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Nkem's Nightmare

I visited my mother in Kano, in the same two-bedroom apartment I had grown up in, to say I was leaving my husband. Nothing had changed here since I moved away with my husband Edu to Onitsha in southeastern Nigeria. The sitting room ceiling had the same brown patch, the long stuffed chair was coming off at the seams, and the black-and-white Philips TV still sat atop the old cabinet whose wooden shelves held all our important family memorabilia – from my father's Frederick Forsythe books on top of the shelf, to the Kenwood turntable, and the old records of Nelly Uchendu, Onyeka Onwenu, King Sunny Ade, and Ebenezer Obey. But my father's favourite part of the chair was unoccupied, and I wondered if my mother allowed anyone to sit in it since his death three years ago.

"You still have papa's books," I said to my mother, breaking the awkward silence.

We had been sitting, facing each other. While my mother went through the bag of beverages on her lap, I rubbed my swollen feet. I had sat in the bus for over 12 hours, the longest journey I had ever taken in my adult life. As a child, I always looked forward to Christmas. When we all travelled down to our hometown Abagana, I and my four siblings and my parents cramped in the small space of the Ekene Dili Chukwu bus, because my father would only buy tickets for three seats. Back then, my siblings and I would count the hours in excitement, barely sleeping, until we got to the village. Now, I wonder how we survived that ordeal.

"I was going to give them away," my mother said and it took me a while to realise she was talking about the books. "He bought all of Fredrick Forsythe books because he heard that the man wrote something about Biafra."

We looked so different, like strangers. My mother's faded blue and yellow kirikiri star wrapper paled against my red gown, a gift from Edu when he returned from Italy.

"You still have the Philips stabilizer," I said, my gaze settling on the small brown box in one of the shelves.

"It doesn't work anymore." My mother put the bag away at her feet and said, "Daalu for the gifts."

I stared at the tired lines around her eyes. "Do you still have papa's Mario game? Papa always locked it up in his drawer." I laughed, but my mother had stopped smiling.

"You didn't sit in a bus all through the night to come and talk about the things your father left behind," she said.

I thought of how to begin. Her eyes bored holes in mine, searching for answers that didn't need sugar-coating. And so I simply told her I was leaving Edu.

"What?" She sat up, her English clipped. "What?"

"I am done with that marriage. I am not going back."

She opened and closed her mouth, a baffled expression wrinkling her forehead. "What do you mean you are leaving your husband?" She finally said. "Did God not bless you with four sons?"

"I was too young to know what I was getting into," I said, almost shouting.

She folded her hands over her chest, removed them, and folded them back again. "You were too young? You were too young? I married your father when I was fourteen."

I stared at her, and then at their wedding photograph on the wall. I had always imagined my mother an adult. "What do you mean fourteen?"

But my mother was already saying things, her words rushed, as she talked about how proud she had been when I got married, that she had danced at the market when she got the call about the birth of my first son, Ogenna. Now she had to deal with the shame I was planning to bring. She asked questions whose answers I couldn't give – Why would you do this to me, your mother? How could you think of ruining your father's good name? Her chest rose and fell.

"Only women who have affairs leave their peaceful homes," she continued, "and I know you are not one of those women because I raised you well." Her voice shook as she spoke. "I can't talk about this now." When she stood up, her wrapper slipped to the floor, revealing her black knee-length underwear. She grabbed the frail cloth. "I have akara to sell. Go and take your bath. I left the mkpuruoka wrapper on my bed for you."

I stood up to do as she had said, but my mind was overwhelmed by the foggy reality of her words, and I struggled not to think of the man I was seeing, the reason I had left Edu and my children to seek my mother's permission to end my marriage. Ebuka.

Ebuka was no different from the men who disliked my feminist posts on Facebook, but unlike the others who said the cause was turning women to devil worship and lesbianism, Ebuka said it was lack of problems that made people talk nonstop about patriarchy and abortion rights when they could channel that energy to important problems like child marriages, the children dying in poor African countries and the rate of unemployment.

When I started my women empowerment campaign on my page, I blocked so many of the men who criticized my posts. There was Olukoye who said that I was possibly in an unhappy marriage. Before Olukoye was Kene who said I was abused as child. Festus had asked if I was unmarried. The angry men tramped to my page with the gallantry of commandoes rushing to defend the male kingdom from female derision. They did not deliberate on the points I raised but made personal attacks as though they knew me beyond Facebook. I added as many names as possible to my list of blocked angry men. It was only after other friends pointed out my lack of tolerance in these discussions that I began to ignore the diversionary voices.

