

**THE
NEWLYWEDS'
WINDOW**

STORIES



THE NEWLYWEDS' WINDOW

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*The 2022 Mukana Press Anthology
of African Writing*



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INTRODUCTION

ALL OVER AFRICA, exceptional literary magazines are sprouting online. Rich communities with work deserving of the world's greatest literary accolades are growing, yet as impressive as this work is, not nearly enough of it has arrested the world's attention, purely due to a lack of exposure.

These twelve stories were selected from 512 entries from 23 different countries. Half of the authors in this collection are debut authors, their work has never been published anywhere, on any platform. A handful have been published online only. We did not give broad direction on the genre or type of story we were looking for. We simply wanted arresting stories and our goal was to give our all in promoting this collection to put it on the world stage. The result was a stunning kaleidoscope of stories told from fresh lenses.

Mukana means “opportunity” in Shona, a language spoken in Southern Africa. Our Press was formed out of a desire to give writers from underrepresented communities the opportunity to share their work. In a world where publishing hubs are predominantly in the west, minority writers the world over often lack access. Our mission is to increase

representation and diversity among published authors. We are deeply passionate about helping the world see through different lenses and learn from varied voices. With our entire team being African, composed of African writers, poets, and journalists living in the United States, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Kenya, it only felt right to direct our initial efforts toward discovering and uplifting African writers.

The publishing industry can be challenging to navigate, especially for African authors. Far too many exceptional stories lie fallow merely because the writer lacks resources to get their manuscript “submission ready.” We spent months editing some of these stories to get them in the best possible shape. We are so proud of the final result and of having given these authors an opportunity to revise their stories with professional input.

The stories in this collection are eclectic, breathtaking, and illuminate readers to an Africa that has largely been left untold. A young woman creates an alternative identity on social media in Nigeria, a little girl discovers hidden photographs of the father she never met, a serial killer stalks his victims, a woman watches the evolution of a newlywed couple’s relationship through their window in Zanzibar.

We hope you enjoy these stories, and if you are able, help us to promote this book. Help us to get more African talent on the world stage.

Tega Oghenechovwen - Nigeria

Nyashadzashe Chikumbu - Zimbabwe

Munashe Kaseke - United States

Eve Mosongo - Kenya



GASPING FOR AIR

I open my fridge and the cornea and lenses are beautiful, the eyes that stare back at me from different transparent containers—different colors, different shades, different sizes—glorify me, all ninety-eight of them. I admire the colors—brown, black, gray, blue. The blues are few, while beautiful brown eyes fill up everywhere. The transparent containers are arranged neatly, one on top of the other. They belonged to people whom the earth would rather not see, and I feel the earth's heart beating with glee and thanks every time I see them. They tell the story of my contribution to God's green earth. They are something, these eyes.

Humans. I drift to my window to see them walk down the dusty street, riddled with potholes left there by their kind; I see them struggle to get on buses, often leaving the weaker ones behind. I see them give

promises to people boarding buses—promises that drip with lies from their parched black lips. Humans! They are the worst thing to have happened to earth since the beginning, and it is my duty to rid this earth of their inconsequential lives, one group after the other. That is the work of my kind. From outside, the voices announcing the daybreak and the city's wakefulness flood in through the window.

The early morning wind caresses my face. The traffic has picked up again, judging by the sounds of the loud horns and the cars jostling for moving space down there. The vendors with wares by the roadside try valiantly to keep their voices above the car horns. I watch them running after cars and buses, advertising their wares, thankful to the potholes for slowing these vehicles down. Chaos! I think. Chaos. That is all the human life can amount to.

Then I walk away from the window. The fridge is open, so I catch a glimpse of the eyes before I focus on them once more.

"Beauties," I say, my eyes roaming through my fridge. It is a beautiful work that I am doing. It makes me calm as well. Only men that think beyond the ordinary can see it.

The only problem I have now is Dinma. She's an orobo, and I'm into those. No, she is not all that fat, just thick from the hips down, hips that span out from a ridiculously tiny waist to backsides that clap provocatively when she walks. They make me sin. Still, somehow, I cannot bring myself to offer her as a gift to the earth. Humans call it love. I call it a disorder.

