



Creators of Justice 2022

Essay

Honorable Mention

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A MIST IN TIME

by Geraldine O'Connell Cusack

Teresa Jumper is a Seminole Indian. We live on Big Cypress Reservation, a community of 300 Indians buried deep in the Florida Swamps. And Teresa has never been outside the state. But we are now in the boarding area of West Palm Beach Airport. Tourists stream in and out of the coffee bar. Chocolate muffins and jelly donuts spill over their yellow pants suits, white sox and brown skin. They look like dehydrated prunes heading back to life in the frosty north. Water skis and the good life will soon become golden memories of the past

Teresa sits with her hands in her lap and she speaks not a word. Her face is a blank slate. She shows no excitement, no fear, and no doubt. Teresa is a full-blooded American Indian. And this is her way.

After a two hour delay, we board our plane. Engines roar. We are thrown back in our seats as our plane takes flight. "We need to get used to this," I say. "And if my plan for the Tribe works out, we will be doing it a whole lot more."

Then an announcement breaks into the whirring silence. "There will be another 2 1/2 hour delay in Chicago. The weather is unnaturally balmy there - still almost 40 degrees." But once we fly over Kentucky and travel up through Indiana and Illinois we begin see snow and frozen lakes below us. Kentucky looks a bit strange from the air. Her mountains are smooth and rippling – not sharp and jagged as I had imagined. Still; Teresa says not a word.

We touchdown in Seattle and have a five minute connection. "This is one jewel in the night

sky,” I blurt out to my silent companion. A blaze of lights spreads out over the city and dazzles the sleeping bay.

At 1100 am the next morning we arrive in Anchorage, Alaska. The sun is blindingly bright, but a sudden blast of ice-cold air brings to mind a winter's day in Ireland. “I like this place,” I think. “I could live here.”

We quickly discover that Alaska is a potpourri of displaced persons. Two of our new workmates are friends from a tropical island in the South Pacific. Long-haired escapists are running away from some ghastly unknown, and the perennial fortune hunters are all still looking for that pot of gold.

At 11:27 next morning we feel the earth shake. Dishes fly off the table. Pots fly across the room. Windows crack – and glass crashes to the floor. “Take cover,” comes a roar from the street. We dive under the kitchen table and cut our hands and legs on broken glass. The earthquake registers 7.5 – 8.0 on the Richter scale. It hit a mountain area about 150 miles southwest of Anchorage.

Welcome to the might of Alaska.

Teresa and I are in clear need of some calm distraction after that almighty introduction, so our workmates hit on a visit to Bootlegger's Cove. The name alone should have warned us of things to come. Mountains of ice tower above us. Snow plows with iron spikes pass us by. Tiny airplanes with pontoons for water landing whizz above us. Dog sleds race into the bush. A large team of road workers are desperately clearing debris from the previous day's rock slide. And Earthquake Park, where the 1964 quake hit, and where houses collapsed down the bluff, reminds

us that, with all our powerful machines, we earthly minnows are still not charge.

The native peoples of this frozen north are the the Yupek, Inupiat, Siberian Aleut, and Athabascan Indians. A team of native language experts have been engaged to work with Teresa and me in the development of our Seminole Tribe's Miccosukee language textbooks. The hope is, that following four weeks of dedicated work, we will return to Big Cypress with the first half of our mission accomplished.

And so it is, that, four months later, and with tribal approval, Teresa and I are in the air again. Our plane takes us over the Rocky Mountains, over southern Canada and into British Colombia. In the horizon we can see the Alaskan Range, with its white peaks, rolling mountains, deep valleys, sparkling lakes, and tiny streams. The summer sun goes down at 10:41 and slumbers beneath the horizon. But it does not set. It casts a soft glow over all the land. Then, at 2:45 am, it begins to rise. There is no dazzling splash of colour. No blast of blinding light. Softly, softly, the sun creeps up. And then it is day.

Welcome back to the magnificence that is Alaska.

