

Calling Dana Flight 9J-992 to Lagos



SO WE DO NOT FORGET

An Anthology from Naijastories.com

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<http://www.naijastories.com/category/flight-9j-992-to-lagos/>

FOREWORD

I got the news of the Dana Airlines plane crash on my BB almost immediately the news broke. The members of the Writing Nerdz group, a BlackBerry group I belong to, are always with ears to the ground, eyes on the prize and hands on their pens, their BlackBerrys, cameras and laptops. And so it was that I read the sad news on one of our chat threads. A member, Chiagozie Nwonwu, lived close to the crash site and before long, he had written that he was on his way there.

Later that evening, I logged on to my laptop and visited a few media sites where I usually get my Nigerian news fix, and the images overwhelmed me. All the reportage seemed to agree that there were no survivors. In one of the pictures, I saw a burnt figure that looked like a dead person; it probably was. It just broke my heart.

At first, I was somewhat upset at the pictures of those who were busy taking pictures instead of helping, but, I later reasoned to myself that they were largely ignorant and probably meant no harm. I know for sure there's not a lot of public information on how to deal at scenes of disaster and emergency in Nigeria.

Some of those early witnesses could also be coping with their own shock at such a gruesome scene. Maybe taking pictures was their way of dealing with the trauma; of removing themselves, their psyche so to say, from the scene and what had happened. Maybe by processing the scene through inanimate devices, they could sublimate the pain of being powerless bystanders by being active eyewitnesses. So they did not forget.

But we do forget. And quickly too.

I woke up on the morning of the 4th of June, and while some blogs and newspapers were still reporting on the incident, some had moved on. How could we move on so easily after a tragedy like the crash with such a high number of deaths, and no survivors? Had we already finished processing the loss, the pain, the guilt, the anger? Could we not think of more ways we can help those affected, the victim's families, the crash site wounded, and victims of property loss or damage?

I was a bit mollified when I saw more pictures of people that helped the Fire Service, what there is of it anyway, hoist pipes and try to douse the flames with water in buckets. I was glad that nearby construction sites gave up their equipment so the dead could be retrieved and their physical bodies given some measure of rest.

But still, a part of me remained angry. I was angry at the greed of the Dana Airlines on hearing news that the same plane had had several incidents in the past month, including developing a major mechanical fault the day before the accident. I was angry that the crew did not stand their ground not to fly the plane till it was fully repaired. I was angry at the ineptitude of government, from the aviation authorities, to emergency management, and to the presidency.

I was also angry at myself. Yes, I was angry that I wasn't there on ground, to give of the strength of my arms. And surely, there was more I could do than just send some money to the Red Cross? Other than giving money and material things to victims and survivors, was there a way as a writer and blogger I could contribute to this healing process? Were there other ways we could recover as a community?

As I began my daily chores before settling down to work that June 4th, I wondered again how easily and quickly we forget and move on. Each day, there are scores of deaths by suicide bombers, road accidents, armed robbery, and so on. And we always forget.

But I didn't want to forget.

Something about this loss was sticking in my craw. I remembered that there is a way to vent emotions and at the same time as keep them in our memory. Writing. So I decided to blog about my feelings. And as I sat down to write, it struck me. I could do more.

Through my blog and through Najastories.com which I manage, I could get even more people to write. So that we do not forget. So that even when time passes, there would be a way to remember.

I sent my husband a message to call me and as we spoke, he gave me a word for what I was thinking. Memorialization. I looked up the meaning. To commemorate, To be mindful of, To remind, To honor or keep alive the memory of. By then, the germ of my idea became full blown. Yes, Yes, and Yes!

It made perfect sense. I have always loved to read, and not long after, I began to write. My earliest writing was of some children having adventures in a rural countryside. They were to help me remember the amazing time I spent each Christmas in Asaba with my family. I am no more a diarist because with age came the fear that my journal would fall into the wrong hands. But I believe strongly in telling our own stories. That is one of the major reasons behind going ahead to publish my books and to set up Najastories.com. Nobody can tell our stories better than us.

In the case of the Dana Plane Crash, I wanted to see the writers among us take this tragedy and turn it into something that we could all connect with. Our writing would be a healing outlet as we attempted as a community to make sense of the trauma and the disaster. We would deal with our emotions through poetry, report on how we could do better next time in non-fiction, or even give life back to those who were lost by recreating their lives and stories through fiction.

And so, on both my blog and naijastories.com, I called for a mixed anthology to commemorate the Dana Airlines Flight 9J-992 from Abuja to Lagos, which crashed on Sunday June 3, 2012.

And from the same day, the entries began to trickle and then flood in. Fiction, non-fiction, and poetry submissions were received at admin@naijastories.com till the end of June. The writers who were already members of naijastories.com submitted directly to the site. All entries were published on the website and beginning in July, we began to compile the submissions that would be published in this anthology. While we will consider selling the anthology and donating the proceeds to charity, for now we are putting it up for free downloads.

My hope is that the submissions collected in this anthology will help us as people and a community to deal with the disaster of the Dana airline disaster of June 3rd 2012. It is not a collection of despondence. Yes, there are sad reports, poetry and stories that might make you cry, but in the end, this is a celebration of life. Life is precious. Stories are forever.

Let us not forget.

[Myne Whitman](#)

Blogger, author, columnist, and founder of Naijastories.com.

153 Places by A9jagreat

I have tried to forget

I have tried to block it out

But it keeps replaying itself

It's like the pictures from an album

Flipping... flipping... flipping itself

I don't want to see those beautiful children

With the mother's arms around them

I don't want to see the face of the beautiful women

Whose hope and dreams were engulfed in the terrible explosion

Someone should help me forget the men

Who were looking forward getting back to their families

I slept a dreamless sleep

But in the morning it was the same pictures from the same album

Flipping... flipping... flipping itself

Each picture, a significance of pain

Each smiling face with the effect of a sword through the heart

Today I woke up happy

But just before my happiness could be displayed

It was the same pictures from the same album

Flipping... flipping... flipping itself

Each picture, breaking my heart over again

Someone should help me forget

But even if I forget, my heart is already wounded

Broken into 153 places

Telling Our Stories by Abby

Life is no fairy tale; it knocks out pretty hard!

...I have always had a delayed reaction to pain...

I read about the dreadful news, both the bomb blast and the Dana crash, as soon as the news broke but it didn't quite register in my mind. I was busy after all. The numerous bombs that have gone off fairly often, lately in the country have a way of making one jaded and oblivious to all the pain.

I still cannot say I have seen images of the crash. That I could keep from seeing. I have however been unable to keep from seeing the pictures and reading the stories: stories of beautiful people with dreams, hopes and desires; stories of love, friendship, laughter and family. Stories of lives lived so beautifully; of love built quite magically; of youth and innocence so enchanting...and it has been heart wrenching and tear inducing.

I do not cry, as a matter of principle. Of course, I'm moved to tears but I refuse to shed them. It always starts a downward health spiral for me. There are other ways to express grief than through crying. I prefer to think it through.

Must be why I wonder at the seeming futility of life. Yes, we will die. But need it be in such a violent manner? That part caused me to shudder.

I imagine the irony in the scenario that people, who probably had never met themselves before, were suddenly united in the moment of their death. Did they exchange eye contact? Did they try to smile reassuringly one to the other? What were their last thoughts? Did they regret their lives? Did they alarmingly cry, "Why me?"

There was an expectation on their part to go ahead with plans they had made when the plane touched down in Lagos.

Instead, they were torched!

Excuse me, my eyes are teary and I can feel the beginning of a headache.

I think of couples on the plane and wonder what the content of the conversation that passed between them at those defining moments was? What many hitherto unsaid things were said in those last moments? How many bothersome issues suddenly became unreasonable? I imagine the fear and regret apparent on faces, the realization of the folly of unnecessary arguments, forgiveness, holding of hands and resignation to the imminent fate.

What about work colleagues? How petty did their competitiveness seem in the face of death? The soon-to-be bride? The sister? The kids? Especially the kids; the ones who rent the air with the cries of "Mummy" and "Daddy", totally oblivious to the fact that neither could help them.

The death they faced was not sudden; it was slow, gradual, deliberate and excruciatingly painful; almost vengeful.

These thoughts have made me sad and feeling quite ill; the headache's worse now too. The fever's not far off.

I think of us; the people waiting for the plane to land: partners, friends and business associates, maybe a vexed acquaintance just waiting to give whomever a piece of his/her mind. What are the thoughts going through our minds now? Now we realize we loved them; that we should have told them; that we should have made the times they were around count.

But what we have now are memories.

Far too many people lose their lives for no reason at all. I cannot begin to tell all the stories; I do not know them all. There weren't just lives on that plane but in the homes it crashed into, and at Living Faith Church, Bauchi. There are lives lost daily from poverty and consumption of fake and expired drugs; lives lost from maltreatment from the hands of a spouse or relative; lives lost from reckless driving; lives lost from good old ignorance or even from voting in a corrupt and incompetent politician; lives lost from plain old age. Lives lost last week and yesterday and undoubtedly, lives to be lost tomorrow.

The stories are not done yet.

I have always believed that when people die, the lessons inherent are for the living to learn.

I was also jarred awake by a personal experience. Fortunately, it wasn't fatal. It could have been though, considering the age of the individual and the realization that incidents less dramatic have been known to claim lives. Reminded me that I need to be celebrating the lives around me and telling them their stories because they are important to me.

Our stories are all beautiful, especially to the people who love us. Let's tell and celebrate our stories today. We are after all, not promised tomorrow.

Quite a while ago, I read that "We commit the dates to mind but forget the lessons." History repeats itself because people forget.

Hopefully, we will remember to not forget.

To all the lives lost on the ill-fated crash, here's to telling your stories beautifully!

My Last Flight Home by Adebowale Adejugbe

'Mors Certa, Hora Incerta' – 'Death is certain, its hour is not'

The important thing is not to stop questioning. - Albert Einstein

I took my bath hurriedly that morning; I wouldn't want to be late for my flight to Abuja. It had been a few days of high debate within me - should I honour the appointment or not? - as this could be that lucky break I prayed and fasted for or just a total waste of time and resources. I tucked in my shirt after the necessary pre-travel rituals had been done, packed my pair of lucky socks and said a short prayer to complete the ritual. I was wheeling my traveling box when a feeling engulfed me, I couldn't place it but it was very strong and I knew I was forgetting something.

It hit me after about thirty seconds that my ticket was on the living room table. That delayed me for a total of about three minutes before I finally set sail. I was thinking about my appointment, the feeling of seeing my best friend and some of my other friends resident in the nation's capital again, the excitement of getting away from the lovely madness of Lagos for a weekend was playing "kele kele" on my mind and the comfy but extremely heart-shattering forty-five minutes journey couldn't be suppressed either. I was eager for all of it.

All my prayers were for a fruitful journey, because the flight fare could easily have been used for a better purpose if not for the appointment that made it extremely mandatory for me to go. I didn't want to put myself through a ten hour-plus journey by road when forty-five minutes would do the job. Add ten hours to that very sinister Lokoja-Abuja expressway and the security uncertainty that are prevalent on our roads, and it was a quick decision to travel my beloved Dana.

I still remember the main reason why I started flying Dana. I loved Aero and its very affordable prices (that's if you booked ahead) and I always booked ahead to lower the prices. The hawking of goods in Aero flights coupled with a scare I had when returning from a trip to Calabar didn't put me off - a multi-postponed flight which I eventually missed severed my association with Aero. I was so angry when I was told to pay almost double of what I doled out (for a two-way journey) to cancel my supposed check-in before I could be allowed on another plane. I opted for Dana and I fell in love immediately.

I had tried Arik, Air Nigeria etc. but I just fell in love with Dana. The flights were on time almost all of the time and it felt comfy enough for me. That's all a businessman needs to hear.

I didn't wait long at the airport after checking-in, the flight was on time again and fifty minutes later I was with my friend trading banter - journey forgotten, new environment accepted. New reality dawned on me when I was called that my appointment had been moved to the next Saturday, meaning I had just flown to Abuja on a purely social visit. In that context, I had to enjoy it to the fullest - no compromise.

The weekend was awesome. I got my ticket's worth of fun and adventure. My flight on Sunday afternoon would be awesomely enjoyed also (my thought), I've come to see life as a game of NOW, live for now and let all sorrows be forgotten.

With everything packed, my friend drove me to the airport with a thirty minute head start before my flight. We were about entering the airport when I remembered I had forgotten something extremely

important (I'm that awkward) and I told my friend to turn back so I could get it. I didn't tell him what it was even with all his prodding, I wanted it back at all cost. He had to take me back but with the constant reminder that I was going to miss my flight (I swallowed a big lump each time he mentioned missing my flight because he would be the one to fund a new ticket).

My lucky socks were lying beside the foot of the bed, very adorable to look at and so sad to be parted with for few minutes. I picked it up and ran downstairs to join my friend (he was obviously irritated that he drove all the way back for a pair of socks). We got to the airport on time to see my flight take off. What I feared most had happened and there was no money to book a new flight right away. My friend promised we would sort it out the next day which would be Monday - that was okay for me. He wouldn't let me rest on the issue of my lucky socks though and I had to take all the yabis on board - he was paying for a new ticket, I'd give him that much leeway to dig into me.

Everything was sorted out! Yeah!

I switched on the TV when we got back to his place (about fifty five minutes after my flight left) and it was all BREAKING NEWS on the scroll bar of several stations. It was my missed flight that crashed into a residential area in Lagos, I checked my ticket to confirm my fears, it was true. I brought out my lucky socks and held on to them, tears streaming down my cheeks, my body and lips shaking uncontrollably at just the thoughts I could have been there. I started praying and hoping.

Eventually, my fears were confirmed! No survivors. Those first few minutes were real torture, several questions ran through my mind most of them would never be answered, ever! The families, everyone on the flight, people on the ground, the environment, its effects on the psyche of frequent flyers and several more thoughts were circulating through my mind. Ninety-five percent of my thoughts were depressing and I still haven't gotten over them.

Everyone that stepped on that flight (pilots, engineers, stewardesses and passengers) and those inside the buildings on ground that paid the ultimate price were heroes; they should be remembered as such and their families should be adequately compensated.

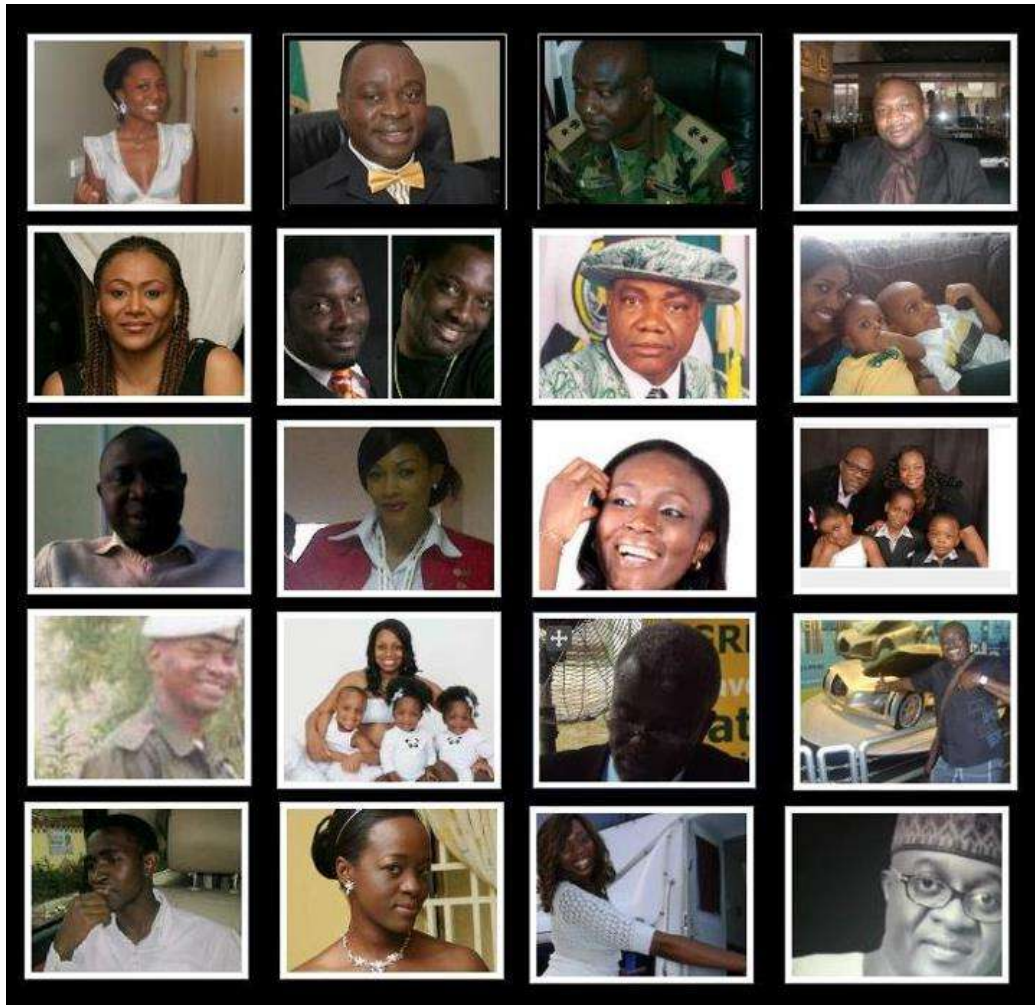
Above all, necessary steps should be taken to prevent a repeat (it is possible). It's better to get it right with the right people and right procedures rather than all these lamentations we are dealing with afterwards. The authorities should learn that human lives are involved and they are irreplaceable no matter how much is being paid as compensation to the families. We need a system that works. We need a system that values her citizens. We urgently need a system that is proactive. We need a system that listens and values genuine inputs from her citizens.

We don't have to stop questioning, because that's where redemption lies. If you are being persecuted for asking the right questions, please hang in there, it will be of use eventually. Imagine what could have happened if the right questions had been asked and the right precautions had been taken!

It might be too early to judge on who should take the blame (as some would say) but it's not too early to admit we've lost an overwhelming number of dedicated and lovely citizens, it's not too early to admit that they are not coming back, it's not too early to posit that if people are found culpable they should dance to the naked drum and it's never going to be too early to say goodbye.

This is dedicated to everyone who took the ill-fated Dana flight that crashed at Iju-Ishaga as their last flight home. We will always remember you and your deaths will not be in vain. You are all heroes.

For The Sake Of Closure by Afronuts



I was at home watching TV and sipping on a can of malt when I got the call.

'Hello?'

'Hi Afro...it's me, Ben...'

'Yeah, Ben...wetin?'

Ben was a friend who was fond of getting into one trouble or the other. I thought he was calling to explain another messy situation that he had gotten himself into. I braced myself for another long narration of tales of woes.