I was my parents' first daughter. At sixteen I was married off to our neighbour Edu, who lived on the floor above ours. I had never liked him. Actually, I had liked him once, when I was eight or nine.

He was the uncle in the compound who fended off the bullies and gave us treats of biscuits and sweets. He cracked his knuckles and thumped Ikenna on the head once, for mocking my height. He had jokes for every child, and helped us with our difficult homeworks. On weekends, he let us watch Indian movies in his large sitting room after we had done our chores. At the end of every term, he assembled us in front of his door and he gave us gifts according to how well we performed at school.

I always came first in my class and so I received the best shoes or dresses, and he would crush me in his bosom and swing me in circles until I was giddy with laughter. Those early days, Edu's words and gifts propelled me to stay up at night to read my books.

But things changed after I turned twelve. He began to hug me a little longer, my small breasts crushed against his chest. He played with my fingers when he held my hands and asked me to sit on his lap when I took things to his flat. At first, I thought nothing of it, but I grew uncomfortable under his intense stare. Being in the same space with him became an ordeal. I stopped joining other children to watch movies in his room, and avoided him at every turn, except when he ordered akara and bread from my mother's stall in the evenings. He would try to hold my eyes, or call my name but I would pound the pestle against the peppers and onions in the mortar, loud enough to pretend I didn't hear him. Afterwards, my mother would drag me by an ear and ask me why I was rude to him. Didn't I know that he was her best customer?

It became a routine. I avoided him or pretended he was not there when he was close by, but he never stopped visiting our stall, or trying to get me to talk to him.

A day after my senior WAEC, Edu appeared at our door. I still remember very clearly, the blue cord lace up-and-down he wore that day, how his black sandals shone. He said he wanted to see my parents and my father appeared behind me and welcomed him in. They talked for hours. Later, that evening, my mother sang as she spooned in bean dough into boiling oil, and she sang Igbo songs of praise as she wrapped akara for perplexed customers.

After dinner and my sisters had gone to bed, my father offered me his favourite seat. He called me 'ada m', the affectionate term he used when he was happy, which was rare, and then he launched into the meat of the story, his eyes glistening. He said Edu had asked for my hand in marriage, that he had promised to send me to the university. I looked at my mother; this was surely a joke, but her eyes were wet with tears, and she was bobbing her head up and down, smiling and wiping her face with the end of her wrapper.

"God has remembered us," she said, rubbing her hands which were speckled with scars from hot oil burns.

My father suddenly seemed younger; the lines that always furrowed his brows had disappeared. My refusal began, but it died in my throat when he said Edu also promised to give my mother money to set up a proper business.

Everything happened so fast. In three months, I was married to Edu, we moved to Onitsha, and I was pregnant. Ten years, four sons and three miscarriages later, I had yet to go to the university, and only found succour on Facebook after a friend introduced me to a closed women's group.

And so, when Ebuka hopped on my post to tell me how I should have been channelling my energy to child marriages and children dying in poor African countries, I wanted to laugh.

I ignored his comment until he launched into a long talk about the evils of abortion, and how he believed that no sane society should grant women that right.

"Why would you want to abort it when you can close your legs?" He continued. "Why would you want to kill an unborn child when you can choose not to get pregnant in the first place?"

I read his comment and was puzzled by how easily people who would never go through an experience lord it over others who could never escape them.

“Abortion is like dropping bombs on children in middle-east Asia,” Ebuka said. “It is inhumane. I am disappointed that you, who I have come to respect, would associate with such evil.”

I was struck by his assumption, by how he had said that women who didn’t want children had no business getting pregnant, as though it were as simple as he thought. And then, I worried that I cared too much about this stranger’s opinion; this stranger whom I could not remember accepting or adding as a friend.

I felt an urge to tell him about my four pregnancies, the miscarriages I suffered, and how Edu insisted that he wanted six children. But I picked up my phone again and wrote him a stinker.

I have the right – no, I have the moral right to choose what to do with my own body. I have the right to live. I am a human being. You are ignorant of the fact that childbirth completely affects the life of a woman. You do not even acknowledge the need for abortion under certain conditions; to you: I, and other women fighting for that right are murderers, senseless, unreasonable murderers. I should know better than engage to a man on a subject men will never experience. But if this discussion, this waste of time, has proven one thing, it shows that I have shameless misogynists lurking on my timeline. Please do me a favour and jump off a bridge. Save the world one more menace.