Two weeks of hard work follow. Proofreading, copy-setting and layout become an endurance test. The Tribe has given us three weeks to complete it all. But enough is enough. Teresa speaks out. "I need a break," she says. "Let's walk."

We are green novices in this frozen landscape. Perfumes of violet fireweed, Alaskan cotton, Hudson tea, rose hip, dandelions and purple lupin are all-intoxicating. But we are told, by those who know so well, that they will disappear as quickly as they sprouted up.

On one of our final evening fishing trips we encounter two film-makers who, we quickly learn,

have become mightily disenchanted with the uncooperative natives. Their hopes of making a documentary about the remote Aleutian people have been dashed into the snow. Instead of the hearty welcome they had expected, they were met with a wall of silent hostility. Little did they understand how generations of long-harboured frustration and resentment have finally begun to emerge. And while more than 5,000 miles separate the Seminole Indians of Florida from the Athabascans of Alaska, they are the same in so many ways. Their languages have a similarity in kinship and grammar. Their tribal stories strike similar chords, and their brutal histories of outside domination are also painfully clear.

But what a glorious day it becomes! Nestled among the green verdant mountains, we can see Portage Glacier. Ice has begun to form 300 feet above its elevation. Toupou, our companion, tells us that Portage has moved 2 1/2 miles from its site in 1941. Global warming is taking its toll.

We pass salmon rivers, rippling creeks, log cabins and tiny villages. Then it is into Nilnechik with its Russian Orthodox Church perched high on the bluffs. We spot a moose and 3 carabou nibbling leaves in the bush. Homesteading was a way of life in Alaska until 1975. Now parcels of land are auctioned off to the highest bidder. Free land, with its carefree life, is very much a thing of the past.

We stop for lunch in Homer Spit - a typical northern fishing village. Crabs, shrimp and salmon are all as big as our dinner plates. "Land's End" with its log-burning smells stocks every fisherman's needs. And the "Salty Dog" saloon welcomes every visitor with smiles and open hands.

The smell of the ocean, the wind in your face, and the spirit of life are all there, in Alaska, and ready to lift your soul.

You could live there!

Biography

I am a citizen of both The United States and Ireland. I lived on Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation, with my family in the 1980s, and I worked with the Tribe in developing a written form of the spoken Miccosukee language. A “Mist In Time” tells how, my colleague, Teresa Osceola Jumper, and I, did that – with the direction of a dedicated team of linguists from the University of Alaska. I now live and work as a teacher with inner-city teenagers in Dublin, Ireland.

UNQUENCHABLE FLAMES

by M. L. Dinuli Dihansa Premarathna

One day, I sat by the beach and pondered a single sentence that I always hear- “Girls shouldn’t speak out loud”. I glanced at the sapphire blue ocean stretching seamlessly in front of me and thought of the numerous girls beyond the horizon. I thought of the millions of lamenting voices which I could never hear. With every 28 minutes that pass, one girl is subjected to child marriage somewhere in the world before reaching the tender age of eighteen. Every year, fifteen million young women succumb to that cruel fate and say “I do”. Somewhere beyond the ocean, fifteen million girls are raising families of their own. They are all young girls who carry hopes, dreams and ambitions just as I do. They all dream of being alone with their thoughts by the vast ocean. Every night, they dream of dancing carelessly to some melodious music. They dream of being free. But it’s solely a dream for them. As I’m jotting down my thoughts on this piece of paper, fifteen million girls are getting beaten. Most of them have never seen the magic of the written word. But they are all girls like me.

I thought of the million cries of pain uttered by women across the horizon. All those innocent pleas are drowned in the violent ocean waves and devoured by the sharks before they reach my ear. I can never give a kind word to them or send them my heart. So is it fair to command women not to raise their voices? No, it certainly isn’t. As women, remaining silent as our sisters are tortured is also a form of cruelty. But that day, I found out where the power of women truly lies. I discovered the strength possessed in every girl’s heart. Every woman is born with the divine

power of controlling the universe. Every single girl has a fragment of Mother Nature's spirit living inside them- the most powerful woman of all time.

