



Creators of Justice 2022

Poetry

Honorable Mention

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RISE IN ASHES

by Lei Ka Man Carmen

They

Sing in slums

Pray in strife

Smile in angst

Tell in truth

Mend in cracks

Dream in fear;

They

Sleep in tombs

Rise in ashes

Biography

Lei Ka Man Carmen resides in Macau. She is a part-time university lecturer, a full-time middle school English teacher, a lover of English literature and an artist. She is interested in the creation of English poetry and abstract painting. Her photographs were exhibited in «New Trend 2008» at Artist Commune, Hong Kong, and her experimental short films were also featured in a joint exhibition organized by Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts.

OLD MAN

by Faiz Ahmad

Raisin faced, he rises from under the shelves,
his back crooked and shaped like a fish hook

hammered by the metal clang of forty years
of daily raising and lowering the grocery store

shutter, the half *beedi* dangling like a quivering
worm from between those cracked lips,

he squints hard and calculates aloud - thirty
seven and twenty one, that would be forty

eight - his aged tone ricocheting uneasily
between the declarative and the interrogative.

Fifty eight, I correct him. His eyes meet mine
with the sharp clank of two swords. He clears

his throat like a fish reel tightening, and then,
thanking me, takes his seat on the stool like a

lazy angler lost in his world governed by its own
set of strange theorems, where the lonelier he

feels, the less the numbers seem to add up.

Biography

Faiz Ahmad is a recent graduate in Biological Sciences, IIT Madras, India. His work has appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Bayou*, *Salamander* and others.

KLITORY

by Ikechukwu Iwuagwu

Like vandalized building beneath the blazing sun, she stood transfixed
Her face was damp, and dry as those of leaves scorched by the blazing sun
“Who are you?” I asked
“My name is Mgbeke, and I have a story to tell” she began
Emotions slithered down her cheek, kissing the earth in calm protest
“Everyone knows that girls cry” she continued
“Do you know the klit cries too?” I dabbed the trickle of tears that rolled down her cheeks

“One
 day
 it was...

The day I was supposed to join my mates in high school
But mama asked that I stayed back, I was barely eleven; innocent, and naive
‘They are coming today’
Mama said, words escaping her lips on tactical limbs, like cunning prisoners; gradually and steadily...
A cynical smile sat on her face like one scared of a chair brought forth to sit on
I felt something was amiss, yes, I did!

The entrance door creaked painfully as it was yanked ajar
I saw Auntie Nene, alongside two other women
Their faces, thrones to drab miens – arid, vapid smiles

I embrace Aunty Nene, she smiled the same way mama did, there was something unusual about her fragile embrace, I felt safe and unsafe at the same time

‘The inner chamber is set’

Mama’s voice rang across the yard

Aunty Nene disappears with the women

Mumbled conversations engulf the pot of anxiousness boiling in my mind

Mama reappears, walking like angel Gabriel on a mission to herald John the Baptist’s birth

She takes my feeble hands and leads me towards the inner chamber

Like a lamb about to be slaughtered

I felt like Isaac being led to the alter by Abraham

Laid supine – my eyes scan the ceiling for answers

Legs ajar like jaws of the great white in the deep blue sea

My eyes peek at the tray, bearer of blades of varying shapes and sizes - models on the runway

The hot water vents its words of steaming anger besides me

The fears within me exit my pores on their trickling sweaty adventure

I try to make away, my mass is held steady by arms of false comfort

‘Relax, it will be over soon, I did it too when I was your age’

Aunty Nene reassured me with a smile, a genuine smile? No, a smile as false as the truth of politicians

And the scalpel was made to kiss my klit

This kiss deluged my eyes with a fountain of pain

Everyone knows that girls cry

Do you know the klit cries too?

After a while,

I was asked to keep my legs ajar to allow the peppery comfort of the billowing breeze

My eyes, stabbed vigorously by the innocent tears from my klit – a garment to the floor

Now being licked up by the fabric's wooly tongue

My eyes a reservoir of flowing pain

My klit, in tears – red tears, red flowing tears

20 years after

This missing rib has been unearthed by a comely pair, and now, ready for a dance

A dance I have heard of, imagined, and yearned for

A passionate dance on the nuptial sheets

But my klit still sheds a billion tears

Unseen tears from silenced sensitivity

Everyone knows that girls cry

Do you know the klit cries too?

Do you hear my voice?

Or is it choked by the watery limbs of tears?

There are other Mini-Mes scattered like stones at a construction site

Soon to dance to the *marlian* beat of this weird culture

Everyone knows that girls cry

Do you know the klit cries too?

Your eyes are perching on these words like a dove on an olive branch

Because they feel the pain between every letter, every word, every sentence...

Be the voice, the dissonance anvil against this scalpel's dentition, before it kisses more klits

And when you see these Mini Mes, don't fail to give them priceless gifts

Give them

A VOICE!

Give them

JUSTICE!

Give them

FREEDOM!"

Biography

Iwuagwu Ikechukwu is an African poet, Essayist, Screenwriter and Dramatist whose poems, reviews and short stories have appeared in several literary magazines across the world both online and in print. He was shortlisted for the 2022 Alpine Fellowship Visual Arts Prize in London, UK. When he is not writing, he can be found researching, teaching or reading the works of Christopher Okigbo, Isidore Diala, Soyinka, Adichie, Buchi Emecheta & Ifesinachi Nwadike. He is a Nigerian, and his publications "The Baptism (A collection of Three Short Stories)", "After Dusk Comes Dawn", "See History" & "Shakespeare Speaks Pidgin" are available on Amazon.

COUNT WITH ME

by Chiwenite Onyekwelu

*“Kolade Johnson was killed on Sunday,
March 31, 2019, by officers of the unit,
when attempting to arrest another man
because of his dreadlocks.”*

— Pulse, Nigeria

I want to begin with the bloodiest
bone. The occipital,

concave-shaped, beneath his oiled
scalp. Let the heart

sit motionless as a stone, flat as that
theory about the

flatness of the Earth. I do not know
decimation quicker

than the one my country affords: In
the news, someone

again is murdered, and I think of the
expansiveness of their

dying. How, at home, there are siblings
unaware of this

backward slump, a mother measuring
his absence with a

clock. My God, death can be so exact
in its taking. Like

golf. Like Judas, long-mouthed, leaning
in for a kiss.

Was it not him who taught Christ that
the difference

between slaughter and laughter is an “s”.
S as the sound of a

kiss. S as blood gushing through a hole.
Tell me, do you

believe in osteology, in the impervious-
ness of a skull

before it begins to crack. A uniformed
man, in the news,

is insisting that because *one shot* because
accidental. Wait—

this cadaver, numb and lifeless, is hollowed
[twice]. Like us all,

it must have wanted a death plain as salt,
a death that would

not disguise. Bless the metal in its frontal
lobe. Bless the man

in a police shirt. See how he’s learned
to tie his rage

around his thumb. I’m saying a boy is dead
but there are still

so many guns registered, loaded, waiting for
whatever that breathes.

Biography

Chiwenite Onyekwelu, 22, is Nigerian and lighthearted. His poems appear in *Adroit Journal*, *Chestnut Review*, *America Magazine*, *Gutter Magazine*, and elsewhere. In 2022, he was a finalist for the Gregory Djanikian Scholars in Poetry Program, as well as a runner-up for the Foley Poetry Prize and the Surging Tide Poetry Contest. He serves as Chief Editor at the School of Pharmacy Agulu, where he's an undergraduate.