I logged off. That night, I slapped Edu’s hands off when he reached for my breasts and yelled at my house help when she turned the volume of the TV too high. I locked myself in the bathroom and stood under the shower. Something warm burned the back of my eyes. At only twenty-six years old, I finally questioned the path my life had taken, why I gave in to my parents’ wishes, if I was built to be a mother. I stood there, tasting the salt of my tears as warm water hit my back.

When I logged on to Facebook the following morning and saw Ebuka’s lengthy response to my last comment, I expected a harsh riposte, but I saw that he had withdrawn his previous words. He didn’t mean it *personally*, he said, as if saying this excused the gravity of his ignorance, and he was not targeting women who had valid conditions that required the procedure. His comments were directed at those who said they could choose to get pregnant at first and not want to go ahead with it later because to them, getting pregnant was like ordering jollof rice and changing their minds about the delicacy when it was served. I laughed; I had never imagined that anyone would liken childbirth to something as ludicrous as eating jollof rice.

I went to his wall.

With my Opera Mini browser, I could never quite see the avatars of the people I engaged with unless I visited their walls, and I had become comfortable with it. Seeing Ebuka reaffirmed why I continued using that browser.

He had an enviable elegance. I squinted at his photos – at the warm eyes hidden behind bold-framed Ray-Ban perched atop a remarkable nose. His groomed, full beard swallowed half his face and his skin was so clear and so fair, like it had never toiled under the sun. He had the body that hinted at a man towering at over 6’4, and his muscles were taut under his shirt, stretching from shoulder to shoulder. I had never seen a man so beautiful.

I wrote him a message, read it and rewrote it again. I searched for a balance between confidence and sincerity. I didn’t want to come off as weak, and also didn’t want to be perceived as arrogant.

I should not have said what I said. But bear in mind that your words were offensive, borderline ridiculous and hilariously arrogant. I should have showed you why you were ten ways wrong. I shouldn't have called you a misogynist. Biko don't jump off a bridge.

I clicked Send. There was a brief moment when I regretted the note; what if he misread my intent and published it on his wall to shame me. That would kill me. I wished I could recall the message. I worried about the reputation I had overtime earned on the platform, and how it would all be flushed down the toilet all because of one unguarded moment. I wanted to slap myself and then I scrolled down his timeline and clicked on 'Block this person'. Perhaps if he wasn't able to find me on the platform, the shame would be less. But I didn't confirm the request.

I stayed online all day, waiting for his reaction, refreshing my page over and over again. By the end of that day he still hadn't replied. What if he published the private message when I was asleep? I would wake up to find my image tattered and splayed from wall to wall on Facebook. Other angry, sulking men would mock me to no end. I sat with my children in the sitting room, watching them watch Cartoon Network, my mind returning again and again to that message. I refused to go to bed. I tried to think of damage control, but tiredness reached to the verges of my mind. I was still debating whether to block him when I dozed off.

I woke up with a start, and it was just me and TV. My neck ached from resting in one position and when I saw that my phone was blinking from the floor where it had slipped to, I snatched it. The battery had dwindled to three percent, but as I hurried to plug it to charge, the phone went off and NEPA struck at that moment.

It was the longest night as I lay in bed. I prepared my mind for a robust response, and then it occurred to me that Facebook was the only place I flourished, the only world where I truly lived. I fiddled with the Samsung Galaxy phone. Edu had given it to me on my birthday and had told me how much he bought it in China, as though by letting me in on that information, I would appreciate it better. I wondered what life would have been if there was no Facebook, if I had no cell phone. Onitsha was a dead place, a thriving commercial town that was dead because it lacked the diversity Kano had. I had no friends. Edu wanted me to associate only with the wives of his friends, those women who talked only about the latest clothes and shoes and called themselves by their husband's aliases – Nwunye Emeka Japan, Nwunye Edu China, Nwunye Nonso London – monikers that set my nerves on edge. I was still rummaging on these thoughts when I fell asleep.

By morning when I saw Ebuka's response, my stomach caved in, and then I wanted to laugh and laugh after I read his message.