Mother Nature is called a mother for a reason. She is the one who gave rise to the vast blue ocean I'm gazing at, the golden grains of sand I'm sitting upon, the rays of the sun which are giving me warmth and the colourful galaxies spiralling above me. She also created the race of humanity. Humans were probably her favourite children because she endowed them with a power that her other creations have not been entitled to. She gave them a power that allowed them to control different elements of the universe and to design their own destinies. Today we call it intelligence. Mother Nature loved her children dearly, and she wanted to care for them. But Nature couldn't be everywhere at the same time, so she created living and breathing embodiments of herself to lead the race of humanity. Today, those creations walk the Earth and call themselves 'women'.

We see the powers of Nature manifest in her daughters in numerous ways. The sun is essentially the beating heart of Mother Nature. It has pumped life into the majestic human civilization. If the sun withers away, the cities, arts and philosophies we have developed over millennia will be wiped out within a matter of seconds. We also witness that power in the unquenchable flames burning in the eyes of women. Most of the time, it's a negligible warm glow that nurtures you and keeps you alive, just like the sunbeams caressing me right now. But if you feed those flames, they could potentially become wild forest fires. The flames dancing in the eyes of women can never be extinguished. If you hurl sticks at them, they'll only burn fiercer.

The power of nature lies in the turquoise waves of the ocean. We see it in the beautiful white sea spray they create when struck by massive granite rocks and colossal vessels. That power is also visible in the smiles of women- the smiles they somehow manage to wear when their hearts are being shattered to pieces. Women possess an innate ability to smile and laugh when the whole world is crashing down upon their shoulders. That makes them real soldiers. But like the waves of the sea, women can ravage the ones who oppose them. Every time you strike a woman, her smile will only get more mesmerizing. Just like the sea spray that scatters in a more exquisite manner as they overcome tougher boulders.

The soil is Nature's most bountiful creation. The enormous rainforests and the food that have sustained us for millions of years were born from those brown particles of dust. Such is the power of creation that women have been endowed with. A woman can create an entirely new life and nurture it. Women are the fountains of life. Without them, the Earth would've dried up millions of years ago. Just like the Earth, we women are capable of creating earthquakes if our hearts get shattered.

"Girls should never speak out loud", that's what they say. But Nature herself is a girl, also known by another name called "Universe". Therefore, the universe is a woman and her voice can never be silenced. We hear the universe speak in the voices of women shouting out for justice. We see the universe speak in works of art created with the aim of harvesting unity. That queen of creation will never cease to speak. She is very powerful and also very furious. Mother Nature flinches with pain every time a woman is struck. With every drop of blood a girl sheds, the flames dancing in her eyes are fed. Her heart gets one more crack. When you stab a woman, you

stab the universe. If the queen of creation is infuriated further, her rage could rise into a hurricane and ravage humanity.

The queen of creation has no golden palace to dwell in. She resides in the heart of women.

Ground diamonds emerge from plain black rocks that are subjected to immense pain and pressure, just like invincible women who rise from every blow with more unquenchable flames dancing in their eyes; with more defiant smiles to hide their tears. Mother Nature's crown is built of these diamonds. It's a crown that any girl can wear, only if they chose to do so.

Biography

I'm Dinuli Premarathna, a secondary school student currently studying at Sacred Heart Convent and residing in Galle, Sri Lanka. I've always been a great lover of literature and a firm believer in equality and social justice. The written word is a divinely powerful weapon that could be used to make the world a more beautiful place, as numerous artists and orators have already proved.

These individuals have always been heroes to me, and I had a childhood dream of following in their footsteps. Earlier this year, my work got published in the "Youth Speaks Human Rights in Verse" anthology compiled and edited by IHRAF 2022 Youth fellow Charlotte Yeung. It was the first time I ever saw my work in print. It was a major milestone and a source of motivation for me. Thank you. IHRAF helped me to take the first step in the journey to make my childhood fantasy a reality.

THE ANGRY BLACK MAN AND SLAVERY

by Kasumba Allan

It is surprising that we have made very slow progress when it comes to the things that matter most to humanity, say human rights. Of course, we do know that there are gaps that need to be bridged but instead we downplay these crises and dilly-dally around. In the end, we refuse to become aware of what's happening and therefore fail to acknowledge the problems.

