

The City of Mosques

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086

201-770-0550 • 347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

Copyright © by Michael Bettencourt

Offered under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

DESCRIPTION

The knock upon the front door, the knife-edged news given by an Armed Services officer in sharp-creased clothing—and then the next day, and the day after that...

CHARACTERS

- LIYAH, Nigerian, early 30s—Segun’s fiancée
- LAWRENCE, Nigerian, early 30s—Segun’s friend
- ADEMOLA, Nigerian, mid 20s—Segun’s brother

SETTING

- A house in Brooklyn (Flatbush)

TIME

- Late fall/early winter

MISCELLANEOUS

- Charcoal grill
- Bag of charcoal
- Small table with cooking tools and a can of lighter fluid next to grill
- Objects wrapped in white butcher paper that look like steaks
- A couple of lawn chairs
- Somewhere hung up, an American flag
- If possible, some of those magnetic decals used on cars, such as the yellow ribbon titled with “Support Our Troops”—if not these, yellow ribbon would do fine

* * * * *

A backyard in Brooklyn.

LIYAH, dressed in funeral black, sits in a lawn chair, staring at the grill. On her lap she holds a canvas bag, which contains (at this point unseen) a folded American flag.

She sits. She sits. She sits.

LAWRENCE, also dressed in funeral black, enters carrying a plate of steaks wrapped in white butcher paper. Eventually he sits, puts down the plate.

LAWRENCE

They were looking for you inside.

LIYAH

Why—someone's glass had to be re-filled?

LAWRENCE

I told them they could fill their own—laughing, of course, while I said it—

LIYAH

And then you—

LAWRENCE

And then I filled their glasses for them—

LIYAH

Of course—

LAWRENCE

Still laughing—

LIYAH

So now there will be gossip for weeks—

LAWRENCE

Probably—

LIYAH

Segun's broken fiancée not doing her duties—

LIYAH cuts herself off.

LAWRENCE

It's hard for them to remember that they're here and not in Lagos.

LIYAH

Well, I am here—

LIYAH hesitates, then gives in.

LIYAH

And soon they won't be, and I will still be here when they gossip about how Liyah has become so American—

LAWRENCE

They are Segun's parents. They have come a long way—

LIYAH

To hold court—

LAWRENCE

Now, that sounds American—

LIYAH makes a dismissive gesture.

LIYAH

I'm glad you filled their glasses.

LAWRENCE

So were they—holding court is a thirsty business.

LIYAH smiles. They fall into silence. ADEMOLA enters.

ADEMOLA

What are you doing?

LAWRENCE

(sotto voce)

I knew it wouldn't take long. Hello, Ademola.

ADEMOLA

I wasn't talking to you.

LAWRENCE

That's all right—my hello to you is still good.

ADEMOLA

Liyah—

LAWRENCE

Ademola—

LIYAH

What?

ADEMOLA

You haven't started it yet.

LAWRENCE

Let her sit.

ADEMOLA

She can't just sit—the charcoal—the people in there are hungry and they want— Liyah—

LIYAH makes no move to do anything.

ADEMOLA

What did Segun ever see in you? With the way things are, you can't even bring yourself to do what he loved to do.

(to LAWRENCE)

She is so stuck on herself.

LAWRENCE

She's not the only one so at the moment—

ADEMOLA

And I am not liking you very much at the moment, either—what you said at the funeral—

LAWRENCE

Segun wasn't just his uniform, Ademola—

ADEMOLA

But my parents—our parents—

LIYAH

Ademola, maybe they didn't mind hearing that their son had a life other than being "a hero for his adopted country"—that priest—I had to bite my tongue—

ADEMOLA

But to talk about the clubbing, the house parties—

LAWRENCE

They were very much Segun—and you were along with us, if I remember—

ADEMOLA

But Lawrence—my parents aren't used to that—

LIYAH

Their good boy—

ADEMOLA

The computer classes, the job—that was how they see him—need to see—

LIYAH

The Nigerian poster boy, hey?

ADEMOLA

You should bite that tongue.

LIYAH

And how do they see “National Guard”? Do they love that, too, Ademola?

ADEMOLA

They're proud that he defended—

LIYAH

Defended what? He thought he was going to defend the subway—the subway—

LAWRENCE

(lightly)

He was defending clubbing—house parties—grilling—

LIYAH

Don't.

