

A SHORT STORY: NIGHT SHIFT

By Obiajulu J. Nwodo

I walked fast, not because I was a fast walker, but because of the look in the sky. I only needed to take a brief glance up the sky to understand what great rage meant. I stared briskly at my wrist watch, the time said 9.50 p.m. I have to get home fast.

My mobile phone vibrated. "Who could be calling me at this hour?" I uttered aloud. A fat woman stopped and glared at me. She must think me insane. I ignored her and received my call.

"Oh thank God, thank God I got you Oyibo!!" Ugo's voice yelled from the other end. I thought I would become deaf.

"What is it again Ugo?" I yelled back. It was obvious we needed to yell to each other in order to hear each other. People were running helter, skelter in agitated spirits to get to shelter. I too was hurrying to go to my own cocoon. Ugo's phone call would not change my plan, I knew what she wanted.

"Pleeeeeease!" She begged. Thunder struck. Onyibo, go back to the hospital! "My husband just called me up, our little son is down with fever and I" ...

"Your husband might as well take Junior to the hospital!" I shouted interrupting her, fed up with her little tricks. "If your son is unwell I continued. Is it not in the hospital the sick receives all the necessary treatments? I need to go home now!! Good bye!!!"-

I hung up. I had never been rude to Ugo. But I couldn't help being to night because, she was very good in disorganizing and scattering my plans and schedules. With this: Onyibo please-take-up-my-shift-for the-night-I-want-to-stay-with-my-family-tonight. Or Onyibo-darling-I-will-not-be-around-for-the-morning-shift-bla-bla-bla.

I heaved a cool sign of relief.

My relief however was short lived. It began to drizzle. I knew very well that if I didn't get into a taxi soon, I would be drenched in my nurse uniform. I carried a small black leather hand bag. My artificial hair would suffer, I knew it.

"Taxi, taxi, please stop!!" I shouted to a blue vehicle with the taxi sign hanging loosely on top. It stopped and picked me up. I was ordered to pay a fare twice what I normally do. Afraid of losing him I decided not to bargain instead, I entered quickly into the taxi. It began to rain in torrents. It was indeed a rage coming down from the sky. I was the only passenger in the taxi and as I relaxed, I dreamed about a hot bath, a well warmed Nrioka (which was going to be my dinner) and a wonderful night sleep. I smiled to myself. I couldn't wait to be home.

The taxi got to a bus stop which once I alight, would trace my way home in the moonless dark night, except of course for the lightening here and there.

I clutched my small bag tightly to my chest and walked even faster. Occasionally breaking into a run and at the same time, careful of some potholes which some was as deep as ditch. I was a few poles to my home in this dangerous but affordable neighborhood when I heard a sound.

It was a man's voice. Though it sounded a bit shrill, stunned, I stopped and gazed around. The rain was still pouring and there was no visible human but then, I heard the sound again.

I turned to my right as lightening flashed and behold as I had thought, it was a man. He had an unbelievable huge dreadlock which extended to his broad shoulders. I froze. I thought I had seen a ghost.

"Come here!!" He bellowed. His face shone dark like a shiny black cobra. He smiled and twisted his face beckoning to me with both arms. He smiled again and when another lightening flashed I realized that I was facing an insane man.

I began to run.

“Ha, ha,ha, ha!!!” Was the sound of hislaughter. It sounded like the laughterof a Wizard. I ran even faster, afraid to look back, lest I fall into one of the ditches.

He grabbed my waist from behind and my bag fell. He carried me in his arms,excited like an animal about to mate. I screamed with all my lungs but there was nobody in sight to help me. The rain drained my screamsand, the thunder bolt almost shut me up. I continued to scream with a thought of regret that I should have conceded to the night shift at the hospital.

The mad man tossed me up and down in delight. He would walk fast, laughing and hallowing at the same time and then stopped to scrutinize my face, and then again he would laugh.

“Put her down!”Yelled a voice, a rich baritone. The mad man turned around to inspect this new comer; he did not put me down.

“Hi, hi,hi, hi!!”Shrieked the mad man, perhaps in an attempt to scare off the intruder. He held me tightly to himself. I was too weak to scream. Then suddenly, as quickly as he had carried me, the mad man dropped me and I fell like a coconut into one of the ditches. He began to run. I was too tired to watch him flee. The tossing and turning had weakened my bones. I was grateful that a rescuer intervened.

The rain had gone back to a drizzle. I felt two strong arms carry me up from the ditch. I opened my closed eyes and stared at his face. A handsome face with a charming smile greeted my sight.

“Thank you.” I whispered unable to hold back a tear of joy.

The man walked fast with me in his arms, my eyes were forced opened when he made a funny low sound: “hi, hi, hi,hiii.” I looked up at his face and shock froze up my lips when I realized I was in the arms of another mad man.

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My screams were drowned by the rain, which came down again in greater torrents.

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