It is so interesting that many countries worldwide look up to the USA. In fact, thousands if not millions of people travel to the states, a country that has been dubbed "the Promised Land" to seek their fortune. And of course, we still celebrate it as the gold standard. But I am here to tell you, it's a broken nation just like many others. The problem is we refuse to admit that the emperor has no clothes.

The news surrounding race in the past three years has given the world a rare glimpse of what the racial climate in the USA looks like. In many ways though, the news was just all we needed to prove what we already knew. The stories of many people of color especially black people, their lived experiences and how they cope with racism, discrimination and police brutality have been so eye-opening but still little has been done to address the elephant in the room. Therefore, change has become really impossible.

But why? It is because black people are seen first as black before they are even considered human by a system that upholds white supremacy. They are treated as less than because of the color of their skin. Therefore, they are never taken seriously. They are perceived as a threat to themselves and others. And why is this so? The answer is simple. There are several dangerous

stereotypes that have been made up and these are the one-colored lenses through which black people are seen.

Stereotypes such as Jezebel, Mammy Sapphire, the angry Black woman and then the most damaging of them all, the angry Black man. In case you didn't know, stereotypes are like malignant tumors, they never stay in one locality but rather metastasize or migrate to every part of the body and do not stop until the person dies. So, in short am trying to say that these ideologies such as the "the angry Black man" did not start yesterday but instead they have been passed on from generation to generation with the aim of controlling the Black man. These wild imaginations about Black people have often stemmed from the way their stories and history have been told.

It has come to my attention that you cannot talk about the angry Black man and woman without knowing about their origin. I guess it is the same for conversations concerning the original sin, you can't do away with Adam and Eve and then the Garden of Eden. Now, allow me take you on a trip to Africa and promise me you will sit tight.

So, where do I begin from? I will start by saying Africa is the second-largest continent in the world with a population of over 1.4 billion people. It is around 30.3 million km² and occupies only 20% of the world's total land. The continent is known for its good climate that has allowed a lot of agriculture to take place and then hundreds of beautiful physical features such as the Nile, the longest river in the world that attract many "tourists" from all over the world. Africa's culture is one of the most fascinating things about it. Here, we're talking about thousands of tribes, each with their unique sets of norms and values.

Back in the days, several societies were organized under chiefdoms and even kingdoms such as Ta Seti that was in Nubia, present day Sudan and also Kemet, now commonly known as Egypt. Egypt as we all know has always made several tremendous contributions towards engineering, planning and architecture and a great example is the famous Giza pyramids. In fact, there are other spheres where the ancient Egyptians made great impact including; mathematics (geometry and algebra), science and philosophy.

Several scholars suggest that the Egyptians had much influence on the work of the Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato. All this shows that political and economic development were existent early on and helps to debunk the myth that the coming of Europeans led to the civilization of Africa.

Above all, I cannot forget to talk about Africa's abundance of minerals with Botswana and DRC having one of the world's largest diamond reserves, with Ghana and South Africa having vast gold reserves. At least now you know something little about Africa.

So let us talk about slavery. Slavery is as ancient as the Bible. It was carried out in Persia, Israel, Babylon, the Roman empire and of course Egypt. Therefore, it is no surprise that slavery was around in ancient Africa but mostly indigenous where captives of war and criminals would be enslaved. Trouble started around the mid-7th century with introduction of Islam in North, West and East Africa by the Arabs.

Many African chiefs and kings were forced to learn the Arabic language in order to profit from the new trade. Initially, the Arabs were trading in physical goods like salt, copper but later

became interested in slave trade when external need arose. However, around the 14th century gold trade started booming especially in West-African empires of Ghana and Mali.

It is this gold and several translations about Africa done by Islamic scholars and sent to Europe that are said to have attracted the first Portuguese merchants, the likes of Vasco da Gama.

Initially, they had come to trade in gold but just like the Arabs, they got interested in slavery.