'Something terrible don happen oh! Plane don crash for Iju !'

I nearly choked on my malt. The impatience in my demeanor quickly switched to the opposite.

'You say wetin?'

‘Plane don crash for Iju oh!’

‘Where?’ My heart was now racing. Our family house was situated in Iju. My siblings and I grew up there. My parents still lived there after most of us grew up and moved to our own places or travelled out of the country. Though my parents would be in church by that time, the thought of the house was tops in my mind.

‘Where?’ I yelled again into the phone.

‘Near Toyin bus stop side for...’ Ben’s voice went off the phone as I heard him make inquiries from someone else and come back on the line, ‘... Akande street! The plane crash enter one building for the street!’

‘Oh Lord!’

I knew the place. It was two bus stops from our family house; a street I had roamed in my high school days when I went chick-hunting with my friends in the neighborhood.

I sat down in shock, thoughts of the fact that people were on that plane and in that house threw my mind into an emotional seizure.

Who was on that plane? Who was on the ground?

* * *

Monday morning was a sober one as the ripple effect of tragedy began to affect work in the office; a client lost someone on the plane and had to cancel appointments with us; the progress meeting was rushed as a certain sadness pervaded the room; in all the offices it was the subject of every gist.

Back in my office, I sat in front of my PC looking at its blank screen. One thought played through my mind.

Who had been on that flight?

By now the flight manifest was out and TV stations had displayed them. The internet was also agog with the list.

I switched on the system and went straight to Google.

I ‘googled’ on the Dana Air crash and the links that appeared were endless. One particular list led to a forum where a thread had been opened for members to make condolence entries. Many people answered to the thread. Some even put up pictures of loved ones on the flight.

That was when the thought of honoring the dead on my blog hit me.

Many people had seen the list of names on the manifest but not the faces that bore those names.

It wasn’t an easy task.

I went online collecting pictures from sites and forums where someone had managed to put up a picture of loved one lost on the flight. What made this an uphill task was verifying the authenticity of the photos.

After an extensive search employing the help of google and facebook and a number of blogs, I put the post which I titled 'R.I.P – The Beautiful Faces of the Dana Air Crash'. I also dropped the link on my Facebook page.

I had meant it to be just another entry on my blog which I did just to honor the dead.

What happened in the next few days was nothing I had expected.

A friend on my Facebook page saw the entry and forwarded the link to some friends via her Blackberry. Those friends in turn forwarded it to other friends.

The link spread like wildfire.

Soon people in my office received it.

I got phone calls from friends I hadn't seen in a long time and got connected again. They commended me for putting up the post.

I got mails commending my effort. Some even sent me their BB pin to add on as friend.

Comments flooded my blog till my photo-hosting site sent a warning that my photo-viewership was reaching a limit that would require me to upgrade my account.

I then had to go through the painstaking effort of re-loading all the pictures on another site and re-loading them on my blog. I couldn't afford to let people down with all the traffic flooding my blog just because I couldn't host the pictures anymore.

The comments on my blog (of which the highest I ever got was about 20) increased to 132 the first day. As at the time of writing this article, it had reached 644.

I started receiving mails from affected loved ones thanking me for putting faces to the names. People started sending me pictures of loved one involved in the crash who were not on my site. I updated the site as the pictures came in and credited who sent it. I was able to sieve out picture errors as more people mailed me.

I received mails from people who I've never met; people who were total strangers to me but had become united to me by this terrible tragedy. I received some mails with pictures and information that broke my heart; pictures that looked so alive it was hard to believe they were dead. All these things made these people so real and it sort of made me closer to them as I put up their smiling pictures.

The most heartbreaking were those ones taken of lovely kids and families involved; the one taken at the airport with a loved one just before boarding; an air hostess who was to be married the following month and two kids of an already widowed mother who were returning home. In fact everyone seems to have some info or the other that would break your heart

At a point I stopped typing and sighed sadly looking at the screen as I conjured my composure to come back.

Someone who had seated beside and peeped what I was doing had looked at me and asked me if I was crying. That was when I noticed that my eyes were laden with tears which refused to fall. I was one who hardly cried but what I was doing had a profound effect on me.

Even as the time I wrote this piece, I was still receiving mails of photos and info from friends and loved ones to include on the memorial post on the blog. I've updated several times now and have never stopped updating as the pictures keep coming.

It's the only thing I can do to give a closure to the many affected families and broken hearts out there; and I'm glad I've been able to give many a comforting hug and honor their loved ones via the internet.

Sword of Damocles by Aturmercy

Calling Dana Flight 9J-992 to Lagos

Calling Dana Flight 9J-992 to Lagos

This is the last call for flight 9J-992 to Lagos

A call for a righteous few that will stand as sacrifice

Their sacrifice: the price for our better quality of life

That the broken wheel; fixed can now freely spin

Insecurity will now know police security

Fire damage will cower in fear of fire rescuers

Medical emergencies will take flight at the sound of ambulance services

This is a God given right of every citizen

The precious loss of life: the price tag for the progress of mankind

The Being came and paved the way

True sacrifice; the only way comes to stay

Though we mourn the loss of our loved ones, family and friends

In this loss we celebrate our gain

Are there not two sides to every coin?

Is life and death not both sides of the same coin?

A mirror, an echo of continuity masked in the dance of eternity

Though we 'mourn' the Cross of Calvary

Is there any that would like to continue in slavery?

Reject this generous sacrifice for you and me?

Yea, there will be sacrifice;

But some will surely pay the price for this sacrifice!

Judas!

A name shared by government and public servants

Craftiness: his slice like theirs in this pie of betrayal

Their reward is woe; weaved and woven in the blood our innocent

So it is and shall be for all those past and present in government

Every public official that fed and fattened of the misery of our problems

Dana flight 9J-992 is their sword of Damocles

For them there is no miracle

The tentacles of Karma bring their ridicule

Memoria by Ayokunle Falomo

Write a poem in memory of the dead, For me

It's all too easy, To watch

My pen bleed on the page, Just as

It was all too easy, To watch

You bleed, as millions get to read

The horrors on the page. Rage

At the ones who are to be blamed

Should be the proper emotion I feel, but

I don't

That too is all too easy

But if I were to be honest

I don't

Because my heart's been seared

I don't

Feel a thing anymore

And if I were to be honest

I don't

have a gun

To shoot

At the ones who are to be blamed

So, I won't pretend as if I understand

Truth is

I don't

So, this is not a poem

That's too easy

What's not too easy though

Is for me to open the valves

Of my heart and let it spill on the page

And that is what this is

It is not a poem

And see

I have no magic words to say

That will make all the pain fade away

For your loved ones, but I pray

Not in a cliché, that's what we do kind of way

But really

That they find consolation

For their breaking hearts

And for you

That as you

Reach a state of Nirvana

Take a rest as a friend

As an old

Memoria, memoria

Memoria, memoria

***The Lost Loved Ones* by Blaise 'Aphascea' Aboh**

When a loved one, a brother, a sister, a friend, dies, you wonder
Of what will happen to his dreams; greatly you ponder
As you remember past times in flashes, tears pour out
The being within you wants to go mad, it wants to shout
Indeed it's a great pain, a loss that you cannot bear
A feeling that comes with one too many tears

The memory keeps coming, it haunts you
Questions of 'why oh why' keep taunting you
Beautiful pictures of the past come to the fore, they live
Painted as if they were yesterday, and he were alive
Bright scenes of when you shook hands, embraced
Watching that smile on his face, becoming crazed

In your thoughts you feel his presence, you mourn
Morning, noon, eve, it keeps on even till the next dawn
You know no rest, for a long time you know you will not
One, two, three, for many days and nights, many months
Your heart bleeds, cries, gets drained of its fluid
As the truth slowly comes to light and becomes vivid

That death has done you a number, a great one
That your mate, friend, sister & brother is truly gone

You only but have to take heart, for God knows best

You only but have to pray for them to have a peaceful rest

For indeed, death is inevitable, it chooses anyone

It comes when we least expect, we cannot run.

My Last Dana Air Flight by Biyi Simoyan

It was Friday, June 1st 2012, in Abuja; a normal morning, with bright sunny weather, ten minutes to 7 a.m. in the morning. I was at the local wing of the airport. The boarding announcement had been made and I was the first to board the plane. Waiting for the shuttle bus is a waste of time to me when the airplane is just a three minute walk away. Something was odd that morning; Aero Contractors normally boarded first, as their flight is normally thirty minutes before Dana Air. This morning however the Aero aircraft was parked and empty. No pilots, no crew, no ground staff. What was going on this morning? I was glad my own boarding announcement had been made and I would be in Lagos in another hour. I identified my luggage and made sure it was moved into the aircraft from the pack. On boarding the plane, I made straight for the lavatory. I normally do this to avoid getting up during the flight.

I had my laptop bag with me as hand luggage and a book written by Manchester United football club coach Sir Alex Ferguson about the 1996-97 season. I reckoned I could apply the same success principles he used in my own life. I equally needed some kind of distraction, travelling by air has always made me nervous from childhood. I walked back to my seat as other passengers boarded and exchanged pleasantries with the lady cabin crew member in the rear of the aircraft. These planes are quite old, I thought to myself. On my seat, I called my wife to inform her that I had boarded and she wished me a safe journey, as she normally does when I am travelling. Other passengers boarded and I recalled an elderly man I saw on the queue when I wanted to get my boarding pass. He had lamented how people who do not like to fly in Nigeria are forced to because the railway system is dysfunctional. I saw him board; apparently he didn't recognize me.

Captain Oscar welcomed us on board. We were going to cruise at 31,000 feet above sea level and the weather all the way to Lagos was clear. Thank God I said in my mind. I don't mind the height, but when there is turbulence, I suddenly become very aware of it. In no time, we were on the runway and airborne. During the flight for the first time, I got up to use the lavatory. This was what I intended to avoid in the first place. The cabin crew lady wasn't too pleased that I got in her way while she was serving drinks and snacks. The aircraft's engine was very noisy. "Well, we're used to this, right"? I thought to myself. I wondered how the passengers who sat at the rear felt. These aircrafts have their engines at the rear unlike the other aircrafts of most other airlines, whose engines are beneath the wings. I hurried back to my seat. I read through Sir Alex Ferguson's account of trying to sign England striker Alan Shearer for his club.

I haven't read about sports personalities in awhile. Then I heard the magic words, "Cabin crew prepare for landing", Captain Oscar's husky voice couldn't be mistaken. I was partially relieved but then I couldn't see the ground, the clouds were quite low, only one thing came to my mind, it was probably about to rain again. Then suddenly, I saw a shadow of our plane moving in the clouds. This made me very, very uncomfortable. I would look away and seconds later look again in that direction and see the shadow. I had never seen such a thing in my entire life. The shadow of the aircraft was in motion as we descended and it moved with us the way a human shadow moves with the person while walking. It was strange to me and felt like it meant something, but I couldn't imagine what it could be. I dismissed the thought but still felt uneasy; I couldn't stop feeling this way until we touched the ground, landing on the runway for international flights.

I called my wife's mobile phone twice, nobody answered. I decided to send her a text message. I called my Dad and told him I had arrived in Lagos. I normally don't call him before flights. He worries a lot. I had arranged someone to bring my car to the airport. I had an 11am appointment to keep in Ikoyi and wanted to get there on time, finish my business and leave before the mad weekend

traffic started. While leaving the airport, there was an announcement. It was the fifth year anniversary of Murtala Muhammed Airport 2. This is unarguably the best airport in the country and I have a good feeling anytime I am landing at this airport that I don't feel anywhere else. It can't be described. There was a further announcement about a raffle draw and prizes to be awarded commemorating the anniversary. In my mind, I say thank God, five years and no aviation disaster involving passenger airlines reported. I didn't know that tragedy was two days ahead.

Sunday afternoon, June 3, 2012, I am with my two brothers, one of the wives and nephew and my phone rings. It's my friend, Segun who arrived from India last week. I can't hear him properly. I just hear "Dana airplane... Abuja... crash... my area". In my mind, I was hoping he was making reference to the unfortunate incident that happened at Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana the previous day. Ghana and Dana sound so much alike, but the line is clear now and he repeats himself, "Dana, Dana Air, that airline you like to fly has crashed near my area, it was an Abuja-Lagos flight". I was playing with my cute three year old nephew who every stranger assumes is my son, suddenly my countenance changes and the kid wonders why I am no longer playing with him. I ask my brother's wife if she can get online to confirm if the news is true. Sad news is hardly ever false. I tried to log on to a news website on my phone without success. She takes ten minutes and comes back to confirm it. I check my phone again; apparently my mother in law had been calling me. When she didn't through to me, she called my wife, who confirmed to her that I arrived Lagos safely two days earlier. I leave my brother's place downcast. I have to drop off my other brother to his place before going back home. As we park in front of his house, I see a young lady at the opposite apartment, receiving a phone call and sounding vey hysterical on the phone, then suddenly she jumps up, screams, starts crying and runs into the house.

There and then I knew she had a relative on that flight. My brother and I walked up to the front porch of the house she ran into and we see two men in their fifties inside a Jeep. One of them informs us that she lost her cousin in the plane crash. He tells us that his brother, who is the other person, arrived from Abuja on Dana a day earlier, and I inform him that I arrived two days earlier! Worse news was to come, they inform us that a family of nine perished! As children my parents never allowed all of us to board the same airplane at once, or be in the same vehicle at the same time. As a child I had always wondered why, it now made sense.

My brother and I aren't smiling as I drive off. Normally, we tell jokes at this point and have a good laugh. Today we are both sober, he tells me to call him when I get home. I had hardly driven for three minutes when I realized, I couldn't continue. I stopped, couldn't control the tears. There was a time I thought I was really tough and could not be moved by anything. But a lot has happened in the last four years that have moved me. I stay there pondering the fate people who had such high hopes and expectations in life. In the twinkle of an eye, it had all disappeared. I drive across the long bridge feeling numb.

I imagined how the passengers on that flight felt when the plane was going down, how the pilots would have tried to stay in control. Was it Captain Oscar? Or the funny American pilot who always entertained passengers when making weather and in-flight announcements? There was a Nigerian pilot too, I recalled, and an Indian. Which one of them was it? What about the crew? Was it the same crew that flew in from Abuja on Friday or from one of my earlier flights this year? I had flown 15 times locally this year and 9 of those flights were with Dana.

How did the pilot feel when he realized he was helpless? There must have children too on that plane. What could have been going through their minds? Some mothers would have been with their children. There is no greater anguish for a mother than knowing you can't save your child. This was

a situation that would shake the bravest of persons. There would be prayer for a miracle that was not to be. Maybe, the shadow of the moving plane in the cloud meant something after all; maybe it was merely a shadow. Who knows?

Phantoms by Chemokopi

I. Aspiration

He will captain this green ship of millions
So tells the young mind that weaves this vision
She will be the emancipator of her kind
When Time clothes her with her mummy's age
He will end the distress of his clan
Someday, somehow--he knows he can
She begins the journey of bringing succour
Next year, as a medical doctor
He will make peace with his wife and sons
Today, when they touch down.

II. Pain

When their dreams fled to heaven
From the heat of the burning comet
Fallen from the sky,
We wept.
When all the innocent eggs
In the womb of the bird from the capital,
Broke on blameless heads
That rested in their humble habitat,
We wailed.
Our siblings

Uncles and mothers

Became distressing sculptures of gore

Filling the comet's crater.

Our peers

Neighbours and friends

Became broken eggs spilling yolks

That would never grow wings.

III. Questions

Wasn't it said that change would come

Coasting on fresh air that would displace

The foul things that had stifled us since?

Was this just

The unaided hand of Fate?

This one time, just this once

Should we weep and not seek to blame?

Should we wail and only seek lessons?

IV. Comfort

We dreamt yesterday

Of our loves departed

As we lay on our beds soaked

With the tears of the evening.

We did not see our loves' faces

We only saw their radiance
And now we are awake
Facing another day
Our hearts less heavy.
We know that someday
When we leave this earth
We will see our loves again.

We have a dream
That one day
We will think back
Struggling to capture
The receding thoughts
Of all that fractures
Our land
Today.

Till Death Do Us Part by Enoquin

I was quite excited. I was going to the comedy show with Kayode later. I had to get my hair done and still shop for what to wear, it was going to be hectic and I didn't simply have the time.

"Stop yelling at me!"

My younger sister screamed at her twin brother. Those twins were the most incompatible set I had ever known or met.

"Stop shouting like a girl," Tano hollered back at his sister.

I swear those two got on my nerves too much. I mean my mum could trade these kids for better ones, couldn't she?

"Hey!" I yelled at them both, "I am sure you both don't want some of my red hot anger this afternoon, it's simply too hot for all this noise."

Peace at last! I could focus on why I was not seeing my favourite tank top in my wardrobe. Mary was the last person to come to my place; she must have taken it without my consent. The girl was simply mad, she knew how I hated sharing my stuff but still that did not deter her from taking my stuff. Picking my phone, I quickly dialed her number and tapped my feet impatiently as I waited for her to pick.

"Efe, I was just about to call you." Whispering into the phone that I had to strain to hear, "My period is late!"

"What, have you been having sex?!" It came out before I could hold it back in. Gosh! I shouldn't have asked that, it sounded too judgmental.

"Yes, I know I have been bad but what do I do now? I mean I hear of drugs and ..."

"Don't even go there...are you..." I looked round to make sure my siblings were nowhere close "are you thinking of ...you know..."

"Yes! What else can I do?"

"But you could die!"

"And I would still die when my parents find out!"

"I don't know, can I ask someone for an opinion?"

"Someone like who?"

"Kay, he is coming in and we are going for a comedy show, the reason why I called in the first place."

“Oh? Okay I guess but listen I also need some money from you, I am broke and will repay you next week.”

“I am sorry I sound so callous but can I call you back on that?”

Sounding confused, she muttered an ‘okay’ before disconnecting the call. I knew I should have answered about the money but I had my soul to think of...wouldn’t I burn in eternal hell for allowing Mary carry out the unthinkable?

* * *

“Hey, babe hello” Kay’s voice always made me tingle all over but we had agreed to wait. Gosh! I couldn’t wait to find out if what made me tingle was going to be worth it.

“Hi” I replied shyly into the phone.

“So, I was thinking about something and wanted your opinion.”

“I also have something to ask you...”

“Okay, I think you should go first.”

“No, mine isn’t too important, so shoot!”

“Okay, I have joined an activist organization.”

“What do you mean by ‘an activist organization’, like all those violent groups?”

“No...Babe...No. You know how I am always concerned about the affairs of the nation, with the bombings everywhere and all.”

“O... kay and?”

“Well, I decided to take the bull by the horn and actually do...join something. I don’t want to sit by passively anymore, I am sorry for not running this by you first but I badly want your support on this.”

“Why? So you could get killed? So, that I become a young widow if we eventually get married?”

