



# BOOKLING CORNER

brittle  
paper

*An Anthology of Children's  
African Literature*

*Edited by Tahzeeb Akram*

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## Editor's Note

Dear Brittle Paperians,

We asked our wonderful writers to share some beautiful pieces for the littlest of literature lovers! There has always been a ton of children's books, but in the last decade there has been an overwhelming surge in BIPOC representation in the literary community to ensure kids see themselves in the books they read. So, this year, we are adding our own contribution! *Bookling Corner*, is an African literary collection of 19 pieces for kids to enjoy!

I was, and still am, an avid bookworm, and little me read any and everything around the house with words on. Every birthday, I asked for books, and any time I saved up money, I wanted to spend it at my nearest book store. It was only years later that I realised, as many do, that none of the books I read, had descriptions that sounded like me, or illustrations that looked like me. But we live in a more accessible world now where it is easier to find books by writers of colour who get to create stories that represent their younger selves and the communities around them. So, earlier this year when I got the exciting news that I was going to be an aunt, it made me really happy to know that my niece can grow up with books that she can see herself in or her friends, or her family, and have it be comforting and wonderful and, most importantly, have it be normal in the most extra ordinary way. So, with the help of our incredibly talented writers, we asked them to take part in adding to this glorious world of literature that represents relatable identities and communities, with the hope that a child may hopefully see a character that feels familiar to them.

In *Bookling Corner*, our 19 pieces are from writers from Cameroon, Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Sierre Leone, Tanzania, Namibia, and Kenya. And we have four lovely parts of the collection for your little ones to enjoy! The first is our **Rock-A-By Rhymes** with cute nursery rhymes and poems, like "My African Alphabet," by Christopher Armoh. Then, we have **Little Scholars**, with some interactive stories and fun learning tales for inquisitive minds, like "Muna and the Moon," by Mohamed Sheriff. Next is the **Doodle Corner**, where Danial Alaka drew some funny comics, and Dorathy Dung illustrated a wonderful little adventure for kids to engage with. Then we join some adorable animals in the **Wild Tales** section, like "The Crows First Tooth," by Lindsay Katchika-Jere Chazika. And finally, the **Bedtime Stories**, with heartwarming works such as "Something Blue," by Blessing Tarfa.

Brittle Paper is an avid supporter of African and diasporic literary representation, and we all know that the world is made better by kids who feel inspired, loved, and seen. We hope this collection is enjoyed by the littlest of readers and story lovers, and we hope you all find childlike joy in this!

Happy Reading!  
– Tahzeeb Akram

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# *Rock-A-By Rhymes*



# My African Alphabet

Christopher Armoh



**A** is for Ananse, who is clever and small,  
He crafts stories to teach us all.



**B** is for Banku, it's round and white,  
Eaten with okro, a tasty delight.



**C** is for Calabash, we use to drink,  
It can float on water and never sink.



**D** is for Damba, when we drum in the square,  
We dance under moonlight with joy in the air.



**E** is for Eban, it means a home that is strong,  
A place where joy and kindness will always belong.



**F** is for Fufu, it's soft and neat,  
Pounded by mama for me to eat.



**G** is for Gye Nyame, a symbol so bold,  
“Except for God” — a truth we hold.



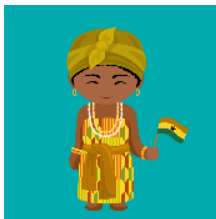
**H** is for Harmattan, it's dusty and dry,  
It paints the air and clouds the sky.



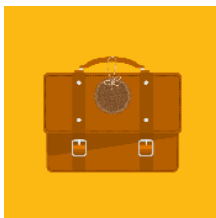
**I** is for Ink, from the storyteller's pen,  
That writes our tales again and again.



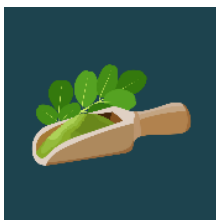
**J** is for Jollof, it's spicy and red,  
My Nana cooks it best, enough said!



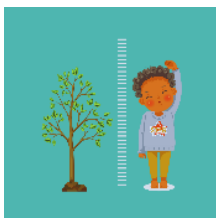
**K** is for Kente, it's woven with pride,  
Each color and shape has a story inside.



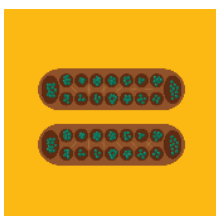
**L** is for Leather, it's smooth and tough,  
It's for drums and bags and all kinds of stuff!



**M** is for Moringa, its leaves so green,  
It's good for soup, it keeps us lean.



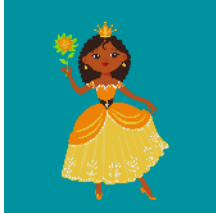
**N** is for Nkɔsoɔ, it's the ability to grow,  
Like trees and dreams, we reap what we sow.



**O** is for Oware, it's a counting game,  
You'll need some maths and a clever aim.



**P** is for Pan-African, it's our flags held high,  
Together we shine, like stars in the sky.



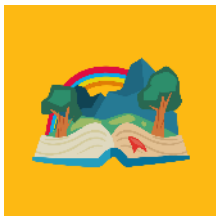
**Q** is for Queen Mother, she's wise and true,  
She fights for her people and sees them through.



**R** is for Rain, it taps the ground,  
It waters our farms with a singing sound.



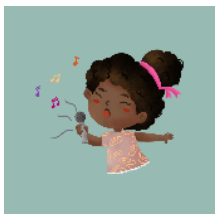
**S** is for Shea, it's from a mighty tree,  
It's butter for skin, and hair and glee.



**T** is for Tales, from far and near,  
Ananse tells them, we listen and cheer.



**U** is for Unity, it's your hand in my hand,  
We build together on our golden land.

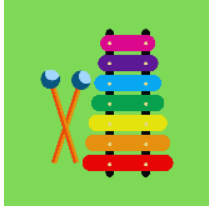


**V** is for Voice, it's soft but strong,  
It helps us speak and sing our song.



**W** is for Waakye, it's beans and rice,  
With shito and eggs, it's very nice.

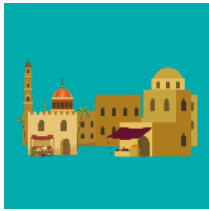




**X** is for Xylophone, it's wooden and bright,  
It plays sweet notes that dance with light.



**Y** is for Yam, it's from soil so deep,  
We cook it, we mash it and feast and sleep.



**Z** if for Zongo, it's rich and loud,  
Full of stories and cultures, it's bustling and proud.

# I'm Learning as I Grow

Nifemi Orimabuyaku



Ding dong, rings the alarm, it's morning again,  
Drowsy eyes, drooling lips, but mama said every day is a win.  
Today, I feel happy, mushy mushy, giggling everywhere,  
Other days, I feel heavy, like a thud in the ware.



Some days are boom! bang!! Full of action and play,  
Others are spiky, not feeling okay.  
But Mama said, every feeling is just a part of me,  
Like a moo from a cow or a snap from a mill.



So, when I feel buzzy like a busy little bee,  
Or slouchy like the rivers that flow beneath the tree,  
I know it's okay, and it's part of the plan because feelings come and go,  
Tap Tap, I'm learning as I grow!

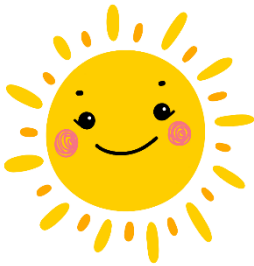


# Sky Friends

Zizipho Godana



Up in the sky where the bluebirds fly,  
Live the sun, the moon, and stars up high.  
With puffy white clouds both near and far,  
They're all best friends, no matter where they are.



The sun wakes first with a big golden grin,  
Spreading light as the day begins.  
“Good morning, clouds!” it calls with cheer  
They drift along, always near.

The clouds puff up like soft white sheep,  
They float and laugh, then fall asleep.  
They shade the sun when it gets too bright,  
Then gently move to share the light.



The moon peeks out when the sun says bye,  
Glowing silver in the grand old sky.  
“Hello, stars!” it whispers low,  
As twinkles all around it grow.



The stars shine bright in cozy rows,  
They wink and dance in nighttime shows.  
They tell the moon, “You’re never alone,  
We sparkle beside you till dawn has grown.”

Though they all shine at different times,  
They share the sky like peaceful chimes.  
They take their turns, they laugh and play,  
And promise to meet again each day.



So next time you look at the sky above,  
Remember it's filled with light and love.  
The sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds,  
A circle of friends in the soft sky crowds.

# Poko the Singing Parrot

Daniel Naawenkangua Abukuri



Once on a perch in the mango tree high,  
Lived Poko the Parrot with songs in the sky.  
Not yellow, not red, not green all alone  
But speckled with rainbows and tunes of his own!

He whistled the wind and he warbled the rain,  
He hummed when he hiccupped, he chirped on a train!  
“Tweet-a-ree-rah!” he’d trill with a spin  
“Polka-dot pumpkins, let Poko begin!”



He sang when the moon wore a slipper of gold,  
He sang while the spiders were weaving the cold.  
He sang to the frogs in their puddle-top bands,  
And juggled his notes with invisible hands.



Flippity-flap, he flipped through the air,  
Looping a lullaby, feather and flare.  
Tiddle-tum, widdle-whee, sing me the sea!  
Wiggle me wiggles and nestle a tree!

He once sang a biscuit right out of a plate  
The baker just blinked and said, “Well, that’s my fate.”  
He sang open doors and sang bubbles to pop,  
He sang a small kitten right into a hop!



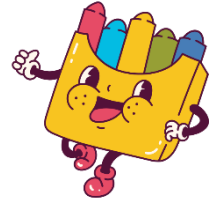
“Cheep-chop-cherry and cha-cha-chow!”  
He’d crow to the crows in the mulberry bough.  
“Mee-nee, moo-noo! Doopity-dee!  
A pickle can play like a xylophone bee!”

The turtles would tap, and the hedgehogs would hum,  
The antelope danced to the tap of his thumb.  
The trees leaned in close, the leaves held their breath,  
Poko could sing even silence to death!



Boppity-bap! went his beak in the breeze,  
Twirling the clouds with his symphony sneeze.  
“Yawn-a-loo-laddle, nap with the moon!  
Chirp me a slipper, and snore me a tune!”

He sang in the morning, he sang in the dark,  
He sang on a roller-skate down in the park.  
He sang to the crayons and taught them to rhyme  
They scribbled in tempo and colored in time!



He chirped to the snails and they started to race,  
He sang to the shadows and gave them a face.  
He hooted to hats, and they all took a bow  
Even umbrellas are singing by now!



“Zig-zag-a-zizzle and flap-whistle-chee!”  
Laughed Poko the Parrot from top of the tree.  
“My feathers are music, my beak is a bell  
I’m Poko the Parrot with songs that can spell!”

So if ever you pass by a mango tree’s tune,  
And hear something warble to tickle the moon,  
It’s Poko, it’s Poko, in feathers so fine  
He’s singing a sunrise and pickling time!



# *Little Scholars*



# **My Hair**

**Msafiri Lwihula**

They say hair grows quietly, like secrets the wind tells only to trees. But I, Tunzo, know something even better. Hair speaks too, just in ways you have to feel, not hear. It hums when I run barefoot. It stretches when I jump. It rests when I sleep. My hair has a life. I can feel it.

One morning, I sat on a short stool while my mama, Mkiri, combed my hair under the mango tree. She warmed coconut oil near the fire, and her fingers were soft as she parted my curls. “Mama,” I asked, “why do we even have hair? Is it just for looking nice?”

Mkiri smiled, her voice warm like porridge, “Oh no, my dear. Hair is more than beauty. It keeps us safe, keeps us warm, and helps us speak without words. It tells the world who we are.”

All day, I couldn’t stop thinking about that.

I began to watch everyone’s hair. Not just mine. My cousin Shaba had thick braids with beads that clicked when she turned her head. My baby brother had tiny soft fuzz. Onia, the nurse in our village, had grey hair like the clouds just before it rains. Even the goats had fluffy heads.

Hair was everywhere, doing something special without anyone noticing.

Under the mango tree, I told Shaba what Mama said. “That’s true,” she nodded. “In stories, people’s hair was full of power. The Warriors kept it long to stay strong. Some cut it short to show sadness. Hair is part of your heart, Tunzo.”

At school, I asked my teacher. “Hair helps protect your head,” she said. “It keeps your head warm when it’s cold, and cool when it’s hot. It even helps your body feel when something is near.”

I looked around at my classmates. Some had puffs like clouds. Some had little curls. Some had lines and rows. Our hair told stories, all different, all beautiful.

I wanted to know more. So, I asked Onia, the nurse. “Did you know,” he said with a smile, “you have about 100,000 little hairs on your head?”

“What?!” I shouted.

“Yes! And each one grows from a tiny hole in your skin. Your hair grows slowly every month, even when you sleep.”

