

2021 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – Honorable Mention]

## **AFTER THAT NIGHT**

(Original)

*Odey Victoria Ogwih*

*(Age 13, Nigeria)*

On that cold evening, mother dressed me up and we headed out of the house. I dared not ask her where we were going as I already knew a frown was going to be the answer. All I could do was to quietly follow her. As we walked towards the junction, I noticed a woman staring at mum and I. I needed no prophecy to know she was the person mum had come to see.

"Good evening, ma," I greeted the lady as soon as we approached her. Immediately, mum grabbed my hands and said, "Victoria, henceforth, you will live with her. She is your aunty". Her name is Nancy. I took a cursory look at the woman and then turned my gaze to mum.

Several questions ran through my mind: My aunty? Where does she stay? How come mum never said anything about her all the while? The two women barely said words to each other. All mum said to her was "Nancy, she is yours now" which she reacted with a wry smile.

I was only nine years old then and couldn't give an explanation to what had happened. Aunty Nancy had a year old baby. She had brought me in as a maid. She was no different from my mum; she treated me with so much disdain. Or maybe she was better than my mum because she loved and cherished her child. I was the only thing she hated (I may be wrong). She often referred to me as "useless" and "good-for-nothing". There were days she made me go without food.

My life was undefined. If life had a better meaning, I knew nothing about it. I was used to suffering. As I grew older, the shield of bitterness over me became thicker as the days unfolded. Aunty Nancy enrolled me in a public school. This was the one thing I was very grateful to her for.

I was the product of a night spent carelessly by a man and a woman who just wanted to have "fun". They never thought about the consequences of that action. Unfortunately, the consequences of that fateful night fell on me. I was neglected by my young mother as she considered me a barrier to her growth. My father doesn't exist. That's all to it. He wasn't ready to be a father and thus was never found. You dared not ask me what life meant to me else, you refresh a healing wound.

Fast forward to years later,

In a similar evening, like that of the day mother gave me out to Aunty Nancy, the one person I had always confided in, wrote me a letter. I see this person every morning in the mirror.

The words of her letter went as thus: "Dear Vicky, in as much as we see every morning I have decided to write you. I could have waited to tell you this when we meet tomorrow morning as usual. But I chose not to.

I am writing to plead with you to pay heed to your sub-consciousness. It's time you let go of hate and bitterness. You are saddled with a responsibility which you must live to. The mistake had been done by your parents and you should not let it as an excuse for being the best you should become. You can still live the dream you've always had.

Lastly, I'd love to remind you that destinies are tied to yours and you have to create a space for them in the world. Build from this very moment, Vicky. Stay well till I write you again". The best version of me started after that evening as I lent my voice against pre-marital sex on several occasions. Today I live, not for the anticipation of revenge but for the destinies tied to mine.