“It’s ‘when’ and not ‘if’ babe. People don’t just get killed, look at Odumakin, Bakare and co...have they been killed?”

“Oh? You want to be in the papers, right? That’s why you want to become an activist so that you can have your name in the headlines...”

“Hey, we can talk about this when I come over. Please, I am sorry I didn’t seek your permission but I will make it up...”

“Save it! I guess it doesn’t matter.” I was being unreasonable but I didn’t care. Men! Silly creatures that plunged into silly projects to soothe their silly egos.

“What do you mean by it doesn’t matter, Efe I am sorry!”

“Kay, it doesn’t matter, I am pregnant!” I blurted out and immediately wished I hadn’t.

The silence was awkward and the deep sigh at the end of the line confirmed just how deep I had stabbed him.

His voice when he spoke was gentle, too gentle. “Do I know who owns it, since we have definitely not had sex?”

“Yes...No...It’s not like that?”

“Can I still see you when I come? I just want to understand where I went wrong and perhaps see you for the last time. Oh Efe! How could you? We have come this far, it was till death do us part...”

I was about to respond and tell him I was joking around when my phone’s battery died on me. God! Blackberries and their short battery life span!

* * *

I hated when I wanted to call and apologize and the line wasn’t going through. It made one more fidgety. Kay should have been here or called me by now. I loved him too much for the childish game I was playing. Just as I was about to call again, Mary’s call came in.

“Oh my God! Efe...Efe...what are you going to do?! I have been trying your line, since I heard.”

Really, Mary could be overdramatic...she wasn’t the first to get pregnant out of wedlock. If she knew she couldn’t handle it, why did she have unprotected sex in the first place?

“Mary, I will call you back. Please I am trying to get Kay”

“Wait...wait Efe!”

Really, she was getting annoying! Couldn’t she stay pregnant for a few more hours? Making a mental note to scold her later, I was finally happy when Kay picked his line.

“Hello babe, I have been trying your line” I said happily falling back down on my bed.

The background was quite noisy – sounded like wails- as I struggled to hear him.

“...be ...his?”

“Hello, I can’t hear you. Where are you?”

“I say who be this?!”

“But who are you? Is that your phone?”

“Sorry...wait...wait...talk to this person...im go answer you well well, oma se o. Akoba adaba, olorun oonije ari!”

What was going on for heaven’s sake? Yes, I had been silly but Kay didn’t need to pull my legs this much, haba, my own shakara go pass this one oh! I vowed to myself as I waited for Kay to answer his phone. Imagine handing his phone over to a tout! Or perhaps he had joined his activist friends in protesting over something. Wait! I hope he wasn’t protesting over the University name change? This would really be pushing things too far, I thought he said he was concerned about the nation; did it include particular groups too? Perhaps, I should switch on the television and see the latest protest.

The television was on CNN which meant Daddy was back. How would I get the latest news? Squinting at the television, I saw a crowd gathered round a building and a downed plane. Hmm...some poor country had just witnessed a crash. What a pity! At least we last heard of this disaster many years back, thank God it was becoming safe to fly in Nigeria.

It was then I realized that someone had been talking to me...my phone was still on.

“Sorry...I ask again, please are you a relative to the owner of this phone?”

“Yes...his wife.” That should tickle him a bit but I didn’t care, life was too short abeg! The crashed airplane in whatever country probably had those who had departed with lovers’ quarrel. What a pity they didn’t have the chance to make things right.

“I am sorry but did your husband fly Dana?”

“My husband?... Oh yes! He flew Dana...any problem?”

“Well...Madam, I am sorry, your husband’s plane...crashed around Iju...”

Jesus Christ! I turned and looked at the television again. I had been hovering at the edge of the parlour but now I glided in – I don’t think I walked, I definitely glided – I was short-sighted so I hadn’t seen the news that scrolled across the screen. The news that said the crash happened in Nigeria, in Lagos.

I don’t know what happened afterwards, I cannot claim to remember. I was told later that I screamed at Mary when she came around, blaming her for what happened. I shouldn’t have, Kay was not coming because of Mary, he was coming because of me!

What saddens and depresses me most is the last thing that would have been on his mind when the plane went down; the fact that he had betrayers round him in that I had betrayed our trust and that his country whom he loved and was willing to stake so much on had betrayed his trust!

Sun re o my love, it’s not till death do us part because death has just brought me one step closer to you.

***Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* by Esosa**

It was three Gregorian counts
Halfway into the journey
To the Mayan prophecy of apocalypse
On a day
That the Omniscient
Saw fit to rest
From the task of creation
The grim reaper
Cast his shadow
Upon the earth
And stole into the Master's field
Rich with heads of grain
And sprouting tenderlings
And set to harvest
With his scythe
The day had barely
Cast off its night robe
As the faithful gathered
To offer up
Praises and prayers
But alas
One desirous
Of the loins

Of three score virgins
And a dozen more
Extinguished lives
In the folly
Of a distinguished death
A nation forlorn and jaded
Bereft of tears
Long stolen
By the frequency
Of the reaper's harvests
Shrugged in resignation
Believing perhaps
That the day's measure
Of tragic harvests
Had been met
But alas
As the day wore on
Those that were bid farewell
And looking to be bid welcome
Journeyed in the belly
Of the crimson tailed phoenix
As it rose to greet the sky
Embracing the cloud and wind
The talebearers know not

Which faltered
The heart of the bird
Or the blood
That fueled its flight
But on a day
God chose to rest
And before
It could reach its perch
The phoenix crashed to the earth
On a day
Death chose to harvest
Alas,
It could rise no more
From its ashes.

(Inspired by the song "Sabbath bloody Sabbath" by Black Sabbath. For the black Sunday that was June 3, 2012)

The Equalizer by Howyoudey

Ibrahim leveled the gun at Konji, and then squeezed the trigger. Click. Konji woke up from its early afternoon snooze and nodded involuntarily at the visitor.

Ibrahim imagined reprising the act with Sergeant Udoji, wondering how the idiot would react to a real bullet hitting him in the head. What a cherished sight that would be. Watch the fool twitch like a sliced chicken, his blood and life slowly oozing out of him.

Konji raised its red head, rotated it about twenty degrees, and then crawled up closer to Ibrahim. Ibrahim released the grasshopper from his grip and sat back to watch.

“This one is not for you, Konji. Step back,” Ibrahim warned. The insect hopped about an inch away from Ibrahim in a bid to escape, but just before Konji could pounce, Ibrahim slammed his heel on the insect, crushing it. “I told you to leave it alone. This one is for the victims of your bullying. I am the equalizer, and I’m on their side today.” Ibrahim loaded the gun with bullets.

Two female lizards crawled out into view and cautiously approached the dead hopper. Konji gave chase, causing the female lizards to scurry away like frightened rats.

Ibrahim pointed the gun at a spot near Konji and pulled the trigger. Bang! The force of the shot made him jerk backwards. He released his grip on the black Baretta pistol, making it drop with a thud unto the grey sandy floor of the unfinished building.

Infused with a new-found sense of power, Ibrahim picked up the gun and gave chase. He ran after Konji, who darted between walls and rooms as if chased by the devil. “Come back here. You want to challenge me today?”

Moments later, Ibrahim found his way back into the front room, and quickly realized that if he were going to face Udoji, he’d need steadier nerves and a stronger adrenalin surge. He sat down on the floor, took out a cigarette, lighted it, took a drag, and inhaled deeply. He leaned against the moldy, black wall of the room and planned his next moves.

* * *

Ibrahim swerved the 1995 Honda Civic sedan unto the far right lane, cutting off the Molue bus, and inciting its conductor’s ire, who rained down curses on Ibrahim. Ibrahim deliberately drove out of lane, aiming at the pile of tires that served as check point for Sergeant Udoji and three other soldiers.

Ibrahim jammed his fist against the wheel of the 1995 Honda Civic, honking so loudly and incessantly that soon all eyes were aimed at him.

A Kalishnikov hanging on his shoulder, Sergeant Udoji waved off the car in front of Ibrahim, and then marched menacingly towards Ibrahim, his face knotted up in anger. Udoji slashed the air in front of him with his finger, directing Ibrahim to pull over.

Ibrahim did as told, took out his gun and sat it on his lap. Through the Honda’s rear-view mirror, he watched Udoji approach his car. Ibrahim covered the gun with the newspaper.

Udoji's demeanor softened when he doubled over and saw who the Honda's driver was. "Na you."

"Yes, na me."

"Ibrahim, what are you doing here?"

"I want all my money back. All!"

"All your money? What are you talking about?"

In one swift move, Ibrahim got out of his car, yanked Udoji's gun off his shoulder, and held him in a head lock. Pandemonium broke out. Yelps and cries of fright broke out amongst the street hawkers, prompting Udoji's colleagues to rush up towards him, their guns drawn.

"Ibrahim, what are you doing? Are you crazy?" Udoji muttered, paralyzed with surprise.

Ibrahim leaned into Udoji's ear and said, "Shey you say I be Boko Haram? I will Boko Haram your yash today."

"Ibrahim I was joking. Are you crazy?"

"You see me laugh. I told you before that that joke no funny. Because of that joke, I've lost my job. Everybody thinks I'm Boko Haram. Wey all my money you extort from me? Telling me you will report me if I don't pay you. Enough!"

"Put down your weapon!" A soldier barked at Ibrahim.

"Don't shoot!" Udoji pleaded, waving his hands at the soldiers. "Don't shoot. I have it under control."

The soldiers looked at each other funny and then cocked their weapons, prompting on-lookers to rent the air with more screams and clashes of merchants' items as they scrambled for cover.

Boom!

At first, Ibrahim wasn't sure what had just happened. He noticed that the onlookers, as if in slow motion, had turned away from pointing at him, but were now pointing at something in the sky.

Ibrahim's grip on Udoji loosened, and that's when Udoji turned around and wrestled him to the ground.

"Ye paripa! Plane don fall for ground!"

Ewo

What was that?

Chei!

Na plane o!

He fall for ground!

Everybody ran.

Helter skelter.

Cars smashed into cars.

People ran into people.

People ran into cars.

Black smoke in the air.

Screams that could shatter ear drums.

Everybody running away.

From their stalls.

From their wares.

From their cars.

From their families.

From Nigeria.

FOR THEIR LIVES!

(Why was Ibrahim still fighting with Udoji? Look at them. Didn't they know that something calamitous had happened? Hey!)

FREEZE!

Ibrahim and Udoji stopped fighting. They picked up their weapons, pointed them at each other, then looked away. They saw the Armageddon that was unfolding before their eyes. They took a few steps backwards, turned around, and ran.

IBRAHIM FROZE IN PLACE.

Wait. He could hear blood-curdling screams. He could see people running away from the area. When he gazed up, he could see a red flame, clothed in a black dress, licking hungrily at the air above the plane.

IBRAHIM TURNED AROUND.

He started running.

Away from his retreat.

Away from the fight with Udoji.

Away from their differences.

Away from revenge.

Away from hatred.

If he could just get there in time he could, may be, save a life. He might lose his in the process; that he'd already factored into the day's equation. And so he ran...

Towards the crash site.

Towards the trapped passengers.

Towards the crying babies.

Towards the doomed passengers.

Towards those on the ground.

Towards the heat.

Towards the fire.

TOWARDS NIGERIA!

Sergeant Udoji saw Ibrahim going against the grain, running towards the accident site, and surmised that his neighbor from the North had totally lost it.

But Udoji stopped running away, turned around, and ran...

Away from his retreat.

Away from the fight with Ibrahim.

Away from their differences.

Away from revenge.

Away from hatred.

Away from deceit.

Maybe his neighbor was not that crazy after all. Maybe he had a just cause, willing to give up his life to save his life, a cause that had now been recast by the plane crash. Maybe now he was willing to give up his life to save another.

So Udoji ran...

Towards the crash site.

Towards the trapped passengers.

Towards the crying babies.

Towards the doomed passengers.

Towards those on the ground.

Towards the heat.

Towards the fire.

Towards their similarity.

TOWARDS NIGERIA!

* * *

Shirtless, and covered with soot and sweat, Ibrahim waved frantically at a slow-moving woman carrying a bucket of water. He didn't know of what ethnic group she was; he didn't care. She was a Nigerian. He grabbed the bucket of water from her and ran for the hundredth time that afternoon. Tears poured down his face as he ran, because he knew he had embarked on a losing battle.

The mother who lay there as her torso burned, unable or unwilling to utter a last word. The child who had been playing with his tire car outside the house. Barbecued. Both images seared into his memory. Forever. God.

And so he ran, cursing at something, at someone, towards the fire. If only he had a fire truck, like the ones he'd seen in DVD's. And if a strong pair of hands had not held him back, he would've run into the flame.

Those strong arms were those of Udoji's. Ibrahim collapsed in his embrace and cried like a baby.

P.S. - I Love You by Ife Watson

You sang and whistled to yourself as you lathered your body in the bathroom that morning. As you climbed out of the bath tub, your feet slipped and your head hit the hand basin hard. You yelped in pain and went to the mirror to check your face. You saw a lump; the size of a guinea fowl's egg on your forehead. You were not one to wallow in self-pity, so you went to the freezer to get some ice to put on it. As you entered the room, you hit your right foot against the chest of drawers. This time, you groaned in pain like a bitch dog in labour. You snapped your fingers in a swift motion around your head and threw your fingers backward into the air.

As a child, Mama Agba had told you when you visited her in the village that hitting one's right foot against a stone or any other impediment was a bad omen and she taught you how to ward off such evils. You smiled to yourself as you remembered all the other things Mama Agba had taught you - when you lost your first milk tooth, she told you to take seven small pebbles and throw it with your teeth over the roof. You remembered how your Mum had always laughed at Mama Agba's antics and she told you to shout "blood of Jesus" instead when you were scared.

Even with the throbbing pain on your forehead and foot, you smiled to yourself as Fola's face entered your mind's eye. You could not wait to get back to Lagos to be close to him. If you had your way, you would have left Abuja at the break of dawn but it was a Sunday and in the Sodeke's house, everyone had to attend church unless you were struck lame with paralysis.

After the church service, your Mum insisted that you followed her to Mama Sade's house to choose the *aso oke* for the wedding. You were reluctant to go and you reminded her that you had to catch a flight at 2 pm but she assured you that it would not take much time. When you got to Mama Sade's house, she said you would have to go to her shop because she did not bring the fabrics home. At the shop, there was a vast array of fabrics in different colours and your head started whirling in confusion as your Mum presented different ones to you for appraisal.

"Do you like this shade of brown or you prefer a lighter one – say like milk brown?"

"Oh! This green lace is so lovely. I know the colours for your wedding are cream and brown but would you mind if Daddy and I wore green?"

"Wow! I think I love this lilac taffeta also, Ayo what do you think?"

You bobbed your head up and down in exasperation. You knew your Mum could spend a whole day going through fabrics – it was her favourite hobby. So, you decided to go along with all her whims except of course the colour thing. You rolled your eyes at the incredulity of your parents appearing in green at your wedding. You wanted a dream wedding where everything was near perfect. You had attended Tomi's wedding the previous day and you loved how the occasion turned out. The high side of the event for you had been the reunion with your high school mates. You recalled the joyous hugs and vibrant chatter as you relived your days at Rona Memorial College with Bimpe. You had laughed until tears ran down your cheeks when Bimpe reminded you of the prank she played on Senior Kewe. Senior Kewe was one of the wicked seniors that always punished the juniors for the slightest offences. So, Bimpe had gotten some *werepe* pods that grew in abundance behind the girls' hostel and sprinkled it on Senior Kewe's bed. Senior Kewe had danced *palongo* on that day as she ran around the hostel; tearing at her clothes and screaming like a banshee.

Your Mum finally decided on the right shade of brown for the *aso oke* and the cream lace that would be suitable for the *aso ebi* and you left Mama Sade's shop with samples of the fabrics to show to your friends in Lagos. You were relieved that you still had enough time to get back home and head for the airport. As you packed your bag, you kept having the feeling that you had forgotten something but you couldn't place your hand on what it was exactly. Lamide offered to take you to the airport – you knew his offer was motivated by the reward he knew he would get. He called it the big sister 'raising' the baby of the house.

You smiled in indulgence as Lamide almost burst your eardrums with Jay Z's *Forever Young* playing at its highest din on the car's CD player. You wondered at the sense of someone wishing to be forever young when old age was a thing of grace and honour in Africa. Or at least, it used to be that way when the words of the elders were regarded as wisdom now they were merely *old school lapel*. Your thoughts were interrupted by a grating sound and Lamide stopped the car to check what was wrong. When you stepped out of the car, you saw that the right tyre at the rear of the car had deflated. You winced in shock and wondered how you would ever get to the airport on time. Lamide opened the boot to get the spare tyre but to his utmost dismay, he realised it had also deflated. It took almost an hour for Lamide to get a mechanic to fix the tyres and by that time you had only ten minutes to catch your flight.

You entered the airport's waiting room in a flurry and half-walked and half-ran to the tarmac where all the other passengers were already on board. One of the air hostesses was on the threshold of the air stairs looking out for latecomers when you hopped to the plane. She smiled at you and welcomed you on board. You noticed the gap between her front teeth and her fair skin. You remembered having read somewhere that gap-tooth was a dental defect but in Africa it was a beauty symbol which stole the hearts of many. Your Mum once told you how one of her friends had gone to file a gap between her teeth and lost a tooth instead. What won't women do for beauty?

You dabbed the sweat running down your forehead with a handkerchief and let out puffs of air in relief. You wondered how you would have explained your absence at work the next day if you had missed your flight. You imagined the scary profile of your boss wagging a menacing finger at you – "Miss Ayo Sodeke, we pay you to give us results and nothing less!" That was the major problem with private owned companies they could sack you at will for the most trivial offence. A lilting voice cooed on the speakers; instructing all passengers to fasten their seat belts.

You looked around at your seat neighbours - there was a middle-aged buxom woman on your left and a young man at the window seat. He gave you a suggestive smile when he caught your glance and you half-heartedly returned his smile. You were known for your amiable nature but you had learnt not to encourage every male attention especially since you got engaged. Men can be so jealous. Your lips parted in a smile as you remembered Fola's attitude when you both met an old friend of yours. Kingsley had given you a bear hug and encircled your waist in his arm. Fola had thought his arm had lingered too long there. He became more infuriated when you laughed off his jealousy. Like all love fights, it ended sweetly with *lovey dovey* eyes melting into each other.

Fola was that man you had been waiting for – loving, caring, responsible, a good sense of humour and above all God-fearing. Your Mum had started getting worried when you clocked thirty without leaving your father's name and house behind. She kept talking in twists and turns about the dream of every mother to carry her grandchildren on her back. You would wink at your Mum and tell her to start back exercises because your first children would be twins. You would burst into rippling laughter as you watched her rub her palms together and utter - *Amin Jesu* so fervently.

