

Тыранны



Unchained



IHRAF Youth Fellows Speak:

Tyranny Unchained

Curated and Edited by 2022 IHRAF Youth Fellow

Mahbubat Salahudeen

A PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ART FESTIVAL
(IHRAF)
TYRANNY UNCHAINED

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It is with tremendous pleasure and honor that the *International Human Rights Art Festival* publishes this collection of work, curated and edited by 2022 IHRAF Youth Fellow Mahbubat Salahudeen. This work collects mostly female writers from around the world — Tunisia, Guam, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Virginia (USA) etc. — all expressing their passionate belief in the power and agency of women.

This work represents a journey to the self — a voyage to understand one's own place in this world, as a woman, so that one might forge new avenues of power from a fresh center.

As Amber Pineda (Guam) notes:

Dear Lady in the Mirror:

I know we're practically strangers at this point, so it must feel weird to receive this relatively personal note from someone you've only seen a few times a day . . . You and me, we seem to be growing farther apart . . . Let's restart. Let's act like the world doesn't exist right now and that time has denied us the right to know the past and present. Let's act as though we could roam freely in our own flesh. Let's act as though skin is just skin and gender is just gender. Who would we be if this was how you and I met?

These poems, stories and essays from writers around the world, yearning to find themselves — as well as help create a society which is more open, caring, accepting and nurturing — point the way through their vulnerability and sincerity of presentation, plus the clarity of their voices, toward a place of hope.

With my great appreciation to them, and Mahbubat for bringing them to us,



Founding Executive Director
International Human Rights Art Festival
New York, NY
November 4, 2022

I have been fascinated by the Internal Human Rights Art Festival even before I was selected as a 2022 Youth Fellow earlier in 2022. IHRAF Publishes is a platform that prioritises human rights supporters, and giving equal representation to individuals irrespective of background, religion, race and sex.

Since the reversal of the Roe vs Wade ruling on abortion rights in the United States, I was unable to stop thinking of the plight of women in America and about producing a 2022 anthology of writings from women explicating their grievances regarding the reversal of abortion rights in America.

Having curated and edited the 2022 *Youth Anthology, Youth Creativity on Human Rights and Social Justice/Change: The Power of Storytelling and The Uniqueness of Art*, I set out to produce this work. The pieces in this collection seek to unravel the mental scape of the current situation for women in the USA and around the world.

In IHRAF's latest endeavor, you will find that memories, feelings and emotions are laid bare and examined in prose and poetry from the contributors; Amber Pineda, Carly Heider, Niroshi Subasinghe, Kendra Mills, Eleanor Nesim, Tasneem Hossain etc. The work is centered around women's rights and joined by the exploration of memory, and reality.

As I have read, and re-read *Tyranny Unchained*, I will assure that you should get ready to be wowed by this collections of writers.

Mahbubat K. Salahudeen

2022 IHRAF Youth Fellow
International Human Rights Art Festival
South Western Nigeria
November 12, 2022

// Her Sacrifice //

by Eleanor Nesim

I don't remember your name.

But I will always remember,

The abortion you had so you could serve the country

That would later take your rights away.

I don't know where she ended up,

but I will always remember

The baby she carried who was shook to death

By a husband with PTSD.

And I'll never forget the withdrawal from Afghanistan

Especially two names,

Nicole Ghee and Johanny Rosairo

Did not die in vain

Women will do continue to prevail

We will do it without taking a new name.

Not because we didn't get the chance too —

Because we paved our own way.

// an elegy for e. mchale //

by Kendra Mills

*"at the bottom
of the empire state building*

*the body of evelyn mchale
reposes calmly*

*in the grotesque bier
her falling body*

*punched into the top of a car"
(life magazine, 1947)*

an elegy for e. mchale

and naked, i can't remember
that i am neither beautiful nor rich,
but perhaps hysterical.

tonight, february slips in through the crack
in the window and i am left
wondering about the next man

who will not recognize
the grace and rapture in my body—
i was born to be free

of this life, and men
who can't pronounce the name
hecate.

// Contemplating the World Independently of Fear //

by Ali Znaidi

She likes making origami boats
to make sure her dreams are still alive
and to show that women don't fear the sea.