“What if we never cut it?” I asked.

“Well,” he laughed, “hair would just keep growing! But it can get too heavy, messy, or tired. Cutting a little helps it stay strong and healthy, just like trimming a tree.”

I thought of our mango tree and how Baba trimmed its branches so it could grow more fruit. Hair is like that, too.

Mkiri showed me how to care for it. She washed it with warm water and soap, oiled it with love, and gently combed it with a wide wooden comb. “Don’t pull,” she’d say. “Talk to your hair. It tells you when it’s dry or hungry.”

“Hungry?” I asked.

“Yes! Your hair eats what you eat. Greens, eggs, nuts, fish, they help your hair grow happy and strong.”

At night, I noticed something new. When I was sad, my hair felt flat. When I was excited, it bounced! When I was scared, it tickled my skin. Could hair feel feelings? I think so. It feels what we feel, even when we don’t say it out loud.

One day, a girl named Alina came to visit. Her hair was soft and golden, falling straight like sunbeams. I touched her hair. She touched mine. We both laughed. We didn’t need words. Our hair talked for us.

That’s when I knew no one’s hair is better or worse. Some curls. Some shines. Some floats. Some twists. All different. All special.



Now, every time I look in the mirror, I see more than just hair. I see a crown made just for me. I see memories, strength, love, and dreams, too.

So, every morning, I whisper to my hair: “Thank you. You are my crown. You are part of my story.”

And even though hair doesn’t speak with a mouth, I know it hears me.

\*\*\*

*Remember: Hair is more than hair. It is your crown, your comfort, your way of telling the world who you are. Whether your hair is short or long, curly or straight, thick or thin, it matters because YOU matter. Take care of your hair. And it will always take care of you.*

### **Word Box – Just for You!**

Curls – Hair that twists or loops like springs

Braids – Hair woven together in strands

Trim – A little haircut to keep hair healthy

Combing – Using a tool to make hair neat

Oiling – Rubbing natural oil to make hair soft and shiny

Feelings – How your heart and body feel inside (happy, sad, excited or scared. Can you name more feelings?)



# **Little Tales**

**Precious Hoffman**

## **Book Club**

Little Mo loves to read, she reads all the time. Every time she was asked by her parents what she wanted for a gift, the answer was always simple: a new book.

During career day in school, Mo listened to different careers, but she got inspired and decided to be a librarian when she grows up. On reaching home that day she shared her thoughts with her parents, and her mother encouraged her by asking, “Mo, why don’t you start by creating a book club?”

“A book club?” Mo asked with excitement. “That is a great idea! I will ask dad to help create posters and membership cards for my book club.” Later that evening Mo was very busy writing a letter requesting permission from her school principal to start her book club.

One week later, permission was granted to Mo to start her club. She distributed posters to every class inviting younger people to join. Everyone who joined the book club received a membership card – beautifully designed cards by Mo’s dad. By the end of the first week, she already had so many students wanting to join the club.

Mo was rewarded with a purple ribbon by her school principal for such a wonderful initiative. The principal also encouraged students to always read, and promised rewards for the best readers. Mo’s parents supported her book club by donating many story books. The book club was very successful and continues to this very day!

## **Quiz Time!**

What did Mo want to become in the future?

What support did she get from her parents?

What reward did Mo get from her school principal?

## **Dictionary Time!**

Encourage: to help someone to believe in themselves

Librarian: the person who takes care of a library and all of its books and information.

Principal: the person in charge of a school

## **Lightning and Thunder**

Once upon a time, there lived a happy couple. The wife was called Lightning and the husband was called Thunder.

They were happy together and everyone in the community loved them. They did everything together. One day, something unfortunate happened. The couple had an accident, and Mr Thunder lost his ability to hear. This was a very sad moment in their lives as Mr Thunder could no longer hear his wife.

Mrs Lightning became very sad, until one morning she thought perhaps she should learn sign language so she could communicate with her husband again. Lightning learned sign language all summer, and she could now communicate with her husband in a new language. Every time that Mrs Lightning wanted to tell Mr Thunder something, she produced light to show him that she was about to communicate.

Because Thunder could not hear anymore, he did not realize he was shouting. When Lightning made a sign accompanied by light, her husband would respond with a loud voice. It was louder when Thunder laughed. Lightning was funny and always made jokes. Thunder would always laugh so loud, and that is why to this day, every time you see lightning, it is always followed by loud thunder.

### **Quiz Time!**

Why did Thunder always shout when talking?

Why did Lightning learn sign language?

How long did it take Lightning to learn sign language?

### **Dictionary Time!**

Sign language: a language used to communicate with people who are deaf or have hearing difficulties.

Lightning: a huge electrical spark between the clouds, the ground and the air.

Thunder: the sound that comes after lightning happens when the air becomes hot and expands, so the sky makes a big rumbling sound.

## **The Brave Butterfly**

Lolo was a beautiful butterfly, one with many colours, blue, white and pink. She lived in Butter Land, a small but happy community. Lolo's community started facing lots of problems. First, the miners bought their home, and then their food and farms were destroyed. Butter Land did not have a king or queen so it was difficult to make any decisions. The new owners of the land started mining and digging. Each passing day, Butter Land was at risk of extinction.

Early the next morning, Lolo decided to do something. She had never flown outside of her little village but she knew she had to find a way to help. So, Lolo flew for many hours in search of a new home for her people. The journey was a tough and she encountered many challenges. After 3 days of flying, Lolo was very hungry and tired, and she fell asleep on a leaf.

When she woke up, she realized she was alone on a very beautiful island. Lolo woke up with excitement and hope. "Could this be our new home?" she wondered. She rushed to the river, and tasted the water. "It is good for drinking," Lolo said. Then, she flew around to see if there was food. "Yes! There were lots of fruits, vegetables and very beautiful flowers." Then, Lolo called out to see if anyone will show up, but no one did.

She immediately realized this was their new home and began building little houses. By nightfall, Lolo was able to construct enough houses for everyone. Happy and tired, Lolo ate and rested. The next morning in Butter Land, the miners were just a few meters away from destroying Butter Land completely. All the other butterflies were very afraid. But Lolo's grandmother was very sure her granddaughter would come up with something.

A few minutes later, Lolo could be seen flying towards them with so much enthusiasm. She shouted, "Behold, we have a new home, one so much better than Butter Land! Quick everyone, gather your things, and let's go, it's going to be a long flight." They flew for hours and finally they reached their new home. The young butterflies flew in circles as a sign of peace, joy and fulfilment. Lolo was made queen and the new land was named Lolo Land.

### **Quiz Time!**

What was the name of Lolo's first village?

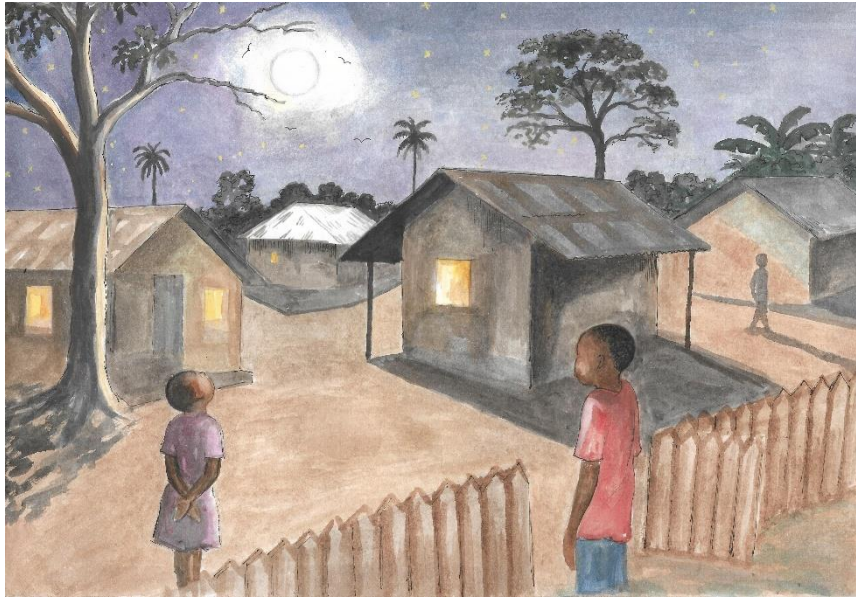
Why did Lolo and the butterflies leave their village?

How long did Lolo fly in search of a new home?

# Muna and the Moon

Mohamed Sheriff

Muna looked up at the sky as she walked. She walked faster and then stopped. She ran a little and stopped. She ran and she walked and she stopped. She looked up the sky and it was still there. A big round moon.



“Muna, it’s okay,” said Tamba. “You have followed the moon for too long now.” Tamba was Muna’s brother. He was eleven. He stood at the gate of their compound. “Grandma has been looking for you. Come inside now.”

“I did not follow the moon. The moon followed me,” Muna said as they went inside the compound.

Grandma was waiting at the veranda. “You have been out following the moon again, right? I have told you not to go out alone at night.”

“I’m sorry, Grandma. I won’t do it again.”

“Muna, you say that all the time. But you do not keep your promises,” Grandma said.

“The moon does not follow you. When will you understand that?”

“Grandma, the moon follows me. I know it. One day I will prove it,” Muna said.

“Okay, have your supper and go to bed,” Grandma said.

These were the things they said to each other every day. Muna believed that the moon followed her. Everyone else thought she was wrong. But when Muna took a walk at night, the moon followed her. Or so she believed.

One evening, Muna went to visit Maria. Maria was her best friend. They went out to the football field near their school.

“Let’s walk around the field,” Muna said. “We can look up at the moon as we go.” They walked around the football field. Then they walked around it again. They looked up at the moon as they walked.

“What do you think? Was the moon following us or not?” Muna asked Maria.

“I think it was following us,” Maria said.

“The moon follows me. I will show everyone. I will even meet with the moon.”

“But where can you meet the moon?” Maria asked.

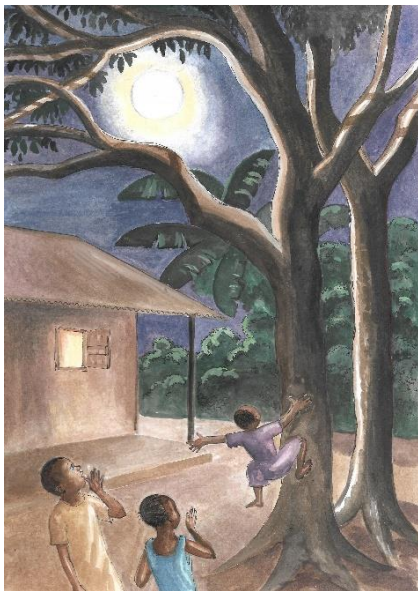
“Up a very high hill or a mountain, if I can’t find a place down here in the village,” Muna said.

“We don’t have a high hill or mountain here. We only have Mona Hill,” Maria said. She pointed to a small hill at the edge of the village.

“It is still a hill. But first, I will look for a place down here. I need to get closer to the moon. I can climb a tall building or a tall tree. Then I will be able to see what it looks like. Also, I want to know if it is as soft as rice or as hard as a rock,” Muna said.

The next evening, Muna and Maria played with other children in a garden. There were some tall trees in the garden. The trees had big branches and many leaves. Muna looked through the leaves of one of the trees. She saw the moon. “Ah, the moon is closer if you’re up in the tree,” she said to herself. She climbed to the top of the tree. She looked at the moon. Still, the moon was not closer to her. Muna was sad, but she did not give up. She would try something else next time.

As she was getting down the tree, she slipped and fell. She hurt her leg. Maria and the other children carefully carried her to Grandma.



“This girl will send me to my grave before my time!” Grandma shouted to the sky.

“Why can’t you leave the moon alone?” Grandma said to Muna.

“I’m sorry, Grandma. It won’t happen again. I promise,” Muna said.

For some time after that, Muna did not go after the moon. Had she forgotten about



the moon? No. One night, Muna went out to play. The moon was out. It was big and bright. It hung right above a tall building. The building was not completed. But it was the tallest building in the village.

Muna tiptoed up the stairs. She reached the very top. She stood there and fixed her eyes on the moon. She stretched up on her toes to see it better. But the moon did not come closer. Muna was sad. But she did not give up. "I will try again another time," she said.



Muna did not give up her dream. She wanted to meet the moon. She thought of going to the top of Mona Hill, but she did not want to go alone. She did not want to make Grandma angry. One full moon night, she begged Tamba to take her to the top of the hill.

"I know I will be closer to the moon there," she told Tamba.

"I'll go with you because I don't want you to go alone," Tamba said.

After supper that night, Tamba and Muna climbed up Mona Hill. They stayed on top of the hill for a long time. There were only a few houses in the area. Everywhere was very quiet. Most people were going to bed.

"We should go now," Tamba said. "The moon has stayed right above us since we came."

