

house help's tale

By : the Lame One

A house help came into a family, acts and is seen like an Angel. Later shows her true colors and physically abuses a 3 year old child left in her care. the child suffers serious head injuries as a result of the beating. the house maid, showing signs of dual personality, runs into a bathroom and slits her wrists. Nigerian flavor, might be hard for a westerner to understand. Here mainly as a backup piece, you are not encouraged to read.
the lame one(fcn)

Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/the Lame One

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SAMPLE

EXTERNAL/ morning

The shadows thrown by the branches of a garden tree dances a silent waltz on the walls of the house from within which a loud squeal is emanating. The constant fluctuations of the rush hour traffic masks this wail as it descends to a barely designable whimper. Amongst the shadow branches a single window reflects the auburn sky and parts on the tree's foliage.

INTERNAL. Living room-morning

A young child of about 3 and a half years huddles in a corner, enclosed by two leather chairs, as the camera pans we see her hair is pulled into a loose ponytail, and she has both palms clasping her mouth tightly, with a close up of her face we see the stark terror in her young eyes and the stain of shed tears on her face. Before her, the living room pans out and we take in the entire living room like we are seeing it from her sitting position. It is a living room of an upper middle class family, it contains all the trappings of wealth that only the rich can afford, on the wall, portraits of the family member taken separately and collectively are hung, together with fine pieces of art, in form of graphic and sculptor. Moving across the room the camera settles on the TV stand where it rests on a framed photograph of a couple, close up on the photograph.
fade.

INT/ dining room-days earlier

The family is sitting for dinner; the sitting arrangement is without sequence as mother and father chooses to forgo the conventional arrangement of table head and instead makes use of a none formal arrangement that has everyone sitting at any available space.

The atmosphere in the room is tense and ominous; the youngest child is looking directly at her father who is at that moment glaring at her with menace in his eyes, the mothers eyes rivets from her husbands face to her daughters, it can be seen from her stance that she is ready to rush to the girl's defense if the situation gets worse than it already is.

The other kids , a boy of six and a girl of eight, appear subdued and both hold their spoon suspended on their plates as if caught short between the process of spooning food up, anger is expressed as a slight frown on the older girl's forehead, while the boy's chest heaves erratically.

The younger girl startles as her father yells

Madu

Are you not the one I am talking to!

Bisi (demurely)

Darling please she is only a child!

Madu

Stay out of this. I've told you to stop over pampering her. Now you see the result of your nonsense.

Madu

Now young lady, go to the kitchen and apologize to Aunt Julia and after that head to your room. I think you deserve to go to bed hungry for what you have done.

He glared at his wife, daring her to contradict his pronouncement. Bisi nodded her head at the clearly subdued Clara who slid off her seat, her face a mask of betrayal, and headed towards the kitchen. At the door she turns once more to look at her father imploring, but he points toward the door. She exits

INT/ dining

Bisi

Darling, I don't support what she did, but don't you think you are being too hard on her? After all she is only a baby.

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Madu

I know she is a baby and that why she is getting off with only a reprimand (turning to glare at his other children Obinna and Iyabo) and the same goes for both of you, if I ever hear you insulting Juliana you will be in soup.

The kids slunk their shoulders lower and Bisi's frown deepened while Madu attacked his food with renewed gusto, apparently the only one that still relished it.

INT/ kitchen evening

The focus is on the door as Clara enters. The close in on her face shows conflicting emotions, of which fear appeared to win. She stays within the line of the open door and looks pleadingly at someone off camera. She twists her fingers around her dress and takes a step back as Juliana's voice, lowered to barely a whisper is head off camera.

Juliana

Daddy's baby, close the door now. Or do you want them to hear what I want to say to you?

We follow the Clara eye view to where Juliana in a simple dress and apron is leaning majestically on the sink with her hands on her hips.

Clara (using her hands to stifle her own sobs)

Aunty Julie, I am sorry, I won't report you to daddy again.

Juliana

But you reported me now, abi. Come here! What is she mewling about? Wait now, I have not touched you but I will, you know now! Wait until they go to work tomorrow. I will!

Juliana takes some quick steps to the cowering Clara and twists her ear painfully while whispering to her to be silent.

Fade

INT/living room-morning

The focus pans out from the framed photograph and draws back as if returning to Clara where she huddles between the chairs, across the exposed areas of her arm, large ugly welts crisscross in an uneven order. Spittle and tears intermingle in her chin, flowing unto her dress to form semi-dry mucus that clung to her skin. Slowly, as if drawn by invisible forces, she straightens up and wipes her eyes with the hem of her dress. She jumps as the sound of a door closing somewhere in the house startles her. She hastily dabs at her puffy eyes and tries to act as normal as she could in the normal circumstance. Somewhere in the house a clock chimes the hour.