Origami boats are like blossoming buds.
That's why, she always sprinkles them on her bed.
For her, the sea is a bed and not a grave.

When making origami boats she feels like
smashing prison's labyrinthine walls.
She feels like breaking the chains of tyranny.

She always loved the sea and
the amazing faces of the waves.
The sea helps her learn how to contemplate.

The sea always teaches her she has a body
and that fear would never tear her apart.

// A proper place for women //

by Niroshi Subasinghe

I think the women in Asia haven't got a suitable place according to their cultural and religious beliefs. As an example, Hindu religious people in India in the past believed that it is a bad thing, the birth of a female child. But the Buddhist religion is different from other religions such as Muslim and Hindu. The Lord Buddha said to respect all women. The birth of any person in this world was given by a woman. Motherhood is a very noble act. So everyone's responsibility is to respect all women.

I would like to take examples from Sri Lankan society. The first female Prime Minister in the world (Sirimavo Bandaranaike, 1960) was from Sri Lanka. But today out of the 225 people in the Sri Lankan parliament, there are only very few women. Even though there are more women than men in Sri Lanka, many things are still controlled by men. When we consider offices and the business field there are only a few women who work as bosses and entrepreneurs. Even today, in virtually all of the leading organizations in Sri Lanka, the highest positions are given to a man. But many women have a good education, as well as the capability of handling such organizations.

There are repressive beliefs of people who live in villages in Sri Lanka. Girls are not allowed to undertake higher studies by their parents. Some husbands do not allow their wives to work. Even today, most husbands feel women a good only for raising children and doing the housework for their husbands and children. Some daughters are not allowed to select a suitable love partner by their parents. Some men think that helping their wife with cooking or any other housework is a shameful thing for a husband. Some males hit their wives when they drink too much.

Women in western countries have the freedom to separate from men if there is no match. They can live together with other women, as well. But some women in Asian countries are forced to bear all troubles of their marriage life. Some women who have children out-of-wedlock are raising their children under immense suffering from society. Such women are shy even to enter the path of law. But today, in the legal situation, there is some justice for such women. We need to increase it. When we consider the modern society in Sri Lanka and other Asian countries this situation has changed. There are many couples who get divorced if there are any mismatching ideas among them. They have the freedom to separate.

However, the power of bearing difficulties is easier for women than for men. Even though women have to face so many troubles in their families, they can bear them. There is a good metaphor for that. When a large wind blows, the Feverfew plant is bent, and then after straightens up. The Banyan plant falls. The Feverfew plant is similar to women and the Banyan plant is similar to men. When big trouble comes to them women can bear, but males cannot bear it. They fall.

I would like to mention a fact from my own experience. I am the only child in my family. Both of my parents have looked after me with much care from childhood. They did not allow me to do anything on my own. I think I grew up under over-protection. When I was a teenager I asked for everything from my mother. After I finished my first degree and my Masters Degree, I started to work. I got to know about a scholarship advertisement from the KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency). I told my father about it. It was a notice on the Master's Degree program for government officers under the age of 40, conducted by KOICA.

My father likes very much to educate me. So he allowed me to apply for that scholarship. I faced the interview. We didn't think that I would be selected. Fortunately, I was selected for the program. It was a one and half year program. I received the approval from my office and I left for South Korea. I expended a lot of effort to finish my course there since I did not have any experience before doing my work on my own without my parents' support.

Some of my relations and friends thought I would abandon the course and come back to my country. There were several times when I thought to leave the course. I had to face COVID 19 pandemic for the first time in my life from Korea. But I was strong and successfully finished my course and graduated with a second Master's Degree from the Yonsei University Wonju Campus in South Korea. I explained this fact to point out that even though I grew up under so much protection from my parents, I was able to find my strength when I faced new opportunities alone. So then women have the power to face any type of situation in their life.

Therefore I wish to suggest that every attempt should be taken to motivate expanding attitudes towards women's role in society. I suggest giving suitable respect and freedom to women rather than giving higher or equal place to men. We should change the attitudes of humans. It should start in one's own home.

It is certain that then the whole world will become a place where women can enjoy freedom.

// #MeToo //

by Carly Heider

I refuse my right to remain silent.