Nkem, daalu. Your message just made my day and it has increased my respect for you. The truth is I was not angry when you said I hate women, I only felt you misread my point. But that misunderstanding didn't diminish my respect or how much I enjoy reading your posts and the insightful points you bring to the board. Earlier on today, I was writing an app for Vodatek Inc. before NEPA struck and I lost all the work I did today because our company's UPS was not switched on in the morning and my computer didn't back up all I had done. I wanted to smash something before I saw your message, and now it's the best thing I've seen all day. Thank you, Nkem. Thank you for brightening my day.

I read it the tenth time and then I made a screenshot of it. I returned to stare at his photos. There was no reference to what he did for a living, but he had just told me that he wrote apps and even mentioned the firm he was currently writing one for. And I knew that he wanted me to check him

out, else why would he add that detail? I Googled him and he had over 160,000 mentions. He had won the best award for writing an app for most of the major banks in the country. He was the managing partner at Nigeria's top IT company and had represented his company at top IT conferences all over the world. I felt proud that I, who did not attend a higher institution, was able to have his type following me religiously. I quickly checked my photos, all 47 of them, and looked out for his comments or likes, I found none. That realisation, that he had been drawn to me because of what I had to say other than my physical appearance, made me smile. And I carried myself with extra pride.

I sent him a reply, "I'm glad you are not offended. But, mind you, I do not agree with you one bit!" I made to click Send but felt that it sounded too harsh, and so I added a face-with-tears-of-joy emoji.

His reply came in seconds, along with a face-with-stuck-out-tongue-and-winking-eye emoji.

"It will be a day when you agree with me! Ha, I will frame that response and hang it on the wall in my room!" He wrote.

My face grew warm. There was something intimate in the way he said it. I sent him another inane reply, adding the necessary emoji to explain how fast my heart beat at the sight of his messages, and he sent quick replies, laughed at how I had told him to jump off a bridge, said he was saddened that I dismissed him like he was nothing, and pointed how many of my posts he always returned to. My head felt stuffed with wool. Later, I stood before my mirror, frowned at my reflection and wondered what was special about my bland, unremarkable face, what Ebuka really saw in me beyond my posts.

But by morning, I had run out of excuses to strike up another conversation with Ebuka and feared that anymore messages to him would come off as trolling. So I began to search for the legit reason to kick off another conversation, something that wouldn't give me away.

I looked him up again on Google, downloaded the seminar topics he had given, and read his papers all day and by morning of the following day, I was bustling with questions about why Nigeria was yet to catch up with Information Technology like Rwanda, a country still recovering from war. I wrote and rewrote my question, sifted it of sentimental thoughts that wouldn't tell how much I yearned to read from him. Ebuka replied immediately, as though, he, too, had been looking for reasons to hit up a conversation. He asked how I was, if I had a good night rest, how he had missed talking to me; his words submerged in the warmth of a man that would rather talk about us than IT. Then he launched into a brief explanation on why Rwanda had become Africa's IT centre.

The next day, after my children had gone to school, I sat through breakfast with Edu, picking through my food. It was only after he had left for work that I began to live. I scrolled through my chat with Ebuka, read up all of our conversations, counted how many times he had started a chat trail, and soaked up the words that gave away what he felt. After I had convinced myself that I was not imagining the new relationship, I sent him a message, a simple 'good morning, Ebuka. Hope you slept well?' His response came immediately. We stayed online, talking, and when I checked the clock thirty minutes later, it was time to get my children from school.

In a month, we knew each other's responses, had shared our growing up stories, and I was comfortable enough to talk about my sons. In two months, he sent me his private numbers and when we talked for the first time, his words were rushed like he had just returned from a marathon. Our conversations stretched from my knowledge about music, to the apps he wrote, and my dreams of going back to school. He applauded my posts and argued strongly when he didn't agree with my

views. We yelled at each other but the fights had become tamed; we disagreed with the enthusiasm of people who had grown to know each other like the lines in the palms.

It was so easy to talk to him, to say anything without feeling awkward, and misstep without feeling stupid. He listened and then he said the right words or he said nothing at all, and it was always the best conversations. I could not understand how I hadn't met someone like him before Edu, where he had been all my life, if people around him were also left breathless by the sound of his voice, the hum of his laughter, the care in his words. He made me see my strength and brilliance. For the first time in years, I recognized myself in the mirror, laughed a lot louder and fell in love with my own voice.