Three months seemed such a long time to wait for your wedding, but if you had waited this long to meet the right man you knew it was such a short time.

Bored with your thoughts, you brought out Bimbo Odukoya's *How to Choose a Life Partner* from your bag and thumbed through the book until you found the actual page where you had stopped. You ate the words on the pages eagerly as she gave instructions on how to run a successful Christian marriage built on love and sharing. You could still hear her vibrant voice in your head even though she died years ago. You wondered why good people often died young. Your Mum had often said God takes away the good people before the evil day. Then, you remembered she had died in a plane crash; what an awful way to die.

You watched as the hostess with the gap tooth came down the aisle with refreshments. She asked if you wanted a soft drink or water. You chose to have water. As you munched on the meat pie and took a sip of water, you almost puked – the water smelt badly. You abandoned the rest of the pastry on the tray and closed the bottle - Nigeria and pure dirty water.

You reclined into your seat to resume your reading but you were startled by a loud whining sound in the plane. The gap-toothed hostess raised her eyebrows in askance as she passed by. The whining sound came back again louder and most people stuck their fingers into their ears. You shifted in your seat uneasily wondering what could be wrong. The hostesses were moving down the aisle rapidly trying to reassure passengers; that they were just experiencing a minor technical issue. The hairs at the back of your neck stood up like that of a cat ready to pounce on a prey as you heard the word – minor. You knew minor meant serious in Nigerian parlance and you did not miss the worried looks on the hostesses' faces as they fought to retain their equanimity.

Then you heard the message that set everybody awry in the plane. The voice sounded urgent and strained. It was a voice on its tether – “Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Murtala Muhammed Airport, Dana Air Flight 9J-992, double engine failure, request for emergency landing and airspace priority, 11 nautical miles to MM2...”

The rest of the message was clipped off as a screeching sound replaced the voice of the pilot on the speakers. You watched as the woman beside you became hysterical; shouting incoherently. You stared as she grabbed a hostess who passed by and held her wrist in a tight grasp; she cringed in pain. The woman's eyes were wild as she continued screaming unintelligibly. You saw the name tag of the gap-toothed hostess then – Hilda. Hilda's lips were tightly pressed now and her gap-tooth was nowhere in sight. A hard glare suddenly came into her eyes and she wrenched her wrist free and walked briskly away.

You heard a tremulous voice on the speakers giving instructions – “Please, we implore everyone to remain calm. We are undergoing a technical issue and would have to attempt an emergency landing. You will all be conducted towards the emergency exits immediately we are on ground. Please do not panic....”

It seemed something sparked in the plane as the passengers heard the word ‘panic’ – pandemonium was let loose as everyone screamed at the top of their voices; calling on to Jesus and Allah to save their lives just this once and they would be good forever. You listened numbly as the young man beside you promised to resign his job and become a full time pastor if God spared his life. You felt like you were in a 3-D cinema watching horrific events unfold on the screen. Then, the glass on your eyes broke and you realised all at once that you were part of this bizarre movie.

There were shouts of relief as the city of Lagos came into view. The woman beside you burst into virulent singing; “Oghene sue mei...” You felt a sinking feeling in the depth of your stomach as a loud sputtering noise erupted and wisps of smoke clouded the plane. You coughed as the smoke burnt your nostrils and smarted your eyes. You looked out of the window and saw that the plane was flying very low; almost touching the electric poles.

You felt a sharp pain in your heart and started talking to Jesus –

Is this how it feels to look death in the eye? Was this how you felt when you laid down your life on Calvary? Why should I be part of the good people you want to take before the evil day? Am I not too young to die? You know how bad I want to get married and give my Mum the grandchildren to cradle in her arms. What will happen to Fola, if I die? Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit...

You knew then that you needed to have a last talk with Fola so badly. You wanted his voice to be the last one you heard before the abyss of death closed upon you. Many people in the plane had already switched on their phones and were trying to call their loved ones. You turned on your phone and there was a faint signal. You dialled Fola’s number thrice but each time the call failed. You heard the screams of the other people as the plane plunged lower. The phone fell out of your hands as the plane bumped roughly in the air. Your hands shook as you scrambled for the phone under the seat. It was becoming more difficult to breathe as the smoke thickened in the plane.

“P.S. - I love you...”, those were the only words that you managed to type before all became quiet within your soul. You would never know if that text message was delivered to Fola or not. You would never know that Fola jumped up affrighted from his midday Sunday nap the same moment the airplane crashed into the building at Iju-Ishaga. As your heart melted in the molten mass that the plane now was, Fola’s heart pumped quarts of blood.

Call it telepathy or karma – these two hearts were moulded into one forever.

MD 83's Last Flight by Inspired Illustrationz

In an Aircraft Assembly Factory in Switzerland, a man is seen driving to the extreme end of the factory. He gets out and works to the last hangar on the left. There is a name on the hangar McDonnell Douglas. He walks in and sees 1 MD-83 and 3 Boeing 737's. He steps out of the hangar, goes to his car and brings out a big poster. He pastes this on the hangar door.

NOTICE!!!

COMPLETE DECOMISSION OF MD-80

In the Hangar

Boeing 737(1): What is on the poster? I can see it from my position. B-2 can you read the words?

B-2: it reads complete decommission of MD-80's.

Boeing 737(1): Why are you been decommissioned, old man? (Looking at the MD-83)

MD-83 sighs, then lifts up its head and replies

MD-83: Our leader and father crashed yesterday afternoon.

Boeing 737(1): Wow! Where? Hope it wasn't that bad.

B-3: B1, try and deduce events first before asking questions. An MD-80 crashes somewhere and the last MD-83 in the Boeing factory is decommissioned.

MD-83: it was a complete loss. Nobody survived and it crashed into a residential area.

Boeing 737(1): No survivors!!! That is terrible!!!

B-2: I thought you were specially designed to deploy emergency chutes within 5 minutes of a crash.

MD-83: Yes we are, but he had crashed too many times in the past. His last crash took out the best of him. Saw him a month ago, he looked in terrible condition. He was brought to Germany for check-up. He looked straight into my eyes and said, MY DAYS ARE NUMBERED SON, I tried to encourage him, but it seems there was much more than he said, in his eyes.

MD-83: 5 years ago he was scheduled to go Home

Boeing 737(1): HOME?

B-3: World Air Museum. Only the greatest of the great go there

MD-83: 5: Yes B-3, the World Air Museum. I was surprised to hear he was re-commissioned in Nigeria and put into full service.

Boeing 737(1): Full service!?!

B-2: Accept my sympathies for the loss of your father

MD-83: Thank You B-2, but it was his time. What pains me more is the death of the humans, *it was not their time.*

The Bird by John Anusie

The day is moss

The night an interminable

Agonized question.

I look at the feathers

In my hands

And my eyes break

In an African thunderstorm.

My bird sings no more

Alone she soars over the happy isles

Unwoven from the string of Isis.

My life in no more.

Whatever goes shall return

Tears Never End by Kamal Aderibigbe

In tears I write this

These tears of mine

They say different things

At different times

When your face comes up in my mind

Which is like only every other time

I have tears of regret

I cannot tell you all the things I had planned to tell you

The next time we planned to meet

“So much gist I have for you,” I told myself.

"Wait till I see him."

There are tears of frustration

Why can't I turn back the hands of time?

Why can't I rewind the clock, change everything and make it all right?

Just the way it was before 3pm on Sunday June 3.

I rage with tears of anger

My country! We have lost so much...

Simply because we don't care!

Poor plane, late rescuers, oh my nation!

I weep with tears of sorrow

I'll never see you again

I'll never see you smile

I'll never hear you laugh

I'll never hold your hand again

I'll take harsh words of criticism from you... just to hear your voice

Amidst all I hear my tears should be of hope

What hope?

Today I am hopeless

No promise of a future – I am despondent

What is the future without you?

A bleak promise of more despair and loneliness

I'd rather live in the past

In the future – you won't be there

This present took you away from me

The past I'll always love because you were in it

Somehow I manage tears of joy

As I think happily

You left this cold cruel world

You are free

You are safe

You are with HIM

He knows

He sees

So when I cry and my tears flow

I am sitting in my moments... any of them

Your memory will never fade

My tears will never end.

Until The Next Cenotaph by Kaycee

Memorializing the victims of Dana Airlines Flight 9J-992 from Abuja to Lagos, Nigeria. The plane crashed into a residential area killing all 153 passengers on board, on Sunday June 3, 2012.

First,

The wails were distant

A far off news echo

We didn't feel the pain

Not as much as we should

Nor as angry as we ought

They were just names

Only names on a manifest

And a tragedy on screen

Soon we forgot

The next was closer

Still we mostly wondered

And then questioned

And looked to blame

First God

He shoulda known better

We questioned Him

But God is a silent being

He didn't say a word

So we shifted

To the authorities

And we got answers

Of ineptitude

And corrupt speak

With only a sigh

And a head shake

We chose again to forget

For we knew not the dead

They were mere figures

List on a manifest

They were unfortunate

We are survivors

They are the fallen

Frontline casualties

In this war of life

In the battle Nigeria

Are our hands free

From their fall?

Just a little check

A little caution

A little truth

And they might still be standing

But we did nothing

No

We took pictures

We updated profiles

We heard speeches

We sighed and shrugged

Life has happened

We did nothing else

And the arms of tragedy

Stretched even closer

Arms we could have delayed

If we only tried,

But look here our cenotaph

For we are dead

Now we have fallen

Now others sing the songs

Take the pictures

And 'Like' the updates

Most are compelled

Again to God

Again silence

But in His silence they are consoled

Always in the believe

That He knew and He saw

And He purposed.

So with a sigh

And resign

They set their hearts to mend

Until the next cenotaph.

Laugh Lines by Kiah

He went missing on a cold Sunday morning; as if to remind the world that he was warmth itself.

I did not need reminding.

He left, and no matter the many layers of clothing that shield me against the cold harmattan wind that blows from the North, warmth has failed to return to the part of my heart that was his.

The night before that cold Sunday morning, he called me on the shiny new cellphone he had bought me on his last business trip. I had not needed a new phone. My old one was barely a year old, another souvenir from one of the many far away lands my lover often visited. Odinaka loved giving presents and I loved seeing his face light up in anticipation as I opened the numerous parcels he always brought back.

'Ezinne.' He said that night.

'Odinaka.' I had answered with a smile on my face.

'How many more hours till I get to see your beautiful face? How many more minutes till I can hold you in my arms, eh? Time spent away from you always seems so much longer that it really is. You have really bewitched me, Ifunanya. It is about time I made you my wife and carried you along on all these trips.'

I giggled and let him sweet talk me to a place where we were together, where time and space meant nothing.

'Good night, Ifunanya.' He had said at the end, bringing us back to the real world.

'Ijeoma tomorrow.' I answered wishing him safe travels on his journey home from another business trip.

My people say a dead person is better than a missing one.

My mother tells me my heart will heal and I will love again.

My father will hear none of this talk of love for a man who never brought him kolanut or palm wine.

His mother stares blankly into the world that has swallowed her son.

His father grinds his teeth and mutters about how the gods have played him false. They have taken away his child in all entirety. They didn't even leave a body behind that he could bury, a grave he could tend and point out to people, to show them a resting place for his son.

Papa Odinaka has always had wrinkles; 'laugh lines' Odinaka called them because his father was a man of mirth. His laughter always ran long and loud. But the lines that crisscross Papa Odinaka's face these days tell a story of guilt and shame rather than of laughter. He has failed to dig his son a grave.

I am alone in this outpost where I stand on the lookout for my Odinaka. Those that knew him have lost hope of ever beholding him alive again, but not me. My love will return. My heart assures me, my soul is confident; and my body begins to show the early signs.

His name will be Nnamdi; and he will restore laugh lines to his grandfather's face.

For the 153 and counting, some of whom we will never have graves for... Chukwugozie....

Translations:

Nnamdi-my father lives

Ifunnaya- love

Chukwugozie-God bless you

***Ishaga* by Layrite**

What happens to a dream denied?

Does it blow up

Like the church in Bauchi?

Or crash on buildings

Like the plane in Lagos?

Does it become dull like the minister's report?

Or shout and dance around

Like a deceived citizen?

Maybe it just cowers in shame

Like a raped teen

Or does it ever explode?

(A Nigerian adaptation-remix of Langston Hughes's Harlem.)

When Aunti Dana Made Her Last Run by Layrite

Don't lament

Never forget

The blood unseen

And the cause unknown

Don't lament

The parts in piece

And the dreams in rubble

(Where now will they find their peace?)

Never forget

The oblivious insiders

And the helpless sojourners

(Fate had no use for mood)

Don't lament

The elephants that wouldn't stand

And the cubs trampled to death

(Form and structure amounted to zilch)

Never forget

The seedlings orphaned at a whiff

And the spouses widowed in a sec

(Can't they insure that too?)

Don't lament

The lineage extinct

And the honey-moon eclipsed

(When will the reunion be?)

Never forget

Faces smile wouldn't visit for a while

And those ambitions buried for life

(What will it take to undo that?)

Don't lament

The pen never to be dipped in ink

And the mouth denied its orders

(Limitation is one sure thing)

Never forget

The town desecrated

And the people blackened

(Never again is a known lie)

Don't lament

The tears men freely shed

And the sigh women unconsciously made

(Were those emotions misplaced?)

Never forget

The Sunday twice dammed

And the tragedy multiplied

(Evils only men could do)

Don't lament

The bolt probably left untightened

And the signature bought with Guilder

(An answer neither there nor here.)

Never forget

The gravity dutifully obliged

And how fragile everything really is

That we know, that we ignore

And that we remembered

When Aunti Dana made her last run.

For Hammidah and other Nigerian children; may the rest of your childhood be devoid of tragedy.

Babatunde by Lulufa Vongtau

*I, Gbenga Phillips representing myself, state that: 1. The Defendant and I were married on 19th May 2008 in Silver Springs Maryland in a civil/religious ceremony. 2. I have lived in Maryland since 26th October 2003, 3. My spouse has lived in Maryland since: 2nd May 2008. 4. The grounds for divorce occurred in the State of Maryland. 5. We have no children together – **Adegboyega Philips versus Funmilayo Phillips, May 2012.***

Funmi laid a well manicured finger on the third button of the series of nine buttons in the elevator; it jerked slightly and began to move smoothly upwards. There was no one else in the elevator, God, she missed human company. The soft background music irritated her and she turned to face the elevator mirror. The person in the mirror was strikingly beautiful, full soft lips, an almost Caucasian nose, large mascara lined eyes and a full head of black lustrous hair. Instinctively she looked down the front of her business suit. Even fully, formally suited, it was easy to see she had a statuesque body. How could Gbenga want none of this? As if on cue, the elevator came to a stop and the doors began to slide open. She turned just in time to see an elfin white man in sleeves and a tie reach out a hand to her. Quintessential attorney.

“Fuhnnmee Phillips?” he asked in a Texas drawl. She nodded, as she took his hand and stepped out of the elevator. She did not bother to correct his pronunciation. She was mentally worn out. She heard little of his small talk as he escorted her through very well appointed offices to a conference room where he motioned her to seat across from him. She looked at him straight in the eye.

“I realize this is a bit difficult for you, but I want you to be at ease, we are here to be of help”

Help? She wanted to scream, but she just smiled at him in stony silence. She did not want help. She wanted Gbenga. The tall, dark, dangerously handsome well built doctor she had met five years ago in Lagos. It was at the Palms, where she had gone to watch an old movie Kramer versus Kramer with her cousin Dele and his girlfriend Nneka. They had gotten there some thirty minutes early and when Dele offered to buy her a late lunch at the restaurant under the cinemas, she was glad. She had ordered brown rice with a meat sauce and hard boiled eggs. And as she turned, she promptly overturned the contents of her plate on the barrel-like chest of another patron behind her.

“I am so sorry...”she began, slightly confused, to dab at the mess on his white shirt front or return the half empty plate to the counter.

“I am very angry, Miss and the only way I can be assuaged is if you have dinner with me.....” the voice was soft, with an American inflection. She looked up at his face. He towered over her, handsome, gap toothed and tiny wrinkles around his eyes as he smiled. She smiled. Who used words like assuaged? Six months later, she left her job with a telecom company and moved to Baltimore to marry the young successful doctor. For a while it was bliss. But the only male child of his patriarchal family, wanted kids. Month after month until she began to dread the coming of her monthly cycles, year after year, she bore him no child.

“Ma’am?” the voice of the attorney jerked her back from her journey.

“Yes?”

“What do you want us to do about the property?”

They owned a spacious beautiful town house in the suburbs, and she remembered the joy she once had, choosing carpets, floors, bottom freezer refrigerators, TV's drapes , cutlery, and the like. It seemed like a long time ago. It didn't matter now.

“Im not contesting, I don't want anything of his.”

The lawyer, a veteran of many lawsuits, seemed genuinely puzzled. He was saying something but now, she wasn't listening. There was a large screen TV behind the attorney and although the sound was very low, she could make out some of the words “..... *The pilot of the ill fated flight 9J-992, Dana Air plane that crashed into a densely populated neighborhood in Lagos, Nigeria, radioed that the plane was having trouble just minutes earlier, an airline official told CNN...there were no survivors...*”

Her stomach contracted in fear.

“What is it Ma'am?” the attorney was asking. She dug out the Blackberry 9900 in her bag and quickly scrolled to Gbenga's last message. “***Please don't hate me, I love you but I have to do this. Boarding flight 9J-992 on Dana to Lagos. Will call you from the international airport.***” Her hands were shaking, even as now, the phone rang almost as if on cue. It was Lanre, Gbenga's friend and her gynecologist. Her hands were still trembling when she brought the phone to her ear, but his voice was joyous.

“*Iyawo, bawoni*, your test results just came in a couple of moments ago. Congratulations, you're pregnant and it's a boy!”

She began to smile, looked at the plane crash behind the confused attorney, and started to cry, and laugh and cry all at once. She had already thought of a name. Babatunde.

There Is Fire On The Mountain, Perhaps We Should Run by Mobola

"This is a final boarding call, for flight 992 to Lagos, please proceed to gate 5". "This is a final boarding call, for flight 992 to Lagos, please proceed to gate 5"

He bumped into her as she ransacked her purse. Smiling, he apologised, "Sorry, I need to get to gate 5." She smiled in return and nodded, "So do I, I just need to find my husband! He gets so excited about our Abuja trips, and its all for Kilishi!" she laughed. They both power walked to the gate, where a pretty young lady checked their tickets and ushered them through.

"Miss, my husband is back there, he just went to buy some kilishi, would the pilot mind waiting a couple of seconds for him?" The hostess smiled in response, "Madam, we cant keep the gate open just for him, but I'll try to stall the pilot, okay." "Thank you, so much, you're a doll!"