Hear me scream my truth —

that I am not what happened to me,

I am not a product of damage done.

I am a woman reborn as a warrior

with a fury in her eyes, a fire in her soul,

and a will to step out of the darkness with weapons exposed.

With sturdy feet I march on to fight a battle

against the men who never learned to knock before entering,

who never learned not to take what isn't theirs.

Let my battle cry rally all of the women to join this war.

We are survivors, not victims.

We are female.

Hear us roar.

// Soar Spot //

by Allison Fradkin

At rise, WILLONA (female-identifying, open age, open ethnicity) inhabits a vacant beach.

You know something? I got sand. That's why I came to the beach. I heard they were running low. Speaking of hearing things, I wish I had some tunes. That tribute to transformation, "I Am Changing," would really hit the spot right now. Well, not the sore spot.

But I don't mind listening to the sound of my own voice. I never really noticed it before, but it's...present. Pleasant. Much more mellifluous than something off of your Greatest Hits album, which includes such scintillating singles as "Diss You Much," "Proud Marry in Haste, Repent at Leisure," and the pièce de no résistance, "You Can't Stop the Beatdown."

Except I can. I did. I stopped the beatdown. You knew my motto: Batterer up, three strikes I'm out. You'll never have the pleasure of seeing me cry anymore. Or the pain of seeing me smile. In fact, you won't see me any kind of way, ever again.

See, you thought our song went: (sings, to the tune of "My Guy" by Mary Wells) I'm tellin' you from the start / I can't be torn apart from my guy. (speaking) But see, that is unapologetically uninspiring. So on my album, which I'm calling The Very Best of Willona, the song goes (sings, to the tune of "My Guy" by Mary Wells) I'm tellin' you from the start / I can't be torn apart by my guy.

Now, I know the first time leaving is the hardest—first is the worst and all that—but once you go black-and-blue, you—I—never go back. So you might think that this is one of those "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" initiatives, that they call it escapism because it's nothing but a fantasy. But I know something you don't: I can take the y off "emergency" and put an e there instead, and then I've earned a resurgence of emergence.

Words to live by. Which is why I'm going to beat the odds my first time out. Well, maybe not beat 'em, but "overcome" just sounds so underwhelming. I got guts for days. Weeks, months, and beyond.

I can't take all the credit for my courage though. Got to give gratitude to Sofia—from The Color Purple, not The Golden Girls. Her song "Hell No," about refusing to be cruising for a bruising, is what got me to make tracks in the first place. A person hears something often enough, she starts

to believe it. She starts to repeat it. Out loud. I'd croon, you'd cringe—and criticize: "I know why the caged bird sings. She's a Maya Ange-loser. Come on now, don't pout, Willona. You know I'm only teasing, and still I get a rise out of you."

And what did I ever get out of you? Nothing but another bouquet of your sorry-not-sorry-ass flowers, the kind perfect for playing that time-honored game of "He Shoves Me, He Shoves Me Not." That's right—I'm playing games without you, and guess what? I can identify 'em. None of that baseless accusation B.S. What games was I ever playing with you, huh? Trouble? Aggravation? Pac-Man?

Well, since you neglected to specify, I picked my own game to play: Pack-Your-Bags-and-Leave-That-Man, where every woman's a winner. Let's tell 'em what we've won, ladies. (sings, to the tune of "He's Got the Power " by The Exciters) He's got no power / No power no more / Over me. (speaking) Formerly sung by The Exciters, presently sung by The Exciters. Ugh, when did I get so infuriatingly inspirational?

When I realized that I am the wind beneath my own uncaged wings.

When I realized that where there's a Will, there's a way out.

When I realized that underneath the coat of war paint I applied to the bruises was a brave face just waiting to be put on.

Someday, even when those bruises are gone but not forgotten, they'll still be souvenirs of survival, and they'll still be a sore spot with me.

But now that I'm no longer under your skin, your thumb, or your spell, I can spell that word a little differently: s-o-a-r.

Hell yes.

// Fractured: Rise //

by Tasneem Hossain

Battered, bruised swollen eyes,

Broken ribs, fractured thighs;

Psychic, macho powered, inferior, cold,

Depression seized tormented boar.