LAWRENCE

I'm sorry, but it's just that—you two—it doesn't do any good—

LIYAH

What doesn't do any good is that every time someone says "hero,"
I have to bite my tongue—

ADEMOLA

So now "hero" is a dirty [word]—

LIYAH

What I know is that "hero" is dead—what I know is that my mouth
tastes like blood—"defending freedom"—"ultimate sacrifice"—I'd
like to rip out that priest's—"hero" died for the freedom of
clubbing—being able to grill his meat on Sunday afternoons— Oh
America—

LIYAH cannot sit still. She rises, walks.

*LAWRENCE gets up and goes to ADEMOLA and loosens ADEMOLA's tie. ADEMOLA resists—
but not really.*

LAWRENCE

(to ADEMOLA)

We're out here by Segun's grill—no one is allowed to wear a tight
tie around Segun's grill. He would not be in favor of us choking
ourselves off.

ADEMOLA slaps his hands away, finishes loosening the tie himself.

ADEMOLA

Enough—

LAWRENCE loosens his own tie.

ADEMOLA

We will have to start—

LAWRENCE

In a moment, Ademola—

(to LIYAH)

Liyah? Liyah?

LIYAH

What?

LAWRENCE
(points to bag)
Can we see it? Would that be possible?

LIYAH
No, Lawrence—please—

LAWRENCE
Okay. Okay. Liyah, did you know that we wanted to break his
legs—

(to ADEMOLA)
—didn't we?

ADEMOLA
That was a joke.

LAWRENCE
A half-joke.

ADEMOLA
A half-joke.

LAWRENCE
His last visit. So he wouldn't have to go back.

ADEMOLA
We really only talked about one leg.

LAWRENCE
One leg apiece.

(to ADEMOLA)
Instead, you tried, like a fool—

(to LIYAH)
He took the left one—

ADEMOLA
He stuffed me into the sofa—can you picture that, Liyah? Like I
was change falling out of my own pocket. I really thought maybe I
could—that I should—

LAWRENCE

I still think that if we had done it—Ademola, look at me—if we had, he still would've gone—one-legged, two-legged, it wouldn't've mattered—

LIYAH

It wouldn't have mattered.

LAWRENCE

Can we see it?

LIYAH

No.

LAWRENCE

Okay.

Silence.

ADEMOLA

We should probably grill the meat—

No one makes a move to pour in the charcoal.

LIYAH

That last dinner.

Everyone nods.

LIYAH

He left angry.

ADEMOLA

I remember that.

LAWRENCE

He wasn't angry—not all of him angry—his eyes—

LIYAH

He complained about his eyes. He said his eyes had filled up.

ADEMOLA

No more room.

LAWRENCE

He couldn't believe his eyes anymore. Everything got quiet.

ADEMOLA

I hated that quiet. Then his joke.

LAWRENCE

Always the joke to lighten—

LIYAH

"Maybe it's not gravity that pulls us into the dirt. Ever think of that?"

ADEMOLA

It was a stupid thing to say—

LAWRENCE

We laughed—

ADEMOLA

We even talked about it—seriously—

LIYAH

And then we let him go.

LAWRENCE

And then we let him go. Liyah—let us see it.

LIYAH hesitates, then reaches into the bag and pulls out a tightly folded American flag.

LIYAH

I didn't want the thing, but your mother handed it to me.

ADEMOLA takes it.

ADEMOLA

My father wouldn't even touch it. It's so light. And not.

LAWRENCE takes it.

LAWRENCE

Did you watch how they folded it? Snap, snap, snap, snap—

LIYAH

I tasted blood.

LIYAH gestures for LAWRENCE to hand it to her, which he does.

LIYAH

I was told this—because I asked this—the metal that cut his throat—listen to me!—slipped between his Kevlar collar and below his helmet—through all the protection—these words—“Kevlar”—did you both know that?

LIYAH drags the flag across her own throat.

LIYAH

Snap. What? Is it too much for you? Our eyes should be ashamed. Our ears should be ashamed.

LIYAH throws the folded flag onto the grill. She picks up the can of lighter fluid.

LIYAH

(to ADEMOLA)

You still want me to cook the meat?

