

*Because success has many names  
And failure is one.*

*- Jeje Oluwasola*

# BEAUTY OF FAILURE

*(Collection of top entries of Beauty of  
Failure Poetry Contest)*

Edited by Funso Oris

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*(Collection of top entries of Beauty of Failure poetry  
contest)*

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## FOREWORD

“Still, you must value yourself for who you are, / not for how well you satisfy the needs of others.” - Paul Brucker

“Fail but never fail to live before you leave; leaves do live -green- before they leave – grey” - Alexander Izang

“Fell and stumbled, picked up scars, / cried and carried on, then carried on.” – Casmir Derengowski

I recall vividly an experience that happened to me in May of 2018. I failed an examination by 6 points. Just **6 points** – the months of preparation, research and financial investment came to a sudden halt by the shortage of 6 points. It was shocking, rudely too. I had never failed a professional examination until that day. It was more devastating because I was confident that I would excel at the examination, judging from the experience of a more difficult one I had passed when I was not even as experienced. I was moody and disturbed; but I vowed to myself that I would retake the examination and must pass with higher scores. While I am yet to retake it, I sat for a more prestigious certification examination the following month and passed with such a high score – 94%. I began this foreword by sharing a personal experience of failure and the resolve to prevail irrespective of a previous fail. If I had defined me by the shortage of 6 points, I might not have had enough courage to have had 14% score more than what was required to have a globally recognized elite credential behind my name.

The call to poets to explore the theme, *beauty of failure*, is fueled by the need to bring panacea to an artistic community lately defined by rejection, depression, suicidal ideation, and in some very tragic cases, suicide. There is a deliberate intention here to show that being a writer is not an immunity from failure or many of life’s vicissitudes and certainly not a canonization for depression. It is human to fail; just like the infant whose first steps are marred by repeated falls – and must continue to take each step till s/he is able to run miles into adulthood. I am fully aware of the argument that depression is not just a momentary bout of sadness hyped by an *experience* or *sense* of failure, that it is a loss of control of one’s mental health. Those who hold this ideal are not only sincere in their conclusion but also demonstrate how suicidal behavior is an extension of the inability to adequately treat depression and other mental illnesses. As one who has done extensive research in mental illnesses and causative triggers, I have come to realize that societal definition of success – acceptance, validation, fulfilment, etc. and demonization of failure –

rejection, inability, no-good, weakness, etc. are often contributory to depression and suicidal behaviors.

To foreground this argument, using the example of a baby, no parent would mock or condemn a baby for falling when the first step is taken. There is encouragement to keep trying. However, let's look at it differently – imagine that the parent mocks the child for failing and tells him/her that s/he is a failure for not being able to walk at the first attempt – is it even thinkable? Perhaps, not. However, why is it that an experience of failure becomes an identity that drives a sense of depression and inadequacy? It is not surprising that most of the poets who contributed to this anthology explore failure from the angle of rejection, more specifically, rejection of artistic works. It is illuminating to share their personal experiences of failure and more inspiring to learn how they have turned these into an inspiration for success. I invite you to explore this collection of beautiful poems as we find answers to some of the questions eating deeply into the core of our coexistence.

Allan Lake's "Café Near Church, Sicily" captures the contrast between hope and loss in a very existential way, using a funeral procession to juxtapose human realities. The poem sets the context for a larger discourse – man's aspirations, satisfaction, socialization, commercialization, capitalization and termination. Despite the experience of death – a metaphor for failure to continue to live, a pallbearer checks into a café to buy a lottery ticket – an action that signifies hope despite the reality of being surrounded by death and addiction to tobacco and gambling. The experience of failure, as part of daily life, is captured in Trish Hopkinson's "Ode to My Mess". Using the metaphor of smashed eggs and shattered bottles, Trish shows us how simple things mirror failure, loss and sadness. The reality of life and setbacks runs through Floyd Cheung's "Interval". The poem describes how we experience life and living differently, while focusing on the momentariness of failure. These poems, like many others, remind us that we do not need to make a *failure* larger than life – rather, we need to "salvage ourselves" by gently lifting our remains after every mishap.

One can argue that dropping a box of beer is not as devastating as a rejection from a publisher or loss of a job. While such argument holds a *kind* of merit, all sense of loss or failure is tangible to the affected person. There are many reasons why a poem, prose or play is rejected, by extension many of life's failures, it is not the rejection that should be celebrated, but the inspiration from such. We should not define our lives by another person's opinion of us. Abdus-Salam Shehu asks "*what do we see in lines and stanzas that makes them perfect? / when they are just the written failure of our feelings / our only hope of expression //*". While still pondering the wisdom of Shehu, Paul Brucker sheds insight into the mind of those who often reject others: "*It may hurt, but it's time you realized / that you'll never get what you want. / Still, you must value yourself for who you are, / not for how well you satisfy the needs of others.*" Joseph Babalola shares a similar, "*we hope you don't consider us next time / for we will ever be unable to match up / with whatever masterpiece you pull out*". The twist, satirical of the blindness of rejectors, points to a self-awareness of the persona as one who

realizes his ability not through the lens of strangers. These poets remind us of the subjectivity behind adjudging others; hence, the need to turn their momentary opinion into motivation, as Temmy Jake declares audaciously: *“i learnt that failure is the wind that pushes me out of my comfort zone/ i broke grounds/ i broke through fearlessly because i learnt no one should determine my strengths or weaknesses/ thank you for showing me that I could move past my rejection/ yours a thriving boy/ against many odds.”*

