

of his feeble skin. Pa's putrid body—once a figure of strength— now a
bag of dry bones.

God, I know you are very busy tonight. I know your ears are heavy with
mountains

of thunderous prayers and plethora of wishes. I am not asking for too
much.

Unlike my window neighbour, who prays you bless her landlord with
amnesia—let him

forget her four-year debt. Amen.

Just give me the strength to shame shame, the grace to mock ridicule, a
mouth

sour enough to swallow the spits of sneerers and the energy to gulp their
thorns

of scorns down my tiny throat.

LORD do not take this suffering away from me. But show me how to
suffer

like you did on the cross. LORD, help me to suffer and teach me how to
suffer.

Join me in suffering. Because according to your steadfast word; to live is
to suffer.

And after long-suffering, comes VICTORY.

9. Sprew of a day

By Merlin flower

As I deftly manoeuvred the catamaran,
an untethered corn flew and burst
itself down like an unwarped blaze. A real fire arrived.
Away from the land, the flames created a song, no one
listened to.

The uncontrolled fame clinched a deal with a wandering God
sprouting a strange temper.

A small raindrop, with bushy eyebrows, dropped anchor.
Stirring a cup of coffee,
I enjoyed the rapacious rain.

10. The Baobab's Wisdom

by Ishaq Isa El-Qassim

In our Home

Nigeria's North, where baobabs preside,

A tribe of trees that are a curious sight, with fruits and leaves
devoured,

By Man

Yet feared by Man as evil spirits' home,

Their massive baobab body, brings them mocks, oft avowed,
And oft endured.

Men, women, the greyed and the lads

Love to pluck – no, I mean, love to stone the baobab's kids

Down from atop their giant branch house

Suck them dry and the seeds thrown

Without a need to conserve or to nurse

Discarded with a wave without the need to save.

In that I see her generous grace.

Even without being allowed a place in the forest,

Its vast fruits shells manage to survive

The human child warned away, lest evil spirits cling,

Their innocence

They are taught to approach the obese mother tree

With incantations - a shield, against the spirits stoned.

It is in this I understand that, stepping up a tree top

Is an honour done to Mangoes, the Guavas and the Citruses

In Her Highness, Queen Mango stands, almost aloof

Except for the few dances when Man walks up her lanky twigs

Often breaking some tree limbs thereof
Yet the Mango offers all securities to the human kind
By being free of spirits that we don't deserve
And she gives forth her fresh fruits for us to pluck
Not minding that once barren,
Man cuts her down and her trunk he burns
Baobab's "yayan kuka" fruits, are however accursed in this mix
They are gulped, yes when soaked as soup or as a sour drink
Yet feared, cursed and avoided as plague
Dear Giant Trunk, full of grace,
You are indeed a paradox, where good and evil closely
cling. Bakare
The baobab stands, through seasons' sway,
Enduring mockery, shame, and evil's bray and hater's neigh,
As a testament to time, where wisdom's lessons stay,
And innocence, like virtue, holds its noble way.
And in your ancient heart, a story's told again
Of contradictions, where humanity's truth shines its torch.

11. Who Am I?

By Victor Ekeji

I have flown million miles on paper kites,
through polar imaginations and tropical thoughts,
amidst spellbinding days and revealing nights,
yet I live in a riddle of who I'm not.

"Who am I ?" I asked the earth.

*Ha, ha, what puerile picture that puzzles humanity,
of course, you pull my fullness with your breath,
you are the unifying grip of gravity.*

Puzzled still, I rang the sky,
His airy voice echoing through my brain.
*How ethereal is your bow lips smile,
the oracle that enchants the rain.*

So, my curiosity called out to the hydro-goddess,
whose crystal innocence hid no fishy truth.
"You are the stirring might of my overflowing goodness,
the feel of life in my roots."

Then I was whirled by the wisdom of the wind,
my ignorance inspired by his acrobatic spins.
"What relief the chill of your aura brings
while caressing the skin on festive evenings.