I have been following her for a month now, and I know everything she does. I know when she goes to the supermarket to buy her toiletries, following at a distance till she gets into her car. Her schedule

is as familiar as the palm of my hands. I have seen her naked, and I could not stop staring. Maybe the earth is not too displeased with a body like this—the full breasts that she cradles between her hands bathing; the tummy that looks like it is always sucked in; the skin that glows like polished bronze; then the damn waist beads around her waist—they must be some enchantment. Maybe the earth is in awe of this physique, just like I am. Maybe, she's not among the ones I should kill. A disorder, I say!

I close the fridge and walk back to the living room. Dinma is sitting there, waiting patiently for me, confident in her living, like I could not just break her neck. She is beautiful, elfin-faced, with long, dark lashes hovering over soft, brown eyes. A black bra hugs her boobs, keeping her nipples out of reach.

My eyes trail down to her tiny waist to see the waist bead, white against the black of her skin. Her tiny shorts ride up past the midpoint of her thighs, and I pine to run my hands over them. She is probably the only creature the earth will permit to walk upon its surface. I pour the only bottle of wine on the table into the two glasses there and raise my glass. She raises hers with that beautiful smile I have always espied on her face whenever I am shadowing her. Dimples appear on her face, and I can't stop staring. Then she is no longer there, fading into the silence.

This has been our way, she and I. She comes when I feast, then disappears into thin air before the feast even gets started. I wonder how she does it. She has cast a spell on this house that I cannot think of her in any other way than that of fondness. When I go to bed, I feel her body beside mine. Aha! This is where she has disappeared into,

our bedroom. “Do you want a massage?” she asks. Her voice is silky and like the sounds of many soft bells.

Before I even respond, I feel her hands on my bare back. They are soft on my back yet firm. They massage the soreness in my muscles away, then they go round and round, tracing a pattern. Her hands lure me to sleep. My eyelids flutter, but I cannot sleep. I want to keep feeling this way.

“A little lower, sweetheart,” I say.

Her hands move around my waist in circles. She is breathing softly on my back.

“You are strong, Inalegwu,” she says. She is the only one who can pronounce my name. The only one who calls me by name. Others scream obscenities or try to shoo me away. The love of my life, she is. Every other person thinks that I’m mad, and why wouldn’t they?

Blind things.

Only yesterday, I was out at the junction, talking to the earth, reveling over my latest offering at home. An orobo walked by me, curling her lips up at me. She was tall and shapely and, kind of, reminded me of Dinma—Dinma, who has been in my books for a long time now. There is this blank space on the page that I have marked out for her where I would write the activities that I would take her through before offering her up. But I digress. This lady—who is not even in my books or plans—passes by, and I see the judgment in her look, the pity, the disgust. How dare she? Humans have no right to feel disgusted at my kind. I followed her quickly, at an indiscernible distance, of course. It would be stupid to let her see me. None of my victims ever do. We got to her house, a bungalow where it seemed she

stayed alone after stepping over countless dirty puddles, and I waited for her to get inside the house first before I followed. Locks, easy things. A long spoke slipping through the keyhole was all it took. I twisted it quietly, my eyes darting about the place. A satisfying click let me know the door was open.

I got into the house behind her and proceeded to the kitchen. There is always something useful there. Knives, forks, machetes even. Humans would keep anything in their kitchens. I would know; I have rid the earth of ninety-eight of them. I moved into the bedroom and saw her lying there in the bathtub, asleep. Asleep? Can you imagine this? A troublesome human resting peacefully? How do curses sleep? Where do they get the peace of mind to rest?

Quickly, I pounced on her, and with the ropes, which I always have handy, I tied her up and carried her to her bed. I held her head in place, and while she screamed into the gag I had forced into her mouth, I cut out two of her beautiful dark eyes. They were mine to keep. At the end of it all, rubble and ruins stood in place of the house. Ashes blown around by the wind. Ashes that meant nothing, just like the woman now. It was an unfortunate incident caused by some gas leakage. That would be the report filed by the fire department, too underfunded to do anything. Dinma knows these things, but our love transcends death and unfortunate fires and some stupid girl that just wouldn't stop looking at me.