Sometimes, we still get trapped in the memorialization of failure. Perhaps, this is where depression is connected with memory. The parts of the brain that share connection between depression and memory include the amygdala and hippocampus. While *“some memories are innocuous wounds”* as Emmanuel Chibuzo puts, it takes a conscious effort to memorialize an experience of failure till it becomes a sense of failure, graduating into an identity of failure – the state of hopelessness and helplessness. Jeje Oluwasola draws our attention to the effect of memorializing failure: *“And when we lag our breath into rest, like recoiling into shell of memories / We won’t know the journey to success is plagued by failures.”* He argues that overindulgence in the memory of a failed experience clouds our judgment from realizing that failure is part of life and living. His shift from being inundated by a sense of helplessness to one of preparation through *“rigorous rehearsals”* is central to understanding the beauty of failure. It is a conscious effort to consistently improve oneself till one achieves success – this is true as Emmanuel opines, *“what bends a body towards will is the concept of physics. I mean. / What we call a physical or chemical reaction can assail us to defeat.”*

The emphasis on choice to become battered or beatified by failure cannot be overstretched. I have once argued in private conversations that there is an element of choice in depression. There is no denying that certain experiences have life changing effects, the concerning issue is the rejection of help, refusal to rehearse till skills are honed and the deliberate acceptance of defeat as the only reality. The hunger for success despite hurdles is central to Tukur Ridwan’s poem: *And because there are doors left untouched, / we keep knocking each the same way / heaven’s doorbells are ringed to find / redemption as an eventual ‘yes’*. Such fierce resignation to success is the impetus behind Casmir Derengowski’s lines: *“travelled every detour. laughed at risk, defied danger / learned everything the hard way, or not at all. / Looking back now. I am only grateful / that I was smart enough to take the long way home.”* Tanimonure Adewale’s “The Food” provides true life account of people who dared to turn their failures into legacies. The poet declares, *“on; strong; stubborn. On!”*, daring the odds and hurdles, *“even if the sun is the brightest thing”* to boast of, as Chinedu Nzere recounts of boys who survive their pains in his poem. Anu Soneye captures this resolute desire to achieve success, to be progressively ambitious in his poem, “Sand Castles”, *“Give me a whole life time and I will still build / just enough sand castles. / Just enough to make the / wind rage and power a nation of real castles”*.

The *Beauty of Failure* is a collection of poems that address failure from a multidimensional perspective. While none of the poet denies the impact of failure, they argue strongly to learn from it, turning it to motivation for success. These are poems of hope, choice, self-acceptance and pursuit of greatness. While they are not a cure to depression, these poems make the case for an alternative to depression and suicidal ideation due to failed dreams. I invite the reader to explore each poem one at a time, as this collection holds timely truths

that will always be applicable no matter the challenge in life. Remember, *to fail is human, to prevail is choice!*

- *Funso Oris*







## Games

### JEJE OLUWASOLA

Whenever we break mouth, trying to sing songs on a phase beyond the stars

We are humbled and light like sitting on a leaf toyed by the will of the breeze

And when we lag our breath into rest, like recoiling into shell of memories

We won't know the journey to success is plagued by failures

Road filled with obstacles like river of fire & wall of deception & mountains of fear  
& broken bottles & thorns

Because life is older than us with these things on her shoulder

We run a path darker than our skin

But when we fall, we earn more coins to jump a ditch again and glide on a sea of  
lethal waves

We keep gaming life and breaking levels

Because success has many names and failure is one

So, when you drop like a fruit, it makes you grow into a tree

Like hiding your body beneath the earth

Like rigorous rehearsals that unravel blemish in closet

And winners failed many times behind the scene to become stronger

Because winning cup is designed by successful failures taming furnace

## Cafe Near Church, Sicily

ALLAN LAKE

A mere meter from our cafe table: a hearse,  
then matching men who shoulder expensive  
casket, guide corpse into church. After solemn  
delivery of coffin, some cough as part of job  
done, they relax with customary cigarettes.  
Spectators gone to funeral, they're not furtive,  
could not care less about cafe patrons, drop  
still-smoking butts onto the piazza as if they'd  
never been engaged. One strolls to Tabaccheria  
with public ashtray outside entrance, for fresh  
pack. They also sell gum and mints, of course.  
Ever hopeful, he also buys a lottery ticket.  
Say Goodbye to the dead, your euros and health  
all in one charming central location.

Thank you for submitting to our journal, but ...

PAUL BRUCKER

We always open the envelope, hoping to discover a gem ~  
a fresh insight, something that will justify or thrill us.

But, after a little fretting and ringing of hands,  
and much serious discussion  
that reaffirmed our tastes and criteria, we agreed  
we are unable (i.e. unwilling) to publish your “poem.”

We never heard of you, nor will our readers.

But we can tell you are a “special” boy  
who is not special enough ~  
the guy the high school literary teacher encouraged  
to write about his fears, truths and longings.