The plane was crowded and full, as she made her way to her seat; 34E. In the next aisle was a pretty lady and her three adorable children, who just made the entire cabin crew, ooh and aah over them. They busied themselves in peaceful merry making, causing their very pregnant mother a headache.

"Please sit still for mummy, we'll be in Lagos soon and I promise, I promise to buy you some ice cream" Their father said and as soon as he said the words ice-cream, they snapped into their seat, humbled, and focused on the coloring pads the hostess had provided.

"Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, this is your pilot speaking. We are set to leave..."

She glanced at her watch and then the door, *how long did it take to buy kilishi?* She got up and craned her neck towards the door and there he was, smiling triumphantly. "I got enough kilishi, for aunty Rosa; you know how much she loves it, I got for Uncle Benite and I got for my boss, before you lock me out or even seize the entire bag" He poked her playfully as he handed her the bags of dried beef. "You know your oga all too well" she smiled

In front of them, the attendants went on to show the safety routine, as most of the passengers quickly made quick phone calls and sent text messages.

A flash went off right in front of her, inquisitively, she craned her neck and watched two young girls, giggling and taking pictures of themselves. "Put the first one as your dp, I'll put this one as mine!"

She rolled her eyes and poked her husband, "Small children, see how they are enjoying life! Probably just done with their NYSC, heading back to be spoiled by mummy and daddy!" He smiled at her in response, "You know that the only reason why you're saying that is because you're going to do the same to your children as soon as you get home, I saw all the dresses you picked up from Maggie's store!"

"Sir, we are about to take off, please fasten your seat belt and turn off your cell phone, please."

"Just be at the airport, that's all I ask, I'm not asking for a lecture as to whether I went to church or not. Just be there!" he flipped the phone shut and fastened his seat belt, giving the hostess a mean growl as he did.

"Some people can be jerks, eh?" she whispered to her husband.

"That's not our concern. Taking her hand in his, he said "let's pray" , they both bowed their heads and said a quick prayer.

"I can't wait to get back home, not back to work, but home to my babies."she rested her head on his shoulder.

"I am all about work, you forced me to take a break and I feel refreshed and alive and I have the energy to pump into the proposal. Oh, it's going to be huge. Mr X wouldn't know what hit him."

"I don't doubt that!" she yawned, eavesdropping on the neighbour's newspaper.

"Are they just going to turn a blind eye to Nigeria's core issues and assume their patchwork outlook would do anything?"she asked loud enough for him to know that she was addressing him.

"Madam, Nigeria just needs for us to pray for her. Prayer, prayer and more prayer!"

The rude gentleman behind her snarled, "Na only prayer, we need action. It's all the prayer that has us in this situation, blind faith!"he hissed.

"Nigeria is selfish, she wouldn't let any one help. She's too proud and ends up hurting whoever tries to help."One of the young girls replied.

With that, a full argument broke out, with half the plane offering their opinion.

"Sorry, but I'm trying to get these kids to sleep and your arguments aren't helping, please don't be offended." the pregnant lady adjusted, uncomfortably in her seat.

As if on cue, the pilot came on the PDA, "This is your pilot, we are making our gradual descent into Lagos state, we should be landing in the next ten minutes, please fasten your seat belts and stow away your trays."

She held her husband's hand and smiled affectionately, "Thank you for taking a break and flying away with me to Abuja, I love you so much"

She planted a kiss on his cheek and as she did the plane vibrated violently. She looked out the window but no clouds were in sight, so it couldn't have been the turbulence.

Rows behind her, she heard a woman begin to pray out loud.

She glanced at the mother beside her, who joined hands with her husband in making a protective embrace around their children, whispering assurances to them and saying prayers for themselves.

The plane made another violent dive and began to tremble even more violently.

She looked at her husband's face and she knew. An eerie silence came over the plane and for a split second as she rested her head on his shoulder, listening as the plane went into a frenzied commotion she let herself hope. Hope that she would once more see her children, her mother, her sister...

She held on to her husbands hands, looking tear eyed into his eyes as flames slowly licked through the plane and at them, before exploding into a fiery ball...

*I chose not to put up any names as I did not want to disrespect any of the passengers on that flight.
*

May their souls rest in God's perfect peace.

Re-Action (Reaction) by Nkem DenChukwu

When a house is on fire, properties are damaged and lives are possibly lost! When a house is being built, and the people involved to ascertain that the house is stable are not communicating with each other effectively, what do you think will happen to this house afterwards? Precisely! It will neither withstand the slightest brush of the wind nor any kind of storm. A five year old knows that if you lite a match near anything inflammable, things are destroyed and/or people could get hurt or even die.

Now, the question is: How do you handle chaos, mass destruction or fix a broken glass in a lawless country? This question needs to be examined carefully by determining how our country; Nigeria, went under water in the first place! Nigeria is a great ship that should NOT have gone under water, PERIOD!

When a woman cries for freedom...from violence, oppression, fear, or storm, sometimes, it is a song only she could sing. Eventually, it becomes a sad ballad that only she could hear. She sees familiar bruises that now look like an art work. Then, she realizes that she is familiar with the artist. In the midst of this chaos, she forgets that she has a voice! The damage on our country is self-inflicted!!!

All over the world, calamity happens! What matters is how this calamity is prevented from repeating itself. When one or two people have the power or the chance to prevent calamities, bring positive change, and restore hopes, but choose to take another route to prevent being affected directly, then, that's clearly being cruel! And, we forget that God never likes ugly.

Recently, Death visited our neighborhood. It was not meant to visit us that day. Its trip could have been delayed a little while longer (say, 20 more years from when it came!!!), but wrong choices were made, and Death made its way to our neighborhood on June 3, 2012 in Lagos, Nigeria!

For many years now, we all have known that Death does not discriminate. It stares in the faces of the innocent, the sick, the old, the young... Its appetite is insatiable. Death never sleeps! When death comes especially unexpectedly, it makes many wonder if God is/was listening in on its plan to strike again! God knows death. He is God. He also knows life for He is Life Himself!

I saw many photos of families, friends, and individuals that were taken unexpectedly by Death! I am broken each time I look at them. Can you imagine the fears on their faces...what their fast-beating hearts were saying to them knowing that they were meeting Death? No! I cannot!!!

I do know that God was aware of this evil calamity before it happened. I also know that each day He gives us the wisdom to choose right. The individuals that made the decision to gamble with 153 innocent lives have won the 2012 Award for Best Supporter of Destruction. That is a lifetime of torment!

Now, tell me: How do things work in a country with ineffective systems or no system at all, considering we made the decisions to support/promote and elect some corrupt/selfish leaders with no vision and goals to make Nigeria the country we all dream of?

Regarding the June 3, 2012 plane crash in Lagos, how can the medical examiners identify one burnt body from the next considering there are no DNA testing capabilities in place? Dental records would have been an option! Cadaver dogs can only find dead bodies, but do not have the capabilities of

identifying Mary from John! How can these innocent passengers who were given no chance to plead for mercy be laid to rest when they all look the same? It is heartbreaking!!!

Some of the people we trust continue to lead us to destruction... 'until Death do us part'? Clearly, the policies and procedures in Nigeria need to be revisited. But wait, the change needs to start from each of us. It is indeed difficult to determine who is/will be greedy and selfish when elected. When you root for a corrupt mind, what does that make you? Precisely! We need to each choose to improve and reinvent ourselves.

There are enough resources in Nigeria to soothe millions of her citizens. Yes! God blessed us abundantly. Yet, only a few long fingers dig into the cookie jar, with smiles on their faces of course, promising heaven here on earth to us when hell is all they continue to feed us as a three course meal.

And to talk about the issues of healthcare delivery services, the Law Enforcement Authorities, Education, Electricity, human and drug trafficking, and Road Safety in Nigeria? That's another sad thought!

Why can't we learn from proven systems that work? Let's take The United States of America as an example; a country made up of billions of people of all races. With all the bad things that also happen in this 'God's own country, their systems of government work... policies and procedures are in place, penalties for law breakers including the people in the government. **In America, NO ONE is above the law!**

A broken glass has rough edges. Get close to it, you get cut. To fix the neighborhood we call home, we must start with self-healing, self-cleansing, change our mindsets to positive thinking, stand up for what's right, be determined to bring positive change with positive results, be hopeful when we make honest efforts, be thankful each day for this gracious gift of life, be appreciative of what you have, never be greedy nor jealous, never cause harm or inflict pain on yourself or another intentionally, and love from and with all your heart. We are the fireproof that we need to survive. This choice is ours.

Life and Death complete the cycle of this universe. May Death not know our names before God says it's time! We must choose life, seek God's face & His grace to live three-score years and more... healthy, safely, happy & fulfilled.

I pray for the souls of the victims of June 3, 2012 Dana/Abuja-Lagos Crash. May God grant them eternal peace, Amen!

I am not a politician. I am just hurt and upset for we have chosen to be on life support system when God has given us free air to breathe and live! *Chi zo ba anyi* (May God save us)!

One Crash Too Many by Obisike

In a conference of opinions

Speaks a voice of spurious reason:

Let's quit the ranting

And the pointing of fingers

And honour the dead

With gentle grievings.

Those gentle words

They jar my ears, and fail to soothe

My heart is heavy

I will grieve the way I want!

A tsunami this is not

A Katrina neither

When even these

Of nature's whims pure and true

Amelioration do find

In the speed of a people's resolve.

Alas, it is Bellview

It is Sosoliso

Incarnated yet again.

That flying death supposedly banished

But harbour it did find

In corruption's neglect.

Martyrs they are

Dead that we may come

Alive to safety's practise.

Nay, bonus martyrs

For the warning had sounded

Many times before

And always with gruesome evidence

To a people in criminal slumber.

An accident is somebody's fault

As the safety police do affirm

And this surely is

One crash too many.

Let Us Live, Love And Dare To Dream by Oge A

Life, I've heard them say, is as light as the wind.

What happened on that fateful day of 3rd June 2012 was a validation of that statement.

Hundreds of lives snuffed out in the space of mere minutes, leaving behind charred remains, unfulfilled hopes, dreams, aspirations and ambitions!

These people set out on the journey not knowing what was to befall them. If they had even the slightest suspicion, that journey, I'm sure, would never have been embarked upon.

It just makes me think, if those people knew they were to pass on that fateful day, would they have made adequate preparations, tied up loose ends, rekindled dead relationships with their loved ones?

Well, we cannot say because we will never know.

For those left behind, we the living, it is an eye-opener, a reminder that we do not own our lives. We are merely tenants on this earth.

We should all strive to live lives worthy of emulation, garnished with good character, and a solid relationship with our Creator.

We need to grab hold of opportunities to do good and shun evil, standing up for what is just and true, and rejecting corruption and all vices.

So, bearing in mind that we have just one life to live, let us live, love and dare to dream. So that at the end of the day, it will all be worth it.

***Red Sunday* by Michael Okwori**

The rising sun smiled shyly,
Like a mischievous prankster
With a dirty joke up his sleeve.
Prophets watched the day with suspicion.

The wind howled ominously,
Like the wail of a banshee.
Morning birds sang a mournful note,
As dogs barked at wandering spirits.

Worshippers walked warily,
Glancing furtively at other frightened faithfuls
As they hurried to the house of Hallelujahs
Lest they fall for their faith.

Yet the brainless butcher did come
With his knife of devilish determination,
And he did have his fill of blood,
Bathing the earth with an overflow.

The voyage on the eagle's wings
Commenced swiftly and suddenly,
Carrying a hundred dreams and desires,

And loud laughter, soon to become screams.

Like the sight of a mesmerizing meteor,

We beheld the fall of the old, weak eagle

As it burnt like Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace,

Annihilating a hundred beloved souls.

***In The Morning* by Oluwafunminiyi**

Let not dark death glory yet

In the taking of our kin

We shall be made celestial bodies

We shall hold their hands and cry for joy

In the morning our saints arise

The belly of the beast rules the beast

So maul, devour and tint in crimson

Till our fruit be cast a-young

We sail past the stars, we are eagles in flight

We'll arrive in a day.

So, do not glory yet, darkly death

Do not laugh aloud or gloat away

In the morning, the sun arises in our midst

Our faces shall beam, shall turn upwards

Your hunger, never again to be satisfied

It will be your turn to die!

(In loving memory of Dana Air crash victims. And for their families)

The Moon At Noon by Oluwafunminiyi

6pm. Thunder crashes loudly in the distance.

"Temi, have I ever told you how beautiful you are?"

They sit together on a sofa in the living room. There is a respectable distance between them. Ron Kenoly is on tv doing "Let it rain". It rains heavily.

"No..."

"Never?"

"Never..."

"I think I have, you just weren't listening..."

"Hmmm...the ears never forget Tade..."

"Oh, but they do..."

"No they don't; they just choose what to listen to..."

"That can be a disservice..."

"Even if it's done in its master's defense?"

"I never say anything hurtful to you..."

"What you do say is not healthy for a mourning woman..."

"That I adore you still...that is unhealthy?"

"How is it that you adore me still?"

"You know how...maybe it is your beauty... It is stark naked..."

"There you go again, making me all woozy headed", she throws her head backwards and laughs, a deep throaty sound. Her teeth are small, and even, and white. "How can beauty, anyone's beauty, be stark naked? Or is it just memories of me, nude?" That was a long time ago.

"There is that... And there is your ebony majesty... And your beautiful honey colored eyes and that laughter... Like waves splashing on a rock..."

"Leave my braids alone... besides you know you are sunshine yourself, Tade..."

"Sunshine, yet you keep me locked outside the gates..."

"The gates restrain a flood..."

"Drown me, Temi..."

She laughs mildly. He laughs too...that boyish, unserious chuckle.

She quiets first, sniffing and wiping her nose with the flat of her palm. She gets up and walks to the dining table to get a glass of water. There, she pauses to watch a sugar ant descend the heights of the Dana powder milk tin. It ascends the briefer blue hill of the St. Louis sugar box, nodding and weaving, and scurrying over the plains only to descend on the other side, dropping out of sight. She returns to the sofa.

Her coming of age had been poetic. A joyous, melodious psalm. One minute, she and her elder sister, Yewande, had been giggling, running about the house, hunting and trapping grasshoppers. The next minute...

There have only been two men in her life.

Tade.

She had met Tade in her first year in the university. He was in his second year, a handsome ambitious fast talking hustler who grew up in the slums of Agege. She liked him because he never treated her with any of the cloying deference people usually treated her with when they learned that she was a serving minister's daughter.

"What's ajebo doing here?" He had responded cynically to her richly accented 'excuse me please...' when she feebly pushed past him in the crowded Student's Union building during her faculty registrations. He had said other unflattering things when he found that she was accompanied by an aide of some sort. "Bloody bourgeois", he concluded. That was the closest she got to deference from him.

Somehow, they had struck up a friendship. He was one of those students who knew their way through anything, the admin and registration offices included. Ordinarily, it took several frustrating weeks of unending hassling from short tempered admin staff who worked in hot, insipid offices and hadn't been paid salary for any number of months to complete the fresher's registration. Armed with Tade, her registration had taken a maximum of three days. She had spent the rest of her university days garnering A grades, and having mad, reckless sex with Tade, her only claim to irresponsibility. The years had seemed to zoom past at the speed of light. Then she had graduated, and gotten married to Femi.

Femi's family and hers shared a fence. Fruits from the mango tree in Femi's compound often fell into hers. They were that close. She and Yewande picked and ate the good ones. Sweet, succulent greenish yellow mangoes. Huge flies with swollen bottoms buzzed around the spoilt ones left by the girls to rot on the grounds. Femi's father, a garrulous Egba chief often joked that the free mangoes were an advance of the bride price he would pay for Temi to marry his son, Femi.

"You are going to Egba with us..." He would shriek with laughter and rub his obese tummy.

"I don't even like Femi .." Temi once told her dad.

"Lie, lie..." he joked.

She put her finger to the earth, touched it to her tongue and pointed it to the skies. He had shrieked with laughter too.

No one was to know that Femi was her 'secret' boyfriend; that they had found love during grasshopper and bee hunting expeditions. Both families naturally accepted it when Femi began to visit Nigeria twice every year during his studies in the US.

They got married in style. Tade had heard about the wedding and sent her an icy congratulatory message from Iceland where he was doing his masters. He had also mumbled something about 'unloading her from his dream via a phone call'.

If her life with Femi was any colour, it was bright yellow. They spent holidays in Europe and had plenty to laugh about. Femi was spontaneous, full of life and the vigour of youth. He was a Structural engineer, and he said that life was nothing but structural jigsaws we struggle to piece together. He was always in a hurry and rode his Harley Davidson motorcycle too fast.

"You won't kill me, Femi," Temi once chided, fearfully, holding the base of her tummy and wincing slightly as the baby in there kicked. He had laughed, and held her and reminded her he was the one on the bike and not her. As if she didn't know.

When they had told him about the arrival of Toju, their son, he had leaped over the rails from the first storey of a construction job he was handling and ordered his driver to 'get the car, get the car... I have a son...' His workers had watched the car screech off, mouth agape...

Then, one afternoon in early June, the phone had rung. The speech of the female caller had been mutilated by the splatter of rainfall on roofs. Thunder roared, and there was static in the cellular network. But, the message had been passed across nonetheless. The words turned Temi's yellow world an ominous dark blue, the color water turned to when the powdery contents of a Robin Blue carton (the fabric whitener) was emptied into it; she had seen the floor draw closer and felt herself drop into and become trapped in the cold dark blue water world, a world that pricked her entire body with sharp needles. She had felt her breath catch in her chest, and suck her life away, the way pressure from a vacuum hose sucked dirt. She had blocked her ears with both palms as she sank to the floor, the telephone receiver falling from her hand. She had felt her mouth open wide, of its own accord, a thick strand of saliva springing from her tongue, yet hanging from the roof of her mouth. She tried to scream but couldn't. Yet, shrill piercing screams infiltrated her ears and crippled her mind. Habiba the house maid later said madame's screaming had brought her scurrying from her room. In those few seconds, joy and laughter had checked out of her life in exchange for the rains.

6.30pm. The rain subsides. All that is left is a metallic silence, aftermath of the heavy thunderstorm. Electric power had gone out as soon as the winds got strong. Traffic had been ground to a halt due to a small flood that had built up in the street. They listen to the guttural sounds of water passing through a nearby drainage pipe, and the distant rumble of thunder. She still feels numb and hollow, overwhelmed by a sense of remembrance and foreboding. She still feels like one who had lived in a land of sea breezes and underwater currents, and was now condemned to a dark life of eerie insect chirps, and perpetual night sounds.

"No Tade. I don't want to drown you... I want to drown in my grief..." , she says, suddenly.

It is fresh everyday. Raw, like a shot of adrenalin. "Don't ... Don't do that..."

"Don't do what?"