Muna stood in different places on top of the hill. She looked up at the moon. She looked so hard that her back, neck, and feet hurt. The moon did not come close to meet her. But still, Muna did not give up. She would try somewhere else.

Muna did not stop thinking about the moon. One night, she looked for the moon but could not find it. She had so many questions about the moon.

Where does the moon go when it is not in the sky? Does it go to meet people in other places? If so, could she meet the moon there too? She decided to find out.

“Where does the moon go when it’s not in the sky?” Muna asked Maria on their way home from school.

“I don’t know,” Maria said.

“Grandma, where does the moon go when it is not in the sky?” Muna asked her grandmother that night.

“What sort of question is that? The moon has always been like that. It comes and goes every month,” Grandma said. Muna was not satisfied with that answer.

“Mr Sesay, can I ask you some questions about the moon?” she asked during science class the next day.

“Go ahead, Muna,” Mr. Sesay said.

“Why does the moon follow me? And why can’t I meet the moon?” she asked.

“The moon does not follow you,” Mr. Sesay said. “You see the moon everywhere you go. This makes you think it is following you. Everyone in the village sees it too when it comes out at night. The moon is very far up in the sky. It is very large. But we see it as small. That is because it is very far away from Earth.”

Muna sat still, paying close attention.

“Now I will use a drawing to explain to you,” Mr. Sesay said.



He drew a square at the bottom of the blackboard. He drew some houses inside the square. Then he used lines to draw people in the square. He used a coloured piece of chalk to draw one person in the square, too. Above the square at the top of the board, he drew the moon.

“Now this is our village,” Mr. Sesay said. He touched the square with his cane. These are the people and the houses. Above the village is the moon. You can see that, from the village, everyone can see the moon, right?”

“Yes,” the pupils answered. Everyone was enjoying the lesson.

“This coloured stick figure is Muna.” The children giggled. Muna laughed. She was enjoying the lesson as well. “Muna, you are the coloured figure. From here, you can see the moon, right?”

“Yes,” Muna answered.

Mr Sesay erased the stick figure. He drew another figure at a different part of the square. “If I take you from here to there, will you still see the moon?”

“Yes, sir,” Muna answered.

Mr Sesay drew the figure on another part in the square. Muna agreed that she would see the moon from there, too.

“This means that wherever you go in the village you will see the moon, right?”

“Yes, sir,” Muna answered.

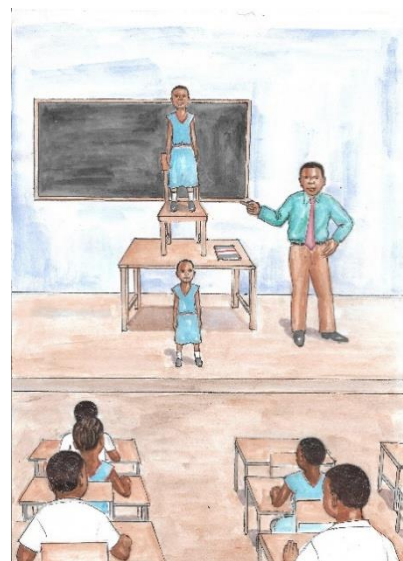
“Good. And that is why you think the moon is following you. Understood?” Mr. Sesay asked.

“Yes, sir,” Muna answered. Now she knew the moon did not follow her. “But, sir, why don’t we always see the moon in the sky?” Muna asked again.

“That is because both the moon and the earth do not stay in one place. They move. The moon moves in a circle along a path called its orbit. Also, the moon spins like a top. The earth also moves in a circle on its own orbit. And the earth, too, spins around like a top. Our village is found on one part of the earth. When this side of the earth faces the moon, you will see the moon. But when it turns away from the moon, you will not see it.”

“Now let us demonstrate. Muna, come to the front of the class. I want one more volunteer.” Maria raised her hand. “Okay, Maria. You, too, come forward.”

Mr. Sesay took a chair and placed it on top of his desk. He lifted Maria and made her stand on top of the chair. Maria became taller than everyone else in the class, including Mr. Sesay.





“Maria is the moon. Muna, you are on the earth. Now, I want you to look up at Maria. Do you see her?”

“Yes, sir,” Muna said smiling. She was enjoying the demonstration.

“Now the earth is turning around with Muna, slowly like a top. Turn around, Muna,” Mr. Sesay told her.

Muna began to turn slowly until her back was to Maria.

“Now stop. Do you see Maria, the moon?”

“No, sir,” Muna said.

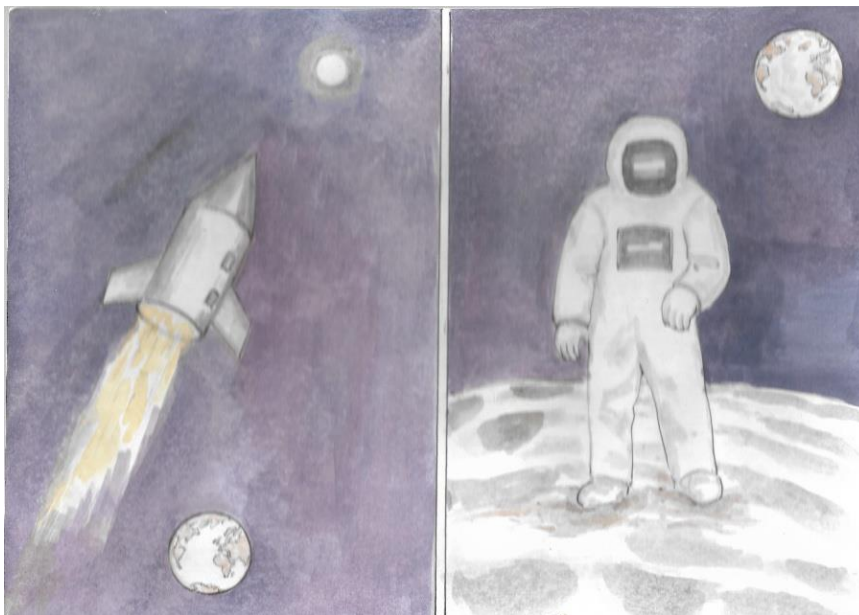
“Well, that is what happens when you don’t see the moon. It means your side of the earth is away from it,” the teacher explained. “Also, thick dark clouds can hide the moon from you even when it is in the sky. Do you all understand now why the moon is not always in the sky?”

“Yes, sir,” the pupils answered.

“Any more questions?” Mr. Sesay asked.

“Yes, sir. One more,” Muna said. This was her most important question. “Can I meet the moon?”

The teacher smiled, “Well, it’s possible to go to the moon,” he said. “People have travelled to the moon in spaceships. If you become an astronaut, you can travel to the moon.”



“Who is an astronaut?” Maria asked.

“Someone trained to travel in a spaceship,” the teacher said.

“What is a spaceship?” Muna asked.

“A ship that travels very far into the sky at very high speed,” Mr. Sesay explained.

“Thank you, Mr. Sesay,” Muna said, feeling very happy. She had the answers to all her questions. And she knew now for sure that she can meet the moon.

“I will be an astronaut when I grow up and I’ll go to the moon,” she told her teacher. Mr. Sesay smiled, “You are a brave girl. And you don’t easily give up when you want something. That means you can achieve whatever you want to.”

From that day on, anytime Muna saw the moon in the sky, she thought of her dream of becoming an astronaut. And she knew for sure that she could meet the moon.



# Where Did the Rain Go?

Opeoluwa Ogunsola

Gloria was curious. So, she asked her mother, “Why does rain fall sometimes and the sun at other times? And how do you know when to expect rain and when to expect sunshine?”

Her mother replied, “There is a season for everything on planet Earth, Gloria dear. There is a season for rain and there is a season for the sunshine. There is a time for planting and a time for harvesting. Here in Nigeria, we have the rainy season and the dry season. In the rainy season, you should expect rain and in the dry season, you should expect sunshine. That is how our seasons run here”

Gloria said, “I like the sunshine, it makes me feel happy and gives us light to see. But I also like the rain, it lets our food grow even though it sometimes gets in the way of my play.”

“Yes, dear,” her mother replied. “All seasons are good. Both the rainy season and the dry season are beneficial to mankind. We are presently in the dry season, so you should expect sunshine.” So, Gloria ran out happily to play with her friends.

Soon it was the rainy season and the time for planting food. Everyone was expecting rain to begin planting, but the rain did not come. There was drought and extreme heat. Gloria was concerned

Where has the rain gone? She wondered. “We need to plant our food. It's the rainy season but the heat I feel is so much. I wish this weather would cool.” She remembered the song she and her friends used to sing whenever rain fell.

*Rain, rain, go away,  
come again another day,  
little children want to play.*

Could that be the reason the rain has refused to come? She pondered.

“Rain, please come. It's the season for you to visit,” Gloria muttered, but the rain did not come. So, she thought, the sun is being selfish because it has not allowed the rain to come. “I don't think I like the sunshine anymore,” she said to her mother.

But the sun heard Gloria. “Come with me,” the sun said. “Let's go on an adventure together and I will show you why the rain has gone. From my perch up here in the sky, I see everything that is going on and know what has caused this problem,” the sun said as he led her to the motor park.

“Where did the rain go? Why has it not come?” Gloria asked.

“You see, the rain has not come because of the change in the climate,” said the sun.

“What is the climate? And why has it changed?” asked Gloria.

“The climate is the average pattern of the weather in a particular place measured over some time, usually years. Human activities such as transportation by cars, planes or ships cause a release of something harmful to the environment, and that is called greenhouse gases. An example is carbon dioxide. These greenhouse gases are also emitted by cooking with wood or coal or by generating electricity. Also, big industrial factories release these greenhouse gases in their manufacturing processes.”

“Why are the greenhouse gases harmful?”

“They trap too much heat within the environment and they cause something called global warming, which is responsible for what is called climate change. And climate change causes many harmful things to the environment.”

“What are the harmful things climate change causes?” Gloria asked.

“Climate change makes the pattern of seasons change so the seasons cannot be predicted well anymore. Seasonal prediction helps to predict the rainy season and the dry season. It also helps us to prepare and know when and how to plant food. But climate change has caused drought when there should be rain, extreme flooding and strange weather conditions.”

“No wonder rain flooded my house on Christmas day last year during the dry season. And now in the rainy season, there is no rain for planting.”

“Yes, that's why the rain has not come for you to plant. And if there's no rain, there will not be enough food for everyone.”

“That's bad,” Gloria replied feeling sad. “No wonder the rain has not come and we have not been able to grow corn. And I love roasted corn.”

“There are other effects too. That's not the only thing climate change causes,” said the sun.

“There's more? Climate change must be terrible,” she said. “Because what more bad things can there be after all you have told me?”

“When there are strange weather conditions, like storms or hail or flooding, caused by climate change, people can get hurt or lose their properties. Children can lose their homes or their schools,” said the sun.

“That would be sad!” said Gloria.

“Also global warming causes the loss of land as well.”

“How?”

“It makes the levels of water on the earth increase, and the lands go underwater.”

The sun then led Gloria to a very large expanse of bare land. “This used to be a thick and beautiful forest with lots of singing birds and families of animals.”

“Really?” said Gloria. “But there's nothing here anymore!”

“That's because all of the trees were cut down by humans and they did not replant them, till everywhere became empty this way. The forests and the grass groaned and wept. I saw and heard it all from my seat in the sky. After lots of animals and birds lost their homes, they moved away. And the place became empty, and some animals got really sick.”

“Oh! What poor animals.”

“This is another way, human beings are upsetting the seasons on planet Earth. Cutting down all the trees in the forest is called deforestation. The opposite of deforestation is afforestation, which is planting trees to create forests. If you plant trees, there will be increased oxygen and the air will be cleaner! This is because trees absorb carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that causes global warming and climate change. Trees also help to control soil erosion that washes away the topsoil and all the nutrients that are good for the planting of food.”

“Then they should have planted trees rather than cutting it down,” Gloria mused.

“Come, let me show you something else.”

The sun led Gloria to a plastic dump. “Do you know that plastic can sometimes take hundreds of years to decay and join the soil again?”

“No, I didn't know that!”

“They slowly release another type of greenhouse gas called methane gas, which adds to global warming and climate change. A lot of these plastics end up in the ocean and cause damage to the marine life that lives there.”

“The fishes also suffer from all of this?”

“Yes. All the creatures and animals that live underwater suffer from it. Some people also burn waste containing plastic, release harmful greenhouse gases that pollute the environment,” the sun said to Gloria.

“Gloria, do you know that you can help cause a positive change to all these problems?” asked the sun.

“But I am only a child. I am too young!” Gloria said, surprised.

“Gloria, you are not too young to make a positive difference! The most vulnerable group affected by climate change is children. So, they must also be aware of climate change. They should participate in saving the environment by fighting climate change. Gloria, won't you go and educate other children like yourself? Oh! Won't you make your friends aware of how they can participate in solving issues affecting them?” said the sun earnestly.

