

Things I Hear In The Middle Of The Night By Oyindamola Shoola

(An Excerpt From *To Bee A Honey*)

Unlike other nights there were no clashing, no breaking, or screaming. This night was solemn and brave. He did not come home drunk and she knew well that he had his strength.

Last Sunday at midnight, he returned home staggering through the entrance door, whistling a church hymn. She silently watched him walk to the bedroom, then sink in their bed like a piece of wood.

When he woke up on Monday morning, all hell broke loose. It was almost 10:00 am and he was late for work. He jumped right off the bed. Rubbing his aching head stung by alcohol, he walked towards the kitchen. She was always there.

At her sight, his speech started slow, blaming her for his lateness but when she paid him no mind, he found a balance to mutter straight words. He moved closer to her and with his teeth clenched like his tight fist he muttered, *Did you not hear me?*

She stood still and as she opened her mouth to reply, he grabbed her by the neck. The steel utensil she was using to cook slipped from her right hand. Its clashing sound got lost in the noise from him hitting her body against the wall again.

Once satisfied, like he would let a glass cup slip from his drunk fingers at midnight, he made her body slip from his hands. Blood spilled from her mouth, her lower lip, quivering, was split open. I would have rescued her even if I hadn't the power to, but the last time I intervened while he was beating her, she yelled at me. She said, *Go away and stay in your room or daddy could hit you too.*

This Sunday night, he didn't come home drunk. He was sober from losing his job because he had too many queries about being late. Mommy had packed our luggage and as soon as he entered the house, she started speaking. She did not wait for him to apologize or kiss her like he always did when he was sober. His kisses made her change her mind the other six times she had packed our luggage.

Her grip of my palms got stronger as she spoke. In some way, I felt as though I gave her the courage I was too little to have.

She said,

I spent so much time in loving you and trying to fix you that I almost missed out on myself. All the rooms I should have filled in my mind have your name hung on their doors. My body looks like the rainbow, my eye, purple from your blows, my healing wrists, blue from iodine and my heart, still red and fresh because you lack the intuition to love it. I grew and broke myself for you. Lost too many pieces, some between your fingers that hit me, some stuck between your teeth that kissed me and your voice that says "but baby I am sorry" as much as the times your hands lashed me. You say sorry and you treat me as though love needs curing too. If love is supposed to be a pinch of how you treat me, I'll rather let your love for me be the night and me, the day.

That was the last time I ever saw him.

Oyindamola Shoola is a poet, short-story writer, a book reviewer, a feminist, and a blogger. She is also the Co-founder of Spring Literary Movement, a non-profit organization dedicated to curating, revitalizing, and transforming Nigerian literature. In 2017, she was awarded by Nigerian Writers Award as one of the top 100 influential Nigerian Writers under the age of 40. She published her first collection of poems titled *Heartbeat* in 2015. Her second book titled *To Bee a Honey* was republished by Jeanius Publishing in March 2018.

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