"You know what not to do... "

Sigh. He retrieves his hand. He suddenly feels tired. "You have tried Temi..."

"It is hard for me...Our son is barely two years old..." They both turn to look at the boy. He had fallen asleep on the rug, his small lips slightly open, forming a cute 'o'. Minutes ago, he had seemed content sitting by himself and clapping with glee at his own baby babble and chasing his yellow rubber duck. He had had no wells of experience from which to draw an understanding of the tension that engulfed the room. He had no -needed no- thermometer with which to gauge the sad heat radiating in the atmosphere. He did not yet know, but he will grow up to hear the stories. That he was a child without a father. Fatherless since he was two. He was a child whom life had visited, while he was too young to understand, or defend himself, and his mother, and his unborn sister. Life had snatched from him a father who had adored him so shamelessly, who took him everywhere he went, dangling around his neck like a medallion of victory. A father who would have taught him to ride a bicycle and play ping pong. A father who would have taught him the proper way to be a man and to chase a girl. The only man who threw him up in the air, and he felt no fear.

Tade glances outside the window. The sun still peeps. It looks pale. The storm has doused its fiery blaze. It is now a shy orange ball, sitting in the middle of the greying skies. It looks out of place, yet beautiful, like the painting of an autistic child. Dust motes dance and swirl slowly in the slight strands of rays that streak in in slices through open, horizontal window panes. They disappear again, settling into nothingness. A cool evening breeze begins to blow. Tade watches the curtains sway and shiver. It looks like it might rain again. He drags his attention from all these, and glances at the woman he realises now that he still loves. The one woman he truly ever felt anything for. Temi sits with her head bowed, her arms folded across her breasts. Perhaps, it was a wrong time, but he couldn't change the way he felt. He couldn't mask it. He had been stupid enough to let her go once. But life had generously lent him another ladle to scoop with. He wasn't throwing it away this time.

"I love you Temi..."

She looks sharply at him. He had never said that before. Not even when... "Tade, I am still mourning my husband..."

"He would want you to move ahead with your life... How old are you? Twenty two... you are still a child yourself..."

"I cannot move on with my life... How do I do that? Where do I move on to?" she asks, looking at him as if he holds the answers. "Where is my destination? Femi took my life away with him. He left me all alone, with a child, and an unborn. Why? Why, Femi? Take a look at me..." she spreads her arms apart and raises her head upwards, a desolate figure. Her eyes come to rest on the only picture hanging on the wall. It is her wedding picture. Tade follows her eyes. In the picture stands she and Femi, smiling brightly, he holding her from behind. Tucked in a lower corner of the picture frame is another picture of them, together on horseback, taken during their courtship. The horse was brown, with a white stripe that ran from between its ears to the tip of its nose. The picture is dogeared, threatening to topple down. Tears stream down her eyes as she stares, mournfully.

They had wanted to lower that frame like they did the others. Her mother said the less she saw of his pictures, the better she would feel. But she had refused. She had screamed at them to "leave us alone..." , and wrestled the frame from their hands. She had fought and scratched and kicked... Even when they had left the frame for her, she had clutched it to her breast protectively, and continued screaming and biting the hands that restrained her. They had eventually had to sedate her- again. She wore a sad hair in those days, and a sad smile. People moved in surreal motions, and spoke mechanically like they did in that British cartoon, Joe 90. The visitors stayed longer than they should. They came and they said nothing that made any iota of sense to her. When she didn't respond to their babble, they just sat there and stared into space, the corners of their mouths turned downwards, their chins resting in their palms. Why did they come? To mock her, and see how she was carrying on? Some brought food which her mother secretly poured away, and sprinkled holy water around the house. Except for Mama Folarin's food. She was the oldest and closest friend of the family. Food made her nauseous in those days, as it had when she carried Toju within her. A strange huge black fog hung around the house. It choked her. Excepting that, and the wierd looking shadows that swam in the pool at noon and danced in the ceiling at night before coming to sit and rest beside her, everything had been fine. She had been fine... really.

Tade rights the black buba she is wearing. It is loose about her neck, dipping on the right and revealing flesh, the swellings that culminate in a voluptuous breast. The buba dips between the two bulbs of breasts which shake from side to side every time she moves. She is not wearing a bra. Her hair needs retouching. Her finger nails are uneven, chewed up. Her face remains beautiful, though her neck has grown longer and her clavicle sticks out prominently. Her eyes are hollow, empty. She mumbles to herself as Tade holds her. She is mumbling to herself as she does at night, her face buried in his chest.

"I still wait for the sound of your car Femi. I still wait to hear you call out to me that you are back. When my phone rings, I pray its you, Femi. I still prepare efo the way you like it... I microwave your food before I go to bed. In case you come around. And in the morning, it's still there, untouched, the way I left it. Every thing has changed. The dogs look at me accusingly, and pass by without a sound. They think I am responsible, like I have hidden their master. I know they know the truth about where you are. Their eyes ask me why I am still here if you are gone, Femi. Your son asks of you too... His eyes ask for his father. You do not come to sponge him down anymore when he has a fever. What do I say to him? That you... died? That you died, trapped like an animal, roasting in the belly of an aeroplane? That you were coming back home, to us...to celebrate the news of the conception of our daughter, and you never got here? Ah, oko mi, ife mi... My husband died in agony, knowing there was no way out but death... I am sorry... I am so sorry Femi..." she sobs, moving away from Tade's embrace, wiping her eyes, and blowing her nose with the edge of her wrapper. He wipes tears from his eyes too.

"I will keep our daughter. We prayed for a girl. She will be my companion."

8pm. He watches and listens as she snores softly on the sofa. She had wept quietly for a while before sleep had come to take her away. He had left her alone, watching her shuddering shoulders as she mourned, and afterwards, heaved like a child. The crying had done her some good, sedated her. She had laid her head on the arm rest, and slept. He wonders what she dreams about. She was too young for this burden. What had been life's plan? What was life's explanation to this? Life had taken her on a jolly ride, and marooned her in a distant land, the middle of no where. Life hadn't bothered to ring a bell before doing that. No warning. Life had simply struck. Life had orchestrated a treacherous opera in Iju-Ishaga, and exited again, like a thief in the night. No hello. No goodbye. In a malicious few minutes, life had raped us all, and turned our face backwards. Now we are looking at the moon

at noon. And the moon held a sad sneer, glaring back at us, like we had no right to be here. 'Hello moon, it is noon. You have no right to be here! You belong in the twilight...' , we yell. The moon simply ignores us. The stench of life's unfairness rises to the high heavens. The carelessness and injustice of life's minions beat a cacophonous sound in the eardrum. And as we, the victims, dance, unwittingly, life's agents smile to themselves in their airconditioned offices as their caskets soar, with us trapped in its belly. They feed fat, growing rich on blood money. Our blood. It is war. What else takes mother from child and fathers from sons? What else tears families asunder and rewrites destinies with such brutish panache? They are waging a war against us.

Tade gets up quietly and goes home. Tomorrow, he will come again. He is all she has now, and he knows it's true.

Rescuing The Dead by Onyeka Dike

As I behold your ashen faces
cast on this rubble that has become your
visa to the world of the dead
I sit still, stealing inexplicable glances
at the tomorrow we all used to dream about
now clouded with gloom and despair

Sorrow bites at my heart while I behold
the government's sudden hyper-activity;
you are the sacrificial lambs needed to jolt
a sleeping government back to the realities of pain

The Police, Road Safety, Emergency Management Agency, Red Cross:
they were all here today
gathering again to celebrate another festival of blood
gathering again to rescue the dead
gathering again to administer another dose of medicine after death

But who will tell your stories?

A couple just coming back from their own wedding...

A bachelor at the advanced stages of preparations for conjugal bliss...

A number of unusually beautiful kids embracing tomorrow with confidence...

A family visiting home after many years in self-appointed exile...

A crew of charming ladies waiting for the tolling bells...

Your faces are swords in my heart

with each look at your smiles burrowing holes

in the fragments of my being

Together with the seven-score-and-one families broken-hearted

I feel pain and pain, and pain

I mourn, I sorrow and I weep

What words can describe the feelings of my heart?

What perfect concerto can be sung for the heroes of tragedy?

What condolence can best be conveyed to those left to bear the pain?

What explanations will suffice for those murdered in the discomfort of their homes?

What use can the president's tears prove to be when he is immune to pain?

I walk along this lonely valley of questions

and I brood...

Burying The Dead by Onyeka Dike

The rescue team has concluded its mission
One hundred and forty-four bodies recovered
the ones not found may fashion out their own graves in hell
or make do with the comfort of feeling other bones
closely caressing theirs in an endless orgy of indecision

Now we can bury our memorable dead
A strange funeral it will be
we will bury hands and feet alone
and hope that we see the heads, the limbs and the hearts
during the second burial:
such a legacy for loved ones!

Now we can bury our dead amidst the tears
drowning the ephemeral seasons of love and laughter
with eternities of pain, despair and depression
No sirens will announce the arrival of bodies we are not sure of
for we want to quietly bury the illusory bodies of loved ones without any hindrance
from other families unknown, rightful claimants to some body parts being buried

These bodies are nothing more than symbolic to us
for our loved ones were murdered and buried in one breath
all that we now hold as memories are relics from the past

reminding us of love and laughter that could have stayed a little longer perhaps
but the time is past for the coulds, ifs and had-it-beens

We will gather today

and paint everywhere with different shades of black

black rags adorned for loved ones whose bodies remain unrecovered

black tears commemorating another black season of carelessness

black memories reminding us of that Black Sunday

black bodies burnt, reminding us of a black government

We need no ceremonies as we gather to bury our dead!

Flesh on Righteous Greed by Philip U. Effiong

I

subdued clash of wind with concrete,
light metal with rough tar,
flesh on eternal greed,
idiocy with feigned wisdom,
blood with innocence

we chant...

homage to fiery entombment
before the litany of baptism,
before the shedding of old skin

we sing...

elegy for glorious decay, a sudden reunion
of the sacred and ancestral
long before the blood cry of birth,
long before the restless call of hades

II

mother hen has suckled on its own egg
to drown out
not to create...
to replace darkness with somber mist

the drumbeat of initiation
has been drowned out by the mystery of requiem
it is a premature meeting with angels,
the awakening of sleeping angels

III

change is coming, change is coming...
we are investigating
in wooden panels and leaking committees,
we are investigating
in wine light and party dress,
we are investigating
with turbaned insanity and broken dance,
we are investigating
with hollow titles invented

change is coming, change is coming...
we are investigating
with random honorariums concealed

we are deliberating,
dem say... dem say...
we are researching,
dem say... dem say...

we have uncovered,
dem say... dem say...

IV

day flight became night flight
carrying children of yesterday's prophecy,
ignorant prey to the slaughter,
ignorant of this prophecy:
they embraced the aura of serene clouds
changing from calm white to wet grey
when whispers turned to growls...
alas!

subdued clash of wind with concrete,
light metal with rough tar,
flesh on righteous greed,
idiocy with feigned wisdom,
blood with innocence

confusion with celebrated hysteria...

but change is coming, change is coming...
we are investigating
in wooden panels and dripping committees,

we are investigating
in wine light and party dress,
we are investigating
with turbaned insanity and broken song,
we are investigating
with grandiose titles invented

change is coming, change is coming...
we are investigating
with purple honorariums concealed

we have found out,
dem say...dem say...
we will reconvene,
dem say...dem say
report of the subcommittees,
dem say...dem say...

V

change is coming, change is coming...
from unwilling martyrs
in this premature meeting
with angels,
this awakening of sleeping angels,

this reminder to dormant gods

change is coming, change is coming...

with your unbending wind,

in your green sacrifice, evergreen,

the sacrifice of purity

like globules in a virgin chalice

change is coming

from flesh planted on righteous greed

to re-create

from blameless caskets

and the echo of empty graves....

alas!

Turn To Dust by Raymond

Chike

It is raining.

I walk down this street, my hands in the pockets of my hoodie, hood over my head. I don't remember how I got here, and even the name of the street eludes me, just as understanding, and peace, eludes me. In my right pocket, I softly stroke the piece of metal I'd picked on that day, not too far from the crash site.

The day the sky fell down.

The day life decided that it...that it...

"Hey Mum! Come quickly! You don't want to be late!"

"I'm coming, I'm coming!" she answers, laughing as she runs to the car. "This boy, you want me to fall? See how you are making me run!"

"Mummy, you sabi waste time oh!" I say as I reach across to open the door for her. We both laugh as she gets in and shuts the door while I start the car.

"Sorry my son. Thank you for waiting. If it were your father now, he would have left me to find my way on my own."

"Haba!" We laugh as I drive off, the gateman closing the gate behind us. The sun is out, and the skies are clear.

"But come oh, Chike, who will..."

...rain. It's been raining since that day, both outside, and within me. I have no idea if I am still crying or not; I don't know where my tears cease and the rain begins. I stop, bring out the piece of metal, and look at it. I have no idea regarding the part of the plane it had come from; the fuselage? Nose? Tail? Had she sat close to this particular part of the plane? I stroke this metal piece; it is cold. I close my eyes and raise my face to the skies and into the rain, my hood falling back.

God, it hurts. It hurts so bad.

Please let this rain stop, at least for a little while.

I want to see the sun again.

Henry

Haunted.

He is haunted by her life...their life. He sees her face everywhere, in everything. How many times has he answered her call, turning to smile at her only to see nothing behind him, or the surprised face of a stranger? How many times has he reached out to pull her close as he slept, only to clutch nothing but sheets and emptiness? How many times has he gone to sleep with a hole in his heart? He traces his thumb on her favourite T-shirt, his black Tommy Hilfiger T-shirt that she'd always loved to wear, sleeping in it sometimes. It is practically hers now, and in about two months, he would have been hers. Now all he is left with is nothing but a whole lot of yesterdays.

He closes his eyes. He can even see her right now. She is smiling. She is...

She smiles at him, and then straddles him. Her skin is smooth and cool. Her hair tickles his face as she kisses him deeply, her hands on either side of his face, her nipples grazing his chest. He can taste her smile, her happiness...her love. She breaks the kiss and pulls back a bit to look at him as he wraps her in his arms. This close her eyes are a whirlpool, drawing him in to depths both achingly sweet and familiarly unknown. She rolls her hips, rubbing herself on him, and he gasps as his heart rate jumps. She giggles and kisses him again, her palm flat on his chest, over his heart. He covers her own hand with his, holding it there.

"This heart beats for you, Amaka," he says as they break the kiss. He means every word.

"Say you'll love me," she says, her eyes speaking to his heart.

"I'll always love you," he says.

"Say you'll haunt me, Henry," she says, smiling mischievously. She kisses his forehead, his eyes, his nose, his lips, holding it for as long as she can, savouring it, not wanting to let go of him, of this moment. "Say you'll haunt me."

"I'll ha-"

"...unt you," he says, opening his eyes. He stares unseeing through his window, a cold wind blowing through his heart. He brings her T-shirt to his nose and inhales. His mind, a maelstrom of images; he can taste her, hear her.

Memory, she used to say, is one of the keys to the future.

"Then tell me," he says to the cold, lonely house, tears rolling down his cheeks, "what sort of key is this?"

She smiles.

Say you'll haunt me...

Mr Gani

Silence.

The cool afternoon breeze blowing off the Jabi Lake ruffles his collar, filling his nostrils with the smell of evening in Abuja. The sky is still clear, but the blue is tinged with orange as the sun sets. He looks down at four-year-old Elizabeth as she holds the guardrail and peers out at the lake, mimicking his silent gaze.

Elizabeth.

Their daughter.

Now, his daughter.

How quickly things change in life. They said 'Time heals all wounds.' What about when you had a part of you amputated without warning, without an anaesthetic; what will Time do to you, or leave you with then? A phantom itch, or something worse?

He'd spoken with her again last night. Bisola. He'd lain in the darkness of their-his-bedroom, unable to sleep, staring at the ceiling. He'd smelled her first, her scent filling his nostrils.

Vanilla. She'd always loved the scent of vanilla.

He'd felt her weight settle down on the bed beside him.

"Hey," he'd said.

"Hey," she'd replied. He'd felt her hand in his, their fingers entwined. He'd ignored the urge to look at her face; he already knew her face well enough. They'd been married for five years.

"I miss you," he'd said.

"I miss you too."

"I think Liz will be okay," he'd reassured her. "She is a tough kid, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"I hope I raise her right. I hope I do alright by you."

"You'll be fine."

The tears, threatening to break the dam. "She misses you though."

“I miss her too,” Bisola had said. “I love you both, so much.” Then she’d kissed his forehead, and he’d cried silently into the night. One more long-

Elizabeth tugs at his trouser, and he looks down at her. She points at the bag containing the bouquet of flowers that they’d bought. White roses. Bisola had always loved white roses.

Mr Gani squats beside his daughter, and together they take out the bouquet and unwrap it. They hold it together, his hand covering Elizabeth’s smaller hand.

I’ll do my best to protect her Bi, he thinks, his vision clouding with tears. I’ll love her for the both of us.

They let the flowers fall into the lake. Then he sits down on the ground and holds his daughter close, their tears glistening in the setting sun.

“Rest in peace, Bi,” he says. “We will always miss you.”

For those who left us all on the 3rd of June, 2012, aboard the ill-fated DANA Flight 9J-992 Abuja-Lagos, we’ll sing a lullaby as you all sleep.

To those who lost a loved one, smile, for they sail the safest seas... in your hearts.

Goodbye...

Goodnight...

Letter To My Sweetheart by Rita

My Sweetheart,

How are you doing? Why am I asking this rhetorical question? I know it has been very hard for you since June 3rd 2012. I know at this time you are inconsolable, but believe me, time heals all wounds and God will comfort you in His own special way.

Recall that whenever I travelled, I always sent you a mail on my arrival to tell you about the journey. That is why I am sending you this mail because I have arrived safely, but at a destination we did not expect. I am going to start with the moment we boarded the flight from Abuja to Lagos.

I called you to tell you I had boarded. I could hear the excitement in your voice. Though I had only been away 2 days, you made it seem as though we had not seen in ages. Oh my love! You always know how to make me feel special.

“Let us pray,” you started. “We are thanking You, Father, for a smooth and safe journey to Lagos. Thank you for my wife’s successful trip, and I look forward to being with my beautiful wife this evening. In Jesus Name, Amen!”

“Amen,” I replied and smiled, for as usual you were very honest in your prayer.

“Safe journey, Baby. I will be at the airport to pick you up!” You said. “Love you!”

“Love you too.” I replied after which I cut the line.

I switched off my phone and relaxed on my seat while waiting for the final checks by the cabin crew. I said a word of thanks to God for the successful trip. You always wanted me to be at peace with my family, despite all my father did. Finally I agreed to a reconciliation, which took place in Abuja with the rest of the family.