And it doesn't matter  
whether your mother loved you,  
or whether you're more sad or lonely than us.  
It doesn't matter that you're the most intent listener during poetry readings  
or whether you wrote 20 drafts, searching for the perfect words  
(and somebody said your voice is moving – if not brilliant).

We receive 3,000 submissions each issue  
and accept approximately 1.5%.  
Too bad you paid 83 cents for a self-addressed envelope  
so we could return your “poem” (which we recycled in the round file).

It may hurt, but it's time you realized  
that you'll never get what you want.  
Still, you must value yourself for who you are,  
not for how well you satisfy the needs of others.

Good luck finding a home for your “poem” elsewhere.

By the way, if you want to see what real poetry is,  
we encourage you to subscribe to our magazine  
– a real steal for \$20. Our themes for the next two issues:  
“death and redemption” and “a penny for your thoughts.”

## Interval

FLOYD CHEUNG

during every run at ages 49 and 15

at some point

I fall behind

my son pulls ahead

until he loops back

I sprint to meet him

call it an interval

## What she said at the seaside

SHEHU, ABDUS-SALAM ALADODO

she was sitting at the seaside / legs crossed / eyes on the turbulent waves like she  
had it on her rejected manuscript / wondering which part of it was not soothing to  
the editor //

if it is that the words are not so deep / Rumi's word are not too deep either / If it is  
that the imageries are not well painted / would you have known if I ran out of  
brush? / If it is that the rhymes are forced / do you know how much my pains  
choke me?

what do we see in lines and stanzas that makes them perfect? / when they are just  
the written failure of our feelings / our only hope of expression //

## How i turned my rejection into inspiration

TEMIDAYO JACOB

dear first rejection letter/ it was like yesterday when you crept into my mailbox like darkness/ i couldn't define my emotions because you looked beautiful & you carried no subject of failure/ my eyes couldn't wait to take off your robes/ my fingers couldn't wait to tap into the words you carried/ honestly/ the way you wrote my name after /dear/ looked like how it is written in book of life/ you took my breath away when you appreciated me for firing my shots like a soldier/ how you thanked me for my submission made me see myself as a submissive husband material/ i blushed myself into wild thoughts/ did you know you made me collapse when you told me you regret to announce that you'd have to walk past me for now because i did not taste good/ did you know i started to see myself as a mere shadow when you told me you had many suitors but you couldn't chose me/ sometimes/ i wonder why you wished me luck in finding home in the body of another when i saw myself as miscarriage/ there is something about failure that tears & stitches a soul at the same time/ i learnt failure is exposure/ i learnt that failure is the wind that pushes me out of my comfort zone/ i broke grounds/ i broke through fearlessly because i learnt no one should determine my strengths or weaknesses/ thank you for showing me that I could move past my rejection/ yours a thriving boy/ against many odds

## Sand Castles

ANU SONEYE

Give me a day and I would build a sand castle.  
The wind will come by silently sweeping away the rooms,  
then the orchard, the pen,  
then the garden of sand roses, then my sand gate.

Give me a month and I will build a hundred sand castles.  
The wind will surely come by to sweep off the cone roof  
that shelters my queen and alas, break down the  
sandbones of my princesses.

Give me a year and I will build a million sand castles.  
The wind will wipe it off with a single whirl.

Give me a whole life time and I will still build-  
just enough sand castles.  
Just enough to make the  
wind rage and power a nation of real castles.



TRISH HOPKINSON POET

Today I dropped a carton of eggs handing it from grocery sack  
to refrigerator shelf, the carton spread in half, upside down  
on the floor—all but two burst, the insides

spreading, the yolks hovering suns on gray tile.

There's sadness in such mess, the wasted protein, a hen's hard work  
spilled and spoiled to be mopped up with paper towels

tossed in the waste basket, shells crushed. In the same way  
six bottles of beer smash on garage concrete—glass scattered  
in sticky, foamy mash. This mess, not as simple—

sopping up, sweeping, splintered finger and palm,  
getting the garden hose. Only one survived—that is, I drank it  
while disposing the rest. Not in celebration, but to save and preserve.

Do we salvage ourselves this way? Gently lift the remains,  
open the spared but cracked eggs into a bowl to store safely away,  
return to purchase more, relax our throats and tongues, drink in what's left.

## Portrait of a body nursing closed wounds

EMMANUEL CHIBUZO

There is no one way into knowing grief. What matters is how it is bended to will.

Often, My body talks me into wars. I'm reminded that turning the cheek to slaps is not peace.

What stretches me from something into everything is abrasion.

I know you would want to know why. A woman puts a fist into her mouth to stifle silence,

That's to say, she wants to gag the failure trying to stretch everything back to the ordinary.

Sometimes, I imagine if I put myself in a corner of my mind

I would quicken my body & make it live with natural immunity.

But you know some memories are innocuous wounds.

I know this because there is no one way into knowing grief.

What bends a body towards will is the concept of physics. I mean.

What we call a physical or chemical reaction can assail us to defeat.

Days like this, I'm learning how to overcome my conflicts.

My father reads an old poem of mine but still proclaims me unfit.

I fold myself & watch it recline certain things away from me

my body brings me back when it takes me on a loneless journey

& My shadows run after me when I will my body towards accepting love after the break of dawn.