INT/ bedroom evening

Juliana lays serene on a double bed in what obviously is the master bedroom, wrapped with clothes that belong to Bisi, and picks her teeth with a toothpick.

Upon the bed side table, a half eaten chicken lap competes for space with the remnants of a meal of jolof rice. A TV set on the extreme corner is showing a local music video; we view Juliana from across the room, the view encompassing the bed, walk-in wardrobe and the small bedside TV stand. She is moving her feet and head in time to the beat.

As the view turns slowly to focus on her face, a slight smile appeared around her lips and she turns to the small alarm clock on the night table. The time shows 4 o'clock. She jerks up, a look of intense alarm on her young face.

Springing up from the bed, she takes two steps towards the closed door and stops short; the camera becomes her eyes as she scans the room. Starting from the open wardrobe, it spins a tight half circle one way and back again to the wardrobe and towards the opposite direction, finally coming to rest on the half eaten chicken. We get a full taste of her displeasure when, in her haste to reach the plate, she trips on the flowing nightgown she is wearing and fall flat on carpeted floor.

She gets up, matching speed with her fall, she rips it off. Her face swelled up with pleasure at the sound of tearing clothes.

INT/ a smaller bedroom-evening

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Juliana is standing in the middle of the room, one hand holding the torn dress and the other planted firmly on her hips, her face is a cruel mask with her lips curled up in a big sneer. Her left leg is tapping the floor with a fast tempo as she leans back slightly.

Before her Clara cowers, tears in her eyes, shaking her head from side to side in innocent denial.

Clara

Aunty Julie I did not tear the dress

Juliana

Shut up! Silly girl, I said you tore it and thatâs final. Now go to your room and when mummy comes back make sure confess to her that you tore her gown by mistake or I will pound life out of you.

Clara runs out of the room.

Juliana smile deviously and flings the gown on the floor before flopping down on the bed. Fade

INT. living room-morning

Clara is now lying on the rug, again looking intently on the framed photograph. The tears on her eyes have now dried and though she looks calmer, her face still bear the mark of bitter sorrow.

As she stares at the photograph, it goes in and out of focus as she slowly dozes off.

EXT. day-months earlier

The three children run out of the front door with open hearted delight as a car pulls up the drive way. They all rush to the passenger side as an elderly woman dressed in a two piece wrapper and lace blouse steps out. She adjusts her wrapper as she hugs first Obinna then Iyabo, Clara she picks up and balances on her hips.

Clara

Granny did you bring okpa for me from the village?

Grand mother

Haa! Nne dim, how can I forget you favorite snack? Off cause I brought plenty for you and Obim and This Yoruba woman (playfully pinching Iyabo who was clutching her free arm)

Iyabo

Mama I am not a Yoruba woman o, daddy says that since he is Igbo that is what I am.

Grand mother (rolling her eyes comically)

Ohh Ohh! He said so? Does that mean you will start bearing the name I gave you?

Iyabo

Noooo! Granny, my friends say Mgbafor is an outdated village name

Obinna (chanting and skipping to beat)

Mgbafor, Mgbeke, Mgboye, Mgbankwoâ ;

Iyabo

Oooh! Granny, make him to stop. (To Obinna) you always do that to annoy me

Clara

Granny what is annoy?

Grandmother

Obinnaya stop singing and carry this bag in. Nnem, donât mind him, it only means you were born on an Afor day.

Clara

What is Afor?

Iyabo

Olodo, it is a market day

Clara

Like Oshodi market?

Iyabo

Yes now, olodo

Clara

Granny she is calling me olodo

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Grandmother (leading them towards the front doors)

Donâ t mind her, my husbandâ s mother was a very intelligent woman and you take after her. By the way (looking at her wrist watch) where is your mother?

Obinna (from the door, frowning at them for delaying)

She went to work

Iyabo

Itâ s a lie o. she went to the market to buy chain

Grandmother

To buy chain? Oh! You mean jewelry, so who is looking after you now? (She is now frowning slightly, one of her eyebrows puckering upwards)

Iyabo (jostling with Obinna for the right to open the door)

Ahmed the gate man, but mummy said a maid is coming today.

Grandmother

What maid? (The worry lines creasing her face) donâ t tell me she wants to hire a house maid?

Grandmother (cont) walking in after the boisterous kids who are apparently unaware of her distress)

What is the world coming to? House maid? What will she do for her? Okay, let them come and met me here. (She entered the sitting room and allowed Clara slide gently down to the lush carpet before throwing her weight down on the nearest chair)

The older children got busy dissecting the contents of her carry bag that the driver brought in ignoring the protests of Clara who tried unsuccessfully to find a safe spot in the mêlée. Light fade with her running with teary eyes towards grandmother.