As the plane began take off, I noticed that the plane sounded noisy and as though it was rattling. It was as if something was vibrating the whole plane and there was no shock absorber. I didn’t want to say anything. So far I was impressed with the service by the airline. Their customer care was excellent. Their timeliness was impeccable, especially in this day and age where there are frequent flight delays. In my mind, I felt if I say anything, it will be as all my friends say, “I complain too much!”

The plane went down sharply, making me hold my breath. At the same time, I heard gasps from almost everyone in the plane. A baby started crying. But in no time, the plane had continued in its ascent. Then I relaxed in my seat, though I could not get over the rattling sound and continuous vibrations in the plane.

I drifted back to my thoughts. Reconciliation with my father. If anyone had met me any time before 3 years ago, they would have said I was an epitome of all that could go wrong in a woman. I was deflowered at the age of 6. My uncle was about eighteen then, and he was the one taking care of the kids in the house. I don’t know what came over him but he did it. I know my parents were furious, and I know that he was treated like an outcast after then, but as of that time, I did not understand what he had done.

Then came the separation of my parents when I was about 9. That woman that brought me to this world took me while my father took my 2 brothers. We never saw again and I never forgave my father for leaving me behind. He was the cause of all the bad things that happened to me. I had been raped several times by different lovers of my mother, right from when I was 11. The most painful of those experiences was the one that happened when I was 14. After all the bruising, I found out 3 months later (more like my mother found out) that I was pregnant, and of course, we had to terminate the pregnancy. And she accused me of enticing her lovers with my “fresh, supple body!”

By the time I was 16, I ran away from home, not like it was home to me. I was looking for someone to love me for who I was. But it was as though I walked into a den of lions. Every single man I met, married or unmarried, just used me like a piece of rag. I could not understand why no man wanted me as his one and only. The only one I managed to hold on to for the last 2 years before I met you, was what almost led to my untimely death. He was a chronic woman-beater. I was constantly treating for wounds and broken bones, and I felt that was the best thing life could offer.

Then I met you, the day I escorted my friend for an abortion in your uncle’s clinic. There you were, helping to stock the pharmacy with drugs when we came to buy the HPT kit. And then you said in a blunt but sincere manner, “abortion is not birth control, my friend! 2 times in a month?”

I wanted to take offense but then I knew you had a basis for what you were saying. I had been in the clinic only 3 weeks ago for an abortion so you assumed I was there for another.

“Tell that to the men who do not want to use condoms!” I retorted.

When my friend went in for the procedure, you came and met me at the waiting lounge. Then we got talking. Then we exchanged numbers. Then we started seeing each other. We always met at a joint those early days because I was still living with that woman-beater boyfriend. Then came the day you called me and I was at the point of death because of his beatings. You are courageous. You drove all the way to his house, carried me from there and rushed me to the hospital. Before that incident, all that I had in mind was to see how I could move from my boyfriend’s house to your house (or for you to pay for an apartment for me). I had no feelings for you. But the way you checked up on me everyday in the hospital, took me to a bone doctor afterwards, and paid my bills, made me love you immediately. At that point, I looked at my life and said God must be making a mistake. Me, a runaway child, school dropout, prostitute, who never goes to church or mosque, had someone like you, a clean, decent pharmacist to be, running all around me. No, I did not deserve the attention from you. God was definitely making a mistake.

After that incident, our relationship went to another level. I moved to my friend’s place, and then we started exchanging visits. We talked at a deeper level. You made me share with you all my hurt and pains deep down. You were surprised to know that I had refused to talk to my father even after all his attempts to be reconciled with me. You kept on talking about forgiving, but of course, I was not going to change my mind easily. You also encouraged me to go back to school, and from your school allowance you bought me JAMB form, tutored me, and made me write GCE. You said I had a lot of potential and you believed in me. To our surprise, I passed my JAMB and GCE in one sitting, meeting the minimum requirements. The day I showed you my admission letter to the University, you proposed. Who was I to say no? It also coincided with the week you got a job in the pharmacy of an oil company. Triple celebration for us.

We only did court marriage because I said I did not want my parents anywhere near my wedding. You believed that we would do the traditional marriage and white wedding some day. You wanted

me to be reconciled with my family, especially my father. You took it upon yourself to see this come to pass. You really did a good job, reaching out to my father as well as softening my heart. Finally, when I was 3 months pregnant, my father and I had reached an agreement, and I decided to pay him a visit.

When I saw him, I wept. I realized that I loved him so much and I missed him, and all I was doing in life was just to get the love and attention of a father. I hugged him so tight and we both cried for a long time. He told me he loved me and he never stopped regretting why he allowed my mother take me from him. After spending the night with him, my brothers and his new family (wife and 2 kids), I felt as if a heavy burden had been lifted off my shoulders. It was one of the best weekends I had ever had, and I looked forward to thanking you for making it happen.

I came out of my reverie when the cabin crew started serving some snacks. It was when I felt something in my stomach. I realized what it was. It was the movement of our baby. I could not wait to share this with you. But midway into the serving of snacks, one of the cabin crew members whispered something to another, and then they began packing up the food and drinks.

I noticed that there was a sense of urgency in their movements. A few sleeping passengers were awakened and told to remain seated. The lights in the plane seemed to have gone off. Then I realized I was no longer hearing the noise and rattling of the plane. I was seized with panic. My fear and anxiety was heightened when others in the plane started asking "what is going on?" I began to pray, though I am not sure of the words I said because I was scared.

The oxygen masks deployed. I was still muttering some words to myself when the captain spoke. I couldn't believe my ears. I never thought I would hear these words that are only heard in movies or read in novels. I listened very carefully to his words:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. The aircraft has developed a problem and we have not determined the cause of it. In twenty minutes we will have an emergency landing at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos. Listen carefully to my instructions.

Put on your oxygen masks. People with infants and children should put theirs on before helping others. Fasten your seatbelts now. Ladies, remove your high heeled shoes. Everyone, remove all sharp objects from your bodies. We may have a double impact landing. At my word, everyone must cover their heads and assume a forward roll position, as shown on the safety card in the seat pocket in front of you.

When I give the word, upon landing, unfasten your seatbelts as quickly as possible, and head to the exit nearest you. Leave all belongings behind. Do not panic."

There was no panic in the plane, but everyone was praying. Some children were crying because of the apparently rapid descent. The flight attendants had walked up and down with portable oxygen tanks making sure people were breathing well and their masks were working. When everyone was okay, they took their seats.

It seemed the plane was nosediving, because the angle of descent was too sharp. We all clutched tightly to our seats. The prayers intensified. I think there were powerful men and women of God in the plane because the words that came out of their mouths were very comforting yet powerful.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang, like there was a huge impact of the plane on something, and then there was nothing. I felt some pain, but it was like a prick of a needle.

There was an unusual peace in the plane just before the impact. People had the opportunities to give their lives to Christ in that plane. Yes, I heard a few people say things like, "Jesus! Save Me! I believe You are the son of God and I believe You died for my sins!"

I am sure you are wondering what was on my mind the last few minutes of the impact, or if I went through torture during the incident. I can tell you. Once the plane started nosediving, I told myself it is either I make it out alive or not. If it is the former, then to God be the glory. But if it is the latter, then I am thankful for my life. I was thankful that God gave me a second chance. I was thankful that despite the ungodly life I lived, God made someone like you walk into my life, show me the way, make me accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour, and gave me a new meaning to life. I was thankful for the opportunity to be reconciled with family, especially my father. Please tell him I love him. I was thankful that God allowed me experience true love both from Him and from you.

Did I go through agony or torture? No! Like I said, I felt something but it was so swift before I entered into a state of blackout. I heard the bodies got burnt. Most of us had passed out with the impact and may not have felt the pain of the burns. And you know that 3rd and 4th degree burns are painless, so please do not think that I or most of us went through pain and agony.

My last thought was "I love you, my Sweetheart. I know I am going to a better place, and we will someday be together – you, I and our baby."

And as you read this letter, just know that the pain you are going through shall pass. God will embrace you with love and comfort. One day you will look back at June 3rd. You will smile, not because the incident was nice, but because God has healed you completely, given you uncountable testimonies, and made memories of you and I a beautiful place you can visit anytime.

I miss you and I love you. Take care and God be with you. Lots of love, your wife.

***Blindsided* by Salatu Sule**

(For every person who knows the taste of grief)

The news

Slams into me

Rips through my soul

Scatters my dreams

Desperately, I struggle

To gather them

Confused

Hurting

Blindsided

I choke...

I breathe...

Inside my soul

I hear it... the sound

Of a thousand hopes cracking

I let go

And cry

Aftermath by Seun Odukoya

“...and I yeEEEARGGHHHHHH!”

He starts awake; drenched in sweat. He looks around wildly for a bit before calming down; recognizing his surroundings. His chest heaves; his breathing labored. He calms down and looks at the neon screen of the table clock beside him.

4: 15 am.

Rising from the bed, he walks to the window and looks out to predawn Abuja. The streets are brightly illuminated, shiny with wet slickness after the rain of the night before. It looks really picturesque.

But he sees none of that. Instead, he sees screaming children and burning bodies. He hears their yells and their pain – he flinches in front of the window; away from their desperately reaching fingers.

He shudders.

The room is cold. He automatically reaches for the AC remote; turns off the AC and throws the remote on the bed. And then he sits beside it, shoulders sagging, and covers his face with his hands.

No matter how hard he tries; he cannot get away from the nightmares. And they had suddenly begun to show up during the day too.

Daymares?

He laughs out loud, his shoulders shaking. Explosive, it reverberates around the empty room, echoing and coming back to haunt him. Then his laughter thins out and abruptly turns to a sob. He covers his head with his hands and starts wailing. Tears stream down his face and he wishes he could just forget.

He remembers.

Anna had held him close that first night. The night the nightmares began.

He had woken up screaming and struggling violently. She had grabbed him; and in spite of his kicking legs and flailing arms and had held him tightly till he calmed down. Only then did she let him go – and just to turn on the lights.

“What is it? What happened?” she asked, her voice heavy with concern.

Slowly, haltingly, he began to tell her about the bodies.

He left the house after two days of recurring nightmares.

Anna stood by the door, tears in her eyes. “Please don’t do this baby,” she pleaded with him on her knees that morning as he sat on the bed and told her his decision. “Think about me. Think about the sacrifices I made – what I went through just for us to be together.”

He looked her in the eyes for the first time that morning. He could see pain, hurt, loneliness and fear in their dark depths. He thought about what she said about sacrifices. Yes; she knew a lot about those.

He silently marveled that she would bring that up now – after three years of living with him. There were times he had deliberately made her angry – just to see if she would mention it. But she remained silent, stoically taking all his rough treatment and only allowing herself a small sad smile.

He looked into her eyes that morning – and then looked at her. The strain of the past few days; days of waking up and not being able to sleep anymore were clear to see. She had lost weight; so much so he could feel the sharp ridges of her wrist-bones as her hand lay on his thigh. Her normally light skin was pale and her full lips drooped at the corners. Her chin trembled.

But he knew it was the best thing to do.

As they stood together by the door, he gently placed his GT Bank ATM in her palm. She made to fling it away, but he whispered hoarsely ‘please’.

She nodded gently and he held her suddenly, tightly to him. “I’ll be back soon,” he said, turning away quickly so she would not see the tears. He pulled his backpack on, gently squeezed her hand and walked away.

He heard her begin sobbing as though her heart would burst.

But he did not look back.

5:04 am.

After a bath and fresh clothes he looks better. But his looks and his feelings are not in agreement.

He hides his haunted eyes behind a pair of dark Ray Bans and walks out of the hotel into the pre-dawn Jos air. It is cold; so he huddles deeper into the black Nike hoodie he’s wearing. He thinks briefly about the hotel room and if the staff would assume he had checked out.

No, not immediately; he figures. I still have about ten days on my tab and some of my clothes are still there. I might be back.

He adjusts the backpack slightly and shoves his hands deeper into the hoodie’s side pockets as he walks at a brisk pace. He has no idea where he is headed; but he knows he’ll know it once he gets there.

A car speeds past; splashing water at his legs and drenching his jeans and sneakers. The car stops a few meters in front and reverses. It stops beside him as he tries vainly to slap most of the wet away from his trousers.

“I’m sorry,” the pretty female occupant of the car says. “I am in a hurry and really was not paying attention.” He nods absentmindedly and continues walking.

“Hey! Can I just help...” but he interrupts her with a wave and negative shake of his head. A few moments later the car zooms past for the second time.

9: 45 am

He has been walking for almost four hours and as much as he hates to admit it, his legs are aching. He stops for a bit; sitting in a park and watching Jos wake up sluggishly and reluctantly. Acting on a sudden impulse, he waves a cab down and yells ‘AIRPORT!’

10:30 am

He sits in the economy class section of the plane, looks around and thinks; *so this is what Jacky means when he says ‘flying poor’. This is not it.*

He feels lethargy steal over him and surrenders himself to the soft and gentle pull of the Valium he consumed before getting aboard. He sleeps, and this time...

“The engines of that craft are making funny sounds sir. It just landed from Jos,” the flight dispatcher said.

He looked at his watch. “Okay then. Have it checked and ascertain whatever’s wrong with it – and let me know as soon as possible.”

The dispatcher; who was female nodded but did not move. He looked back at her and asked, “What?”

She cleared her throat. “Well sir, it’s scheduled to fly to Lagos within the next twenty minutes. It’s already almost an hour late,” she finished.

He thought about that. He really thought about it. “How serious are the ‘serious sounds?’”

The woman scratched her head. “Well sir, they’re not really loud and it’s not exactly anything out of the ordinary. We hear sounds like those daily,” she concluded.

“Okay. Have a cursory check and then dispatch for Lagos. Once it lands we’ll have the maintenance crew go over it properly,” he finished.

The woman nodded and hurried out.

Barely hours later, he got the call...

11:47am

He wakes up in his seat, shrinking away from the shadow that loomed over him. *Oh let this pain be brief*; he thinks.

“Sorry sir but we’ve arrived Lagos,” the pretty air hostess smiles at him while eyeing him a bit strangely.

“That was fast,” he answers as he scrambles out of his seat. She moves back to give him space to move and he nods in appreciation, slinging his backpack as he makes his way towards the exit.

“Enjoy your stay sir,” the girl calls after him. He waves in acknowledgement.

As he steps outside the airport, he takes off his Ray Bans and stops a passing okada man, “Okada!”

The bike stops. He walks towards him and says, “Iju.”

The okada man looks up. “Which side for Iju?” he asks.

“Where the plane crashed.”

The okada man sniffs. “Na everybody wan go dat side.” His face softens slightly. “Your pessin die for dia?”

Getting no answer the okada man continues, “I no go fit reach there, mopo dey dat side. But I go drop you for one junction before...”

He interrupts. “That’s fine. Let’s just go,” he concludes.

As he mounts the bike, the okada man says “Ya money na five hundred o.”

He does not answer. He just waves the bike on.

12:07 pm

As he approaches the site of the crash, his heart starts thumping crazily. He feels moisture gather in his sneakers, but he’s made up his mind. No turning back now.

He sees a few people milling around, some of them in civilian clothes, some in long white coats and gas masks – some in military uniform.

He turns a corner – and the full import of the tragedy hits him. *No*; he thinks. *No. It cannot be this bad.*

It is worse.

As he makes to lift the tape which cordons off the site from the surrounding area, a menacing mobile policeman shouts, “Hol’ it!”

He stops and turns to face the policeman approaching him. The policeman stops and shoves his face close. “Wetin you dey find for hia? You no see rope?”

He winces. The policeman’s breath smells of gin and groundnuts; an unlikely combination that makes him queasy. Without a word he pulls out his ID card and shoves it in the policeman’s face.

The card reads; *Tunde Balewa, Airline Quality Control Engineer, Dana Air.*

The mopol waves him through

* * *

There’s no way anyone could have survived this obviously; he thinks in horror. Oh dear Lord. I killed them.

There’s a roaring in his ears. He tells his legs, *move*; but they do not respond. Suddenly, the entire site is covered by a black cloud and it starts again...

He is seated beside a woman with three of her children. He looks around wondering where he is. And then he recognizes the thrum of twin engines. He sees a pretty air hostess walk down the aisle pushing a tray and he recognizes the uniform she’s wearing – just before he recognizes her.

No; he tries to scream. No!

But nothing comes out. He struggles with his seatbelt as the woman and her kids look at him strangely. The air hostess runs towards him and holds his shoulders, trying to calm him down but he struggles harder.

You don’t understand; he’s screaming. I shouldn’t be here. You’re all dead!

But they cannot hear him. And suddenly, the plane bumps in midair – and starts plummeting fast. He becomes calm; as the other occupants of the plane begin to scream. You deserve to be here more than anyone else; an inner voice tells him and he closes his eyes, accepting the inevitable...

He starts awake; drenched in sweat. He is still standing where he was, but the black cloud is gone.

He slumps to his knees, overwhelmed by guilt.

“I’m sorry,” he sobs. “I’m so sorry...”

Overhead, there’s the sound of thunder. With a sudden rush, the heavens let go.

The mobile policeman who let him in rushes to his side. “Oga, come join we for shade for dat side...”

Still kneeling, he declines. The soldier shakes his head and rushes to the shed to join his comrades. Together they turned to look at the *educated fool* who has let go of his senses.

He revels in the rain. His shoulders square themselves again – he feels absolved.

He feels cleansed.

Anna...

Numbers by Taiwo Odumala

Numbers, 1, 2, 3,

We all count

In one form or the other

To keep facts,

To manipulate situations,

We count...

140 million,

Last count before the last

The living we count

Because the dead do not count

But sometimes we count

To jolt our memory that

The dead were once living

So that we can know

How deep our grief

To measure

How deep it should be

to remind ourselves

That they were more than numbers

They were humans in numbers.

DANA...

They counted 153

"No hope of a survivor", they said.

How do they know?

How can they say?

When to each 1, there is grief

To each 5, there is sadness

To each 3, family trees are cut

Gbenga was aboard

He can't be dead

Keep checking, you'll find him

You should find him.

He's probably writhing in pain.

Somewhere.

Find him.

And then, there's Ebuka

He told her he was going

It was meant as a surprise

Guess he surprised her..

1 out of 153

His family have no idea.

Tears erupt

For some, silence won
For others, it was a dream
For us, a cruel reality.

They keep counting
While we mourn the numbers
Fleshy numbers
Mere statistics to them
In a plot
To downplay their mistakes
Their greed.

To us, they were humans
Not numbers
Not figures
Not statistics.
They were once us
Flesh.
Blood.
Us.