A scathe managed offers stars.

BELLO SODEEQ

When we were still newbies in this sinful district  
they named us unsullied creature —  
immaculate without an iota of misdeed -  
and juxtaposed our pureness with that of a heavenly emissary  
they said we harboured light brighter than  
the beamful dawn, electrified mall & lucent crystals  
but I only mock their words because the little me  
knew of those blemishes that abounded  
yes! stain is constant, tincture is real & spot is inevitable  
if being flawless robs us of failure's taste  
then we can't feel the savory aura of its accomplice - success  
one day, I saw a warrior, battered & stabbed  
still his eyes were replica of merry — chamber of cheers  
he said, “heroes find joy in stars wrapped in scathe  
because success is a moniker for prettified scars.”

## Glass Painting

JAYATI MAITY

Deliciously dreamt lines of Perfection

Haunts

Empty nights screening the Screen;

SCREAMING...

Midnight lakes, crumpled flakes,

Flailing earphones...

The walls, gazed at, gaze back,

Embracing the bottled shadows in their gaze...

Broken shards of a tired world are strewn....

Breathing new colors, the figures are sewn

Caressed and Healed.

The arts of the worlds, multiple, parallel, forever,

Battling the sombre void of The Hollow

Born and reborn in this life, in every life, in all lives

Eternal....

## Do not pull off your body

ADEWARA JOSES

Today, we found Michael's body on a map,  
where lashes of whip and pool of tears met.  
I heard that was the confluence of failure.  
So, he wrote to Mum about punctuating life, by pulling off his body.

And she replied him:

"My son, wear your body – like a king,  
then every lash of the whip will be a crutch to your innocence,  
every pain on your butt will scream an alarm to your feet,  
channelling them to the library,  
paving an escape route from class teacher's whip – tomorrow,  
and you'll smile when your innocence starts growing wings,  
and when the green future blooms.  
Son, do not pull off your body".

*Love from Mum.*

## Untitled

### DIVINE OGONNA

You call it tears, I call it pearls  
Grown from weeds 'stead of flowers  
You call it pierce, I call it prize  
For gold to be must be first fired  
You fear to fail - the leap to light  
Life is but a trapped maze  
When only the fallen rise  
And every darkness light illuminates  
Examine the sky and see  
Follow not the rule of gravity  
For this wilt be thy beginning  
In thy moment of bliss  
For this is the fate for crown  
That success demands loud.

light years, at bay

KOFI ANTWI

and doom. what is preordained – pardon a  
sea of regrets, an interval. let us  
enter the 36 chambers perplexed as  
comprehension fleets or is absent; the  
soul is questioned, solace riddles a poet,  
love is love and or war – bargains power,  
the tide submerges our faults, we dance  
and toil the fruit, we bear witness,  
tranquility, november (the 21<sup>st</sup> day), before  
men feast, we prepare the table, in  
abundance – of laughter & joy, there is an  
art to poetry and assembling the gods, a  
crescent smile suspends the perpetual  
sky, and space prolongs fixtures

## Subtle things

### FAME ODEY

Sometimes, you walk into a corked night  
and bury your dreams into its potruberance  
you fall bereft of holding fast to your broken ego  
and when the clock ticktocks, your heart roosts of fedorentos  
you hold death on a knife and wish to stab your shadow  
thinking maybe to suicide world, you'd become another mallow  
you carry your heart on your burnt tongue  
and wish to spit miseries on your rejectors  
there are voices telling you to quit  
to a world where subtle things do not exist  
you become a ship on the surface of the sea  
yet thirsty like pebbles in Sahara's tits

but before been broken

kindly answer this...

does a ship go thirsty while still on the surface of the sea?



## History of fire

OLABODE DAHUNSI

My grandmother's lung is parched  
with waters of ruins &  
her eyes are a moon soaked with blood  
her tongue stammers with the history of failed language.

Today, she is wearing a morose face.

I once asked her,

"How can fire make ocean burn bridges? How does a butterfly seek for safety in fire?

Why didn't you suck out the pain that drowned my Father's dream?

What is the beauty of failure?"

She said;

"beauty of failure is weightless -

It's about digging the sands before touching the sky

maybe my mouth is a fire that chews mysteries

but there is beauty in failure;

twice broken, three times more powerful."

what i wrote & pasted at the back of my door

ADESINA AJALA

my leg enters my other leg,  
& i sprawl on the rocky ground,  
the child in me rises like yeasted dough —  
a baby must learn the art of walking;  
because destiny is a destination with distance.

failure is not that i've failed,  
it is i honing my skills like an apprentice;  
mastering my way to the light,  
it is i in the lab of success;  
becoming.

the man in me shall fall, rise, fall & rise:  
i'm just measuring my wings by the wind,  
i mean to say i'm plotting waves on my coordinates,  
& you'll be constrained to calculate my wavelength;  
the lambda [ $\lambda$ ] of my reach because i'll reach far.

Last night, mother took me to a dark room & showed me the  
scars on her body where light glowed with blinding radiance.

She said scars are my only heritage, and in my walk to the seat  
of those who are not tired of falling, they would be my candles.

Failure, she said, is my father's name. My father —black incense,  
stumbling nomad of a downtrodden tribe, battered — bruised,  
but standing again like sprouting stump at the return of rain.