Frustrated, frightens the weaker soul.

New namesake damages indoors,

Patience preferred than flashing, endures;

Rising against the beastly scaffold,

Shameful acts of womenfolk.

Rise O' woman, even if you fail.

Show the light to the next woman in the test.

Be the light in the darkest nights,

Be the sun in the bloodiest daylight;

Be the fire in the darkest daylight.

Today or tomorrow the sun will shine.

// Free //

by Sushma R Doshi

There! said it. Firmly. With quiet conviction.

For years, my refuge had been dreaming of plans to kill him or prayers that he would die someday. The day he continually slapped me till my lips started bleeding, I dreamt of stabbing him like they did in the crime movies airing on television. Take a big blade, push it into his stomach forcefully and twist it. Then watch him and laugh with my bruised lips. The night he poured boiling water on my hands, I imagined poisoning him. I have cut him into pieces and sealed him in a body bag innumerable times. In my fantasies. A small piece for knocking two teeth out. A big piece for pushing me down the stairs and breaking my femur.

It was not the scars of the wounds but the torment of maintaining the illusion of normalcy that suffocated me. I felt like I was dying of asphyxia with a plastic bag being tightened around my head. Rising up in the morning with a black eye and swollen cheek, dragging myself to the kitchen, making tea and serving it to everybody. My father-in-law who would avert his eyes while taking the tea gingerly from the tray I would hold tightly. My mother-in-law who would pretend that there was nothing amiss.....that she didn't hear my screams and his grunts of satisfaction. My thirteen year old son, Mayank, whose scant respect for me was evident in his behavior. "You must've done something to annoy him," he once said as he brushed aside my efforts brusquely to win his sympathy. There is finally Him. Piyush, my husband, the breadwinner of the family, the master of the house, the wife beater, the abuser.

"Men are like that," my mother consoled me when I confided in her. "At least the rest of your in-laws are decent people. They've never laid a hand on you."

Really? Am I to draw comfort from the fact that the entire family didn't gang slap me?

"So....I have to wait till they all join the party and start beating me up...then...I can leave Piyush...Can I?" I asked.

My mother missed the sarcasm. She looked suitably horrified.

"Leave? Don't even think about it. You have a son...God!... How will you survive alone in this world?"

I understood Ma. She conveyed the fact that if I were to leave Piyush, I would be disowned by my father and brothers. There was no hope of finding a home with her if I were to be a divorcee. It would have been simpler if Piyush died. Widows are more acceptable in society...to be pitied.

Maybe Piyush would get a heart attack and collapse like Sharma uncle did. Every time he would travel on work, I would hope that his plane crashed. I felt guilty for not feeling guilty for my thoughts. I only felt anger...a sense of anger at my helplessness. I wasn't educated enough to find an office job. I couldn't stoop so low to become a maid... washing clothes and utensils and mopping floors in other people's houses.

I wouldn't be able to afford this lifestyle but I could manage.....maybe I could take cooking classes...teach girls how to cook, I thought as I set the dining table for lunch. A Sunday lunch when everybody would be at home and create the picture of a happy joint family eating together at the dining table. Mother-in-law and father-in-law chewing placidly. Mayank, irritable at being refused lunch in his room. Piyush, content as observed my limp.

"It's true what they say in the movies," my mother-in-law would repeat this every Sunday. "A family that eats together stays together," she would say, nodding wisely.

Moronic proverbs of Bollywood movies, I mused as I poured out the dal into the bowl for Mayank.

"Not so much," he mumbled as he fidgeted with the phone in one hand and waved me away with the other. I lost my grip on the bowl and as the bowl smashed breaking into tiny fragments on the white marble floor, the dal spilled on the table splashing on Mayank's shirt. I turned to my right to see a few drops on Piyush's shirt. There was a sudden hush ...a hush before the storm...the storm that one enjoys watching safely from behind a window glass....secure in the knowledge that the storm will only ravage those caught in it outside. Piyush sighed and leaned back on his chair.

"What am I to do with you?" he asked, softly, with mock resignation.

I suddenly felt a stinging blow on my left. I turned. Mayank standing next to me. As tall as me. Or almost. Fury on his face.