Another Kind Of Surprise by Teewah

He lay staring at the ceiling remembering his chat with Toni the previous night. They had argued back and forth on how she wanted him to attend her Aunt's birthday party and how he didn't think it was important. He knew he was justified if he didn't attend, and he knew he could always placate her afterward. Yet there was something about her that always made her win an argument, there was something that always made it impossible for him to deny her most things. Now, here he was mentally rescheduling most activities for that day, to make sure he attended the party at all cost. She wasn't expecting it, but he knew she would go bananas with joy, and that was all he wanted.

With the sunlight streaming in from her opened window, she gradually came into consciousness, rubbing her eyes as she made to open them. Reaching for her phone to ping Dayo was the first thing that came to her mind...then she remembered the argument they had had the previous night and his insistence on not coming for her Aunt's party. Putting up an "angry face" on her display message instead, she decided to ignore him for the rest of the day.

It was almost 2pm when he rushed back home and started to pack his things. He had hurriedly gone about few activities for the day, and even succeeded in getting a ticket for himself - even though it had not been his preferred airline. Who cares though, as long as he ended up in Lagos one way or the other. He picked out his overnight bag and grudgingly began to throw in his clothes, perfume, hairbrush... "Damn, things you do for love" he muttered under his breath, as with hands on hips he paused to think of why he was doing this. He loved her madly he concluded in his heart, and this had been the case since they had first met two years ago. With a smile on his face, he did a quick check on the things he had packed before hurrying to the airport.

Taking a seat to catch her breath for a minute, she scrolled through the numerous messages Dayo had been sending her all day. His words were sweet; apologizing and trying to make her understand why he couldn't make it over for the party, even promising to make it up to her. Smiling she put away her phone, got up and continued on her errands....She sure wasn't as pissed as she was yesterday night during their argument, besides she honestly knew if there was anything he could do, he would have been here. Still she was bent on making him beg and grovel, just for the fun of it.

He noticed she still had that "angry face" up on her display and had replied none of his pings. She sure was one hell of a case and he loved her for it. He imagined her reading his messages and ignoring them, simply bent on making life miserable for him. Chuckling softly, he began to imagine what her expression would be when she saw him at the venue of the party...it would be hilarious for sure. "Baby please talk to me" he again sent to her while at the waiting lounge...He could only hope he was going to get a response.

She had been so busy all day, ensuring all things were in place; food, drinks, caterers, servers, decoration..."Ha..." she sighed when the party eventually started and she had a chance to rest her feet. Dayo...she thought and excitedly fished out her phone looking forward to more "I'm sorry, I love you". After she read the last message he sent her, she finally decided to give him a break... "I'm really not angry babe, just wish you could be here"...she had scarcely sent it, when she heard her Aunt (not the celebrant) call her name. Off again she went.

After they had all boarded and the plane was ready for take off, the voice of the air hostess making her routine speech floated through to his subconscious. Surprised at getting a response, he read through it elated. Of course he knew she had just been intentionally giving him a hard time, still he was glad it was over. He hurriedly sent Toni a last message before he had to turn off his phone. He

then secured his belt, laid back and closed his eyes counting down till they got to Lagos... "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now in Lagos and would be making our landing very soon, please ensure that your seat belts are secured...". Excitement started to course through him at the thought of seeing her very soon. Thinking of it now, he had missed her much, and he was actually glad he had decided on this trip. "She would have a fit" he thought, laughing out loud and earning a strange look from his seat partner.

News of the plane crash had filtered into the party hall, and dampened the mood of everyone except her. God forgive her, but she was elated. Not because people had died, but because she kept thinking it could have been Dayo, with her foolish insistence that he come for this stupid party. She went about looking for her phone, not remembering where last she had placed it. Still looking for her phone she ran into her Aunt - the celebrant, "Ha Toni, thank God Dayo didn't come o... Oya go and call him now and apologize okay"... She nodded and continued her search, all the while thanking her stars and thinking of the sweetest words she would use to psyche him.

*She finally found her phone with a friend of hers whom she had earlier given it to. She punched in Dayo's number, and waited unsuccessfully for it to connect, over and over again. "Terrible network" she hissed as she opened her pings. Scrolling to find the last message he had sent her, the words that greeted her eyes were; "I'm on my way babes, leaving the airport now...wanted it to be a surprise. Call you when we touch down...Love you" ...**but he never called!***

***His Pot Lied* by Tonye Willie-Pepple**

On a rainy noon,
She longed for the welcome kiss of her man
But the devil washed his pot,
And she didn't know,
Where it would cook

On an Ikoyi stove,
Cooking soup for her man,
The devil cooked as well,
And she didnt know,
The meat he'd use

At 15:45 hours
Her man's soup done,
Waiting to be served,
The devil had also fried well
His own pot of soup

Her man neither ate the soup
Nor did he receive the welcome kiss,
He watched from beyond,
As she watched him burn,
In the devil's frying pan

And so from hills to plains,
Through deserts and creeks,
It thundered and rained,
From every watching eye,
Tears for loved ones gone

The devil cooked his best
And sauced well too,
But it was time to eat,
And he found no meat,
For his pot certainly lied

What he had seen as meat,
Were mere ashes and dust,
And what he thought was fried,
Were clothes of spirits gone,
For the great banquet of light

(For victims of the Dana plane crash, may their souls rest well)

Air-Collapse by Vivekanand Jha

In the blink of an eye
their lifelong desires,
destinations and endeavours
reduced to fearful fire, spiraling smoke,
abysmal debris and flesh in fission,
making them an appalling mechanical mixture.

From the most blessed and blissful lot,
they witnessed themselves
a showcase of junk, annihilation
and self-carved catastrophe,
accruing and multiplying the existing numbers
of orphans, weak and dispossessed.

Some of them left
no trace of their ancestry and posterity
who could be empathized with in this hour
of fatality, sadness and grief .

The rest of them turned to their kith and kin
shocked, depressed and worried.

The tragedy, a testimonial of the truth:
None has control over death and doom.

Let them be prince and pauper,
they get ground, slashed and slain
equally and evenly by the Almighty's chopper.

Such incidents make a mockery
of discovery, innovation and invention
where an aircraft is no less than a flying bomb.
All over in one explosion and oblivion
and man turned no more than a tomb.

Such disasters justify the conviction:
Death is predetermined,
it has no enemy, no friend;
when, how, where and why
it makes one its own prey,
mentioned in none of the zodiac signs.

Final Boarding Call by Walter Uchenna Ude

“This is the final boarding call for all passengers going to Lagos!” the voice of the female automaton blared from the loudspeakers of the public address system.

I looked grudgingly up from the page of my Vince Flynn novel, dragging my attention from the point where Mitch Rapp had been about to blast yet another Middle Eastern terrorist to hell where there won't be any fifty virgins waiting to receive him. I glanced round as the line shuffling past the check-in counter trudged on faster than it had been before. This was the final boarding call for my flight and these people were still crawling forward as though they had all the time in the world, I thought with some asperity.

Right in front of me was a young boy, roughly my age, clad in the de rigueur low-slung jeans over his nonexistent buttocks, his boxers peeking out from beneath his slim-fitting T-shirt. With his Mohawk haircut and earphones strapped over his ears, he completed the image of many youngsters in Nigeria – an image I didn't particularly like. I don't know why this male fashion sense was so in vogue, but I wasn't impressed by it at all. The memory of the blistering tongue-lashing I'd given to one such shabbily-dressed guy who had accosted me in the Mr. Biggs in Wuse 2 yesterday lifted my lips into a small smile. After my putdown, I'm sure he'd think twice about approaching another girl dressed like a Lady Gaga groupie.

“Here, Junior, this is for you. And Chichi, this is for you,” a wheezing female voice said behind me.

“Thank you, Aunt Brenda!” a couple of childlike voices chorused.

I looked behind me to see a tall, heavysset woman with a heavily made-up face and fat fingers bedecked with several flashing rings. A chainmail of heavy necklets was hung around her neck, and her breath was heavy and sonorous, as though she was going to drop any second. I shook my head derisively; all these ornamentation just to prove what? That you're some hotshot socialite with boatloads of money to spend? Well, at least, she was spending some on the two teenagers surrounding her, judging from the wads of cash she had just handed over to them. Their mother – I assumed the other woman, who had her hands around the shoulders of Junior and Chichi, was that – thanked Aunt Brenda, and shepherded her wards away from the line.

“Oh, thank God, the line is finally moving!” a harried-looking young lady gushed as she dashed to my side, attempting to edge into the line in front of me.

“Hey! You're not supposed to cut into the line like that!” Aunt Brenda wheezed irately behind me. Some passengers crumbled behind her. Ear-phone boy and a couple of people before him looked back to see what the commotion was about.

The harried-looking woman flushed with abashment as she turned to speak. “Madam, I was here. Ask this girl. I just went to buy something outside.”

“Is that true, young lady?” a rotund man with sparse hair and graying goatee groused at me from behind Aunt Brenda.

As if I would let a total stranger cut into the line before me. These people sef! I stifled a sardonic hiss and answered, “Yes, it's true. She was in the line before me.”

More grumbles. Aunt Brenda wheezed some more. Ear-phone boy moved forward. Harried-looking girl stepped in. The line shuffled forward.

“Welcome to Dana Air Flight,” the security agent said with a beam at me when it got to my turn. “Have a safe flight.” And she waved me forward.

Just my luck, I thought with an indelicate frown etched my face as I paused to gape at the person seated beside me in the Economic Class section of the airplane. Aunt Brenda, with her gasping, wheezing respiration and garish bling-bling. On the other side of the aisle, harried-looking girl was getting settled on her seat, dusting out the console before her and buckling her seatbelt. Seriously?! We haven’t even taken off yet. I was about to open my mouth to politely – real nicely – ask her to exchange seats with me. The last thing I needed was this obese woman’s asthmatic breath cascading over my shoulder and keeping me awake for the entire forty-five minute flight. Then Ear-phone Boy sauntered down the aisle, paused beside her and squinted at the seat numbers stamped on the compartment above her.

Oh no, please, don’t – don’t –

And he did, plopping down on the seat beside harried-looking girl. The two of them exchanged an awkward smile of strangers running into each other, and he gave her a quick onceover, interest sparking inside his eyes. Fantastic! Just gru-ate! As much as I hated having Aunt Brenda for a seatmate, I’d much sooner let her gasps and wheezes become my lullaby than endure the overused overtures and facile lines that ear-phone boy was bound to plague me with if I should exchange seats with his harried-looking girl. Further ahead, beside a window, I spotted goatee man snapping open an edition of Punch newspaper and losing himself in the voluminous pages.

Finally it was time. And the pilot’s voice floated out through the address system. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We would like to welcome you onboard this Dana Air Flight to Lagos. Flight duration is around forty-five minutes and we are expecting a fairly smooth flight today. Please, follow the following instructions to ensure your safety during this flight. Endeavour to switch off all electronic devices and gadgets. Put on your seatbelts; you may unbuckle them after we have ascended into the air. And when you need the attention of any host or hostess, there’s a button beside you; press it and someone will be right with you...” As the litany of instructions sailed across the length and breadth of the cabin, I switched off my attention and buried it back inside the pages of my novel, journeying together with Mitch Rapp down the terror-ridden streets of Saudi Arabia. Occasionally, the words of the pilot sneaked into my consciousness – in case of emergency...oxygen masks...heads between your knees...

I’d flown like a gazillion times. Who needed to hear these sef? I turned a page and returned to Mitch Rapp’s side.

As a presage to what happened, there should have been a dark whisper in the wind. Or maybe a deep chill in the bone. Something. An ethereal song I could hear. A tightness in the air. Some premonition written somewhere.

It was the screeching sound that jolted me out of my nap. I opened my eyes slowly, blearily, and that was when all the screaming tumbled into my consciousness. Aunt Brenda's beady eyes were opened wide with terror and her mouth was making a squealing sound, the kind you hear from pigs about to be slaughtered for a festivity.

What is going on?

What's with all the screaming?

And why is the plane moving as though we were getting slammed by a cyclone?

"Blood of Jeeeeezuz! Blood of Jeeeeezuz!" someone kept chanting frantically.

"We're going to crash!" another person bellowed.

Sleep fled instantly from my eyes as I jerked up and looked quickly around. Everywhere around me looked as though a small whirlwind had passed through it. The doors of the luggage compartments above flapped open with loud banging noises and the different bags and carryon items stashed inside them had blown out of their confinement, strewing the entire cabin. The screeching sounds came from the body of the plane as it whistled with violently-jerky motions through the atmosphere, bit after metallic bit peeling off from its framework. Passengers held on to their seats with deathlike grips, their faces in different contortions of stark fright and overwhelming terror, their mouths peeled open to let out varying ululations of mounting horror. Harried-looking girl was the one who kept on screaming for the blood of Jesus as she fumbled frantically with the buckle of her seatbelt.

The seatbelt!

I hadn't fastened my seatbelt!

Realizing that, I jerked upright and snatched at the leather strip on the side of my seat. I yanked it forward, my trembling fingers searching for the buckle on my side. Even then, the plane gave a sharp tilt, bucking forward; the leather strip slipped from my fingers as I was thrown forward, my derriere lifting off my seat. A scream of terror ripped through my mouth as I felt myself getting thrown off my seat, but something grabbed at my back, stopping short my perilous flight forward. Aunt Brenda's hand yanked me backward and plopped me down on my seat. Harried-looking girl was not so lucky; she let out an earsplitting shriek as she was jerked out of her seat and was airborne, pitching forward and tumbling down the aisle.

"Father God – into your hands I commit my soul – God, please save me!" Goatee man blubbered on his seat, his hand repeatedly moving over his chest in an erratic pantomime of the cross. "Father! Please – commit into my hand – your soul – God...save me...!" His mantra was cut rudely short when the entire wall of the plane beside him was ripped apart with a jarring, cacophonous sound. His utterances turned into a bloodcurdling scream as the unfriendly strong air current reached in and rived his chair violently, tearing out both passenger and airplane chattel through the jagged opening. The serrated metal tore at his skin before he was out of the plane, airborne, careening into the clouds outside, his voice fading out into an echo.

The horror of what I'd just witnessed washed over me, turning my insides cold. And I got hit with the absolute reality that we were going to die. It dawned on me as cold and as precise as when one of

the Vince Flynn terrorists looks into Mitch Rapp's eyes and realizes that the legendary CIA agent was going to kill him. Aunt Brenda must have realized that too, because in a wheezy voice suffused with tears, she gasped, "Young lady...what's – what's your name?"

I turned to her. Her doughy face was tear-streaked, the heavy makeup she'd been wearing running in scattered rivulets over her features.

"Adaeze," I managed thickly. My eyes burned and a thousand emotions roiled inside me, surging up and spilling in the form of tears, fat globules that blurred my vision and tracked flyaway paths down my cheeks.

Aunt Brenda managed a watery smile. "Adaeze...nice name. Beautiful name." And she reached out her hand to grip mine on the handrest. "God be with you, Adaeze..." Her words dissolved into a choking sob as her expansive body heaved with emotion.

"God be with you too..." I was crying now. The tears flowed faster.

And the plane plummeted speedily, carrying us all, to a certain end.

Lamentations (When shall we heal; what shall we remember?) by Xikay

I.

Leave me be, let my wounded heart bleed.
Did not your own eyes see the planted seed,
Dug out while yet a sapling in the soil;
There goes the reward for the farmers toil.

II.

What shall we say now to the little one,
Tugging teats from whom breath has gone?
And what shall we say to the grayed one,
Looking in the eyes of a breathless son?

III.

Say, is he blind that holds the harvest sickle?
Why doth he pluck fledgling stars, yet to twinkle?
Foolish farmer, hungry; he slaughters little chicks
And stuffs apples yet unripe, in his cheeks!

IV.

How many coins shall we barter for breath?
Gold or silver, what shall we give you, Death?
If your lips can mouth to us a mortal price
Shall we not pay, though you ask us thrice?

V.

How did we come to this market of death
Where unwanted goods are gifted free for all?
Even the one that holds an empty wallet
Gets 100% discount in each dreadful stall.

VI.

All are forced to swim in the raging river,
Though we wear no swimming pants.
Lucky are they that emerge with a shiver-
The others, gone, we remember in chants.

...Oh, how fickle is this breath-filled clay;
And how brief his sojourn in this lay!

Traveling Light by Zazu

They say bad news travels fast
Did you hear? another blast
Thunderstorms, tonight's forecast
Well, at least that's what I heard

They said tough times never last
They said all the worst was past
They said we would smile at last
Surely, that was what they said

One by one we all file in
Waving goodbyes, all smiling
No one sees bodies piling
Our bright futures so blinding

Turn by turn we're all dying
Casualties multiplying
Bad news sells, and we're buying
And our tears are not drying

First some strangers, statistics
Then a name I couldn't pick
Then a friend who wasn't sick

Wait! I recognize that pic!

See the babies, see the miss

See the dad give his last kiss

Hear the sour passenger hiss

Soon they'll be the news topic

But rewind an hour or two

They were just like me or you

What was it they didn't do?

Why them? We may never know

So I'm seated on this flight

Burdens dropped, my conscience light

Maybe I'll make news tonight

Or just read it tomorrow...

**Submissions were arranged in alphabetical order of author's names.*

MORE RESOURCES

Complete submissions - <http://www.naijastories.com/category/flight-9j-992-to-lagos/>

Some articles, reports and thoughts by various bloggers compiled by Myne Whitman

[Let us live, love and dare to dream - Oge A](#)

[Down to Earth - Fantasy Queen](#)

[Sigh...June 4th - Simply Mee](#)

[It will never be well with Nigeria...until - Atilola](#)

[The Love of Money - 9ja Great](#)

[DANA Plane Crash; the Limits of Prayers - Rudolf Ogoo Okonkwo](#)

[R.I.P - Beautiful Faces of The Dana Air Crash](#)

[Teardrops... But it is Well - Priscy](#)

[Dedicated to Those Who Lost a Loved One On Nigeria's Black Sunday 3/6/12 - NaijaLines](#)

[Lest We Forget - Naijamum in London](#)

[One Tragedy too many - A Pen and a Heart](#)

[Rest in Peace - Gretel](#)

[Grief! - Ayo](#)

[The Change we Desire - Hitnrunmullings](#)

[Useless, clueless Government - Prism](#)

[Listen! - Stelz](#)

[Re - Black Sunday - Culture Soup](#)

[Cause of Death, A plane crashed into their home - Nakedsha](#)

[Dana Air: Where is the Nigerian Government? Mikki](#)

[This one really hit Home - Mamuje](#)

[Nigeria, I Tire - DOHK](#)

[When your time is up, it's up - Ginger](#)

[Papa God I Cannot Lie To You - DNW](#)

[Life, Purpose and Death - Jaycee](#)

[In Honor of the Fallen - Dayor](#)

[When Hope is cut Short - Jemima](#)

[Death is Painful - AY](#)

[Dana Air Tragedy - Elizabeth Obih-Frank](#)

[And We Have Moved On – Abiola Obileye](#)

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