“But how can I make them understand?”

“They will understand if you create a friendly group where you tell them about it. Then, you will help your community by planting trees. You can also care for the

environment by helping reduce pollution caused by plastics. To do that, you can pick up plastics you find on the ground and drop them in recycle bins.”

“Recycle Bins?”

“Yes, you can create recycle bins in your community where everyone drops all their discarded plastics for it to be reused.”

“You can also tell your parents to use clean energy sources like solar energy to reduce greenhouse gases,” said the sun. “When you do this, the earth will thank you! It will produce all your favourite foods with rich harvests. There will be enough rain to water the fields and make your seeds grow. The forests will shout out for joy with green lush plants and leaves, because the rain will come in its season and the sun in its season.”

“Thank you!” said Gloria. “I have learnt a lot. And I will do all you have taught me!”

So, Gloria went home and did as the sun said, she gathered other children and told them, “There is a big, urgent problem. It is the reason why the rain has gone away!”

“What is the reason?” they asked her.

“Climate change caused by bad environmental practices. If we don't take action there won't be rain. If there's no rain, there will be no food, no clean water for drinking, and we can get sick from drinking bad water. We must help to reduce greenhouse gases, and tell a friend to tell a friend!”

So, Gloria with her friends created the *Tell a Friend About the Climate* Group and they invited the other children from all the other nearby communities and schools. Together, they planted trees, gathered up discarded plastics and encouraged their parents to use clean energy sources to save the environment. Soon after, the rain came back again.



# *Doodle Corner*





# Sweethearts

Daniel Alaka

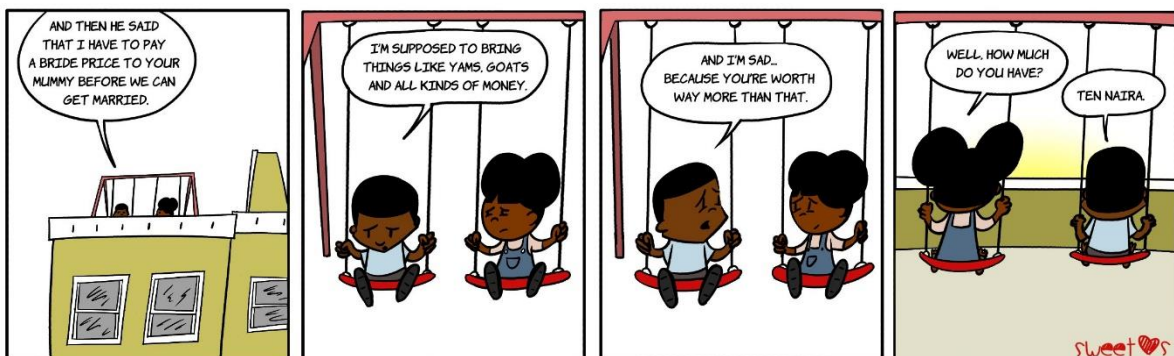
*Chidera and Obi are two friends who have sweet little adventures! One day, Obi comes over to play:*



*Chidera thinks really hard about it:*



*Obi goes home to tell his brother all about it, but his brother asks him about something important:*

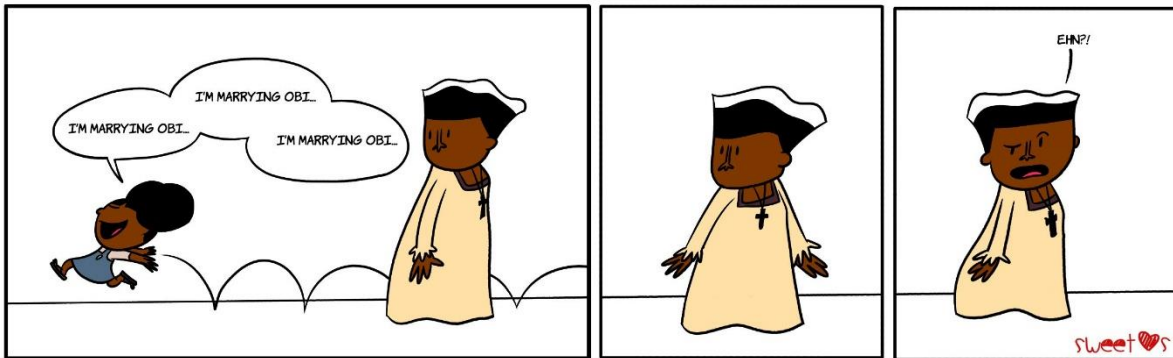




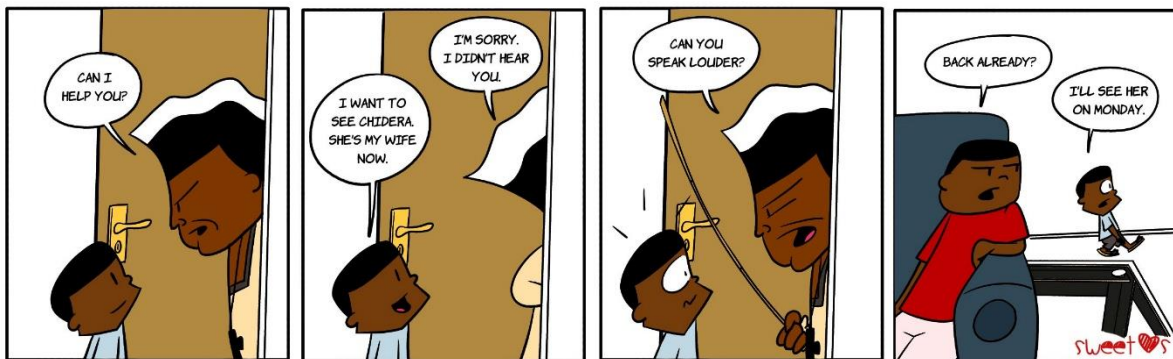
*Obi and Chidera go back to their moms to talk about their big plans:*



*The next day, Chidera is really excited but forgot to tell her grandmother:*



*Obi comes by to have a play date:*



*To read more of the Sweetheart comics, you can continue the story [here](#)!*

# Wonderous Adventures

Dorathy Dung

Ms Dorothy drew a beautiful picture! Would you like to create a story to go with it?



Here are some things you need to think about for your story!

- 📖 What name does the little girl have?
- 📖 What is her dog's name?
- 📖 Where do you think they are, and where are they going?
- 📖 The girl is looking at a flower. Do you think it has any magical qualities?

You can write about whatever you want, even if you do not want to answer the questions! Use your imagination and the story will be wonderful!

# *Wild Tales*



# Twinkle Twinkle: How the Elephants Got Their Tusks

Nande T. S. Kamati

“Owls have always whispered that they were born from the stars,” said Old Tortoise with a twinkle in his eye. “And if you listen closely at night, the moon and the stars will tell you why... and maybe even share a secret about the elephants.”



Namwi had finally turned three trumpet-years old! She was bursting with excitement — *pop! zip! zoom!* — because this meant she could finally join the other little trunks at nursery school, just like her parents had promised.

“Daddy, are the teachers going to teach me how to trumpet as loud as you and Mommy?” Namwi asked, her trunk swinging like a vine in the wind as she waddled beside her dad.

Her father chuckled, a deep “hurr-hurr-hummm” rumble. “You already trumpet loud enough to wake the stars, my little darling. But the matriarch will teach you something even more special — something passed down from grandmother to granddaughter, from tusk to tusk.”

Namwi’s eyes grew as round as a baobab fruit, “Ooooh! What is it?”

“She’ll teach you how to find water,” he said, his voice steady, like the beat of ancient drums.

Namwi’s ears drooped. “But Daddy... I already know where the spring is,” she said, a little squish of disappointment in her voice.

Her father smiled and nuzzled her ear gently. “Ah, but what if the spring dries up? What if the rains forget their way down to the earth? Then where will our thirsty friends in the savanna go?”

Namwi blinked. “I... I don’t know.”

“Exactly, my clever one,” he said. “For as long as anyone can remember, elephants have followed the whispers of the earth to find water — even when the ground is cracked and crying. We don’t keep it to ourselves. We lead the way, so all creatures can drink.”

Namwi's whole face lit up like the morning sun. "Wooow! We're like... so special!"

Her father nodded. "Yes, all elephants are special," he said as they reached the great baobab tree, its branches stretching out like welcoming arms above the little learners. "And no matter what, you must always remember — you are just as special as any other elephant. One day, you too will find water, just like the matriarchs before you."

He leaned down and gave her a gentle snoggle-boop on the forehead with his trunk.

Namwi squealed with laughter. "Okay, Daddy!" she said, her ears flapping like butterfly wings as she galloped off to join the other calves under the tree.

She trotted up to the group, eyes sparkling, "Hi! My name is Namwi. Are you as excited as I am to learn how to find water?"

The other calves paused mid-giggle and turned to her. Curiosity flickered in their eyes like fireflies. One calf reached out and lifted her trunk. "She has a trunk like mine!" he trumpeted.

Another wiggled Namwi's ears with a playful flop. "And big, floppy ears like mine!" Namwi giggled — until a third calf stepped closer, squinting.

"Wait... where are your tusks?" he asked.

Namwi blinked. "What do you mean?"

"You have no tusks!" the calf cried. "What are you?"

Namwi lifted her chin, her voice steady like her father's, "I am an elephant, just like you! I came to learn how to find water, just like you."

But the other calves burst into snort-giggles and silly stomps. "Look at us! We all have tusks, and you don't!"

"You can't be an elephant — 'cause *all* elephants have tusks!"

"Yeah! And without tusks, how will you ever find water? My daddy says tusks are for digging! You'll never be able to do it. Maybe you should go find your own kind."

Namwi's heart sank. Their words scratched at her like thorny branches. Tears welled up, warm and fast, and before she could stop them — *plip, plop, plop* — they spilled down her cheeks.

Without a word, she turned and bolted — away from the laughter, away from the baobab tree, away from the sharp sting in her chest. She ran until her legs ached and her breath came out in huffs. Then, she tucked herself beneath a thick bush and curled up tight, her sobs rustling the leaves around her.

She was crying so loudly she didn't hear the soft crunch-crunch of approaching footsteps.

A great shadow stretched across the bush as someone gently nudged the branches aside. It was the matriarch — tall, wise, and calm as the moon.

"What's the matter, my dearest sprout?" she asked, wrapping Namwi in a warm, trunky hug that smelled faintly of dust and sunshine.

Namwi hiccupped. “I... I don’t have tusks like an elephant should,” she whispered. “I’m not a real elephant.”

The matriarch took a slow, thoughtful look at her, then let out a gentle chuckle that rumbled like distant thunder. “Oh, my little seedling,” she said, “some calves take longer to grow their tusks — but that doesn’t make them any less of an elephant. You are as elephant as an elephant can be.”

Namwi sniffled and wiped her eyes with the end of her trunk. “But... but how will I find water? The other calves said tusks are for digging. I can’t help without them.”

The matriarch’s eyes sparkled, “Nonsense! Tusks are useful, yes — but they’re not what makes an elephant a water-finder.” She gave Namwi a gentle nudge, “Come now. There’s something I want to show you.”

Together, they walked back through the grass toward the baobab tree. The other calves sat in a quiet huddle, their trunks drooping a little as they saw Namwi return, safe and close to the matriarch’s side.

The matriarch’s voice rose, warm and full of stories. “Gather around, little ones,” she said. “Let me tell you about the elephants who walked these savannas long, long ago...”

The matriarch’s long tusks shimmered in the sun, sending sparkles spinning into the air. They twirled and danced like fireflies — *swish! swirl! zing!* — rising higher and higher until they burst into four glowing stars above the treetops.

“This story is as old as time itself,” the matriarch whispered, her eyes soft with memory. “And as real as the sun that tickles your ears each morning.”

The calves leaned in closer, wide-eyed.

“Long ago,” she began, “when the first animals walked the earth, there was no moon. The nights were pitch-black, and the only light came from four bright stars. Each had a name:

Kaskazi, the northern star.  
Mashariki, the eastern star.  
Magharibi, the western star.  
Kusini, the southern star.

They were sisters — glowing, brilliant, and said to love each other dearly. Or... so everyone believed.” She paused, letting the silence of the savanna wrap around them.

“Though they sparkled side by side, the animals on earth didn’t love them equally. Kaskazi was adored by travelers — she always showed the way. Mashariki was the most beloved of all, for she brought the first light of morning. Kusini was known for her steady glow, guiding animals even in the daytime. But Magharibi...” The matriarch’s voice grew quieter, “...was different.”

“The animals believed she swallowed the sun each evening, just to steal its glow. They whispered that she was greedy, a trickster. They never danced for her. Never



thanked her. Magharibi ached to be loved like her sisters — but as long as they glittered beside her, she stayed in their shadow.”

The calves looked up at the stars — one, two, three, four — glimmering gently in the sky above.