The sun and moon were my sputtering hope.
What do you see from that hovering distance?

"Truly, our static beauty only mopes at the scope
of your world to cast a meaningful glance.

O heavens! What multi-sided mutant do I make,
strange as a sphinx in the taxonomy of creatures.
Quiet!" Echoed a voice that gripped me awake,
"you are the totem of my terrific features.

12. My Safari

By Etowa Emori

My Safari, my nursery, at dawn's break
A breathtaking sight of nature unfolds
Young chlorophyll organisms, radiant and green
A haven for mankind, a treasure to behold

We grew amidst the rain and scorching sun
Our roots digging deep, our leaves reaching high
We flourished with carbon dioxide, pure and clean
Our beauty was a gift, a treasure to mankind

But now, as dusk falls on the open field
I see my species, my kind, growing old
Our senior citizens, once strong and proud
Now weathered and worn, like furniture left out

Others suffer from the venomous gas
Emanating from mankind's buildings of recreation
Their leaves wither, their colours fade
Like falling hair from a cancerous entity

They who swore to protect us, now unleash
Joyous mayhem, destroying our beauty and might
The cruel nature of man renders us desolate
Leaving us to weep, our tears unable to reproduce

Our offspring, our future, lost forever

A journey of no return, to meet our children and their descendants
The memories of our past, now all that remain
A bittersweet reminder of what we once were

Our chlorophyll hearts, once full of life
Now wilted and faded, like the leaves on our branches
Our cries echo through the empty fields
A haunting reminder of the beauty that's been lost

The wind whispers secrets, of a time long past
When our beauty was revered, and our future was bright
But now, we're nothing more than a fading memory
A distant echo of a time, when our beauty was free

Our story - one of sorrow, of loss and decay
A tale of how mankind's actions, led to our demise
A cautionary story, of the importance of preservation
A reminder to cherish, the beauty that surrounds us

Let our story be a lesson, to future generations
To respect and protect, the beauty of nature's creations
For we are not just plants, but living beings too
With a story to tell, and a beauty to renew.

13. Crude Oil, a Blessing or a Curse?

By Okekechukwu Eric Ifesinachi

From the dunghill of the dead beneath the earth we find you, deep down
the earth a natural treasure is found, enclosed in hard rocks, having
gases as a guard there lies the treasure of a nation

Black gold what are you?

What are you to us Black gold? People salute you as crude oil, but I
salute you as cruel oil, your dark colour depicts your nature of cruelty I
wonder why you are like this , slinky , calm in nature but vigorous

Black gold what are you?

When found you tend to erase of every human sound judgement, from a
pure heart we see greed being birthed, from a patriotic heart we see
selfishness grow we see treason we a death to national consciousness

Black gold what are you?

The trade market rage, greed invades the nation like COVID, even
Mother nature frowns at you, rages at your destructive doings, your
inhumane nature no one can fathom, the work of nature cries in peril

Black gold what are you?

Woe! To the country you are found in, because you will sure , sow
economic dependency, you love attention and centralization even when
the nation perishes, you smile and choke them with your fluctuating
wealth

Black gold what are you?

Woe! To the river that once housed you they weep when you are birthed,
the ground that lodged you lament at your coming, your parasitic
relationship I like to a mother viper and her children when she delivers

Black gold what are you?

The soil you pass through is sure, fruitless for life Mother ozone layer
cries because of what your children are doing how do we forget so soon
the life' lost to you Wiwa knows Ijaw knows, Ecuador you can testify

Black gold what are you?

But are you to blame? Why do I feel you are innocent? Are you really
more of a blessing than a cures to us? Yes! We humans, we are to be
blame our actions and heart posture has made a blessing to look like a
curse

Black gold what are you?