"I'll take care of her," he said. I could see Piyush smirking from the corner of my eye. The continuation of his legacy has been ensured.

That was it. That was when I knew. I swung my serving spoon across his face. He fell back toppling the chair.

"Don't you dare!" I whispered.

The expectant silence turned into shock. The storm does take an unexpected twist at times.

"I'm leaving. I want a divorce," I said.

There! I said it. Firmly. With quiet conviction.

Mayank is getting up. Shaky. Bewildered. He is my son. I love him. Perhaps he loves me. I don't know. I do know that he will not leave this house with its comforts to be with me. I accept it without resentment.

"You won't get a Rupee from me," Piyush snarls viciously.

"You won't be able to survive alone." Where have I heard that before?

I look at him. Malicious double chin. Beady frustrated eyes. I reflect on my thoughts. I realize I didn't want him dead. I wanted the power he held over me to die. The power he held in this house.

I smile as I walk out of the house into a stormless afternoon. No clothes. No money. Free.

Dal: dish made with lentils and spices.

// A Stranger's Letter //

by Amber Pineda

Dear Lady in the Mirror,

I am writing this to you in hopes that you will hear me out. I know we're practically strangers at this point, so it must feel weird to receive this relatively personal note from someone you've only seen a few times a day. But, I feel the need to say this, not just for your sake but for mine as well. You see, I've noticed something...off. You and me, we seem to be growing farther apart. This, on its own, shouldn't be a big deal, but wouldn't you know it? The discordance between us has been bothering me a lot. Has it also been this way for you? Considering how revolted you are whenever we meet, I'm assuming this is an issue only I bear, but I'd like to hear your thoughts if ever you decide to respond.

I don't remember the first time I met you. I was so young that I probably hadn't grasped the idea of mirrors yet, so I assumed you were a different person. Of course, Ma made fun of me for this. She said, "Bobo (Idiot), that's you!" It took me some time to realize that, but by 3rd grade, I think I'd gotten a good grasp of who you were and who you were supposed to be. I thought as I grew older I'd better understand this, but I only find myself growing more cautious of you. Don't take it the wrong way though! In no way, shape, or form am I trying to say you're scary. I think it's just that you're not who I expected you to be. Or, maybe you're not who I wanted you to be.

I remember when I was first added to my highschool group chat in freshman year. I attend an all-girls school, so pretty girls are everywhere. However, I only realized that when I saw the profile pictures of my classmates-to-be. It was 11:36 PM when I was added to the chat, and I woke up early that day, so I was supposed to be asleep by then.

I spent that entire night scrolling through my classmates' profile pictures, zooming in to spot any flaws then zooming out upon realizing there weren't any. That was probably the most eventful evening of my life because it was at that moment that I decided I could no longer bear to see your face. Granted, we still see each other almost every day, but each time we do, I don't feel that we're growing any closer. It's quite the opposite really; you've become an outsider to me.

It's not that you're upsetting to look at. It's just that you don't look like a lady. I attend an all-girls school, so I should know best what a lady is supposed to look like, right? After all, my classmates and I are constantly being addressed as such, but I can tell that they're not looking at me when they say it. I follow their gazes and mouths carefully whenever this happens, and after about two months of doing this, I've concluded that you aren't a lady and neither am I. It might seem weird that despite this, I've decided to call you "Lady in the Mirror," but see this as my

way of showing respect. My teachers do this too even if they know I'm not what a lady is supposed to be.

So, what is she supposed to be?

I'm sure you're wondering too, but I've got no clear answer. Ma says a lady is a maturing girl, the prerequisite to becoming a woman. We've got the "girl" part down, but "maturing" is too complex of a concept for me to describe. People have different ways to do it, but most agree that for girls, maturing means getting a period, having a bit of acne (not too much though, just enough to look adolescent), growing wider hips, attaining a thinner waist, acquiring a bigger bosom, and advancing from "cute and pretty" to "gorgeous and beautiful."

If that's what it means to mature, then I think we're babies at this point.

Listen, I want to know you. I want to understand you. I want to actually see you and realize your humanity, but whenever I try to, all I see is a frail girl, pallid and dull. I see how your arms and legs are obscured by hair, how your mustache is still untrimmed, how frizzy your hair gets in the mornings, how decrepit your eyes look in the evenings, how slender your body becomes after a skipped lunch, and how bloated it gets after a 6-hour binge. Tell me, what about this is lady-like?