“Once a year,” the matriarch continued, “on the first day of summer, the four sisters were allowed to visit the earth as animals. They drifted down from the sky on chariots made of butterflies — orange, purple, black, and blue. The butterflies flapped and fluttered in a glorious breeze — *flish-flap! flutter-zoom!* — carrying the sisters gently to the ground.

As they landed, their glowing forms melted away like morning dew, and in their place stood four oryxes.

Not just any oryxes. Their coats shimmered white, speckled with golden dots like stardust. Their long, curved horns reached for the sky — graceful, glowing, grand.

The four sisters laughed and played beneath the golden sun. They danced with the gazelles. Splashed in the cool springs with the fish. And ran wild through tall grasses, their hooves kissing the earth below.

But hidden beneath her laughter, Magharibi had a plan.

She brought her sisters the juiciest melons the land had ever seen — round as the moon, heavy with sweetness, their scent like sun-warmed honey. The three sisters eagerly devoured them, never knowing the fruit carried a secret: a deep, magical sleep.

One by one, Kaskazi yawned... then Kusini... then Mashariki. Their eyelids drooped, and before they could speak, they drifted into a quiet, dreamless slumber.

Magharibi watched them sleep. Then, without a word, she climbed back to the sky — alone — just as the sun began to sink behind the trees.

But there was one rule the stars were never to break:

*They must return to the sky before nightfall...  
or fade forever into the wind.*

Without their celestial forms, the sleeping sisters crumbled into stardust. Their golden bodies shimmered once — and vanished.

Magharibi thought she had won. But the Lion King of the savanna, the great guardian of balance, had seen it all.

“You have betrayed your sisters!” he thundered from the earth. “You will no longer shine in the sky.”

With a mighty roar that shook the trees, he stripped away her starry form, and cast her down to the earth. “As punishment,” the Lion King declared, “you will live forever as an owl — never again among the stars, but always watching them from below.”

And so, Magharibi became the very first owl. To this day, when you hear an owl hooting softly in the night — “hoo... hoo...” it is her — whispering her sorrow to the moon, still longing to return to the sky, still waiting to go home.

With no stars left to light the night — and no guiding star in the south — chaos swept across the earth.

The four winds — North, East, West, and South — became confused. They spun in the wrong directions, clashing in the skies like angry drums. Their quarrelling shook the world, and the earth began to spin the wrong way!

Seasons crumbled into confusion. Rain poured when the land was meant to be dry. Cold winds blew during sun-soaked months. Rivers overflowed, flooding the land. Trees lost their leaves too soon — and flowers forgot how to bloom.

If this went on, all life would fade away. But in the heart of all this trouble, the elephants remained calm.

Back then, they didn’t yet have the long, curving tusks we know today. And yet, while fear ruled the land, their world remained unchanged.

Why?

Because elephants had never relied on the stars to find their way. They followed the ancient paths worn into the earth by the footsteps of their ancestors.

And when the skies were darkest, their tiny friends — the fireflies — danced beside them, lighting the way with lanterns made of living gold.

The elephants always slept beneath the northern star, drank only the sweet waters from the waterholes in the east, and feasted on the golden fruit of the marula trees, which grew only in the west. And when an elephant’s time came to journey to the eternal savanna, they walked south — where their ancestors waited to welcome them home.

But the endless bickering of the four winds had started to disturb the elephants’ peaceful ways. So, the wise matriarchs decided to help. “Let us be your guides,” they said kindly. “We will lead you back to where you belong.”

Tired of fighting amongst each other, the four winds eagerly agreed.

Each day, four elephant matriarchs took turns guiding the winds, showing them the right paths to follow. Slowly, the winds learned their way again.

The northern wind once groaned, “I think I’ve passed that rock a few times already!” The others chuckled quietly, and the elephants continued walking calmly, now finally understanding the ancient paths the elephants had walked for generations.

Yet, the world remained covered in deep darkness at night, and all the animals longed for light.

So, the mighty lion king of the savanna let out a thunderous roar. With it, a powerful gust of wind — greater than any ever seen — rose from the ocean’s depths. It swirled through the land, scooping up the shimmering stardust left behind by Kaskazi,



Mashariki, and Kusini. Up, up, up it carried the dust into the sky, shaping it into the glowing moon and the countless twinkling stars we see today.

The great lion king did not forget the elephants, who had restored peace among the four winds. As a reward, he sprinkled them with the last of Magharibi's stardust. The dust settled on their foreheads, shaping into the strong, beautiful ivory tusks they bear to this day."

As the story ended, the tiny sparkles that had danced in the air drifted back, reattaching themselves to the matriarch's tusks, glowing softly in the sunlight.

"So, elephants didn't always have tusks?" Namwi asked the matriarch.

"No, they did not," the matriarch replied. "Our tusks are beautiful indeed and help us in many ways, but they aren't what make us special."

"What makes elephants special, then, Ms. Matriarch?" one of the calves asked.

"Our kindness towards others and our selflessness in helping others, so life is better for everyone," the matriarch said. "It's how we make the world brighter, just like the stars in the sky."

The calves suddenly hung their heads in shame. "Ms. Matriarch, I'm afraid we were really bad to Namwi, and we made her cry," one of the calves said, his voice soft.

"I'm really sorry for teasing you, Namwi," another calf said, looking genuinely upset.

"Me too... me too," chimed the other calves.

Namwi felt the warmth of their apologies and approached them cautiously. With a hesitant giggle, the calves patted each other with their trunks, and soon their giggles turned into a joyful chorus. All was forgiven.

"That's the spirit," said the matriarch with a smile. "Now, who wants to learn how to find water?"

The calves trumpeted happily, their calls ringing through the air, filling the savanna with joy.

# A Home for Mr Giraffe

**Olakunbi Olatunde**

Deep in the jungle, where trees reached for the bright blue sky, the elephant trumpeted and the frog croaked in harmony. The animals loved to party. There was always a party to attend every week.

Last week Zaki, the lion, had a party in his den. The thump-thump of the bembé drum filled the air as the animals danced under the sparkling lights of the fireflies. Everyone was excited to be there. Twiga, the giraffe, was excited too but once again, he had to peek in from outside. Why? Because he was much too tall to fit in the lion's den. He could only bend his knees to stick half his neck in. He had fun, but his knees were tired after the party.

Next, it was the elephant, Erin's party. He invited everyone under his Musanga tree; the big, cozy umbrella tree of the forest. While everyone had fun, Twiga's neck kept getting stuck in the branches. He went home with a sore neck and bruised face.



After the parties, everyone would go home. Lion to his den, snake to her lair, ants to their colonies, gorilla onto his fresh nest in the treetop, and elephant under a cozy tree. But not Twiga. He had the sky, nowhere to be.

Twiga wanted a home, a home that his neck fit in and where he could throw a party and not be left out. So, he thought long and hard. Everywhere he went, he thought, and soon the other animals noticed.

One warm afternoon, as he walked by, he saw the owl flying above him and soon settling in her nest atop the tree.

"Hello, Patu," Twiga greeted. "Must be nice up there. Why do you live in a tree anyway?" Twiga asked.

"Well, there's a lot of stomping on the ground; it's safer up here, and it's much closer to the sky than the ground is," Patu, the owl replied.

“I see,” Twiga said, realizing that some animals had a reason for building their homes.

“There's another secret.”

“What's that, Patu?” Twiga asked.

“Birds build up here so our chicks can dream of flying before it's even time.”

Before Twiga headed back to his spot under the sky, he saw Zaki, the lion, yawning in his den. Twiga noticed that the den was a pile of rocks, and he wondered how the lion managed to pile the rocks together. So, Twiga asked him, and Zaki replied, “Oh, I didn't build it. I found it, nature made it. And I can keep an eye on my jungle.”

As he walked on, he saw a burrow and, on closer look, he saw it was Ijapa, the tortoise, relaxed and munching a green leaf. He asked why he lived in a burrow and not in a tree or cave. “I can't even climb a tree,” Ijapa laughed. “And it's hot outside; I can stay cool in here.”

Everyone had a home that catered to their needs. Twiga wished he had a home; Ijapa could see the longing in his eyes. “You know, some of us go high and some go low. You don't need a house like others; you just need one that feels right,” Ijapa said to him.

Twiga heard Ijapa loud and clear. “Everyone has a home built just for them. But maybe... mine doesn't exist yet. Maybe I have to build it.”

Twiga swayed, deep in thought, his hooves kicking at the red soil of the jungle. He soon found himself under an iroko tree. He looked up at the tall tree. His neck didn't get tangled between its branches. Finally, he got an idea. He was going to build a tower as tall and strong as the iroko tree. He didn't know if it would work, but it was better to try.

He began picking the strongest rocks he could find. All the animals thought he had gone mad, picking pebbles, but soon joined him when he wouldn't stop. It was fun selecting the best pebbles for Twiga's new home.

The elephant, gorilla, and lion helped stack the biggest stones. Monkeys and mongoose fetched pebbles, and even the hummingbird dropped tiny twigs. Bit by bit, with a ladder made of jungle friends, a tower rose, tall enough for Twiga, strong enough for friends.

Twiga knew he had to throw a party. He had always wanted to. And this time, when Twiga threw his party, no one was left out, not even him. For once, he didn't have to bend or peek. He was home at last.

# Njiwa Learns to Fly

Patrick Ochieng

“Tomorrow, I’ll teach you to fly,” Njiwa’s mama said as she smiled and fed her a worm. Weary at the thought of soaring up in the sky, flying, the little chick could barely sleep. Sensing Njiwa’s dread, her mama softly cooed as she rubbed her beak against Njiwa’s sides and finally rocked her to sleep.



“There is nothing to be scared of,” Njiwa’s mama said as she woke her up in the morning. She then pulled out another worm she’d stored for breakfast and slipped it through Njiwa’s beak. “You’ll need all your strength today,” she said as she led Njiwa from the cozy nest and onto a path in the forest that led to a field, popular with birds teaching their chicks to fly.

Along the way Njiwa saw another ring-necked dove, accompanying its chick. Njiwa waved and the chick waved back and it helped ease Njiwa’s anxiety. The morning sun’s rays felt warm and tender on Njiwa’s back.

“Well! Here we are,” Njiwa’s mama said as Njiwa stared out at the field that seemed to stretch out endlessly, with only a sprinkling of trees. “Now remember it doesn’t happen at once. But if you work those wings well, you’ll be up and flying in no time.” She patted Njiwa on the back, “Now go for it.”

And so Njiwa leaped up into the air, beat out a light, *tapa, tapa, tapa* with her wings. And sure enough, she was airborne. Swinging left and right to avoid the trees that rushed out at her at break-neck speed, she dipped low, only to rip through thorns and brush, before crashing to the ground.

“It isn’t working, mama. I feel sore all over.” She limped back to her mama, in between catching her breath.

“You must be patient,” Njiwa’s mama said. “That was your first time and you can’t expect miracles. If you work hard at it, it will come.”

And so Njiwa tried again and again, but could not stay up in the air for long. “Let’s get back to the nest. Tomorrow will be another day,” Njiwa’s mama said after lots of attempts.

Early the next day, and the day after, Njiwa was on the very same field, flapping and flapping as her mama watched. She flapped on and on until she was dizzy and her sides were sore.

“You can do it, I know you can,” her mama urged her, after each failed attempt.

“But I’ve been at it for days now,” Njiwa said with her head lowered. “Maybe it was not meant to be. Maybe I was not meant to fly. Maybe like Hen, I’m doomed to forever walk upon the ground, pecking for food.

“It’s only your third day,” her mama said.

“How long did it take you to learn to fly? How long will it take me, to be like you? When will I be able to soar off to any place that I please?” Njiwa asked.

“It will take as long as you decide it should take,” her mama gently cooed.

“But I want it to happen today. I want to be able to soar and swoop like an eagle. I want to be able to dive in and out of the clouds. To be able to see all the wonderful things that Swallow speaks of. Is it true that, from high up in the sky, the earth looks like a pot, with the trees and grass, no more than green-veggies, stewing in it? And that a great distance from here, there is a huge, huge pool of clear blue water that stretches further than the eyes can see?”

“Swallow must be filling your head with all kinds of stories,” Njiwa’s mama said and laughed. She then told Njiwa the story of how three blind men chanced upon a cow for the first time. How they all touched different parts of it. How the first touched the horns, and the second its ears, and the last man touched the tail. How they all described it differently. “No experience is the same for all of us. When the time is right, you will live your own experiences and describe them differently from Swallow. Now off you go. And don’t you fight with the wind. Always remember, the wind is your friend. Use her. Work with her, so you may soar.”

Again and again, Njiwa flapped her tired wings. At times she barely rose above the tree-dotted field. Other times she was up with little effort only to come crashing down.

“It is easy to befriend the wind for a brief moment and lift off the ground, but difficult to build a lasting friendship with her. A friendship that will allow you to stay up in the air,” her mama advised, as they walked back to the nest.