14. I've lost my will

By Amos Parish

I've lost my will,
As darkness descends
Men wield the politics of devils,
And lands choke on suffocating smokes
I am Nature, but my beauty fades
I hear explosions shatter my skies,
My breath is poisoned
Once-stable climates unravel fast
As carbon furious eye darkly glare at me
And chaos spreads

My gardens wither.
Forests cry out in anguish and pain
The earth's cries echo through my rivers,
As humanity's core begins to break
Save me, oh heads of nations,
DO NOT NUKE THE BALL!
Defuse the bombs, break the guns,
And let humanity's heart revive
Let West and East embrace,
North and South entwine

In love's sphere, let the flames of hatred die
Love the trees, rivers, soil, and man

End war's dark game,
Let love and peace come nigh.
I am Nature, the gentle stream that flows
The purest cloud in the sky,
Still connected to humanity's core
But man's pursuit of power has turned against me

Devouring and being devoured,
Testing my limits relentlessly.
Stop hurting me! stop the damage,
For when I falter, all will face death
Save me, and save yourselves,
Before it's too late
I'm the whisper of the wind,
The warmth of the sun's rays

The melody of birds,
The rhythm of life's precious ways
My heart beats for the future,

15. Feel the World

By Kayode Basit Oluwafemi

As I sit on the terraces, life seems calm and peaceful.
The ruckus of the rustling trees lifts my mood.
I yearn for the woods by the busy river.
I feel excited by the clapping waves.

Previously, life seemed busy and serious.
Boredom and loneliness in me, vexed me to Japa to my city's outskirts.
We came here before, but I come myself today.
While some see destruction in nature, I see the opposite.
Audi alteram partem.
I seek solace in nature, still, I prioritize health over wealth.
I searched for strength; it led me here.

Feeling the gentle breeze, I glanced at the open sky.
Suddenly, the sunny weather changed unnoted.
The sun dipped below the horizon, into the empyrean.
The cloud moved swiftly around the earth.
Thunder booms, rain pounds for a clash.

"I'll seek the snail's resilience, not the caracal's speed", I said.
I'll seek refuge behind my cozy shield strength .
I won't run or fear.
Despite my small presence, I'll make a lasting impact.
Even though my shield is tender, my movement is wider.
That gives me optimistic euphoric enthusiasm.

The expedition unfolds as planned.
I'm a natural nature philosopher.
Then, I moved towards the hill to get in the hole.
I strive to remain focused, and I fell silent.
A multitude of birds flee from the south to same hole.
Every creature wants to survive, competition is universal.
I, myself realised, but not unleashing.

The thunder calms down for me, but the uproar will arise soonest.
The calmness unveils my instinct.
Time to go home, time for salvation.
I noticed two different plants; one grows on another.
My sixth sense senses, "Truly, competition is ubiquitous."

As the rain subsides, I emerge anew.
The world awakens, and so do I.
With every breath, I feel myself.
The trees sway gently, their leaves rustling free.
A symphony of sounds, an Amapiano dance for me.
In harmony with nature, my soul takes a futuristic dream.

16. We Belong in Nature

By Oliver Sopulu odo

The day is darkening, the trees are waving,
thunderstorms are striking like gunshots.
Rain starts falling, the rainfall becomes heavy,
thunderstorms are striking. *Is the world about to end?*

The rainfall reminds us of our childhood.
As children, we always played in the rain,
our parents couldn't stop us, because the rain
belonged to us - nature belonged to us.

As children, in the moonlight, we gathered
at the village square to hear the tale of the moonlight,
the storyteller always told us stories of animals
in the forest. The storyteller always praised the moonlight god.

We wished we could understand the songs of the birds.
When we were children, we loved watching the sky,
we loved looking at the stars in the sky.
Stars made us admire the sky more.

Now, we are adults, we are still children of nature,
We admire nature's beauty because, this is where we belong.
We water the flowers around us,
nature takes us back to our childhood,

nature is where we belong, *Aren't we nature's children?*

17. Education Robbed Me

By Deng Wien Chol

I slept in my youth,
a sleep I couldn't awaken myself from.