Therefore, the Portuguese became the pioneers of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The slaves were got from inland where villages would receive surprise attacks especially at night. Sometimes they would be set on fire and everybody was expected to surrender.

The captives would then be sorted starting with the strong men, followed by women and then children. The elderly were often times killed on spot or left behind to die since such areas always experienced famine since plantations would all be destroyed by the fire. During these slave raids, many families were torn apart forever. The captives would then be chained to avoid escaping before being taken to the trade markets at the coast such as the East and West African coast.

There, their legs and arms would be restrained with iron shackles before being loaded onto the merchant ships like commodities.

On these ships, the slaves were too congested and sometimes got infections. On some days, they would go without food and water, overheating became too much and so many would die during the voyages while others committed suicide.

Even though other slave trades such as the trans-Saharan and Indian ocean trade had existed before, the trans-Atlantic became the largest and most well-known. Approximately 12 million

slaves were shipped out of Africa during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It was highly commercialized and racialized.

However, the Portuguese did not operate alone in this trade, they had companions from Spain and in the year 1500, both colonies shipped the first African slaves to the New World.

Later in 1600, they were joined by the Dutch, English and the French as they had realized that trading in slaves was very profitable as these would be needed to provide forced labor on the cotton, sugar and tobacco plantations in the New World.

In August 1619, a Portuguese ship, the São João Bautista, sailing through the West Indies with slaves from Angola was attacked by two English ships on its way to Mexico. Half of the slaves on this ship had died and so the remainder was taken to Jamestown, Virginia where more than 20 of the enslaved Africans were sold off. Where they went to provide labor, they became property to slave masters and therefore lost their freedom. This is said to have laid the foundation for the rampant slavery that would spread throughout North America.

So, allow me say that the anger of the Black man is justifiable given his past interactions with the white man during slave times. The Black man gets angry every time he is mistreated and tortured by white people who fail to realize that USA was built on the blood and sweat of Black slaves.

The Black man is forced to get angry whenever some white people say “I am color blind. I do not see color” because this proves that such people are ignorant about the existence of different skin colors. Black men are angry because of people who hold the notion that we all need to be of the same color in order to look handsome or beautiful. Black men get angry when white people refuse to acknowledge that no one is born racist, racism is learned and can be unlearned.

It is because of stereotyping that Black men are considered rapists, thieves, aggressive, hypersexual, rude and fragile. In the end it becomes even harder for them to show vulnerability because their experiences are not validated. People forget that Black men and women are also emotional beings that need love and belonging. White people forget that Black people have feelings and that they are allowed to express them whether it is anger, pain, joy or grief.

It is such a shame we cannot talk about Black people independently without talking about white people because both share an intertwined history.

It is sad that many Black folks spend half of their lives fighting for rights that they must have by virtue of being human beings. What is even sadder is that even after all this fighting, they are never granted these rights. Because every time they are almost winning, the rules of the game are changed, and they never win at all. And what are some of these rights we're talking about? A right to a fair trial. A right to freedom of speech and expression. A right to vote freely. A right to government services and a right to public education.

I am hoping for a time where Black people walking through a white neighborhood do not feel like they are navigating uncharted waters. I am looking forward to a time where Black men, women and children are not taken as criminals for jogging or walking their dogs at night.

I am also optimistic about a time in the near future where Black people will not have to code-switch or constantly keep modifying their behaviors so as to feel accepted by white people. And am praying for moments where Black men will stop being treated as bombs that are about to blow up anytime soon. The truth of the matter is that there are kids who never see their fathers again on Christmas or New Year's Day because they were killed just for being Black.

Lastly, let's not forget that "the dead cannot cry out for justice, it is the duty of the living."

Biography

My name is Kasumba Allan. I am a male from Uganda and currently a student at the university pursuing my bachelor's degree. I hereby submit my work for the contest.