God said, 'let there be light' but darkness still lurks in the crevices  
of creation. And somehow, I know that even God once failed.

So, when I look into the mailbox, into my pockets, into my body  
and other places where failure had become an identity, I smile  
because darkness itself is beauty, and a rejection is a mistuned  
song, falling into place. Failure is a damp cloth, hope dries it up.

## The food

TANIMONURE RICHARDS ADEWALE

Darwin. Gardener. Canfield. Jordan.  
Chaplin. Sanders. Seinfeld. Cuban.

stars that sparkled  
so bright in the sky,  
how they shone good  
from grey waters of eye!

stillbirths! the grief night  
of their wondrous glow.  
stillbirths! what steel heart  
they fed of it to go

on; strong; stubborn. on!

child, take your pain, eat,  
a soldier of heart;  
go! bold! don't! spill  
your tears to cheers. what stunned earth!

## Beauty of Failure

### DANLADI NENGA

We've treaded this path for long

dancing to the rhythm played on our own backs.

Painfully, our skins have been forged into maps leading nowhere but the very beginning of another failure.

And our feet, familiar with the journey that has housed our emotions and tears into becoming what we are.

A thousand and one attempts,

a thousand and two, success is a cold day in hell.

but these dreams will not become carcasses shelved in monuments of failure.

for only in this, we are refined.

only in this, the essence of beauty is carved out.

# The story of the girl who remained but chose not to stay or a therapy session with the boy who drowned

ABDULRAHIM HUSSANI

—How did the memory reduce you to tears?

she was like Tituba— dark/ bulbous eyes/

an encyclopedia of spells for a tongue

—How did you drown?

she emerged from the groove/ he saw/ petals sprang from broken places

he never examined/ the depths/ glass shards/ bloody

—How did they find the body?

the men who knew the patois of water

plunged in/ searched/ returned/ empty palms

—What is the anatomy of grief?

a stallion galloping in the dark/ an empty shelf forgotten inside a boy

—Tell me where it hurts the most?

how do you break dawn/ sweetness snatched/ how do you rise?

—Will you survive?

now he's free/ he'll enter dawn/ dew on his tongue

## Dream again, live again

ALEXANDER IZANG

Boy, life is irregular like the lines of this poem- hope straightens it

The 'f' in Life stands for failure, take it away and life is a lie

It is also faith, take it away and life is a grand scale failure

A wise man said, failure is the best matter for success

I believed him not until I became a student of despair

Hear my story of how I became the sun that shines even after an eclipse

I was no Luther, but I had a dream big enough to move the souls of men

But on its way to reality it had a fatal accident - disfigured in body and soul

I enrolled into despair, almost to graduate into suicide

Then the counsel returned- failure is the best matter; sleep, dream again to live again

In a sleep that is not death I dreamt again- bigger than Luther's

A dream so strong, failure resistant, strong to move all things to its bidding

now the dream is awake- full of life - standing on the medal podium

Boy, fail all you would but never fail to receive the Holy Grail - after the jeer comes the cheer

Boy, fail but never fail to live before you leave; leaves do live -green- before they leave - grey

Dear failure

AKIMANA DIVINE

When all seems to be going smooth,  
I feel rough hands scratching my door,  
I wake up to dialogue with you  
Dear failure, you whispered in my ear with  
A loud yelling scary sound, I trembled but learnt  
I screamed to my grave, I stumbled to my failing  
Remaining legs, walked to the school you sent me  
Hoping I would chase you away and here you are.

Dear failure, I treasure you enough to know  
You will not break the foundation made with an  
Oak. Keep knocking, I open because you sent me to schools  
Which give me gold to add to my silver, pound to my dollar

You beautify my world with strength, equip me with  
Shield, you dress me with confidence, you sail me with success  
Dear failure, we are not enemies rather, you are my mentor. You push my limits.



## Boys and Easter baskets

ROBERT GIBBONS

She asked me to sit in the high chair to take an Easter picture  
I did not like taking pictures with a basket. My mom begged me  
to take that picture, boys and baskets full of eggs; full of color.  
She asked me to close my eyes to think of something beautiful. I could not,  
only a gigantic mosquito in Georgia; the kind we would exterminate,  
as big as a bumblebee that stung my brother in the top of his bald head.  
He had a mountain of flesh for weeks. We made fun of him, boys can be  
so violent to other boys, life can be such a detriment when there are  
the unforgiving.

She sucks this out of me; some of my life. My history with the clinking  
of tubes that became petri-dishes; became saucers at the bottom  
of coffee cups; did not want to be grown; did not want to be mature  
as I winced; trying to convince myself it would be over, boys and Easter  
baskets. My life flowed into plastic container and then she placed cotton  
on the spot and it was not over.

## The Journey

KATHY LUNDY DERENGOWSKI

I think I stepped in every puddle that my mother warned me about,  
had to hear the splash, had to feel the mud  
took every short cut that made trips longer  
climbed every fence designed to keep me out  
explored every canyon, challenged every crevasse  
fell and stumbled, picked up scars,  
cried and carried on, then carried on.  
travelled every detour. laughed at risk, defied danger  
learned everything the hard way, or not at all.  
Looking back now. I am only grateful  
that I was smart enough to take the long way home.