At midnight---
the first night of my youth---
I dreamt of my ancestors awakening a shameful son.
How greatly have I failed to repay them.
How greatly have I failed to uphold their golden image!

Education robbed me,
it robbed me of my name,
Ancestral dignity, I cowardly lost myself.

I saw my indigenous homes owned by an enemy,
perhaps renaming them in his tongue,
calling it his Ancestral grave.

Would I be a slave of pen and words of another man?
I am in trepidation, sweating for my descendants.

The robbery (Education) brainwashed me —
bloodshed is unmerited,
ancestors are gone,

I am stolen, the thief preached fear, installed it in the mind.
Education shrewdly belittled me to free the grave of the children, he
deceived.

18. Nature and You

By Abolade Temiloluwa

The woods of old still proudly stand,
Swaying gently, hand in hand.
Birds take flight with songs so bright,
Trees twirl softly in morning light.

The earth releases a scented sigh,
As raindrops fall from silver sky.
Sunbeams warm the forest floor,
While oceans gallop with a lion's roar.

The morning dew brings calm and grace,
Washing sorrow from this place.
The moonlight guards through silent night,
The sun guides you with golden light.

Leaves rustle secrets through the breeze,
Whispers carried among the trees.
In every echo, wild and true,
Nature sings its song with you.

19. I Inherit the Silence

By Ayan Dar Basit

I was born where the river once sang—
now it whispers through rusted pipes.
The earth beneath my soles remembers
more than I do.

My grandmother's hands
once combed the hair of the mountain,
planted prayers in the soil
and called the rain by name.
She told me:
The land hears you best when your mouth is closed.

I have tried
to speak to the roots
in languages I don't know
but feel
throbbing behind my teeth.
Every time I breathe,
I borrow air from extinct trees.
Their ghosts
sit heavy on my lungs.

City lights bloom like fungus—
unnatural,

persistent.

We paved the bones of our ancestors
to park electric cars.

I still press my ear to the ground
as if it might tell me
how to be sacred again.

Somewhere in my blood,
a forest is still on fire.

And no one
is coming
to put it out.

20. Midnight Feeling

By David Adiele

There was once a crossing, long and narrow, stretching into the endless fields. Remember how we stared at it? Sat across, hoping we'd someday cross over and not get run over. Deep down we knew we'd never see it together, you had so much ahead of you, to give up for a thought we couldn't bring into reality. Bled like I was never going to heal, grieved like I knew sorrow forever, happy memories, flashing before burning candles. You left my hands and watched me from the other side where we once laid and laughed till dusk, exchanging sacred words. Foolish is the anthem of the ones in love, cursed with bonds, can't be broken by force,

Dearest, stand still. I'll cut through these walls, march on your doorstep and make you fall again.

It's me knocking, I'm calling now, are you coming out? Let's talk it out, it's way too silent, speak and I'll hear you; I adore you, open up, I'm here for you, I care for you, don't relent on me because I'm not done watching us across the yard. It's probably nothing but still can't let it go. Can't find the words to describe my inner self, so keep me, keep me on fire, keep me burning... Took it upon myself, raised voices in my head, hard liquor on my chest but who am I kidding?

You think you can hurt me?

I'm on therapy every time it's midnight—that's when it's quiet, that's when it gets to me. If therapy music were drugs, I'd be on the list of addicts. Rolling on the seats of past things, rushed feelings. If hope is all I have then I have none at all. Think I need a change before I go insane, intense, am I dying? Is this all migraine? This I can't explain, put these thoughts on hold, missing calls I can't uphold leaving me paranoid when you're around. Holding up like I'm a drop out, but you're the driver. You crashed this thing the moment you fell out, ending up accidentally meeting you. What a turn we had there, thinking we could drift away from these bottled hollow feelings. On the hills counting bills, took this all as a cruise, guessed we were a sinking ship, you were my ride to freedom .You

sank us and left in a skip without heeding me. Chasing endless memories, 50 shades of you,

Shy or wild, which are you?