One evening, I served Edu and our children jollof rice and fried plantain, and then moimoi I had prepared with corned beef, fish and eggs. Edu finished his first serving and asked for more.

"The moimoi is so sweet!" Nonso, my second son, said. "I want more!"

"What are we celebrating," Edu said. "It's been a long time since you prepared my favourite dish. Or what do you want me to buy for you? You deserve anything you ask for today."

He was smiling, his eyes wet with eagerness. He rubbed my back, winked and returned to his food. I realized I always served him his favourite food when I wanted to ask for something, like going back to school, but each time, he repeated his promise to send me back to any university of my choice after I had given him two more children.

I moved my moimoi in my plate with my spoon, and said, "I want to go to Abuja."

Edu pushed back his plate, his shoulder defiantly set. "What?"

"I want to visit my sister Nonye," I said. His eyes searched mine. "She has been hospitalized. My mother can't visit because she is not feeling too well either."

Edu resumed eating, his spoon clashing against the enamel plate. I stared at this man I had called my husband for years. Though we had shared the same bed every night since our wedding, he still looked like the old stranger I had been wary of.

He mumbled something about *thinking about it*, got up and left the room, his footsteps heavy on the floor.

"Are you traveling, mummy?" Nnamdi asked, my last boy, his plate of moimoi untouched.

"Yes, I am travelling. Just for a few days and I will be back."

Later, in bed, Edu lifted my dress, pulled down my underwear, and slid in his finger, his other hand squeezing my breast. I looked at the ceiling, at the familiar spot that had become the lone spectator to our lovemaking. As Edu's breath quickened and he heaved and jerked above me, I began to count the boards. His moans filled the room as I counted twenty boards, and he got off before I was done counting all forty of them, as always. I sighed, relieved. Something wet dripped down to the back of my leg, staining the sheet.

"You will go tomorrow," Edu said, pulling on his shirt. "But you must be back in three days."

There was a moment when I wanted to leap up and hug him, but I stayed back as warm tears trickled down the sides of my eyes.

After Edu's snores ricocheted around the walls, I reached for my phone and began to send Ebuka a message.

"I will be in Abuja tomorrow," I wrote, "to see my sister. If you are in town, lucky you." But I didn't click Send. I knew he would reply immediately he saw the message, and he would want to know all the details of my arrival. I switched off the phone, saving the excitement for when I got to Abuja.

I dreamt I was sitting in an exam hall, my papers laid out before me, but I didn't know the answers to the questions. I was shrouded with a sense of failure so frightening that when I woke up, I was shivering. I didn't want to go on the trip anymore. My mind bubbled with questions as Edu dropped me off at the Enugu airport. I wondered how Ebuka would react when he met me, if he would be put off.

The air was different when we disembarked from the Arik flight. Abuja smelled of freedom so crushing I took in deep breaths. The people carried themselves with extra puff on their shoulders, talked with accents and young girls drove nice cars, girls much younger than me, who didn't have wedding rings.

Later, I checked in at a hotel in Apo which I had looked up. The room – 411 – was a small quaint place with generous splash of colours, and a bed wide enough to contain a family of five. It was only after I had showered I checked my phone. Edu had called three times, and Ebuka had sent ten messages, asking why I wasn't responding to his chat. I called Edu. He wanted to know if I had seen my sister, and I said I was at the hospital. I sent Ebuka a 'good afternoon', and he responded in seconds, asking if I was okay. I said I was. He talked about his day, said he was yet to order lunch.

"I don't know what to order," I said.

"Order? What do you mean 'order'? Where are you Nkem."

"Somewhere far away from home."

He called immediately, his words tripling over themselves. He wanted to know that everything was ok – Just tell me where you are Nkem.

I told him.

"What?"

"I'm some minutes away from your place of work."

He hung up.

I dialed his number again and he didn't pick up. I tried to settle in, thought of ordering lunch, but I was worried because he had refused to take my calls. I called Nonye to fill her in and said we would meet later in the evening. Ebuka's call came as I ended Nonye's call.

“What’s your room number?” His breath came in short gasps.

I stood in the middle of the room, my stomach knotted in tension. A knock came to the door, and I forgot how to walk. They came again, soft *tap-tap*, like a plea. My knees carried me to the door, my lungs struggled to suck in air. I pulled the latch open and he stood there, as tall as an iroko, with a chest wide as a board. He made a sound – or I did, something incomprehensible, that sounded like a moan – and then I was crushed in his arms. Time took flight, nothing else mattered, my heart thudded in my ears, and hot breath fanned my ear. Ebuka tightened his grip.