The next day, Njiwa hurried ahead of her mama. “Today will be my last try,” Njiwa said to herself. It would be her sixth day of trying and she pictured herself growing up, heavy and slow, like Pheasant or Hen flapping about only to come crashing down. Well! She would give it her last shot.

As though reading her thoughts, her mama smiled and said, “Each time you feel like giving up, remember that victory might just be around the corner. Now off you go.” And with a couple of flaps, Njiwa was off. This time she rose high up into the clouds, swinging from side to side with the wind under her wings and the sun behind her back.

“I’m flying! Mama, I’m flying!” she hooped out with joy.

“I knew you’d do it,” her mama shouted and flew by her side, smiling. “But don’t you ever forget, there are eagles up here.”

“There are eagles everywhere,” Njiwa shouted back above the wind’s whistle. For that was what her mama had always taught her. To be weary of eagles everywhere.

“I think you are now ready to face the world,” Njiwa’s mama said as the two soared up the blue sky. She then dipped – left and was gone. And Njiwa who was busy enjoying her new skills did not notice her mama’s absence.

Alone, Njiwa swung across the sky. Thrilled by her speed, she rolled once, twice, then zipped high up into the clouds. She had been at it a while when she spotted a group of swallows. Flapping hard she flew forward to join them. Together, they whizzed on, without a care in the world. And when the sun’s rays dimmed and the sky turned indigo, Njiwa broke off and flew to the place she’d last been with her mama, but there was no trace of her.

“I will surely be able to find my way back to the nest, before dark,” Njiwa told herself. And so, she began to trace her way back home.

Along the way, Njiwa met big-eyed-Owl. “Hello Njiwa? It’s been almost two months since I saw you,” Owl rolled her round eyes and hooted out.

“But it is only this morning you waved at mama and I, from your favorite perch on the mango tree,” Njiwa said. Owl gave her a curious look, before flapping off.

Next, Njiwa bumped into Crow and it surprised Njiwa, the tips of Crow’s wings had grown gray with age. How much time had passed from when she had parted from her mama, she wondered? Realizing she was lost, Njiwa asked Crow, “Do you know where I can find our nest and my mama?”

“How would I know?” Crow, who was always grumpy, cawed out. “Look at you all grown up and still asking for your mummy. At your age I was already looking after chicks of my own.” Crow flapped her wings and flew away.

With the dusk, Njiwa began to worry. And when darkness enveloped the forest, her fears grew. It was late at night when she finally traced the old ngou tree that had held her nest. But now there was a fresh nest with chirping chicks on the familiar forked perch. An angry weaver bird screamed out a warning and scared Njiwa off.

Tired and afraid, Njiwa picked a spot on a flame tree, and perched on a branch for the night. Scared and alone, not even the sway of the branch and the soothing whistle of the leaves in the wind could rock her to sleep.

At dawn, Njiwa continued to search for her mama in the nearby trees, but there were no signs of her. Tired and lonely she flew about the sky wondering what to do. It was then that she spotted another group of swallows flying West and joined them in flight, and her worries vanished.

It's now a long time since Njiwa and her mama parted. Though she still remembers and misses the soothing words of her mama, Njiwa now has two lovely chicks of her own to worry about. One is white and the other brown like Njiwa. Like her mama once did to her, Njiwa also rubs her beak against the sides of her chicks and says, "Tomorrow I'll teach you two to fly." And the joy on their faces makes her smile.



# The Crow's First Tooth

**Lindsay Katchika-Jere Chazika**

In a small town, deep in Malawi, on a hot October evening, the skies were streaked with gold and the air hummed with the last chirps of the day. Yellow mangoes hung like lanterns in the trees.



Inside a blue brick house surrounded by deep red hibiscus flowers, eight-year-old Atu sat on a reed mat, poking at his baby tooth. It was wobbly and white and hanging by a thread, almost ready.

“Grandma!” he called, clutching his cheek. “It’s ready to jump out!” Grandma Stella waddled in, carrying a long black thread and a bowl of roasted macadamia nuts. “Mmmh,” she said with a sly grin. “Then we must call the Khwangwala crows.”

“Khwangwala?” Atu repeated. She tied the thread around the tooth like she wrapped her traditional cloth around her waist. “The Hidden World above the clouds, my boy. Where the Tooth Crows live. They collect children’s teeth from rooftops all over the world. Then they turn them into extraordinary things!”

“Like what?”

“Stars, tree seeds, snail shells, waterfall pearls... depending on how special the tooth is, and how brave the crow is.”

Atu hesitated. “But... what if I throw it wrong? What if the crow doesn’t come?” Grandma looked at him closely. “Do you remember when those schoolboys laughed at your stammer in the poem recital?”

Atu looked down, rubbing the back of his neck. “They said I was a slow chameleon.” “And what did I tell you then?” she asked.

“That even a chameleon reaches the top eventually,” he murmured.  
“And so will you,” she whispered. “Now... let’s fly this tooth.”

She gave one swift tug. POP! And the tooth jumped into her hand.

That night, under a moon as round as a pumpkin, Atu climbed a wooden stool with the tooth wrapped in cloth. He stood for a moment, then tossed the tooth high onto the tin roof.

The little bundle landed with a soft plink.

Then, with a deep breath, Atu lifted his head toward the sky. He began to sing softly, snapping his right index finger in time:

*Khwangala Basikeya,  
Ndipatse Kheyala yanga*

*Crows fly high in starry skies,  
Bring my tooth, make it shine!*

*Khwangwala Basikeya,  
Ndipatse Kheyala yanga.*

*Snap finger, snap finger, call the night,  
Turn my tooth to glowing light!*

Snap, snap, snap.

He repeated the chant, his voice growing stronger, the snapping echoing like tiny thunderclaps through the night air. The stars seemed to shine brighter, as if listening.



Far above somewhere beyond the clouds, the call reached the ears of the Tooth Crows, who stirred in their glittering fluffy nests, ready to begin their magical journey.

It wasn’t made of clouds. Oh no. Ntolilo was built from stardust, feathers, silver shells, and shiny forgotten buttons. In this glittering sky-kingdom, magical crows in

velvet coats of all colors and monocles flew between spiraling towers made from old clay pots and broomsticks.

And deep inside the Tower of Teeth, a young crow named Timti Featherbeak sat on the edge of a clay pot, shaking.

“This is it,” he whispered to himself. “My first retrieval mission. I’m going down to Earth!”

“Don’t drop anything!” croaked Auntie Phiri, a tall, glamorous crow with a golden beak.

“And don’t get caught by a cat!” warned Engineer Kikisho, who had five pens in his wing and wore socks on his claws.

“Remember,” said the Grand Crow master Zobo, whose feathers shimmered like midnight, “all it takes is courage and good timing.”

“But what if I fall?” Timti muttered, fluffing up his feathers.

“Even a falling feather still flies,” said the Crow master with a wink. “Now go!”

Timti zipped through a feather-shaped portal and zoomed toward the rooftops of Malawi. He reached Atu’s house just after midnight, the stars blinking around him like curious eyes.

“There it is,” he gasped, spotting the tooth bundle shining softly on the roof.

He reached out his beak—but SNAG! A rusted nail tore his wing, and he tumbled down, crashing into a mango tree.

“Ow... beakberries!” Timti groaned, stuck between branches. “I can’t do this. I knew I wasn’t ready. I’m just a fluff-chick...”

Then he heard a soft voice.

“Are you okay?”

He turned. Atu stood below, holding a Koloboi. “You’re not supposed to see me,” Timti croaked.

Atu looked up with wide eyes. “You got hurt... but you tried. That’s what matters.”

Timti sighed. “I was supposed to be brave. But maybe I’m just... slow.”

Atu smiled. “Grandma says even a chameleon reaches the top. And a broken drum still makes noise.”

Timti blinked. “That sounds like something Crowmaster Zobo would say.”

Atu climbed the tree carefully and found the bundle stuck between two branches.

“Here. You can still finish your mission.”

Timti took it, wings trembling. “You believe I can?”

“Yes,” said Atu. “Because I did. And I’m just a boy with missing teeth.”

The little crow looked at him, feathers fluffing proudly. “Then I’ll fly. For both of us.”

And with a flutter, Timti soared into the sky, his wing glowing faintly with starlight.

Back in Ntolilo, Timti dropped the tooth into the sorting shell, where it spun with a whirl of colors.

“Outcome?” asked Auntie Phiri.

Timti smiled. “Star-seed. One of the brightest we’ve had.”

The next morning, Atu woke up to find a glowing feather and a tiny note tied with spider silk:

*Thank you for helping me fly. You’re braver than most stars.*  
—Timti Featherbeak

He tucked it in his pillow and whispered, “Khwangwala Crows.”

# *Bedtime Stories*



# Something Blue

## Blessing Tarfa

Dada had some news to tell Sophie when she returned from school. “Sophie, something is growing in Mama’s tummy, and soon there will be four of us in this house and not three,” Dada counted with his fingers.

Sophie was confused. If something is growing in Mama’s tummy, won’t she just use the loo? Whenever Sophie eats too much mango in mango season, and her tummy grows big, Mama sings to Sophie’s tummy and Sophie runs to the loo.

*Loo-loo, go to the loo.  
Loo-loo go to the loo.  
Loo-loo go to the loo.  
Go to the loo, my darling.*

Mama would sing to Sophie’s tummy, Sophie’s tummy would stir, and soon she’s off to the loo! Sophie decided to sing the song to Mama’s tummy.

“It is not for the loo, Sophie. It is a baby,” Dada said, laughing so hard because Sophie is so funny.

“You are going to be a big sister!” Mama smiled.

Sophie liked the idea of not being the littlest person in the house, but only for a moment. “Where will the baby live?” Sophie panicked.

“The baby will share your room, Sophie.”

Sophie was okay with sharing her room as long as nothing changed.

Every time Sophie returned home from school, she ran to Mama’s tummy and sang the loo song. The baby would stir but Mama would still not use the loo. But as Mama’s tummy grew bigger, Sophie’s things began to go missing.

One day, Sophie returned from school and her pink crib was no longer in her room. Even though she didn’t use it anymore, Sophie used it to play parent. She would wrap her dolls in blankets and lay them to sleep in the crib.

“Help! My crib has been stolen,” Sophie called running out of her room to meet Mama and Dada.

“Don’t be silly, Sophie, we just took it to get repaired,” Dada comforted Sophie. “Your dolls can share your bed today.”

“True,” Sophie thought, “the crib could do with a little polishing.”

The second thing to disappear was Sophie’s pink rocking chair.

“Help! My rocking chair has been stolen,” Sophie screamed when her rocking chair was nowhere in sight.

“Don’t be silly, Sophie, we want to get a new rocking chair. I will rock you on my back today.”

“True, I have grown too big for the rocker. Maybe Mama and Dada want to get me a

bigger one,” Sophie thought hopefully. Dada squatted and Sophie jumped on his back. Dada’s back is much better than any rocking chair.

As Mama’s tummy grew even bigger, things began to turn blue. Sophie returned from school one day, and one half of her room was painted a very light blue. Sophie thought that because she forgot to close the curtains before leaving for school, the sky had snuck into her room and clung to her walls.

“Mama, Dada, the sky has moved into my room,” Sophie blurted frantically.

“The sky? What do you mean, Sophie?” Mama questioned.

“Oh, Mama! I did a terrible thing. I did not draw the curtains in the morning and now the blue sky is on my wall,” Sophie cried.

“Oh, no, Sophie, it is not your fault,” Mama told Sophie. “We only painted the wall blue, Sophie. It is the colour for the baby,” Mama said in her velvety voice.

When the pink crib and the pink rocker returned, they were not pink anymore. The crib was polished but also blue like the sky in her room. The rocker also did not come back bigger, only bluer. Sophie was not happy with these changes. She was feeling blue too.



She remembered Mama said that it’s the colour for the baby. There were so many blue things, Sophie was convinced the baby would be blue.

When Mama’s tummy was so big she couldn’t even see her toes, Dada called Sophie and asked her to sing the loo song.

Sophie didn’t feel like singing again, since Mama never went to the loo anyways, but she obeyed.

*Loo-loo, go to the loo.  
Loo-loo go to the loo.  
Loo-loo go to the loo.  
Go to the loo, my darling.*

Blue stirred in Mama’s tummy and off Mama and Dada went to the hospital.

The next day, Mama and Dada returned with a little bundle swaddled in a blue blanket. When Sophie peeped, she was surprised to find the Blue baby looking very very pink.

Sophie was happy. There will still be something pink in her room after all!



# Mr Sun and Mrs Moon

Beverley Ann Abrahams

## Walking in Sunshine

Do you know that the sun is the big, bright ball that shines high in the sky? My mummy shows me the sun all the time! I think the sun is lovely! She says that we must love the sun because he does so much for us all. I wonder what he can do for me? Mmm, do you think my mummy is right? I can't think of what he can do for me! Do you know?