I want to love you, but you've given me no reason to.

But, if there's one thing you should know about me by now, it's that I don't want to give up that easily. So, here's my idea:

Let's restart.

Let's act like the world doesn't exist right now and that time has denied us the right to know the past and present.

Let's act as though we could roam freely in our own flesh.

Let's act as though skin is just skin and gender is just gender.

Who would we be if this was how you and I met?

With ire and much warmth,

A familiar stranger

// Incense of Semen and 400 Condom Sheaths //

by Chidiebere Geoffrey Udeokechukwu

I slaved like a shaman on the streets of *Dichemso*.

Day after day, my shrine reeked
incense of semen and 400 condom sheaths—
ruffled up and dripping milk in
a rubbish bin by a window pane.

My throne was a raddled brown foam
on an iron bunk; and the nights especially,
were squeaky and mad. In those darkling
days, each night fetched handsome
dollar tributes to Madame who swore me
a bloodied oath of servitude and sex.

I was plundered without compassion by
depraved dreamy desires of men who
long had grown tired of humanity,
of Love and fidelity.

// Woman Divine //

by Rashida Aliya Stratton

Tweaked past the 3rd hour she pressed on
Feeling drained from its power thirst crept up
Swallowing life like nectar upon high
She reimagined herself
As Queen Goddess Empress a Most High
The frequency she felt
Gave her sight to see the ALL
A part of each & every
She realized she was evolving
To quantum physically create from ether
Manifesting Love & Righteousness, she is Peaceful
Destiny is hers seeing thru the ruse of Time
Spatially envisioning the bursting forth of Life sublime
Superbly existing within this current Spacetime
Focused upon her Divine Feminine rise

// Where do I go from here? //

by Lucy Gathoni Njenga

The mere thought of writing this down wells up the years of pain, confusion and the frustrated desire to get off the shackles that have been on me as long as I can remember. My mind has hardly had a chance to settle down and focus on one single thing and drive it to completion, how could it? As I sit down to write this, one part of my mind is screaming “get up and go find food for the children! They’ll not feed on words when they return from school”. While I miss them all day long, I always sink with fatigue when they finally get here...all hungry and waving letters to demand for school fees, trips or some other money-harnessing projects that the teacher may think of. They grab and swallow what’s in sight, turn the whole place upside-down then head out to play-without a single trace of worry. That’s a good thing though, it comforts to know that my children are far from experiencing what I go through every day. I feel grateful that they have overcome the loss of being abandoned by their father, and have found a way to live with that. I on the other hand have to stretch myself in all possible ways to seal the gap by fending for us all, fighting the bitterness and shielding them from the emotional outrages that catch up with me from time to time.

Unemployment has been on the rise in my country and I have not been spared. I have applied for jobs locally and even internationally in vain. Every business that I think of requires capital which is hard to come by; not with a bad credit record cropping from education loans. I keep asking myself, what am I gonna do now? Where am I gonna go from here? Should I run and abandon my children too? Or should I wait for death or go for it as well? But then something asks me, if it’s this unbearable for you, an adult of sound mind, how much worse is it going to be for your children vulnerable as they are? So, I just soldier on, not because I am strong, but because my children are weak. They are therefore the only reason I’m here. If something were to happen to them today, God forbid, then this would be the close of business for me. I would be gone early in the morning, to the land of no return. I would want no one to remember me, for what is there to be remembered for? Why would anyone want to bring back to life the pain I endured all the years of my life? Memories should be sweet I believe, otherwise they are not worth it.

When I lose track of my story, I know that I should have headed to the voice that told me to get up and do something worthwhile, because at the end of the day, I’ll be crying again. When the night is here, my sleep will go and I will gaze up wondering what tomorrow will bring. When its morning, I will ask myself again, what I’m I gonna do now? Where will I go from here? Maybe tomorrow I will be stronger, or too weak to cry. So, if tomorrow comes, it will be sufficient for itself. I feel hungry — let me see what I can eat, then clean up this place, it looks like a whole

mess! so stressful – this is one of the main ways my children kill me slowly. They turn the place into a headquarter of disorder and go off to school. This then becomes my employment, without pay! Where am I gonna go from here?

