

THE WRITER

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“Hey, you, adjust your tiny black butt!”

I adjust a little to the left, close to the window for some fresh air, free of the unwanted smell from the fruit he chews on with such ferocious force. His heavy weight drops on the rotten leather seat with some quake. Some dust escapes. I hold my nose and keep my head straight, facing what would become the road, vaguely. The dash board of the bus is old, and has another cake of dust decorating it. The vehicle is a 14-seater, heat-dominated box, heading to the east. I take my eyes off the road and the fate of it to my open copy of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*.

“Hey you! You are reading?”

I nod vaguely to his rather expression for question. He throws the seed of the fruit away and unwrap a small polythene bag. There are snacks in it. Its aroma smells delicious. I gulp saliva quietly. He collects one of the snacks, forces the whole into his large mouth and chews aloud. The mixed sound of saliva and the molars grinding the meat-pie makes for discomfort.

“What’s the book about?”

“..Rushdie’s.” I reply.

“Hey, fool. I can see it is Rushdie’s. I am asking what the fuck the book is all about.”

“I am just reading it for the first time.”

“How long has it been with you?”

“About two months”

“And you haven’t read it in two months? You are a perverted fool, man. You can’t keep such a book on a shelf for that long. No one keeps Rushdie’s for two months. That’s not wise. My Indian friend would shoot you.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I said my Indian friend would have your brains spilled into these ugly gutters of Port Harcourt, you fool!”

“I am sorry. I had a lot I was doing, and other books too.”

“Forget that rubbish. What do you do?”

“I am a writer.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I write. I write short stories, poems, and screenplays.”

“Na. You can’t do that. You are too young. And besides, you are stupid. You kept Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* for two months. No writer does that. And you are telling me you write. Fuck you, man!”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. You are just a perverted bloody silly fellow. So tell me a story, something interesting.

“Now?”

“Fuck yes! Now! Do you want to tell it yesterday?”
“I mean it’s sudden.”
“Na. Nothing is too sudden for a writer. You should tell me a story.”
“I...”
“You stammer also?”
“Not really?”
“Then what’s that?”
“I was thinking.”
“You shouldn’t think. Tell me a story. Besides, where are you from?”
“Rivers State.”
“Is that a tribe?”
“Ogoni is my tribe”
“Oh, fucking bastards! Saro Wiwa’s brother. I know a lot of shits about that guy. That guy was a funny ass fellow, man. I liked him but later, I hated him. I still love that book he wrote in *rotten* English.”
“Soza Boy?”
“Yeah. That book is funny. And that guy, he thought he could unseat the Federal Government for some oil shit with his MOSOP retards? He was sick man. But he is your hero, isn’t he?”
I nod.
“Yeah, I knew it. You know what; I am attending Chukwuemeka Odemegwu-Ojukwu’s funeral. If that short bastard of a hero of yours was alive, he would curse Ojukwu even at death with his Ibadan dominated knowledge. He said a lot of shits about Ojukwu in that his book of the civil war.”
“On a Darkling Plain?”
“Yeah, that book. Have you read it?”
“No...”
“No? You know nothing about your *god*. You are a sick bastard. You know nothing about nothing. What do you even read; porno mags? Anyways, you know, Ken would say, Ojukwu is a selfish bastard. And that he wanted that war ‘cus he thought he had had all there was at Oxford. But Ojukwu was a great guy, an orator, a historian of a certain level beyond the realm of mortals. You know the military would bury him? Your man, the Ogoni *god* did a lot of runs that endangered his kin’s men, right? Hahahaha. You won’t say anything right? You worship that Ken. Anyways, forget him. Tell me a story.”
“I can’t say anything anymore.”
“Why? Because I spoke *bad* of Ken Saro? Really?”
He draws out a penknife, puts it to my throat.
“Would you tell me a story with a rather slit throat?”
I shake my head.
“Once upon a time...”
“What’s that?”
“What?”
“What you just said”
“I’m trying to tell a story. The one you requested”
“With ‘once upon a time’? Do I look like a kid? Can’t you tell me something great without that shit?”

“Okay. Two men were once in a bus, seated, a young woman came to join them.

“What?”

“I am telling a story.”

A lady walks to the vehicle. The stranger hides his knife. The lady pushes the door and sits.

“Good day gentlemen. Where is the driver?”

“He should be around.” I reply with a shaky voice.

“Is that Rushdie’s” she asks.

“Yeah.”

“How long has it been with you?”

“Two months.”

“Really? Have you read it cover to cover?”

“No, I just picked it up.”

“What? Really? No one dumps Rushdie’s. Woah. Do you know of his book, the one that sent the demons from Saudi and around the Islamic world after his bloody neck? That guy is a fearless shit. I love him. If I saw him in an airport and I were with a man, my husband, maybe, I would defile rules and kiss him. He is my favourite bastard.”

“Okay.”

The stranger looks at me with dismay.

“So what do you do?” She request.

“I am a writer.”

“Really?” She replies.

“Young lady, the driver isn’t here yet, we were talking, and you interrupted. Could you wait outside the vehicle?” The stranger commands.

“Are you the conductor or the fat son of the driver? Hahahaha. Hey, writer guy, tell me a story.”

“What?”

“Yeah, you heard me. Tell me a story. You are a writer aren’t you?”

“Once...”

“Shut up!” The stranger barks.

“I told you to say something else.”

“I’m sorry. Two men were in a bus, seated, waiting for the driver...”

“Hey, man. You are narrating what’s real, like what’s happening here, I mean. Be creative. Think. You know, like you should close your eyes, visualise, yeah, that’s some shit. Think. Tell me a proper story.”

The stranger asserts again.

“Two men and a lady sat in a vehicle, waiting for passengers and suddenly, there was a crack in the earth.”

“What? Isn’t that some scary shit where the world ends? I hate scary stories.” The stranger shut me up.