"What do you think of her?" I ask Dinma, stretching toward the bedside stool to turn on the lamp. There is a transparent case there, and inside it, the eyes of the dead orobo stare back at me. The ninety-ninth. I hold it out for Dinma. She knows what I do. She knows,

yet she cannot stop loving me. Her hands are still on my back while she examines the case.

“She is better this way, my love,” she replies, a smile playing across her lips.

I keep the case back on the table and still find myself being lured to sleep by the soft touch of her hands.

Tomorrow is a Saturday. I wake up early to find the bed empty. She is gone. I pull on my tattered clothes, and the first place I can think of is the church. I think I have committed a mortal sin: taking a life when it was not yet her time. I never do this. I would never let my emotions get the better of me. I have never fallen in love with the people I was supposed to send back to God, and I’ve been coming back to the church ever since my love story with Dinma began. My kind is not supposed to fall in love with humans, so I think there is something I might have done wrong. The answers, I can’t find. Inside the confession booth, I sit and wonder what in the world I’m doing while I process my mission in my mind. The emptiness yawns at me. Something shuffles on the other side. The priest? His rosary?

The booth is dark, unlike the church cathedral outside it, with the paintings of the saints in persecution hugging each part of the wall. The priest’s breathing is light. If I believe in God, I have to wait for the right time to send the mistakes of creation back to him.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,” I say, feeling a little stupid for confessing to a man I do not know. Will he understand what I have to deal with? The confusion? The sleepless nights of being a messenger of a deity that speaks with only urges inside of you? I think he does. He’s the closest to my kind, the ones with claims to hear from the divine.

I hope he does. Even as this debate assails my mind, I decide he's not like other humans, not really, or maybe it is just my mind. Perhaps, it is because I just want to talk to somebody, anybody, someone that wouldn't think me mad.

"Speak, son," his gruff voice comes from the other booth.

It is a good thing that he can't see me. If not, he probably would have had me pushed out of his church. I always wear the dirtiest of robes. It helps. When people are after a murderer, a beggar is the last person they suspect.

"I killed a woman yesterday," I say. "A woman, for glaring at me."

There is silence from the other side of the booth. The priest's breathing gets harder, more forced. I can hear the shuffling of his hands. Were God's messengers supposed to feel this uncomfortable in the face of truth? I know I do not.

Then...

"Why?" the voice trembles slightly, a string on edge.

"It is my work on earth, but it wasn't yet her time. The urge was not there. It was only anger." Again, the silence comes. It makes me wonder if he has gone away from the booth. Maybe he, at this moment, has hurried out of the booth to go call the police, so they can come and whisk me away. But I would have heard him. I strain my ears and pick up his breathing; it is shaky. He is trying not to breathe.

"What is your work on earth?" he asks. The quivering in his voice is more noticeable; they break his words. It is painful to hear. God's messengers have no fear. They shouldn't.

"I fell in love with another woman," I say. "She loves me, too. But our kind are not supposed to be together."

“What do you mean, your kind?”

The shakiness is still there, struggling to hide under the sound of his voice. He is afraid! The priest is afraid of me! Of God’s judgment!

Of my work on earth!

“The kind that rewards iniquity with the appropriate punishment,” I say.

I am wasting my time. It is my work, my mission. Coming here was a mistake. The priest is a mere man with fears showing in his voice. I feel ashamed for bringing myself this low, for seeking help from the one I am supposed to judge. I have to end this! End my doubts. Take my mind back! Dinma has to go, sadly.

Quickly, I spring up from the seat and push the door to the booth open. The church is empty when I step out into the hall. Pain-filled eyes of the suffering saints stare down at me once I slip through the booth. The soles of my worn-out sandals make an echoing noise as I walk quickly towards the church’s entrance. The priest would only see my back, and backs do not tell stories. I have to meet my lover for the last time. She had gone to her father’s house from my place this morning. I think I have to do it. My kind can never be enslaved. Not by love, not by a woman.