PRESS ON

by Aaron Mbindyo

Platitudes like ‘guilt eating you alive’ or ‘never judge a book by its cover’ don’t really sink in until you’ve actually judged a book by its cover or had guilt eating you alive. Growing up, I worshipped the Decidir Media Group (DMG). How using just information, they were able to hold the government and all those corporate hounds accountable. How they brought them to their knees. They were like some television vigilantes. Watchdogs ensuring democracy was upheld. This was only possible if the people were well educated, informed, and not easily manipulated- and the press did just that. Knew I wanted to be part of it. Now that I was, I realized they weren’t the cream on top. Just excrement that floats.

Guilt was all that ate at me as I made my way to the DMG headquarters. The kind of guilt that follows you around forever-the constant shadow of a wasted life. A reminder that it’s not a purpose that wakes you up to go to work anymore. It’s fear. Fear of defamation, revocation of your journalist license. Afraid of publishing anything that goes against the government and its corporate donors lest they do ‘colorful things’ that are sure to make your life even worse. A life of compromise. But who am I kidding. I had it good. Those hundreds who die of opioid drug overdose every day have a different story to tell. The kinds of stories you don’t want to hear. And if you do. You spend every waking day trying to forget. Convincing yourself there’s nothing you can do to aid their situation. Maybe it was their fault. Maybe they deserved it. However, underneath all those lies I tell myself, lies the undeniable truth. It’s all our fault. Our false advertisement of the opioid ‘miracle’ pain killers led them to their deaths. A misleading

marketing push underplaying the risks of opioids and exaggerating the benefits. Boldly going on air to counter the ‘myth’ that opioids are addictive. Claiming that many studies show that opioids are rarely addictive when used properly for the management of chronic pain. That they were the American dream. Approving publications. All to further the interests of the corrupt capitalist opioid companies. At the expense of the proletariat. Evil machinations of the greedy and rich in control.

“Earth to Marcus Armando,” came a voice from the background.

“Jim. Heyy...didn’t see you there.”

“What’s up? You seemed distant. You day-dreaming on the job. But I guess it’s not like there’s any real journalist work to be done. No research. Fact-checking. Digging up scandalous truths. We’re just a smokescreen now. Spinning whatever news they give us, to make the government and its ‘esteemed’ investors the good guys or the victims. Blaming the ‘few’ drug deaths on the entitled and spoilt nature of kids these days-nothing to be worried about. We’ve simply become a fraudulent extension of their power.”

“Ha! On the contrary, I was just thinking about how I haven’t visited my parents in a while. Might pop in and pay them a visit one of these weekends.”

“Woow. Lying to me in the morning. That’s how you build a healthy relationship with your colleague. Any relationship would crumble. Yet I struggle to keep it afloat, being the lovely person that I am. I heard the drugs are even transported across borders. Got them to poor Mama Armando’s backyard. Immigrant police turned a blind eye for the first time.”

“They’re fine, thanks for asking. I should probably get going. Someone called in. Said they have a story.”

“Ooo! Go get all those juicy details so we can do our job of censoring them.”

I grabbed my coat and took the elevator down. Against my better judgment, I decided that walking is the best. A decision I sorely regretted ten minutes in. Cramps started creeping in. Consequence of my sedentary lifestyle. People around me smiling. Going about their day. A sinking feeling in my gut. Whispering a hard truth...

“Every face is a signpost of what you’ve become. One of these people might be the next victim of your handy work.” Ignore it. Just like everything else.

I finally get to the place. Grove Street. Liquor stores, pawn shops, a Laundromat full of mobster bookies and loan sharks. A seedy hangout for all kinds of sleaze. Looked like a fun place. If your idea of fun was hollow friends, a bottle of vodka, and nothing between the ears. I looked around for the specific house and rang the bell. The door was opened by a lanky guy who looked to be in his mid-thirties. Kind of guy who worked himself to the bone so his family could sleep the sleep of the content.

“Come in. Make yourself at home.”

“Thank you. Nice place you have.”

“Every man’s dream Mr...”

“Just Marcus is fine.” I hear shrieks coming from one of the rooms. All too familiar shrieks.

Heightened sensitivity. Anger. He was detoxing someone.