I am a slave to order. I love order. I like order in my spaces and in all I do. However, when all this is dependent on some three musketeers whose main duty is to disarrange everything and scream while doing it, where does this leave my mind? Are you surprised that I can't tell my story? Does it surprise you that I am looking for a place run to from here? Far...far away. It's just that I'll have to come back and check on them every day, feed them, tuck them in bed, wake them up in the morning, prepare them for school, tidy this place up and go find their daily food. Well, this is how I have ended up here every day, for the last sixteen years! And you know what, I feel that's enough. It's enough because, just 'how many seas must a white dove sail before she can finally sleep in the sand?' How many tears must a woman cry before she can finally draw a sigh? How many years must a mother serve before she is allowed to be free? How many times must a girl plead before she can stop being victimized and a made slave of the society? How many lifetimes must she bear the burden of her children while their fathers roam the world like scot-free winds? These ones only stop to have fun, make more babies and fly away? Why? Why? Why?

Why us? Why me? Why more baby girls? Do we really need them? If I could swing a wand of magic, I'd have all babies born from now onwards be boys. Then all the girls would grow up, age and die. The world would be left with men only; and they can forever be free to roam the world like scot-free winds, and never ever have to run away from responsibilities or abandon the fruits of their merry-making to poor women. Only then, can mothers be free!

Meanwhile, since wands of magic are only in fairy tales, can you please stretch an arm...a long functional arm, even the long arm of the law to reach the absconders of duty and enslavers of women? If you're not with them, then you must be for us. It's probably the only way to wipe our tears away, then we can clearly see where to go from here.

// Hidden Cadavers //

by Okparaoyibo Chukwuma Paul

Swollen stomach without bond
Spells doom only for me
Eyes and hiss goes beyond whispers
For a saintly whore
Street walk with the usual fallen crest
Like one going to the gallows
Starving from love and acceptance
Teaches me a new world
Of the weaker vessels wreck
With my lost lover binging with another
My sorrow glows with sunrise
Called back to duty by your bowel kicks
I promise
To stand by you till the end
Even if the stronger vessel chose not to.

Contributors' Biography

Eleanor Nesim (Wisconsin, USA): Lucky to have The Monroe Theater Guild in her Wisconsin hometown, Eleanor began acting at a young age. She later studied creative writing at the University of North Carolina Wilmington after serving in the Marine Corps. She continues to hone her skills and honor a legacy of playwrights, poets, and directors on each side of her family by participating in theater and continuing to write plays and non-fiction geared toward progress. She is a believer in the power of art to heal, and the ability of words to move. Eleanor is passionate about collaborating with other artists and helping others explore their creativity. You can find her published work on Writers Hive Media, The Things, and in Atlantis Magazine, and upcoming projects in The Colorado Women's Veterans Magazine, and Alice Says, Go F*&% Yourself.

Kendra Mills (Washington DC, USA): She lives in Washington DC and Massachusetts. She is a recipient of the Elisa Brickner Poetry Prize and her work can also be found in The Rialto, Moria Literary Magazine, and Mud Season Review.

Ali Znaidi (Tunisia): He is a Tunisian poet, writer, and translator living in Redeyef, a mining town in southwest Tunisia. Follow him on Twitter @AliZnaidi.

Niroshi Subasinghe (Sri Lanka): She is from Sri Lanka, and the only child in her family. Both her parents are retired government servants. She is also working in the government sector. She did BSc Special Degree in Export Agriculture and Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) at Sri Lankan Universities and Master's Degree in Community Development at Yonsei University, South Korea. She presented the paper on marginalized women, and the women empowerment of my district in Sri Lanka at Yonsei University South Korea.