Did I matter so little to you that you never even noticed?

Never asked? Never cared to know who left me shattered before you came along?

If I were a hunter, I'll hunt these feelings down till I can kill them.

Forced to go, it reminds me of you,

Still holding on to what's left of you

It's not random thoughts, it's moments of us

The closest of bonds, the best of us, exists in most of us. They are ghost of us.

21. The Core of Nigeria

By Ahmad Rufa'i

Take my hand; let's slip into Nigeria's heart.
Where Sokoto's sun crowns my baldness, fierce as Sango's fiery art.
We shimmer in rivers of crude, where harmattan winds do sigh.
Loamy spirits dancing in whirlwinds, ancient skies do cry.

In Ilorin's whispering villages, I spin to the Oriki's song.
Each trill a praise, each wingbeat strong.
In Nsukka's evil forests, the talking trees call my name.
Their roots weaving riddles from earth, ash, and flame.

September rains drum Ogene beats across Lagos's seas.
Silver-tongued tides chant stories to the listening breeze.
In the grasses, crickets call on Ogun's iron tongue.
While lions of the Yanakari roar the unsung.

Joy floods my chest like a Maiduguri's storm.
Tossing me weightless, wild, and warm.
In Asaba's savage cradle, my soul snaps free.
Bound to Iroko's roots, to rivers, to crooked trees.

Osun's sacred groves anoint my skin with river lore.
The young mermaids weave their magic on the forest floor.
Odenigbo's Python's guard old shrines of stone and bone.
Jos's scarred mountains sing their secrets alone.

Cross River's rainforests whisper like Anansi's tales.
Threads of stories riding misty, unseen trails.
I follow the Niger's silver tears as it murmurs and bends.
Crooning myths of beginnings, middles, and endless ends.

Take my hand; let's whirl like masquerades in dusty squares.
Our feet a heartbeat, our laughter filling broken air.
In Kafancha's sparse wild, I am the hawk, the drum, the game.

22. Earth Will Remember

By Isaac Bakare

I lit my cities with stolen dawns,
Plucked stars and caged them into wires—
The forest watched with rooted grief,
Its lungs reduced to funeral pyres.

I paved the rivers into sleep,
Tamed currents with my cruel designs—
And called it progress as I poured
My poison into sacred lines.

The sky once wore a robe of blue,
Now stitched with smoke and industry—
The birds, confused, have lost their maps,
Their wings forget where home should be.

The soil, once rich with secret songs,
Now chokes beneath relentless tread—
Its memory, a faded scroll
Where every root I broke has bled.

The oceans swallowed all my waste,
Their salt now bitter with despair—
The coral dimmed its ancient light,

And silence bloomed where life was there.

I scaled the mountains, mined their hearts,
For gold that turned to dust in hand—
And left them hollowed, grieving gods
Whose bones still rise to make their stand.

I carved the Earth with hungry tools,
And crowned myself with empty names—
Yet every wound I left behind
Still burns with more than mortal flames.

But somewhere in the ash and ash,
A fragile green begins to climb—
A leaf, a stem, a whispered chance,
Rebelling quietly through time.

The Earth does not forget her face,
Though scarred by all I failed to give—
She waits, she watches, breathes, endures—
To see if I will learn to live.

Not reign, not own, not strip and burn—
But live as part of what she is:
A keeper, kin, a gentle guest—
Before the door is closed like this.

23. On the Bench, Where Loss Drinks Deep

By Bolaji Fashola

On the Bench, Where Grief Takes stool
On this splintered bench I sat.
the air thick with rot and river mud.
I watched a hen scratch the earth's skin,
her claws desperate, Searching for the earth's worm.
Her chicks, fragile as hope,
Always behind their mother , cheeping for scraps.
I wonder what kind of mother she is—fierce, yet fraying,
her eyes darting to feed her infants*
Then nature strikes,
An Eaglet who just put to bed.
In search of what to feed her children
Slides through the sky.
Her Talon snatch a chick,
its scream a needle in the wind.
The hen shrieks, feathers scattering like ash,
but the sky doesn't care.
It's just hunger, just wings,
just the world's cold churn.