I get home first and pull off my beggarly clothes. If I am going to meet my lover for the last time, then perhaps I need to wear something more appropriate, something like a suit and a tie. The cologne that I hardly ever use is put to good use today. But it does not look like the one I bought. I shave, too. When I step out of the house, I feel like a brand-new person. I’m certain people would not recognize the beggar that stands silently by the junction, tattered clothes—shredded white

shirt, darkened with age, and a coat, dark with grime and years of wear, torn in different places, hanging above equally worn-out pants, riddled with holes — dirty beard hanging down towards my tummy, and dirty, overgrown hair. This is a skill acquired by my kind, to move among humans in whatever dimension carrying out our earth-purifying mission requires. As I sit in the cab that takes me to her place, I think about my people and what I'm about to do.

I'm already feeling a heaviness in my chest at the thought of not ever seeing her body again. But I push it away with the thought that my kind would be proud of me for casting aside my selfish desires to be one with her forever.

My kind, who I see all the time, on the papers, on the news, accused of killing people, who I see standing by the road, drinking gutter water, pretending to be mad. Mad people. Serial killers, the humans call them. But what do humans know? What does mankind even know?

The earth would not be pleased with all the dumb accusations. The cab stops, and I step out of it.

"Here, keep the change," I tell the driver, handing him some naira notes. I have never needed money anyway.

The time is 2:50 pm, and most people are out at work. Not Dinma.

She works from home. I have watched her without being seen for a long time. I know where she is in the house at this moment, and I also know she is the only one at home. I approach the door, fish out my key, and unlock it with ease, taking care to move naturally without drawing attention and not make much sound. I head straight to the kitchen. There are too many things to choose from. I will wait here. She usually comes down for a drink.

While waiting, I decide to make myself comfortable, her longest knife in my hand. I cannot wait to finally feel her body before letting her go. She would offer it up because of the love she has for me. I see now why I have been hesitating to kill her. What we share is something

I have never seen before, never felt before. I must have been sitting here an hour, licking a plate of ice cream before her footsteps make soft padded sounds on the stairs. I put on my best smile. She would be so surprised to see me here. Her joy would know no bounds. Even if what had to be done must be done, we would have this last moment to ourselves.

She pushes open the kitchen door and walks straight to the fridge without looking my way. I cannot wait to run my hands over the gleaming thighs beneath her little shorts. Her cropped top hanging from full breasts gives me plenty thoughts, and I feel my length hardening.

There were the waist beads again. She gulps down water quickly, still not noticing that I'm here.

"My love," I say.

The glass slips from her hand as she jerks, spinning around quickly to see me standing at the table, the knife in my hand. She freezes. Her eyes show no recognition at all; instead, they are frozen with terror, wild and round.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" she whimpers.

Stupid question. Is she acting? Why would she act up?

"What are you doing here?" she asks again, her voice slowly climbing the decibels, her eyes traveling to the knife in my hand and then to my face. I have never seen her so frightened before.

"I have come to do what must be done, love," I tell her. I can't even

contain the sadness in my voice. Oh, how I love her! “But you must know, I love you dearly.”

“Get out!” she screams. “Get out before I call the police!”

What is she going on about? She will attract people!

I lunge toward her. She must be feeling ill. She quickly backs away, turns, and flees. The table gets in my way, and I stumble over it.

When I make it out to the hallway, I hear her footsteps on the stairs, thudding up toward her room. I follow.

This is perplexing. She knows about my work. I have hinted at this once or twice. She knows what needs to be done, yet she is still running away.

Her door is locked. I knock. Then I hear her rambling on and on. Is there someone else in there?

Is that what this is? Is she cheating on me with someone else? I should have known. Love is a fickle thing.

“...stranger...into my house...knife. He’s huge...to kill me...killer...”

There are other words, but I cannot make them out. Whoever is she talking to? Her new lover? I put my key in the keyhole and turn it quickly, and then I push the door open.

She’s huddled close to her bed, looking for something in the drawer.

There’s a phone in her hand, but there’s no sign of anyone else in the room. The phone!

“You called... the police?” I ask. I wish she was cheating instead of calling the police. I could have forgiven her for the former and cherished her pair of eyes every day of my life.

“Stay away from me!” She flings her phone at me, but I dodge that easily as I walk toward her, the knife in my hand. There is no time

now to say a proper goodbye, to feel her insides clinging tightly to my cock and refusing to let go.