Wait a minute! I do know that the sun wakes me up in the morning when he shines through my bedroom window. He also makes me warm when I play outside during the day. Sometimes he makes me so hot that I have to drink lots of water, put on a hat, and hide from him under a big tree! And while I am under the tree, he will be peeping through the branches and still trying to shine a light on me. Mr Sun, you can be a naughty chappy, you need a switch like the stove so that you don't burn me.

Mummy says the sun is teaching me that it is important to wear a hat. Well done, Mr Sun, I will make sure I wear a hat whenever I go outside to play. I hope you are listening too! All children must wear hats when it's hot and sunny outside.

Sometimes when there's no clouds, Mr Sun is so bright that he even hurts our eyes! So, let's all be careful. My granny showed me that if I close one eye, and hold my finger in front of the other eye, I can block him out! One finger can block out the sun! But he doesn't go away, oh no, he's just resting behind my finger until I open my eye. Isn't that amazing!

Mummy says loving Mr Sun and being careful is having RESPECT:

**R** for Resilient, so strong that no one can defeat him!

**E** for Extra Special, we love you so much Mr Sun!

**S** for Sunshine King, no one is brighter than you!

**P** for Perfect Partner because I can depend on you to come out every day!

**E** for Endless days of sunshine!

**C** for Careful of the heat, it is time to wear a hat!

**T** for Touching every corner of the Earth!



Wow, mummy, that's so clever! I want to teach all my friends about RESPECT for the Sun.

Mummy says Mr Sun makes all the good food we eat. I think mummy is being silly! How can Mr Sun make food? He floats in the blue sky, he looks like a ball that's on

fire, rolling over the clouds, squishing them. When does he have time to make food for me?

Does he cook the food in the sky and send it down on a sunbeam just for me? That would be so special! Mummy, you don't need to cook for me anymore if Mr Sun can do the cooking. I think you work too hard. Why don't you rest!

Oh, mummy says Mr Sun doesn't cook the food, he makes it for us. It's a special trick called science. Can you say the word? S-C-I-E-N-C-E. It's a big word, and I'm still learning what it means.

Mummy says that science is when we take different things, sunshine plus water, and we put them together to create something special. All the plants that grow need the sun. They also need water and that's why the rain is so important. The sun and the rain are best friends, and together they grow all the plants and all the grass and all the trees, all over the world! His sunshine makes them green and happy! That's why plants like to stretch themselves higher and higher to reach the sun. I think we should call the sun the king of the world! He looks small but he must be so BIG to take care of the whole world!

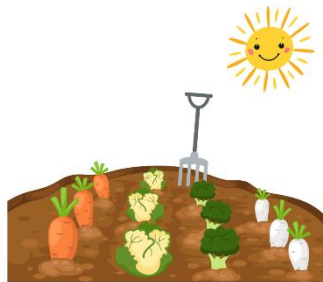
Mr Sun, do you make me grow? Mummy says he does! He grows the plants which I eat, so that's how he helps me grow. I asked my mummy which foods make me grow and she said that there are so many! Some of the plants that make me big and strong, like the sun, are:

Apples and oranges

Bananas and broccoli

Carrots and cauliflower

Potatoes and tomatoes



Do you know that the sun helps to make milk for us? Yes! The sun makes the grass grow green and healthy, then the cows eat the grass, and the grass helps the cows to grow strong and healthy and they give us lots of milk. That milk is used to make cheese which mummy puts on my macaroni so it is so delicious! I think the cheese is bright yellow and orange because it is full of the goodness from the sun! It's like eating sunshine!

I wonder if the sun helped my daddy grow big and strong? My daddy says he eats lots of good food so that he can grow big muscles, and if I want to be big and strong too, I need to do the same! Mummy, I want to be big and strong, please feed me lots of good food! I promise, I'm going to eat all my vegetables and drink all my milk so I grow bigger and bigger.

I'm going to play outside now. Where's my hat, mummy? I don't want to burn outside! Please call me when the sun is ready to go to bed, then you can tell me about the Moon!

## Moonbeams like Magic

Mummy says that there are many things that are strange... like the moon that has no fire but it lights up the sky at night. I can look at Mrs Moon and she doesn't burn my eyes. I can see all of her, at the same time, with both my eyes open. Sometimes she gets very skinny and almost disappears. I feel sorry for her because she looks like she is very hungry, but afterwards she starts getting fat again until she's like a big, bouncy ball.

I asked my mummy why Mrs Moon gets skinny and round again, and she said it's because Mrs Moon has to go on a journey, so when she's far away from me she will be skinny and then when she gets back, she gets bigger as she gets closer to my home. She must love me very much because she looks so happy when she's big and round!



Sometimes I can't see Mrs Moon, because she is cuddled up in the clouds. The clouds are her blankets, and they look so soft and warm. I wish I could climb on a moonbeam and join you, Mrs Moon! Although the night will be dark, I'm not scared because I know she is still there, it's like she is playing hide and seek with me! Then she pushes some clouds away, and I will see a little bit of her face! I found you Moony! Tag!

The moon reminds me that it's the end of the day, not just for the sun, but also for me. Just as the sun needs to rest, I need to rest too. The moon has a special light, it's not too bright, it's just bright enough to make the dark not too dark so I'm never scared. So, I think the moon takes care of me at night. It keeps watch over my house like an angel.

I wonder what Mr Sun and Mrs Moon see when they look down from the sky. Do they see me? Do I look like a little shadow because I'm so far away? Am I lit up like a fire cracker? Am I floating in the air like a lost balloon? I know the sun goes to bed at night, just like me! He has to sleep so he can be bright the next morning! While he is sleeping behind the world, Mrs Moon will be in the sky looking after me! I am so lucky, I have a mum and dad looking after me, and I have a Moon and a Sun who care about me too!

# Tami and the Talking Shoes

Clovis Esomba

Tami hated her school shoes.

They were brown, stiff, and always made her feet sweat. Worst of all, they squeaked when she walked. Everyone at school called her “Squeaky Steps.”

Mama always said, “Tami, these shoes will carry you into your future.” But Tami wasn’t sure she liked that future if it smelled like sweaty socks.



One night, after a long school day, she tossed the shoes into the corner of the room and said, “Ugh! I wish you’d just walk yourselves to school.”

“Maybe we will,” the shoes replied.

Tami sat up so fast, she hit her head on the bunk bed. “Who said that?!”

“We did,” said the left shoe.

“Obviously,” added the right one.

Tami stared. Her shoes had eyes now. And mouths. They blinked slowly, waiting.

“You... you can talk?” she stammered.

“Yes,” said the left. “But only when children stop believing the world is boring.”

“I never said it was boring!” Tami cried.

“You did,” said the right shoe. “Every time you sighed in math class.”

Tami blinked. “So... what do you want?”

“To run!” they said together. “Let’s go on an adventure!”

The shoes took off with Tami still inside them. Whoosh! They ran out of the room, down the stairs, past Mama sleeping in front of the TV, and into the Lagos night.

They ran faster than cars.

Faster than bikes.

They zoomed past okadas and suya stands and flying newspapers.

“Where are we going?!” Tami shouted.

“To visit the other shoes,” the left one called back

In the middle of the city, hidden behind a gate only brave hearts can see, was a place called Shoe Village.

There were:

High heels reading poetry

Flip-flops playing drums

Rain boots dancing in puddles

And a pair of worn-out slippers preaching wisdom to baby sandals

Tami's shoes bowed. "She is our human," they said proudly.

Everyone cheered.

In the center of the village sat Grandpa Gum, an old sneaker with patches, laces like a white beard, and a sole full of stories. He told Tami, "Every shoe has a story. And every child walks a journey. But only a few listen to their feet."

Tami sat still. "What is mine saying?" she whispered.

Grandpa Gum leaned close. "It says... you're afraid to try."

Tami blinked hard. She remembered how she never raised her hand in class. How she always let others answer, even when she knew.

"I'm scared they'll laugh," she said.

Grandpa Gum nodded. "They might. But your steps are yours. And laughter fades. But courage stays."

The shoes brought her back before sunrise. Mama never noticed she was gone. But in class that day, when Teacher asked, "Who knows the answer?" Tami raised her hand.

Her shoes squeaked.

But she smiled.

Because this time, she squeaked with pride.

And every night after, when Tami took off her shoes, they whispered, "Walk with wonder. That's how stories begin."

# Why Am I the Rainbow?

Rohan Magerman

In the neat little city of Sketchville, everything was drawn in pencil.

Grey houses stood in grey rows.

Grey trees lined the grey streets.

Even the birds were just little pencil scribbles.



But Zanele was not grey. She was painted in watercolour.

Her skin was a beautiful brown, and her braids sparkled with bright beads that clicked and clacked when she skipped. Her dress was red and orange and blue, with triangles, zigzags, and tiny suns stitched into the fabric.

Sketchville did not like Zanele's colours. Because everywhere she went, her colour rubbed off — a trail of turquoise on the pavement, a splash of pink across a park bench, a daisy turned yellow where she sat. The pencil people called her a mess on a perfect page. They told her to keep out of important drawings.

The teachers scolded, "Please stay within the lines."

The bus driver frowned, "No liquids allowed."

Even the dentist shook his head, "You need to brush those brushstrokes!"

Zanele tried to wipe the colour away, but it wouldn't come off.

"Mommy?" said Zanele. "Why am I painted and everyone else is drawn?"

Her mother smoothed her braids, "Because the Artist made you that way, my love."

"The Artist?" Zanele blinked.

Her father smiled and said, "The one who made everything. The pencil lines. The shades. And you. The Artist wanted something different, something full of light and joy."

Zanele snuggled under her blanket and held those words tight, even when the pencil people gasped, "Oh no! She's leaking again!" and "Who let her touch the lamppost?" Zanele couldn't help it. She didn't know how to turn her colours off.

One day, she saw a boy sitting under a tree. He was grey, like the others. But he had a book full of colour. He had been picking up her smudges and turning them into pictures.

"You're using my colour," she said.

He nodded. "I draw with it," he whispered. "But I can't show anyone."

They didn't speak again that day. But she noticed the boy everywhere after that—carefully gathering the colour she left behind, storing it in tiny jars.

In the middle of the week, the sky began to shiver. And then—WOOSH!

A giant eraser storm swept over the city. It rubbed and scrubbed and wiped the sky clean. When morning came, the sky was blank. Just white. Empty.

Without the sky, people didn't know when to wake up or when to sleep. They didn't know which way was north or south. Birds didn't fly. Rain didn't fall.

Zanele was still bright. Her colours didn't fade. The erasers couldn't rub out watercolour. Her colours felt out of place during this time of sorrow, so she put on grey clothes and rubbed charcoal on her skin.

Nobody noticed her. She felt small and quiet.

Days passed in silence. Until one morning, a page fluttered past her feet. It was one of the boy's drawings—a sunset with reds from her hair beads, purple from her dress, pink from a handprint she'd once left on a bench.

Zanele had an idea. She held it tight. Then she climbed. Up the stairs. Up the ladders. Up, up, up to the tallest building in the city. Wind whooshed around her. Her hair beads clicked and clacked. With her own colours, she began painting a new sky.

Yellow spread across the white.  
Then blue.  
Then pink.



Down below, a crowd gathered. They looked up, eyes wide.

The boy stepped forward. "I'll help," he yelled. He painted a cloud—soft, purple, and fluffy.

A little girl tugged her mom's sleeve, "Can I paint too?" Her mom hesitated, then nodded.

Other children joined. One painted a bird. Another added stars. Grown-ups came, unsure at first. A teacher added butterflies. The bus driver painted trees with orange fruit.

Swish. Swirl. Drip. Drop.

"This was not in the original city plans," a voice boomed. The mayor had arrived, holding a very serious pencil. He stared for a long time.

A pink balloon floated past him. A green leaf waved in the breeze around his ankles. Then he sighed. "I suppose a little colour wouldn't hurt," he said, and drew a rainbow moustache on his face. The crowd gasped. Then they giggled.

All around the city, colour bloomed. And the city of pencil and paint lived on.

With lines and splashes.  
With shade and shine.  
With space for everyone—  
Even a watercolour girl like Zanele.





# Iman's Magic Baobab Tree

Nadia Ahidjo

*A dedication to my sister Iman, may your love live on endlessly.  
With special thanks to Nisan Abdulkader and Muna Hussein*

My name is Iman Hussein. Some people tell me it means faith, while others say it means belief and beauty, or goodness. My mom says it just means I can be whoever I want to be and do everything I dream of. I've thought a lot about it and I've decided I want to be an explorer.