Carly Heider (Virginia, USA): She is an emerging poet residing in small-town Virginia. She has a background in education, a passion for writing, and cares deeply about advocating for mental health resources and sexual/domestic violence awareness. Much of her poetry centers around themes of trauma and healing, overcoming hardship, and personal growth. Heider's work has been featured in several literary magazines, most recently in Coin Operated Press's "Depression Walks" magazine and annual collection. Her poem "Waves" was a poem of the day this past April on all of Gnashing Teeth Publishing's platforms. Heider's work can also be found in an edition of The Blue Nib literary magazine, as well as the Freshwater Literary Journal. She holds a bachelor's degree in education from Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, as well as a master's degree in creative writing from Southern New Hampshire University. When she is not writing poetry, Carly keeps busy with friends and family, is a loyal dog-mom, and works full-time providing student support for an online business degree program.

Allison Fradkin (Illinois, USA): she/ her creates poetry, plays, and prose that (sur)pass the Bechdel Test and enlist their characters in a caricature of the idiocies and intricacies of insidious isms. An enthusiast of inclusivity, visibility, and accessibility, Fradkin freelances for her hometown of Chicago as Literary Manager of Violet Surprise Theatre, curating new works by queer playwrights; and as Dramatist for Special Gifts Theatre, adapting scripts for actors of all abilities.

Tasneem Hossain (Bangladesh): She is a multilingual writer of poems, op-ed and fiction writer, translator and a professional HR trainer. She has published two poetry books and a book of articles: The Pearl Necklace and Floating Feathers. The book of articles Split and Splice consists of her published articles. She did her Masters in English Language and Literature from Dhaka University. She is the Director of the Continuing Education Centre, an HR development consultancy firm in Bangladesh. A faculty in Bangladesh Institute of Technology, Chittagong, she also worked in radio Bangladesh as English newscaster, commentary reader and interviewer for ten years.

Sushma R Doshi (India): She completed her graduation in History from Loreto College, Kolkata. She went on to acquire a Master's degree, MPhil and PhD in International Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Currently, she resides in India and dabbles in writing fiction and poetry.

Amber Pineda (Guam): She is a rising junior in Dededo, Guam. She currently works as an intern for the Pacific Daily News and attends the Academy of Our Lady of Guam. Her work has been featured in the Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine, Belladonna Comedy, Haven Comedy, and red rose thorns magazine. To Amber, writing is a vessel through which the voiceless are voiced.

Chidiebere Geoffrey Udeokechukwu (Nigeria): He is an Igbo Nigerian lawyer. He was an Editor for Cicero's Brief (A student run literary periodical; then published by the Judiciary Arm of the Students' Union Government, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus). He is a review writer for Writers Space Africa, a Nonfiction reader for Carve Magazine, a poetry reader for Sepia Quarterly, a poetry editor for The Crusaders Magazine, and very recently, a poetry editor again, for Flare Journal. His poems have appeared in Irawo Poetry Anthology, Writers Space Africa Magazine, Small Leaf Press (Jaden) Magazine and Poetic Africa.

Rashida Aliya Stratton (Pennsylvania, USA): she a poet, singer, lyricist, writer, working on her first Audio Spoken Word Poetry E-book. She is accomplishing what she has always dreamt of doing: assisting humanity in overstanding government implementation and inner-standing how to stay above their human decimating antics using spoken-sung-written word with spiritual-physical-mental healing teachings. She is determined to contribute to the unification of humanity.

Lucy Gathoni Njenga (Kenya): She is a 39-year old Kenyan lady and a mother of three. She has a degree in Language & Literary Studies and has worked as a freelance writer and editor in various fields. Her main interests are in addressing issues affecting people, especially children living in unfavorable conditions -poverty, violence, negligence and abuse among others. She is also deeply touched by women who undergo strenuous marriages, violence and divorce and have to deal with issues that could push them to depression or worse. Above that, she is a pro-lifer stands for life from conception to natural death.

Okparaoyibo Chukwuma Paul (Nigeria): He was born on the 20th of August 1995 in Benin City, Edo state and a student at the University of Benin. He is a Nigerian and lives in Edo state.

Curator's Bio (Nigeria): Mahbubat K. Salahudeen, IHRAF 2022 Youth Fellow is a genre-bending writer from Southern Nigeria who has an interest in fictional prose and confessional poetry. Her works have featured/ forthcoming at Ake Review, Better than Starbucks, Brittle Paper, Northern Otter Press, Cathartic Review, Euphoric Musings, Livina Press and elsewhere. She's on Twitter @SMahbubat