“We talked about this, Dinma,” I say. “I thought you understood.

But you are just like all the other humans. Shallow, fickle-minded.”
I take another step towards the bed.

“If you come any closer, I will shoot you!” she screams. She’s hysterical, and there’s a gun in her hands now. There are about six feet between us. I inch closer. She wouldn’t know how to use the little gun.

“You can’t shoot me, Dinma. You love me.”

“You are crazy!” She clicks off the safety pin, and I halt. Maybe she does know how to use that gun. BANG!

* * *

FROM ACROSS THE ROAD, lurking in the shadow between two houses, I watch the policemen attend to the woman that I had called my own. Dinma is sitting on the front doorsteps, looking shaken. Her house is the only one on the street with flower hedges around it, a pretense at making the house look prestigious while it sits on this terrible, pot-hole-ridden road. As usual, I blend in. Nobody would care to look between these two houses packed close together. Police cars line the street on both sides. Boys who have nothing to do stand around watching. Vendors forget their wares displayed along the street, their eyes picking up the woman being questioned by the police.

Something is wrong, I think, still breathing hard. I had been barely able to make it out of the house alive only because she cannot aim well.

I could not have stayed back in the house, too, not with the police sirens getting closer.

“Madam, you dey okay?” one of the policemen ask, his voice sailing across the road and into my ears.

“Yes, I think,” she murmurs.

“For now, sweetheart, for now,” I say.

I hear the footsteps before I notice a woman walking down the street, her hips like spindles on which the two worlds of her behind are loosely placed. Her eyes, the lightest shade of brown, settle on me, and she starts. I watch her cross the road to the other side, and then I look around me to make sure no one is watching.

BORDER CONTROL

“O -PEN your legs!”

I lie flat on my back to sacrifice myself into a wider Y for Nurse Clara, who wants to peer deeper into my nether regions. I wish I could open my legs some more, but jeez! The furnace is *boiling*. My tummy, my head, my everywhere. It's hard to focus on anything. *Who placed those bolting and unbolting padlocks in my lower back?* They were hardly there an hour ago. If I had known better, I would have opted for a cesarean instead of activating raging padlocks and having my legs spread and hung. So undignifying!

“And you be polite!” I snarl back, clutching their light brown and gray-striped bedsheets. *Of all colors to have in a delivery room.* I take another quick glance to reassure myself that my vision serves me right. I am paying through my nose for this delivery, but she makes it appear

as though I am her church's charity case. Having booked a room in this private hospital, I was expecting some back massages, extra pillows, face towels, and a bit of empathy. Not an unsympathetic female nurse who obviously skipped bedside training as a medical student and is now carrying out her personal frustrations on me.

Perhaps if I had a good job, I would have saved enough funds to put to bed in a hospital someplace saner. "I said, open your legs!" Nurse Clara emphasizes, spreading me further like a thanksgiving turkey. *She is going to tear me.* I do not like the idea of being an open book for someone I can't place a face to.

"Madam, I need to examine you properly, or I will suspend your legs in stirrups," Nurse Clara states. Her tone, no-nonsense. Nurse Clara should be banned from wearing white.

How wide, ma'am?

Perhaps it will help in hurling this pain a far distance, probably to another continent, because only a union of countries can handle these rapidly undulating digs. I experienced different degrees of pain en route here, but this is a new level of intense discomfort. No one said anything about padlocks performing a circular, territorial dance during the antenatal classes. I tremble but quell my tear ducts. *It's just for a while, Yemi. Focus. Bigger picture.* I watch two nurses with distinct hairstyles exit the room.

"I need the AC," I mention to Jerry Curls and Fiery Locks, who return with an aluminum tray full of metal devices, losing my nerve when Fiery Locks holds up stainless steel scissors. *What is that for?* I swallow and look away, only to be assaulted by the stench of disinfectant. What is left of my tummy tries to retch. I send it

back. *Where is my nice midwife? And who placed the pack of cotton wool on my tummy? Am I furniture?* I try speaking, but explosives are now going off.