“Mr. Marcus. You ever detoxed someone?”

“No. But I’ve heard about how tough it is.”

“Tough. That’s funny. It’s brutal. Watching this person you care about lose themselves piece by piece. Until it’s almost as though there’s nothing left of them to call alive or dead. But you suck it up. You do what you can. Cause he’s an old friend. An old friend can give advice. Where new friends only ask for more stories. Like the song says right?”

“You said you had a story, sir?”

“Right, forgive the sentimentality. I’ve seen. No, I’ve felt loss Mr. Marcus. Attended funerals. Watched as wings were clipped by these ‘harmless’ painkillers you so proudly back. You know Mike always kept telling me how he’s gonna to quit tomorrow. We always say we’re gonna quit tomorrow. Then the need for escapism gets to us. Seeps in through the cracks. Then your parents’ medicine cabinet becomes your first dealer and we all know how the story goes from there. You get your first hit. It’s great. Too great in fact. Like the pureness of nothingness. Makes sex seem boring in comparison. The first few are great. After that, you’re chasing those first good times, but you’re addicted and all you’re really doing is trying not to feel like \$h!t from withdrawal. It gets its claws in you. Friends could literally overdose in front of you, get carted away in an ambulance, and you wouldn’t get bothered in the slightest. Gradually deadening your senses, novelty and humanity. Trying to numb the pain instead of realizing it’s a part of the human condition. We feel it for a reason and anything that seems to make it go away is a chimera. Like a broke person going into debt to become rich. ”

“Is there some point to this, sir?” Ignore his suffering. Fake it till you make it right?

“The point Mr. Marcus. Doctors who overprescribed. Parents who should have checked on their children more. Friends who didn’t stick around. Media who falsely advertised a drug despite the mountain of evidence indicating that prolonged use can result in grave complications, a higher risk of addiction, overdose, and death. The companies who falsely deny or trivialize the risk of opioids while overstating the benefits of using them for chronic pain. The point is, we’re all to blame. We all played a part. No divine amnesty is going to get us out of this bind. There’s no undoing it. It’s about damn time we take some accountability. Pay for what we’ve done. There’s only so much I can do alone. I know my limits. I need help. Your help.”

“Honestly, I don’t think there’s much that I can do. It’s been a long time since I was on top of my game, whether it was as a reporter, or leading a remotely respectable life.” I felt like what I was. A fraud. What was I doing anymore? What did I want to do when I set out to be a journalist? Out here publishing a product. Not a story. Showing the observer exactly what he wants to see. Was this living? I guess I was also in a hallucination myself. When did I stop trying? When did I resign myself to apathy? To stagnation. Move Marcus! Move!!

“But... If you don’t mind backing a losing horse that might not even finish the race. I think there is something I can do.”

Saw a smile form on his face. Hope. I guess I also felt slightly spirited. It felt nice to be needed. Serious ego boost. We agreed I would come back tomorrow when Mike was feeling better and record a statement. That wasn’t going to fix anything. But it was a good place to start. Figuring out how I would get it on air was a problem for later.

“Looks like someone had a good time. You look different. Like you got zapped by an alien beam and now have superpowers different. What happened?” Jim asked immediately I got back to the office.

“Well...the truth is, I was zapped by an alien beam. It gave me Omni-precognition and the forecast is there might be catastrophes ahead with an almost certain chance of unemployment.”

“Those always make for good stories.”

“Yes they do. Also, a new bar just opened up down the street. Want to check it out. Figure we ought to live a little.”

“Yep. I’m convinced an alien has taken over your body. But that’s okay. Because this alien’s positive outlook is just what we need to press on.”

Biography

My name is Aaron Mbindyo. I’m a Kenyan medical student in his third year. I’m studying to be a doctor. Helping people get another chance to get on with their lives and getting paid enough money to get by. Doesn’t sound bad you know. I also have an interest in farming. Mixed farming. Seeing as our country has lots of arable land, farming is a good venture. The major problem, is that most of our farming is rainfall dependent. Water harvesting methods are slowly being adopted and this is a fight I’d like to join.