## Shoppers for a Dress

PASITHEA CHAN

Have you ever been to a mall of ideas;  
a place where you try out themes not dresses?  
The dressing rooms have emails for padlocks  
with editors for mirrors and rejections for sizes!  
We are all poets using pens to shape ideas  
like dresses to win publishers' eyes for prizes.

Restrained with lines and times, themes  
are hot issues minus politics and personal narratives.  
You either ride the wave or forget your dreams  
because ticking boxes creates rooms not what ifs.  
It seems rejection is success' coffee cups hiding in failure's seams.  
No surprise there, writing is a road for those who dare:

To spin inspiration's loom until an idea blooms  
into a dress that allures from a pen that consumes  
rejection that presumes all shoppers for a dress are fleeting perfumes.

## The beauty of failure

MOINAK DUTTA

Fail I alone?

Why, the engineer fails,

The doctor too,

When a bridge collapses

Or a patient leaves this earth

Without any cure!

The statesman fails everyday

Most blatantly,

He says what he does not see

And lies he dwells on

Every moment which is gone;

The lawyer fails,

In cases with merit,

The oppressor rejoices

The victim does with gloomy face sit;

The God even fails too!

When evil wins over the just,

Phew!

Every attempt is a journey to perfection

ADEYEYE OLUWATOBI

(I say failure is a prospect, an instructor who teaches men how to become fitter and stronger for life's journey?

I don't know Who told you that success is the first draft of a song coursing from your stormy mind

But I know failure is its colour  
& here, colours ,to me, are

-friends who tell you how weak you are -  
Like an infant learning to walk, unfit, weak

- Is a mother who reminds you on how close you are to success  
She teaches you ways to patch your broken pieces together each time you mispronounce your name fighting storms

She makes you see failure as a journey to perfection

& she folds herself into words of encouragement to strengthen you  
Till your bone of attempts becomes strong enough to withstand failure

& withstanding failure is success

## Passage

### TERRY BORDAN

I live in the land of “used to be”.

It is so far from the country “I was”.

I would walk in a room when I “used to be” and others would stop

And pay homage to my words and carriage.

Troops standing at the ready.

Am I still an “is”?

A dog licks my hand and looks at me

With eyes that invite more, much more from me.

But I am emptier than I “used to be”.

It’s not confusing because I felt much fuller when I “used to be”.

I am told that the “used to be” road meets up somewhere with “I am”.

It’s a crooked path to “I am” but I am lost and hope it is not too far.

There is pain in our invisibility.

I want to get to “I will” but first must traverse my “used to be”.

Is there a fellow traveler to help me? Another “used to be”?

We can help each other figure out the “what” of “I am”.

It may be easier to master the what of “we are” if we stick it out together.

One club, two no-trump, three spades, and four hearts are part of our battle cry.

Mahjongg, canasta, book clubs, and more

Is this what “I am”; it can’t be.

I cry out for more.

I won't despair; I am not resigned.

"Used to be's" of the world unite.

"I am" may be better than "I used to be".

It's so very different I know.

Yet we will get to "I will", I promise.

We must.

## Beauty of Failure

OLUBOLA ADEPOJU

Darkness dives in like a hurricane,  
Paving its way in the ocean of the mind,  
Wrapping the brain in the cocoon of weariness,  
The Whys unending,  
Impossibilities roaring on the mountain of failure,  
But there's a lion in you,  
One that would stand boldly on the mountain,  
That would turn the failure around,  
One that would use it to its advantage,  
To get a better view,  
To dare, to learn,  
To soar and climb to a greater height,  
By unraveling the puzzle,  
Rejoice, set THAT lion loose.



## When we fail to fail

AYOBAMI OLUWATOSIN

We only fail when we fail to fail

For how do we know what was a success

If we didn't first know what was a failure?

We only fail when we fail to fail

For there is no right way

If there hadn't been a wrong way

We only fail when we fail to fail

For this so called 'failure' is just an insufficient success

An extra effort will push those failed attempts to success' limelight

If we do not go weary of hammering

If we do not stop sowing morn, noon and night,

Knowing we do not fail until we fail to fail

For herein is the irony

The more we fail the closer we are to success

Our real failure then comes when we fail to fail.

## Flood\_survivors\_rebuild

MARK HEATHCOTE

What happens when your house  
Becomes a riverboat?  
That neither sinks or swims  
With the current or float.

House, that's a watershed  
Watermark of pure dread.  
How do you look ahead?  
Heart wells with deep-regret.

But somehow you'll find strength  
Pull together, make amends.  
Whatever catastrophe-  
Brings, whatever portends.

Flood survivors rebuild  
Stand shoulder to shoulder  
Disasters internship  
Makes them stand together  
Soldier on twice as strong.

## Failure is not the end of life

EBUBE ANOCHILI

Am I good enough?

Am I buried deep in my own dirt?

Are the webs of my faults blocking my path to greatness?

Am I so inconspicuous that even the wind doesn't whisper to me?

Is there light, just a spark, at the end of this tunnel?

Will my fears keep me trapped in my castle of failures?

Will they make me dine eternally with my demons?

Do I take a sip from my cup of sniper or dive and dine with the fishes?

Will I be lost forever?

