

She had to pee. That was what woke her up that morning. Not the heat. Not the whizzing sound of the solar standing fan a few inches away from the bed. Not even the prickly feel of Adam's toes poking at her thighs. She felt her bladder being pressed into, and after opening her eyes and rolling into a position where she could sit up and then stand with minimal effort, she headed for the door.

She liked to play a game whenever she walked through the apartment alone like this, in the death of the night or the earliest hours of the day. She would move through the rooms in the dark, feeling her way as she went, and try to notice something new about the cold tiles beneath her feet, the texture of the walls, the taste of the air and how each space contoured itself as she moved and turned, the smell and feel of it. It was even better on days like this when the power was down and the street bulbs or lights from neighbor apartments didn't filter through the blinds like fireflies and taint the unlight as she stepped through it; always with wonder, an intangible thing tangibling very hard in her chest as she waited to discover something before unfound. But right now, she could feel her thighs clamping together, so instead, she headed for the bathroom door, walked in, and after taking a few steps, loosened her wrapper and sat on the toilet.

When she was sure that the last drop was the last drop, she reached for the bidet, unclasped it from its stand and then stopped. She placed the bidet back, put her right hand on the wall and lifted herself up before she walked over to the side of the wall with the light switch, turned it on, walked back to the toilet, and tore off some toilet paper to wipe herself with. When the whiteness only showed a faint stain of yellow, she nodded to herself and threw it in the trashcan, better safe than sorry. Then she sat on the toilet again and washed herself with the bidet.

In the bedroom, she stood over Adam and watched him sleep. There was a pillow fort that spilt up her side of the bed from his, was meant to anyway. But naturally, just like Adam, one of the pillows was already in his arms, pressed to his chest like a lover or a child while his leg was stretched over another one, crossing into her territory. She wanted to yank that hairy leg and fling it away from her side, and she could too, he was that skinny. But mostly, she wanted to laugh. She could no longer remember what she had been so mad about when she set up the pillow border while he stood and stared at her with his skinny arms hanging helplessly by his side. Actually she did. She just couldn't be sure why it had made her that angry. She took off her wrapper, threw it on the bed, picked up an abaya from the pile of clothes on the sofa by the closet and after pulling it on, she walked out of the bedroom.

Walking through a house in the dark was not as dangerous as it sounded, and she did not only think that because she had lived in this apartment for half a decade and could recognize every room even if she was bundled up like a pile of loose fabric and thrown from one part to another. All she needed was her feet on the floor, her palms on a wall, or even when all that was impossible, she knew she just had to be still, feel the room in motion and look for it without seeing it. She would be standing still in a dark room yet walking in another one, and then she knew she would recognize it and call it by its name. As long as she had been there before and knew it. A thing that had a name was a thing that could always be found.

She was in the hallway that led to the study now. Even if she had not been counting her footsteps or realized when she turned into a narrower space, she would have known because of how damp the wallpaper felt. She turned the lock of the door, pushed it open and walked in. The darkness here was different and felt more dimensional. The night from outside pushed into the dark of the study through the huge windows of the room. This had been the one place in the house that Adam had stood his ground, all of his body even. I don't understand why you feel the need for the house to be some cavern but I will not have heavy blinds in the study, he had said while the man who had come around to take the measurements for the curtains stood awkwardly with the tape around his neck and the pencil hanging from his lips like a giant toothpick. There has to be somewhere where there is always natural lighting, and I would prefer it to be where I work. Then his voice had softened. Zainab, I'm actually begging you. I'll be painting here and I need to see it. I can't see with just light bulbs.

When the room suddenly flooded with light, her startled eyes ~~xx~~ themselves shut as she steadied herself. Adam must have left the study lights on last night when he came to bed, and before the generator went off a few hours later. She kept her eyes closed as she moved till her fingers turned the lights off on the switch. Shutting the door of the study behind her also muffled the sound of the alarm that always rang through the estate when power came on. Going by the new schedule that the power company was working with these days, she realized that she must have been up and walking through the house for longer than she thought. Her Apple watch confirmed her suspicion; 6.40 am and way past fajr, she was a bit surprised that Adam was still asleep.

Zainab was born the same weekend that they shot Anini at Bar beach. Whenever her mother told her that story, and she often did, she always led with the radio announcements. The ones that notified the general public once there would be a public execution. She told Zainab how her father had wanted to go alone, saying the gory sight was not fit for intending mothers but he wanted to see for himself that the armed robber who was as famous for his supernatural powers as he was for his murderous reputation didn't escape death this time. But she had insisted because she also had a right to witness Anini's ignoble end, even though, as she whispered to her daughter with a mischievous chuckle, the actual reason she didn't want to stay at home was because she didn't want to be alone with her mother-in-law who thought she used her pregnancy as an excuse to be lazy and order her husband around. They were only a few minutes away from the execution site when her water broke and she started feeling contractions. Zainab's father had been trying to parallel park. Everything after that happened in a rush, but she remembers the sound of the gunshots and the noise that followed as the car pulled out of the parking lot and headed for the hospital. Zainab was born no later than 20 minutes after her mother got checked in. She was 2 weeks early but she made up for it by giving her mother a quick delivery. 'You were in a hurry but, mashallah, God still had to take a great evil away from this world before he let you arrive in it', her mother would say, gently touching her young daughter's face

When Adam later finds her, she's sitting on the sofa and distractedly scratching her scalp through the holes in the hairnet she has on to keep her braids in place. Her legs are up and

resting on a footstool. The day has broken and the living room has taken on the hue of a forest on fire. The lack of light gap blockers in the spaces where the sun scatters through was another compromise she had made for Adam who insisted that they were unhealthy even though she had earlier agreed to light filtering curtains instead of the blackout ones she preferred. He stands and watches the way the sunlight bathes her in a way that makes her look almost ethereal for a while and then readies himself to make his presence known. Zainab is easily startled and he doesn't want to risk anything that would set her off.