“The AC is on,” Jerry Curls motions to a huge off-white machine on the wall. No wonder! It has been this old model AC caressing me with a humid, malicious-silent breeze. The inscribed letters are not so legible anymore, but I can still read PANIC. *I’m that all right!* I watch Fiery Locks’ locks bounce and some of Jerry Curls’ curl as they leave the room. *Who still makes jerries in 2022?*

I stare at the former’s blue nails on the handle again to detract from the renovation happening in my womb and renew my visual relationship with the overflowing, orange plastic bucket harvesting leaks beneath the AC that is almost threatening to swim to safety. I feel you, bro! Now I know why some panasonic letters had run away. Empathy! I watch Clara make her exit as Fiery Locks enters. Why all the movement?

“Then why am I sweating? Oh!” I yelp, jerking my hips off the bed. *Dear Lord!*

“Stirrups,” Fiery Locks states to the team who rush in.

“No, I want a caesarian, please.” They force back my hips. The nurses hold my legs wider apart, my vagina in the open glare. *I’m going to be bowlegged by the time these women are done with me.*

“You are too far gone for a caesarian,” Jerry Curl soothes. “In another five hours, this will be over, and your baby will be safe in your arms.”

“Five hours!?” I shriek, watching my shadow relinquish its post. *Someone is kneading dough in my insides.*

“Madam, this is a quiet zone! You’ve been screaming since you arrived!” *Just where did they fetch Clara from?* I exchange looks with Fiery Locks, who nods at Clara in approval. I wince as some heady spring retracts my tongue.

Five hours in this space with curtains looking like they belong in the morgue? Not even a TV to distract from the torments enveloping my body? Nor forgetting the bright orange bucket coordinating leaks from the off-white AC, and how long has that bucket been there? Or the sheets? Zero color coordination!

Something keeps distracting my line of vision as I examine the now almost chilly room. My ears catch the disgusting buzz of a tiny black creature darting around my ears. The buzz disgusts me. It must have found its way in when we did. Some of the bulbs have no glow, but it made no difference because the room was as bright as their bucket. I spot some exposed wires near the sockets.

I glance at the growing puddle snaking towards that zone. Am I going to be electrocuted, too? This is supposed to be a private hospital, for crying out loud. The creature returns to taunt me. *That’s right, girl. Ignore those explosives.*

“Ma, you need to ride out your contractions. You’re breathing too heavy,” Jerry Curls advises. *Why was Clara the only one with a nametag?* I take another look at her jerries.

“There is a bee in the room,” I gasp. *“And padlocks running a campaign,”* my shadow adds.

“A what?” Fiery Locks looks at me in amazement.

I watch the trio exchange looks before seeking out the bee. *Did they think I was crazy?*

“Don’t worry. When the baby starts crowning, you won’t see nothing,” Fiery Locks dismisses with a small laugh. *Why didn’t I notice her freckles earlier?*

“And even if it stings...”

“You won’t feel it!” they chorus joyfully. *Might as well have done hi-fives.*

And this is to be my lot in this mixed practice hospital; fired by my unborn, stung by a bee, and electrocuted by a faulty switch. Thwart their plans, my Lord! Another contraction threatens to kiss tomorrow off my calendar.

I plead, “Please get me drowsy, give me that air that makes people woozy. Pleeeaseeee.” *And erase these padlocks furiously popping and unpopping behind my back! Good heavens!*

Jerry Curls repositions my foot in a stirrup as I jerk it to the side. I try remembering the last time I crossed my legs. I make a mental note to treasure that moment. The next contraction has that image vanish. My eyes somersault within their sockets. *Who is my child playing hockey with? Am I to really stay awake during all these? Who did I wrong? This is a crime against humanity.* I grimace and try to count sheep leaping over a fence.

“Look! Tie that left leg properly. I don’t want it slapping my face later,” Fiery Locks admonishes. Her hair fit her tone.

“It’s too small, Ma,” Jerry Curls replies.

“That’s why I said tie. T-i-e,” she restates in her artic tone. “I do not need to tell you that,” she continues scornfully. I study her ears which look too small for her face and cheeks adorned with tribal marks that suggest she had a row with a tiger. Her sideburns are not artistically