Whatever we do, let's not forget that failures are a part of life.

Whatever you did, or think you've done, there's redemption.

Don't stay down, don't let depression steal you from yourself.

Get up, try again, Kindle your light even in the tunnel before you get to the end.

Break yourself free from that castle.

Believe in yourself, believe you will succeed and you will.

Re: final rejection

JOSEPH OLAMIDE BABALOLA

Dear Mr. Possible,

for being hit the fiftieth time

but never broken a bit

we appreciate the chance to consider you

we value how much effort you've put into this

unfortunately, you're not quite a fit for us

your resilience is five-star, we're sorry to

disappoint you—after much consideration

we will have to pass on your greatness this time

we are sure—no longer hoping—that

you've found a worthy home to lodge

your undeniably strong-rich essence

we hope you don't consider us next time

for we will ever be unable to match up

with whatever masterpiece you pull out

## Beauty of failure

*(An acrostic)*

AJEIGBE OLUWATOMIWA ISAIAH

Beauty, they say, is in the beholder's eyes.

Even though your eyes deny it,

All you see are ugly manifestations of truth,

Underlining the thought that you are not good enough.

This time, maybe you'll breakdown and stop trying,

Yielding to the voices of despair in your head.

*Or you may try again,*

*For those who fail and try again have another chance at winning.*

Failure is a stepping stone,

A stimulant that says you can do better.

In every disappointment,

Lies a lesson learnt and experience acquired.

Until you learn to get up when you fall,

Rejection will continue to push you deeper into depression.

Every writer has a masterpiece in his head & failure is the only tool that can extract it.

## Rejection

ADENIRAN JOSEPH

this world is worried  
about herself:  
so, don't beg her not to cry.  
we are lonely children dancing  
in the rain like the guts of dust  
don't tell us to stop because pain  
is what makes us feel alive again.  
we have been rejected by many countries  
they tell us that we wear the wrong body  
like cloth, that's why we are fat sometimes  
& this body doesn't have size limit  
so, we carry the burden for many years  
smiling like a happy river flowing through rough  
hills. don't tell us failure is the end of the world  
because the best way to die is to live more.

## Never ever give up

### BABS DELE

When life throws at you its puzzle  
And there's no way to dazzle,  
When you fight endless war of rage  
And you feel like quitting the race,  
When disasters unseen by the seers  
Make your eyes flooded with tears,  
When you're tormented with pains  
Abasing your body like torrents of rain,  
When tough times come like hurricane  
And you don't have strong barricade,  
When the calamities of life fill the head  
And there's total eclipse of the mind,  
When you feel knocked down and out  
And there's no foresight for breakout  
When the light on a bright sunny day becomes darkness  
Flushing away the brightness off thy face,  
Never, ever give up!  
It's time to hook up  
With the author of life  
Who has the final solution  
To the mathematics of life's examination.

## We keep knocking

TUKUR RIDWAN

A closed door is a no no for feet  
seeking space within fulfilling rooms.

This 'no' leaving footprints of pain  
in us can speak for many other yeses  
in doors rather left unopened.

"Keep knocking, knuckles, no matter  
how patched you get from the pressure".

And because there are doors left untouched,  
we keep knocking each the same way  
heaven's doorbells are ringed to find  
redemption as an eventual 'yes'.

We keep cracking this jinx until broken.  
We keep kicking to hatch from these shells.

"Keep knocking, knuckles, no matter  
how patched you get from the pressure".



## Brighter Darkness

OGOCHUKWU PETER

This same darkness I feared  
Was my savior in disguise  
The lost battle, departed glory  
Huddle crossed in the tunnel  
Introduced me to the streets  
Popularized my name on their lips  
I thought it was the end  
Or at least I wanted to end it myself  
But somehow the silver lining tickled  
across these dark clouds of mine  
The huddles strengthened my muscles  
My supposed delay boosted patience  
The parted glory made way for greater ones  
And my fame flooded the streets and beyond.

## Acceptance

STEPHEN HOUSE

I had anticipated my slide into poverty  
would be worse than is.  
Raging hurricane of losing all I value  
would suffocate me into almost non-existence.  
Fortunately, I have found the opposite.  
From my financial and social decimation, abandonment  
by some deemed near, and messy complication  
of nil self-esteem, the wonderful has now emerged.  
On this wind-swept coast, sheltering from weather  
in a dilapidated caravan I now call home  
acceptance nurtures me more each moment.  
I embrace it; aware this unwelcome lesson  
in letting go is a disguised gift to be treasured always.

## Resilience

HERVÉ SOKPOH

The art to bounce back I possess.  
Sorrow fears me as my creed is try again.  
Though tears burn my cheeks in the rain,  
I prepare for the worst and hope for the best.  
Try to crush me, you will see me back on the track!  
Though I swim in the ocean of lack,  
I twist the neck of failure to kiss progress.

Cut my wings, I will fly with my dreams!  
I fall down seven times and stand up eight, in Tokyo! Nana korobi ya oki  
My soul of bamboo keeps me alive in the hurricane of lifetime misery.  
Call me raincheck because I won't fade away.  
A glowing twilight emerges from a dark dawn  
As a glittering light receives birth from a setting sun.  
You see the smile of the clown, but I live the trail of tears.  
Yes, Rosette Poletti and Barbara Dobbs know my name...