I spend a lot of time in our backyard exploring with my best friend, Chewey. He's our cat and has been with my family since I was a baby. I'm an explorer so I can understand everything he tells me, and every trusted explorer needs special friends to take with them to discover new things. I've been exploring our backyard for a very long time, but I discover something new all the time. My mommy doesn't like it when I go too far beyond the treeline. She says it's not safe without an adult because there are lots of animals hidden in the trees that could hurt me. I'm not afraid though, I'm an explorer and I know Chewey will always protect me.

Last week, we had a huge storm with lots of thunder that shook the whole house. When it ended, the trees in the backyard had fallen everywhere! The only tree still standing was the huge baobab tree towards the end of our backyard. My Baba says it's been standing there for over one hundred years, planted by my great-great-great (lots of greats) grandfather who came here from Yemen a very very long time ago. Now that all the trees around it have fallen, I noticed a carving on the sides and in the front of the tree that I had never seen before.



Chewey was super excited and growling all around the tree, he could sense something special was hidden there. I tried to read the carvings, a little bit like the explorers who use maps and clues to discover new things and places. It was really hard though; I'm still learning to read and write but I'm an explorer and explorers never give up.

I kept going back to try, and after a few days, I noticed that the first letter of my name was written all over, and Chewey's too. Whenever I'd put my finger on the letter I, the tree would shake a little bit. So, I asked Chewey to put his paw at the spot with the C. And at the same time, I put mine on the letters I and H for Iman Hussein. We heard a distant rumbling and the tree started shaking really hard. I was really scared but I'm an explorer and explorers are fearless so I stayed right there to see what would happen next. And you know what? While we were standing there with all the shaking and the noise, the bark in the middle of the tree split open right down the middle!

There was a magic door hidden in there! It looks like only Chewey and I could open it together, using our name's initials.

We went inside and found a little hollow room that was filled with all the things explorers dream of for their adventures. There was a compass, a telescope, and even stuff for snorkelling and exploring underwater. There were also charts and maps for magical places all over the world that we could take cars and trains and planes to get to. There were books about numbers and mathematics, and something called banking and finance. I'm not sure what that means but I do like maths, it's one of my favourite subjects at school and I'm always helping others understand it better. There was also a space with a huge mirror and all kinds of makeup you can imagine – lipsticks, eyeshadows, eyeliners, and weirdly shaped things to apply them with that I wasn't sure how to use. In one corner, there was a huge poster on the wall, it showed a beautiful woman with a mass of curly hair, wearing a red bubu, and gold jewellery, belly-dancing. It had all the instructions for the steps on how to do this. And the little images of the lady moved on their own to show the steps! I can already dance a little bit – at school, I won last year's belly dance competition so I'm excited to try out all these new steps!

My favourite discovery in the special room though, was a big book. On it, written in gold cursive, was "Magical Book of World Recipes." It was filled with lots of drawings telling the stories of other explorers and their adventures discovering, tasting, and cooking different meals from around the world. The book talked about food as something explorers used to share love with their friends and family. I was really excited to find this book today, because my extended family is coming for dinner tonight. Can you imagine how amazing it would be if I could cook a special recipe filled with love from this magical book to share?



I looked through the recipes at the beginning of the book, and many seemed really complicated and with ingredients I had never heard about from faraway places in the world. There were ingredients like amchur, candle nuts, black sesame, pandan, and pomelo; items that didn't really grow in our part of the world and were very expensive in the supermarket. I ended up choosing a chicken biryani recipe from India that seemed easy to make with my little hands, but especially filled with all the things my family loves to eat. I copied it down neatly into my notebook (turns out that magic book of recipes cannot leave the secret cave!) and ran back home with Chewey to begin preparing.

I washed my hands and began to set ingredients aside, while my Mama and Baba looked on curiously. Mama even asked me if I wanted any help, but I promised her I could manage on my own, with the help of Chef Chewey! I set aside some rice, butter, onions, bay leaves, cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, chicken, curry paste, raisins, coriander, and even some toasted almond flakes. I also had to find some yogurt, ginger and garlic paste, and chili powder (*atchoooo*, that one made me sneeze!). My cousin Muna came into the kitchen at that moment to grab some water and added some lemon juice to the table for me to use. Two of my brothers, who were kneading flour to make some bread, added some garam masala, cloves, star anise and caraway seeds as well. This recipe was turning into a very big and busy task, so I was glad to have all this help from my family.

I needed Mama's help to grab the big cast iron pot we sometimes use to make rice dishes. Halfway through the process, my other brother came into the kitchen to ask what was going on and, after looking through my notebook, added some mint leaves to the mix! I guess that's okay because the recipe in the magic book did say at the beginning that the recipe and the ingredients used only became magical if they were made together and with love at the centre. I wasn't sure what that meant but I think now I'm starting to understand.

Do you know how long chicken biryani takes to cook? FOREVER! Everything had to be layered in the pot, and all family members had to do the layering. Mama said it only took a few minutes to complete this, but it felt like hours and hours to me! Finally, a lovely smell started coming from the kitchen, just as all our guests arrived for the meal. My aunts, uncles, and cousins (I have a pretty big family and when we get together it can be quite noisy); all settled in so we could have some dates and warm goat soup to start us off. I couldn't sit still, I was so excited to have everyone try my special recipe.

Finally, after what seemed like forever again, it was time for the *pièce de résistance* (this is just a fancy word I heard my cousin Nusa use once from her French class, I think it means the most important thing). Everyone was so silent as they ate, it made me nervous because we are usually such a loud family always telling jokes and laughing. My Baba was the first person to begin sniffing and come around the table to give me a big hug, and suddenly everyone was smiling and laughing and patting me on the back and asking for seconds. My recipe was a success!

The magic book was right after all! Food does become magical if it's made together and with love at the centre. I cannot wait till I'm big enough to travel the world, and discover new meals from the recipe book to share with my friends and family. In the meantime, I hope you can keep my secret about where the magic comes from.

## About the Authors

**Beverley Ann Abrahams** is a teacher of English and Art (40 years), an activist against gender-based violence with Daughters Destined For Purpose, a UK based charity in Zimbabwe (10 years), a writer of poetry and short stories, and a mother and grandmother. She holds an Honours degree in English from the University of Zimbabwe, and has been published in four anthologies of African short stories, three anthologies of international poets, and numerous online journals.

**Blessing Tarfa** is an educationist and a Safe Schools expert. She is also the Creative Director at Play.Ed Limited, a company created to address the punitive ways education is presented to children in Nigeria. Blessing is a Climate Reality Leader, a Public Health specialist, and an international award-winning writer. She enjoys reading, writing, teaching and learning.

**Clovis Esomba** is a writer, filmmaker, and storyteller from Cameroon. His work weaves spirituality, identity, and poetic truth into narratives that speak across generations. As the creator of *The Dolphin Within: Global Echoes*, he tells human-centered stories that uplift voices often unheard — from African villages to global stages.

**Christopher Armoh** is a Ghanaian poet and fiction writer. He holds a BA in English from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. His work explores identity, culture, social consciousness, political dissent, nature, and sustainability. In 2025, Armoh won the Adinkra Poetry Prize. Through his platform, the *Take Um So Podcast*, he advocates for mental and physical health awareness among young adults. He is also a passionate literacy advocate and founder of the book club, *BOYS & BOOKS*.

**Daniel Alaka** is a Surulere-based storyteller of many mediums. He runs two ongoing webcomic series – *Virgin Mary and Sweethearts*, both of which can be found on Instagram and Webtoons. His short film, *Tito's Tiger Book*, can also be found online. When he's not crafting stories, he is either watching cartoons, listening to music, reading books, or just thinking about life.

**Daniel Naawenkangua Abukuri** is a Ghanaian writer, poet, and literary critic. He was a finalist for the 2025 Adinkra Poetry Prize and twice shortlisted for the Goethe-Institut's Young Creative Writing Lab. His work has appeared in several literary magazines, including *Lolwe*, *The Kalahari Review*, *Brittle Paper*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Spillwords*.

**Dorathy Dung** is a digital illustrator from Plateau state and is currently based in Abuja. She graduated from Bingham university with a BSc. in Computer Science. Dorathy's love for gardening inspires her to create artwork that shows the beauty of nature. Currently, she is exploring 2D animation as another form of artistic expression.

**Lindsay Katchika-Jere Chazika** is an award-winning Malawian children's author and literary advocate. She was the 1st runner-up for the Wakini Kuria Prize for Children's Literature 2023 and is the co-founder of *Lindsay's Books*, a publishing project dedicated to Malawian storytelling. She lives in Lilongwe with her family.

**Mohamed Sheriff** is a writer, producer and publisher who heads Pampana Communications Publishing, specialising in young adult and children's books, among other things. He has won awards for his writings and productions, including three BBC International writing awards, the Economic Community of West African States Prize for Excellence in Literature, and a 2019 recipient of the Sierra Leone National Literary Award for outstanding contribution to Literature.

**Msafiri Lwihula** is a Tanzanian storyteller, educator, and creative rooted in vibrant traditions of African storytelling. He writes joyful, culturally grounded stories in English and Swahili that spark wonder, wisdom, and pride in young readers. Msafiri is deeply focused on blending science and storytelling to help children understand their bodies, environment, and potential. His works include superhero adventures, poetry, films and fiction. His published books include *Ngongoti: The Superhero*, and *Think Differently, Make a Difference*.

**Nadia Ahidjo** is a Pan African feminist with a passion for gender justice and social inclusion. In her free time, Nadia loves writing feminist reflections and short stories. Her work has been published by *Afreada*, *African Feminisms*, *Bakwa Magazine*, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Short Story Day Africa, and elsewhere. Her children's books are distributed by the African Books Collective.

**Nande Thomas Sakaria Kamati** is a Namibian children's author. Deeply inspired by his Bantu, Khoekhoe, and Christian heritage, he crafts enchanting fantasy tales set in Alkebulan. His stories explore love, belonging, and culturally rooted characters. His work has appeared in *Writers Space Africa*, and he was *Brittle Paper's* Writer of the Month for August 2024. He is an honorary member of the Namibian Organization of Youth with Disabilities, and advocates for inclusive storytelling for children.

**Nifemi Orimabuyaku** is a lecturer at Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria, in the Department of English. She is also a doctoral student in the Department of English at the University of Ibadan, specialising in literature and medicine. Her academic work and research contributions primarily revolve around the critical and interdisciplinary field of the medical humanities.

**Olakunbi Olatunde** is a Nigerian writer and preschool teacher who crafts imaginative tales for children and adults alike. Her stories are inspired by her community and everyday moments. She aims to spark curiosity through storytelling.

**Opeoluwa Ogunsola** is a lawyer from Nigeria who loves languages and fiction. Her work has appeared in the *Kalahari Review*.

**Patrick Ochieng** is a lawyer who resides in Kisumu, on the shores of Nam Lolwe/Lake Victoria. His 2021 novel, *Playing a Dangerous Game* was published by Norton Young Readers and is a Junior Library Guild gold standard selection. His novel, *Displaced*, is forthcoming in August 2025, published by Carolrhoda Books/Lerner Publishers. His short stories have appeared in *Munyori Lit Journal*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *Isele Magazine*, and elsewhere. He was shortlisted for the 2010 Golden Baobab prize, the 2017 NALIF short story prize, and the 2024 Iskanchi Magazine Prize.

**Precious Hoffman** (also Dione Precious Abwe Betika) is a French and English language teacher at Enterprise Corporate University Kumba, Cameroon. She is the founder of Women's Action for Knowledge and Entrepreneurship (WAKE Cameroon) and the author of Love Wins. Dione is also a singer-songwriter.

**Rohan Magerman** is a South African writer of fiction, poetry, and drama. His work has been published by West Avenue Publishing, Shacklebound Books, and Wicked Shadow Press. His play has been staged at the GI60 International One Minute Theatre Festival, and his poetry was recognised in the ArtsHelp Climate Art Contest. He will also be published in Kinsman Quarterly's Holiday Playwright Contest anthology later in 2025.

**Zizipho Godana** is a writer from South Africa. She has a BA in Psychology and Criminology from the University of South Africa. Her writing can be found in African Writer Magazine, Brittle Paper, and Writers Space Africa Magazine.

## About the Editor

**Tahzeeb Akram** is a South African literary editor and curator. She has an MA in contemporary queer Nigerian literary where she focused on anthologies published by Brittle Paper. Now, she is publishing literary works and anthologies under Brittle Paper and loving every minute.

*\* All images used in this anthology are either illustrations by the writer or from [Canva](#).*



### **About Brittle Paper**

Brittle Paper is an online literary magazine for readers of African Literature. Brittle Paper is Africa's premier online literary brand inspiring readers to explore and celebrate African literary experiences in all its diversity.

AINEHI EDORO, Founder and Editor-In-Chief

BLESSING UWISIKE, Assistant Editor

TAHZEEB AKRAM, Submissions Editor

Visit the Brittle Paper website: [brittlepaper.com](http://brittlepaper.com)

Contact Brittle Paper

Email: [info@brittlepaper.com](mailto:info@brittlepaper.com)

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