“This is you, Nkem,” he said.

“You are so tall,” I said.

He kicked off his shoes, made me climb on his feet. At my six feet, he was still taller. He held my head in place against his shoulder, warm air fanned the back of my neck.

“See?” His breath smelled of fresh mint, “We are both tall.”

There was a moment when air was sucked out of the room. I rubbed against him, kissed his neck, eyes, nose. He made small sounds, rubbed his nose against my cheeks. I removed his glasses, searched his eyes, for the juju that held me captive. He held my face in his hands and said, “This is my happiest day”, before holding me in another long hug.

“I wanted to surprise you,” I said.

“You gave me a heart attack.” He pressed his lips against my forehead. “This is the best thing, ever.”

There was no hurry about him. He did not tear at my dress, or rush to know my body. We only lay in bed, cuddling and whispering things I never remembered, and occasionally, he pushed my hair to the back of my ears, talking and looking me in the eyes. It was all I ever wanted, all that mattered.

The day rolled by before I could blink and Ebuka did not stay for the night. I felt a certain pride that for the first time, a man was not itching to grab my breasts and part my legs. After he left, at a few minutes past 11 pm, I lay in bed, all through the night, even after he had sent message to confirm he had gotten home. I wondered if it was a crime to want this kind of freedom, to live all by myself, to have the right to choose what I wanted, for the first time in my life.

The second day, I met up with Nonye at a Chicken Republic in Wuse and told her a story about how I had come to seek for admission at the University of Abuja. She hissed.

“So he finally allowed you to breathe? Odikwa egwu.”

Nonye never talked to Edu. I longed to tell her about Ebuka, and wondered if she would approve of him. It had been years since I left home, and Nonye was no longer the thirteen-year old child who wept on my wedding day. She had acquired the airs Abuja girls carried. After she left, I realised I envied her.

The remaining days flew by. Ebuka worked from my hotel room, his laptop cradled in his lap, his feet buried under his thighs, and he pushed his glasses further back his nose when he wanted to punch

the keyboard. He would take short breaks, cuddle against my back, and doze off, only to wake up to return a call or type a few more words.

“You will come back again,” he said on our last night together. He sounded desperate, holding my face, squeezing my shoulders, enfolding me in a hug. “You will come back again.”

A dark cloud loomed as we landed in Enugu. Edu stood by his Toyota SUV, talking into his phone. He simply got back into his car when he saw me, and still talking into his phone, nodded when I mouthed greetings.

The trip back to Onitsha was the longest. After he had ended his call, he turned to me and said, “And how is that rude sister of yours?” He continued, “She is finally getting better?”

I stared at him, his gaze darted between the road and my face. “I allowed you to go only because of your mother. That your sister does not deserve my niceness. I wonder where she picked up that rude attitude from.”

“I did family planning,” I said.

“Eh?”

“I am not going to have any more kids,” I said. “I am done.”

Edu rolled the car to a stop along the road. It was just me and him and the vast bush. Cars whizzed past us. “What did you just say?” he asked, his voice strained.

“You took advantage of me.”

“You are not yourself,” his words were clipped, “You have been fed poison by that sister of yours.”

“I did that by myself, after my last miscarriage. I took contraceptive injections.”

He grabbed my collar, asked who gave me the permission, if I knew the gravity of what I did, why I betrayed him.

“I will never have another child,” I repeated, like a song. “I won’t go through that again.”

I saw the dark lines that streaked his palm before the slap pelted my left cheek, a punch followed, he was yelling, asking what demon had possessed me. I was consumed with pain, and then a crushing happiness, as he kicked and slapped. He had given me the reason to leave. It wasn’t until hands pulled me away from him did I realise that I had been screaming.

“She is my wife! She is my wife!” Edu said to the two men dragging him. They looked at me, and then they left him.

One man told him he shouldn’t have hit me, the other said he should have waited until we got home. Other cars had rolled over, men and women asking what had happened. Edu talked with the men and some women asked me to go beg my husband.

I could have begged Edu when he got back into his car. I could have gotten into the car with him as the people urged me to, but I stood back, watching as he drove off in a huff, until his taillights disappeared at a corner.