After she hears his footsteps, she angles her body on the sofa without fully turning but enough for her to see him walking towards her.

How far?, she smiles with her eyes blinking softly in a way that reassures him that his crimes the previous night have been forgiven and it's safe for him to approach her.

I'm okay, he says. He feels his shoulders relax and takes his hands out of his pocket to stretch. When did you get up? I woke up when they brought light and you were gone.

Not that long ago, I was stretching my legs for a bit before I spend another day on this sofa doing nothing.

He smiles, then a small frown crinkles on his brow when he sees her put both hands on her high belly. Are you okay?

I don't know, she says as she rubs both sides of her distended stomach. Then she looks up and sees his face and hurriedly shakes her head. No, no, I am fine, Adam. I just, I don't know, I had a feeling.

Did he move again?

We don't know if it's a he or she, Adam. But no, it wasn't that kind of a feeling. Actually, babe, can you make me some oats? I just realized that I'm starving.

Well, it is better than you calling our child a 'it', he says with a smirk. But no wahala, which berries do you want it with?

No o, no berries. Do we still have bell peppers? Please help me cut small and add to it when it is done. Add onions too, the purple one not the white one, that white one is too sweet.

He nods and starts to walk away. He has been in the kitchen for less than a minute when he hears her yell. Adam, don't forget to add salt before you cook the oats o! You always forget to add salt!

On the days they talk about how things came apart after that moment, Adam always makes a note to mention how quiet she had been when he came back into the living room holding the food tray and found her on her knees in a little pool.

She was just there o, he would say to whoever was willing to listen. I was slicing green peppers in the kitchen, and Zainab was outside squeezing her face without a sound while her body poured water. Fear catch me, are all Yoruba women like that?

At the hospital, the doctors ask Zainab questions about ..... while Adam fills forms and tries to keep his hands steady. When he is sure Zainab isn't looking, he goes through his phone and types at intervals.

The door makes a strange sound when Adam returns from ..... while the nurse on duty checks Zainab's vitals again. He stands by the doorway and examines the door hinges with his nose scrunched up and his mouth making inaudible sounds.

Funny, I didn't hear it make that noise before, he says while he moves the door back and forth. Nurse, is this how the doors here sound? Or is there something wrong with this door?

Zainab lets out a drawn out hiss and Adam looks away from the nurse and at her.

You called him, abi? And don't annoy me, Adam. Don't act like you don't know what I'm saying. You called him.

Adam looks from little thing to little thing as the room can hold while Zainab glares at him. The nurse mutters something that they both don't hear as she leaves the room.

I'm sorry Zee, but I had to, he finally says, pushing his words out like a deep exhale. I would never forgive me if I were in his shoes. And I wouldn't forgive myself if I robbed him of this.

Please, just calm down. He's in the car, he doesn't have to come in.

Okay, Help me check if there's a doctor outside, that nurse that was in here didn't seem like she knew what she was doing.

Wait, did I do the right thing? You are not angry with me?

Adam.

Yes, babe.

Find me a doctor.

He looks smaller than Zainab remembers, or maybe its because the sofa he's seated on is absurdly big for a ward, even if it is meant for new fathers to sleep on. The last time they had been in a room together and she had held up the old iPad to his aghast face while she swiped through an old folder, her father still dyed his hair black, the moles under his eyes were not so loose and limp, and his cheeks had that fullness that other people recognized in her face whenever she went to his old office and asked to see Prof. Now, instead of that telltale black streak on his hairline, there's just skin and a hint of silver and gold curls, enough to show a man that has gotten tired of fighting time or just couldn't.

What are the doctors saying? Zainab's father's voice still held the soft girlish lilt that made him the butt of jokes at the university where he had taught for most of his life.

Adam watches Zainab nervously as she goes through her phone with no indication that she heard the question or that anyone else is in the room with her.

Everything is going well, Prof. She's only a few inches dilated now so we are just waiting. Alhamdulillah, It is well. She was an easy child so I'm sure Zayn will be kind to her too. Zayn?, Adam asks.

Yes, Zayn. A great name for a great boy. Zainab and I used to say that her children would also have their names start with the same alphabet as hers. I can't think of a better name than Zayn. Prof's arms were open as he said this, like he was making a rousing speech.

Oh, we actually don't know if-

If you are only going to piss me off more than your presence already has, you should leave. And it's a girl, we already know how you feel about that. Adam can just call you again when its done.

It takes almost a minute for Zainab to realize what she has done, and a even longer one before she can look at Adam who looks less stressed than he has been since Prof walked in the room accompanied by a nurse who announced that her father had arrived with a smile on her face.

Adam, what I meant was that-

Its okay, Zee. Dr. Alara already told me a while ago that you asked to confirm the sex of the baby. He thought I knew.

So you knew?

That you knew? Yes. But I told her not to tell me, I still wanted to be surprised. I've played along with you cos I didn't want you to feel bad about it.

Prof who has been watching Zainab and Adam talk with a bemused look raises his arms like he's about to make another declaration but is cut off by the nurses who come in and ask that he and Adam leave the room for a bit.

This is what Zainab remembers. That she was drinking a can of ginger ale when she got the call. That the fizziness in her stomach crawled up her guts, sprouted and mutated into a tree somewhere in her throat. The tree had branches but no leaves because death cannot grow a tree that grows a thing that lives. That these branches extended themselves and found form in the vine of her tongue. That it was hard to swallow when there is a tree growing from your gut but even harder to unswallow. That she thought it strange that her father said her mother was gone when it was she who was away. She who was trapped in another country where she occasionally took walks around her dorm with her mother's

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