## In the face of failure

### ASUELIMEN FAVOUR ISI

In this tongue,  
no bud as sweet, no dawn for sugar,  
no breath for candy, no juice for this  
dry apple stuck in my throat;  
I lost them to failure.

In this house,  
no opening for doors, no path for ways,  
no crack for frames, no sight beyond waves,  
just walls for gaze;  
I lost them to failure.

Still,  
In this heart,  
no beat for pain, no shape for shame,  
no blood for loss, no drip for tears;  
I won it through Hope awarded by Failure.

## Beauty of failure

NEHA SAMUEL

Standing in ablaze, bold lights, among a crowd of audience my vision couldn't settle  
on

Out of breath, heart pounding, the mike felt like a thousand pounds in my hand

With no voice nor gesture out of me, the crowd fell silent

Walking out with the million pair of eyes behind me, not daring to look, I ran back

Weeping in my sheets, I realised the gravity of being the small boat in the ocean.

It was frightening as all I knew fell apart

As my soul sagged with exhaustion

And sleepless nights got the ashtrays overfilled

At this point, I knew tomorrow could not be today

As chandeliers clicked away and as my mirror witnessed me,

The shadows of the night were not going to be there in the light ,

Everything I couldn't say, were wrecking balls inside my brain

The art of not doing what I wanted to, to fail, made me realize the intensity of how  
silly we can be

The beauty of all awake at night, was only so deeply observed because I couldn't get  
past my fear

The stage shut me out but I knew 10 other gates were waiting to be pushed by me,  
All I had to do was Breathe and follow my heart.

To stand once again, among the flickering lights and eyes

I pushed past the devils in my head that told me I couldn't do it

And looked straight into the million people who knew I could.

Hold strong to that which tries to run from you,  
Without which, you might lose your true meaning.  
A sulky write-up isn't something new;  
What's banal is hiding in your trash bin.  
Cast into the sea of rejection, walk;  
Broken by the thumbs down, you can fix it.  
Open the windows of hope to your work,  
Revisit her in that rejected pit.  
Learn from your mistakes, do not hide from them.  
Cast pride out of the shadows of your eyes,  
Your work is likened to a fragile stem,  
It could grow to birth or be home to lies.  
We write, knowing that our write-ups are keys;  
Picking certain doors in vain or with ease.

## Untitled

### THE CHRONICLER

*...we have toiled all night, only to catch no fish*

*vs. John 21:6*

seven worn out men in their fishing boat

off the shore of Tiberias

dark waters promising

Thomas – a rent net

before dawn.

## Lingering Doubts

CHRISTINE TABAKA

I determined early on  
that I was insignificant.

Absorbed in lingering doubts  
I fell deeper into endless  
loops of a stagnant future.

After far too many years,  
of wading in fatal self-pity,  
I realized my life was my own to live.

Slowly emerging,  
one breath at a time,  
I now stand at the  
precipice of my own design.



The days were gloomy

PRITESH CHAKRABORTY

The days were gloomy, the nights were dark  
The nightingale didn't sing, silent was the lark  
I wore my armour, I took my sword  
Sore were my feet and endless was my road.

A storm had come, high rose the tide  
My bark shook helplessly in the ocean wide.  
I grasped my helm, I straightened my sail,  
I was a lost cause, all knew I would fail.

My tears dried, and I fought my sobs  
The doors didn't open but I kept turning the knobs  
To rise in glory we do fall,  
I stand today still, if not tall.

Life's tests appear sans premonition, they follow no grammar  
We all have blunt weapons and mountains to hammer.

## Sunflower

XOLANI NTULI

We know nothing of our true nature  
Until we grow as a wild flower  
In the dark  
Until our root stretches down into the ground to stand firm  
  
And when we step into the light  
We become a revelation  
That we are stronger as a cold wind  
And we have stood the hands of time  
Because it is darkest before dawn

I am a relentless optimist  
doomed to succeed at trying. To fail,  
to learn, to try again, only to restart the  
cycle with a constant attitude and a brand  
new idea. The effort it takes to keep trying  
is almost more demanding than the initial try  
itself. I keep it up because if I'd quit  
now, after all of this effort and time, then  
I'll truly end up with nothing. In the face  
of constant failure, we are faced with  
unwavering despair with the sole knowledge  
that we tried with everything we had. That alone  
sometimes, most times, is all we really need to learn.

broken crayons

CHINEDU NZERE

we are those boys who died at birth  
the ones their mothers left for death  
in the thick of the forest  
we are those boys who wear proudly  
the scars our fathers left us  
the ones our tribesmen gave us for recognition  
maybe they were trying to test our spirits  
to know if our mothers were faithful  
we are the boys who fought spirits to stay alive  
the ones who left home at seven  
those boys with hope tattooed across their chests  
we are the boys who think they're a first world country  
even if the sun is the brightest thing they can boast of

## More Than Survive

LYNN WHITE

It may not look that way  
but I've done more than survive  
my time in this city.  
It may not look that way  
but I've done more than survive  
in the time since I left in disgrace.  
Now I'm ready to come back  
to make a success after failure  
to find a new way  
through the old streets  
to make my way afresh.  
And I will.



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