I sit on this same bench,
Watching a woman, a woman who lost her partner to the war.
Her back is bent like a branch broken in a storm.
She's raising three kids on her own.

Their faces are thin, their eyes empty like ponds with no water.
I wonder what kind of mother she is—
iron-willed, scraping plates for crumbs,
working nights at the diner,
her hands cracked from bleach and time.
But nature strikes again.
She doesn't wake from her last sleep,
her heart stilled by some silent thief—
cancer, exhaustion, or God's neglect.
Her children, orphaned,
are swallowed by the city's jaws, the watching Predator.
Their left to drift in nature's unyielding tide.

This earth, this sky,
they don't mourn, don't bend.
The river keeps sludging past,
carrying oil slicks and plastic bags.
The trees, half-dead from drought,
stand silent as graves.
I sit here, On this bench,
knowing nature lets it all happen—
the eagle's kill, the mother's collapse,
my own slow unravelling.
What's a man to do
when the world's roots drink tears
and call it rain?
The Nature let's it all Happen.

26. Beauty's Echo

By Lawrence Abiaobo

Do you know what the Trees say to the Wind on rainy days?

They say - the Rain may leave us wet, but its caresses arouses us first.

Nature's eyes are like a black hole of beautiful desires,

Which takes me into depths deeper than I ever thought possible.

To think Nature's aura could be so contagious,

I'm glad the world faced covid and not you,

So, here's a toast to the embodiment of beauty's essence,

Tell me why the world shouldn't be selfish, when a beauty like you exists.

Like lily flowers - your beauty is refreshing and your glow evergreen,

And I can attest that none that has been in your presence left, the same person,

Like my tired heart filled with a flux of non-metered emotions,

Slowly finding some tranquillity, a breather long craved.

And in this moment the world twirls gracefully with elegance,

To the tides of the whistling birds, dancing under the gaze of the
beautiful moonlight,

Who would have imagined this 'threesomed-bromance' unfolding,

Where beauty's secrets are whispered day by day.

With this scene in full display, my once tired heart grew hopeful,
And the faithlessness grew faithful as the grass felt a bit greener than
usual,

My feet now firm with no signs of shaking nor anguish,
In this moment, I choose to merge with Nature's rhythm.

24. The Nature I Knew

By Yakubu Baikie

I grew up with the sun in all my days.
Talking family faces filled my nights.
With treats and pebbles filled pockets,
I chased and shot rodents in fields.
Often drenched and ignoring shivers,
I hunted less and gathered lots more.
I swam rather than fed worms into rivers.

Fields I chased butterflies on, now cities.
Gardens I hosed my thirst on, in concrete.
Rivers I swam are missing or missed.
Air conditioned buildings and cars.
Picture perfect thoughts lost to sight.
Where I walk are cycled or encircled.
Memories lost to sight without a fight.

Youthfulness wasted indoors to games.
Toy teddies looked slimmer on shelves.
Jailed gigabytes of memories in clicks.
Screen watchers in hypnotized dazes
hum discussions through ear pods.
A generation changed times it knew,
to inherit artificial intelligent gods.

Dreadful thoughts ache my being,

for my future I bequeath nooses.
Times walked across all eternities,
beginnings to possible endings.
From trees that had grown themselves
to forebears men felled without end,
in perpetual wait to again fail themselves.

Countless eons of watch less care,
a wetted earth now cries its rains.
Fewer rivers flooded veins of sewage
as oceans swell with melted hope.
Brethren proudest in learned follies,
unrepentant and adamant in their ruse
of wealth as airless, breathless pennies.

About Contributors

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