

The Next Story



Mode
Williams

The Next Story

by Mode Williams

Edited by Benjamin Morgan & Mode Williams

Illustrated by Sophie Burrows

I'm pissed

I don't want to go to Romford

My father was a very simple man
who cared about himself alone &
didn't give a damn what his children
were doing or would become.

I don't like when they say we come from royalty.
Grandad was a prince, he was heir to some land or
other before death snatched him away. What does
that make Dad? I don't have time for that rubbish.

He's a Lagosian. A tout. No-good people,
always getting into trouble. It fits the description
if you think about him & what he used to do to earn
a living. Most of his youth he spent hawking rice
& stew on the street, just to survive.

He always likes to be at the centre of attraction,
to be spoken about in a knowledgeable manner.
I think he wants recompense for all that time he
spent not going to school.



They call themselves immigration officers but they are crooks. If you want to apply for a passport these are the guys who will sort you out through the back door.

He would say, I have a family to feed. If I come home emptyhanded what is the wife going to say? How am I going to put food on the table? How am I going to pay school fees?

A family to feed! He wasn't the family type.

We lived in a place called Alagomeji.
A-la-go-meji:
the owner of two clocks.



she says

why do you need housing

They take a chicken & they kill it. Then
they use a sharp blade to make a tiny cut.
They mix the chicken blood with
this black substance to expand the cut.

It's like redemption. Giving something
for something & buying my soul back.
Some nonsense like that.

I used to think about cutting them off.
Cutting off a layer of skin
then leave the skin to heal &
I'm not going to see that stuff any more.
I wanted to cut it out,
for them to just disappear.

coz I'm in temporary

social services put us here

how many children?

one & I'm pregnant

At secondary school I was notorious.
Once when I had my braids
there was this fricking child who came
& pulled my hair.

I hunted him down.
I made sure he felt the pain I felt.



Another time I brought an air gun
& I was shooting at everyone.
Yay-hey! They had all these red
blisters on their faces, I was even
shooting at the girls that didn't
do anything. I didn't care.
I wanted them to know
I was proper serious

They don't live in blocks,
they live in houses. *Hou-ses*.
And they come to school with fancy
pencil cases. Glitter pens &
perfumes, girly stuff,
I wasn't interested in it.
But to be on the same table with them
was too much.

I ended up in the newspaper!
You can Google it!
All the white parents took their
children out of class.

I remember always this want
of going out of the house.

We had Jamaicans, Nigerians,
Ghanaians, Sierra Leoneans,
Chinese, Filipinos, Italians.
All these people in the estate &
you want to mingle with them,
have a rapport with them.
But you're not allowed.
When the parents go to work
you have to stay inside.

I was not having it. Nobody can
rule me. We can sit down &
dialogue, but for your will to
overpower mine?
It wasn't going to happen.
So I rebelled. I went outside.

There was the monkey. You
hold your ears & you have to
keep moving. Up & down for
hours, on the spot.

Or the elephant. You raise one
foot up, & you put your hand
underneath your knee, & you
have to try and touch your face.
That position, for hours.

I liked to feel the pain.
I derived satisfaction from it.
Testing my level.
After staying in one position
for hours your body
becomes numb.

then she wants the whole history of

my immigration status

The contract was three nights a week. Twelve-hour shifts. Eight in the evening till eight in the morning & she was giving me all this extra time. There was nobody else who wanted it. Sometimes I wouldn't go home after the night shift.

You have to wash all the dishes. Change the sheets that get wet or soiled, clean the dining room & get it ready for breakfast. You put the serviettes out, the cutlery, the saucers, the tea mugs. Sweep the floor, mop the floor.

You go in each room, check everyone's alive & kicking. One gentleman—the morning staff saw him brushing his teeth. Twenty minutes later he's laying on his bed, dead. Toothbrush still in mouth.

Then you write reports all night. At so-and-so time Mr. A got out of bed. Requested to use toilet. I assisted to toilet. Assisted back to bed. Put back the sensor.

We'd sit together in the staff room.
Water dripping from every angle.
The fridge doesn't work
so you bring from home fresh.
One night I'd bring for everyone,
the next night somebody else would.

Or we ask the team leader,
can we quickly go on the high street
& buy a McDonald's?

Or we'd order Chinese
in the middle of the night.

You fill the basin with water
& soap & you use the flannel
& you just strip them down.
Face & private parts,
you encourage them to do that.
Some of them do it,
some of them don't.

One gentleman kept picking up the phone
& calling the police. Help help
they're not letting me go!

He would go to the window
& start banging,
shouting for help.



she says

I can see the letter says you qualify

but your status is quite

they've only given you thirty months

I found out from the manager. It was a
Thursday & my shift was on the Saturday.
But she calls me. She has to cancel it.
She's received an email saying
I don't have the right to work.