ADEMOLA goes to stop her, but LIYAH squirts him with lighter fluid, which stops him. LIYAH looks at LAWRENCE, then squirts him as well. Then LIYAH sprays the flag with lighter fluid, puts the can down.

LIYAH

I should cook the meat. Because the fiancée should do her duty—Ademola? Duty? To your parents? To all who hunger and thirst? Give them comfort?

LIYAH gestures to LAWRENCE.

LAWRENCE

I don't have one.

LIYAH gestures again. LAWRENCE digs out a lighter, hands it to LIYAH.

ADEMOLA

Don't—

LIYAH

Shut up. It is time we all shut up.

LIYAH flicks the lighter, lets the flame burn. Lets it burn. Her hand shakes. She lets it burn. Then drops it.

LIYAH suddenly takes off her shoes and throws them, then rolls down her pantyhose and shucks them off, throws them. Her body shakes.

LIYAH

I can't stand this—uniform—

LIYAH tears at her dress. LAWRENCE takes a step toward her, but LIYAH shies away. ADEMOLA picks up the shoes and pantyhose, not quite sure what to do with them.

ADEMOLA

Liyah! Liyah! Put them back— You have to put [them]—

LAWRENCE moves directly to LIYAH, takes her by the shoulders, but LIYAH slams him.

LIYAH

Did you read— Did you know—did you?

LAWRENCE

Know what, Liyah.

LIYAH

I did, every day—on the internet—reading, reading, reading—the pictures—

ADEMOLA
(to LAWRENCE)

What is she talking about?

LIYAH

Fallujah— Fallujah—

LAWRENCE

It's a war, Liyah—

LIYAH

No—no—no—

ADEMOLA finally puts the shoes and pantyhose under LIYAH's chair.

LIYAH

My Segun—my Segun—in the “city of mosques”—always saying that: “Fallujah, the city of mosques”—animals don't do what they—

LAWRENCE

They were ordered [to do]—

LIYAH

(derisive)

Ordered! God! You didn't see, did you?

LAWRENCE

You can't—

ADEMOLA

And you shouldn't!

LIYAH

You're ignorant.

LAWRENCE

Still you can't—

LIYAH

I read because I wanted to follow [him]—my two unbroken legs following—try to be inside [him]—to keep my fear—and I looked and I read and I started to hate—

ADEMOLA

You can't hate Segun [for]—

LIYAH

(to LAWRENCE)

Did he talk to you—did he tell you anything—he would have told you—

LAWRENCE hesitates just a moment too long.

LIYAH

He did—he did—and not me—

Again LAWRENCE hesitates, and ADEMOLA looks at him.

ADEMOLA

What, Lawrence?

LAWRENCE

His last emails—

LIYAH

He said nothing to me—

LAWRENCE

His precious Liyah—of course not—at least to keep one thing clean—

LIYAH

They talked about napalm— Lawrence, they talked about napalm—bodies melted—children—melted—did—he wouldn't do that—he knew enough, being from Lagos, from our own stupid—he knew—

LAWRENCE

Maybe he didn't know enough, Liyah.

LIYAH waits.

LAWRENCE

I deleted them.

LIYAH

You deleted them.

LAWRENCE

All of them.

ADEMOLA

Good.

ADEMOLA re-tightens his tie.

ADEMOLA

Good.

ADEMOLA straightens his suit. The backyard fills with silence.

ADEMOLA

I am going to tell them that we are going to be a little late—a little late—perhaps we can order something—save the steaks—

ADEMOLA pats down his tie, now formal.

ADEMOLA

Segun is still—in my eyes he still is—

LAWRENCE

Who would doubt it?

ADEMOLA

Our parents need—

LAWRENCE

And they will have it, Ademola. I'll say anything.

A moment's hesitation, then ADEMOLA leaves.

LIYAH goes to the grill, picks up the can of lighter fluid, and proceeds to empty it out onto the flag. LIYAH picks up the lighter from the ground and just holds it as she stares at the flag.

LAWRENCE

I will do what I told Ademola I would do.

(points to flag)

We can say you spilled it. We can wash it out.

LIYAH takes the flag and rubs it against her dress, soaking it. She drops the flag, then flicks the lighter and holds it up between LAWRENCE and herself.

LIYAH

This is what we should all do.

LAWRENCE steps closer to her. He puts a hand on her wrist. The flame burns. Lights bump to black.