EXT/ within the compound

Clara is playing with Ahmed who has her running round the car park area while he chases after her, to the hilarious delight of Clara. Ahmed is making funny monster faces at the now cornered Clara who is caught between two cars, his back is to the house and he did not notice anything amiss until the erstwhile laughing childâ s face fell and became a fear drenched mask.

He dropped his monster stance alarmed that he had scared her.

Ahmed (whispering)

What is it?

Seeing that her eyes are focused somewhere behind him, he followed her gaze, turning slowly, his head moving faster than his body, such as to reach the intended destination before his other parts did.

Directly behind him stood Juliana, arms akimbo, a strange look in her face.

Ahmed (startled)

Ah, Julie, na you.

Juliana ignored him and pointed first toward the slightly shivering Clara with her index finger, then slowly, almost sensually drawing the same hand back to indicate the house over her shoulder with her thump.

Juliana (with menace)

SLEEP!

Clara slipped around Ahmed and ran into the house. Juliana gave the bewildered Ahmed a once over look that scanned him thoroughly from head to toe and turned away towards the house.

Ahmed

So this how you treat small children eh? Wait until madam returns, I will tell her my self.

Juliana turns around at his words, her eyes growing round as fear leapt into her face, this change though, is very brief as her scowl deepened and she snapped her fingers at the back of the retreating Ahmed in a vindictive way. We get a Close in of her face; she is biting her lips, a contemplative look in her eyes.

Fade

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INTERNAL. Setting room-night

Ahmed stands at a corner of the room close to the entrance, a look of stark disbelief on his face. Before him Madu seats in a pensive mood looking at an infuriated Bisi who was then raining invectives on Ahmed, behind her a subdued Clara looked down on the rug counting the tread.

Juliana is leaning on the kitchen door; seemingly not party to what was taking place further inside the room. Standing behind a three setter, Iyabo and Obinna can only be said to march Ahmed in expression. They both bore identical open mouth, wide eyed expression of shock.

Bisi

I said I want you out of my house this very minute, you ungracious beast.

Ahmed

Madam I SWEAR Iâ

Bisi

I donât want to hear another word from you, leave my house or I will get the police to arrest you.

Ahmed (turning to Madu)

Oga, you know I have worked for you for a long time, you canât believe I am capable of an act like â

Bisi

Dear, donât even think of it, Ahmed has gotten away with murder I this house before, but this time, I have to think of my daughters. What if he takes advantage of them?

Bisi (cont)

And donât forget that Juliana is someoneâs daughter too, as a woman I must act now. Ahmed must leave this house now.

Madu

Ahmed, I am very disappointed in you. Though I find it hard to believe, Claraâs evidence holds against you. I have no alternative but to let you go. Come back later for your severance package.

Ahmed

Oga Madu, Madam, please reconâ

Bisi (hyperventilating)

Pleeeeeease, get out before I lose my temper.

Ahmed shuffles towards the entrance door, stopping briefly to contemplate a now visibly triumphant Juliana. As he exits Clara and Obinna both run after him.

Madu is then looking at Juliana, whose brief triumphant smile he appeared to have noted, she avoids his eyes, and worry lines distort his forehead.

Fade

INT. living room-morning

Clara sits on the floor, playing with her doll set. She sits one in front of her and proceeds to feed it with an imaginary food.

Spooning food from a small plate, she brings it up to the dolls mouth.

Cut to the bedroom door, from which Bisi is entering the sitting room, she is dressed for an outing and is clutching sets of jewelries in her hands, seeing Clara at play she stopped momentarily to watch her, a small smile playing around her painted lips.

Following her gaze we return back to Clara, who from afar, looks like any child playing house with dolls but, as she comes into focus we see the feigned furious look in her face and the violent way she is feeding the doll. She is pushing the spoon into the dolls mouth with such speed and force that the dolls head jerks back violently with each spoonful, this is not eased by the sequence of spoonfuls with is torturously fast, coupled by the string of invectives, whispered but harsh that Clara is saying to her.

We cut back to a close up of Bisiâs face. A look of horror had replaced her earlier smile. She staggers back a few steps, her hands rising towards her chest which it clutched painfully.

Fade

INT. living room-daylight

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A woman dressed simply but tastily, sits comfy facing Bisi who sit opposite her.

Juliana, slightly more genial than we know her, sits bolt upright-openly bewildered by her surroundings-beside the woman, a small bag by her side. Clara is curled at her mother's foot, one little hand clinched around sticks of crayon while the other colors a picture book. As we look, she takes a shy look at Juliana and smiles sweetly before shyly returning to her work.

The woman, having noted Clara's interest, used her eyes to call Bisi's attention to the event.

Bisi

You say she is from a good home and educated?