These government officials—
I mean the black ones—
don't they have families themselves?
Don't they think,
but what if it's me in this situation?
All of them forgot what they went
through, I can tell you this.

Like Ade's mum. When she got it she
deserted us. You can't call her
coz she's not going to pick up.
She doesn't want to be associated
with people who don't have
their papers. She was waiting to
get where she is & then: bye bye.

I'm not the person
who is going to keep calling.

If the letter says I qualify

why keep telling me

I might not qualify?

The last page had my picture on it.
It says I've been granted bail.
As if I'm a criminal.
The first page says I need to notify them
about my intention to make an application
& otherwise I need to leave the country.

I'd heard stories about the deportation camps
& about the mother that died.
She was found dead
with her baby next to her.

because her name is Sheila

& she's white

My first ever scan & it's a trainee.
She asks about dates, messes about
with the machine. Then she says,
I just need to get one of my colleagues.

Now it's the two of them in the
room talking to themselves.
Have you done this, have you done
that? Nobody talking to me.
Nobody eye contacting me.

The senior one says, why don't
you go & walk around the building?
Have something fizzy to drink.
Come back after twenty minutes.
It's nothing to worry about.



I went & bought a Fanta & drank it.
Nothing. They have to call somebody else.
That one says, let's give it some more time.
Walk up & down. Do some exercises.

I go for the second time.
Same story.

She asks, do you have
somebody who can come & be with you?
That put the cherry on top of the cake.

You watch movies whereby the baby's
dead inside the mother. They have to use
forceps to cut it into pieces.

The needle snapped in my back.
The Chinese lady, her hands were too tiny
& she wasn't wearing her glasses.
So she couldn't see properly.
They had to put another syringe in.

They keep pinching you & asking if you feel.
When I said I didn't feel it they told me to lay
& they pulled the gas mask in my face.
That's when the shit went down.
They cut me open & took her out.

The year she was born it was snowing like mad.
No electricity, no gas. The others all left
coz they didn't have money to top up.
But there was nowhere I could go with a baby.
The damp went into the Moses basket
where she was sleeping.



It's strange. You see from afar & you have
questions. It happens to you, you have times
three the questions. How come? Why?
I'm an individual & the child is an individual.
We're not one body.
The child is not eating
& I'm in pain. Oh God.

People said it takes time. Time!
I was not thinking about time.
There is no time. You have to eat,
you have to eat!
Because in my mind
everything happens for a reason
& the reason is already there.
The baby's out—the baby eats.
There's no comma in between.

Now I understand
there are commas, there are full stops.
Maybe she didn't realize that she was
out of the womb,
that she was in the world.

Weaning her was easy.
I was stressed about the immigration
so I stopped producing milk.
She accepted it because
She had no choice.

I was way out of solutions.
At times, mentally,
I was not there.

she asks

where we live now

I say

it's a room above an Italian restaurant

I remember the time I locked myself out.
Early in the morning & it was cold.
Nobody to call & my phone died anyway.
Everybody was just passing by, looking at
this girl sitting on somebody else's property
with a child. Probably the child is stolen,
they must be thinking.

it's actually an Italian restaurant

run by a Turk

he invited us once

I look out of the window & there's people on the road.
Two of them throwing punches, one's naked
& the other one's dressed.
Then they're on the floor beating each other
& everyone's taking pictures & video.
One guy's saying, it's a mistake, let it go.
The other guy's not having it.

Some grandma gets caught in the middle.
They ripped grandma's dress off
so you could see her bra.
They had to cover her up with a jacket.
When they pull them apart the kids move in.
Looking on the road for a watch
or a phone that's fallen out of someone's pocket.
Or they were looking for blood.

I put the volume of the TV up to a hundred.





*It's
probably going to be Romford*

Sheila says

London is full at the moment

That's what I'm saying, you know?
Me receiving these papers,
I haven't had a moment to enjoy
the state of being recognised as free
or achieving free movement.
Coz they always come up
with the next story,
& if you get through that
they're going to come up
with another one.

you know what

I don't feel angry now.
None of this was in my journey
itinerary. But I don't get mad
with white people like before.
I will just be like: look at this one,
she doesn't know her left
from her right.

God is the creator & the only one
that can take away. That's my
perspective. But I don't care.
I'm just happy that I'm alive
& I'm here, that's all. If these
marks mean that I can be alive,
that's all that matters.

if it's some stupid address

there'll be serious issues

Nothing is easy in this life.
Nothing comes natural.
We don't own nothing & we
shouldn't be expecting stuff.
That's why I'm just waiting &
watching everything unfold.

I'm ready to put up a fight