Agent

Yes, her mother is my friend. She only accepted the offer because I said you are a friend and will treat her like yours. She hopes to get back to school as soon as she raises the finances.

Bisi

Don't worry about that, we will see she starts school as soon as possible. (To Juliana) what class did you stop at?

Juliana (shyly)

SS1 Ma.

Bisi

That okay. (to agent) you say you will come at the end of the month to collect her wage? Wouldn't it be better to open an account for her? I doubt if she will have any need for the money here, since we will see she is provided for.

Agent (complacently)

Ahh! No, that's not necessary, most of the money goes to her mother and the rest will go into an account we have already opened for her.

Bisi (impressed)

That's great to hear!

Grandmother walks in through the front door accompanied by Madu, Iyabo and Obinna.

Bisi rises to hug Madu and the kids, going on her knees in front of her mother-in-law, who is pleased despite her look of disapproval.

As the adults engage in greetings and pleasantries, Clara pulls her older brother and sister to one side and whisper into their ears. Their conversation is accompanied with a lot of glances towards Juliana who sits still, occasionally glancing shyly around her.

We fade on a close up of grandmother, who is spotting a displeasure look on her aging face.

INT. kitchen-night

Juliana is bent over the sink, scrubbing pots and pans. As she moves to pick up a bar of soap on the cabinet top, loud argument from the living room distracts her, she listens.

Grandmother (o/s)

I still fail to understand what you need a maid for? You are married to a man who takes care of all your needs. Must you do this business you claim is taking up your time?

Juliana turns fully and walks closer to the half open kitchen door, here she stops, her ear cocked to one side.

Bisi

I am a modern woman Mama and I can't sit at home will a man provides for me, do I have to remind you that I gave up my career to run this house for nine years, now all I ask is for a little chance to augment my family's income thru a little jewelry business. If a maid can buy me that time I don't-pardon the language-see why the hell not!

Grandmother

See her talking about modernity like I am not also living in this modern time. Remember that I worked as a teacher for years and managed to raise a family of six all alone after my husband died. I know it is hard but, one has to sacrifice in other not to introduce strangers into our home and!

Madu

Mother, it is alright. I assure you that we understand your fears, but Juliana has being with this family for week and the reports that I got, even from you, is that she is of the best behavior and a hard worker. So, I

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suggest we change this topic and accept her as an integral part of this household for that is how I see it. Juliana smiles her now recognizable triumphant smile and walks back to her washing, humming a song under her breathe.

Fade

INT. bathroom-night

Under the light of the electric light in the bath room we see Juliana staring at her reflection in the mirror. Initially, it was her reflection that we see, it is looking directly at the camera and it is only when she turns to look over her shoulder that we draw back with her to get the full view of her before the mirror looking over her shoulder at a commotion on the other side of the door.

Her expression is strangely calm in the light of the noise coming in through the door.

Madu (

Juliana! Open this door before I break it down. Juliana

Bisi

Juliana, we know you are in there open this door this very minute.

Juliana is not affected, she turns back to the mirror and we return with her to her reflection, which though bore her features, strangely looks unlike her. While her face as we saw it before is calm her reflection is nothing close to calmness and at that moment seems to glare at her with burning hatred and anger.

Going back to Juliana's face we see shock there, like she too sees the duplicity in her reflection and is scared by it too.

Pain flashes through her face as she raised her hand to stare with horror at the thick coating of blood on it. We follow her shocked eyes down to see that the floor below is stained red with blood that is still running down her arms from deep slashes across her wrists.

Outside Madu applies his shoulders to the door and it burst in wards after the third shove. The momentum carries him into the bathroom, Juliana turns slowly towards the door, and Madu rooted to the spot in shock makes a futile attempt to catch her as she falls.

Quickflash

A view of Juliana using powder to cover the bruises on Clara's body.

Fade

A close up of her face which is bewildered.

We hover around them, going in slow motion around until we come back to her face to see that the bewildered look is gone, replaced by the usual triumphant sinister smile.

Juliana

Now, now, that does it. I bet your too busy mother will not notice anything out of the ordinary.

Fade

Quick flash

A panning view of Iyabo, Obinna and Clara kneeling with their hands held above their heads. Juliana, who at that moment is striking a beat on her palm with a vicious looking cane, struts before them, lashing out at any knuckle that lowers an inch.

Close up on the kids show tears and intense fear.

Fade

Quick flash

Slow motion of an infuriated Juliana hitting out at a cowering Iyabo, Iyabo's head snapping back to strike the wall.

Rotating view of Juliana trying to revive her.

Quick flash

Speed shot of activity around the prone Iyabo, nearby the driver is talking excitably into a cell phone.

Juliana running towards her room with a screaming Bisi behind her.

Madu and Bisi trying to force open her bathroom door.

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