

No Great Loss

by

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DESCRIPTION

Emma Newmark's hair is thinning, as is her patience with Awagu Kidane, her hairdresser, whose comments about how trim Emma's husband Spurgeon is looking makes Emma wonder what her hairdresser knows for sure.

CHARACTERS

- EMMA NEWMARK, late 50s/early 60s—aging colleen, speaks with an Irish accent, thinning hair, poofed brittle look common to some older women's hair styles
- AWAGU KIDANE, early 50s—Ethiopian, wears a headscarf

SETTING

- AWAGU's hairdressing shop, set up in her house.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two wooden chairs (one being the "working" chair, with arms—the other chair without arms)
- A small table holding some implements—scissors, electric haircutter (cordless, battery powered), an apron, small towel, etc.

NOTE

- Looking toward the audience when in the working chair is considered looking into the mirror.

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EMMA, in a rage, apron around her neck, points a pair of scissors at AWAGU—except that the scissors are backwards and therefore pose no threat.

AWAGU

Emma, sit down. This is not like you.

EMMA

This is a "like me" you don't know about.

Emma, sit down. AWAGU

Not until you take it back. EMMA

Take what back? AWAGU

What you said. EMMA

Which what I said? AWAGU

You know— EMMA
(brandishing the scissors)

About? AWAGU

Spurgeon— EMMA

I said I thought his new trimness fit him well— AWAGU

That's what I mean! His "trimness"! You hussy! Take it back! EMMA
(with a pop)

AWAGU takes a deep inhale, as if sucking back the words.

Will that do? AWAGU

Ha, ha, Smarty Jones. Don't mess with me! What do you know about his "trimness"? Tell me! EMMA

AWAGU

Less than you do, I'm sure, who watches him whip it out every night!

A shocked look on EMMA's face. EMMA sputters.

EMMA

Why you— Why you—

AWAGU

Aha! You didn't think I knew such lingo, hey?

EMMA

I didn't know I knew such lingo.

AWAGU

But there you are, every night—Spurgeon whip, whip, whip, whip, whip—

EMMA

Stop it—

AWAGU

And if you continue letting the scissors be held like that and spouting off silly things—go on, look at them—

EMMA looks down at the scissors, sees that they are backward.

AWAGU

—you are going to shame yourself with one of your excellent friends.

(pointing to handles)

Not built for stabbing me to death—or anyone else. I thought a smart woman like you knew such things.

EMMA, almost defeated, won't quite give up yet. She brandishes the handles with a half-heart.

EMMA

You've always wanted him, haven't you?

AWAGU

Let me finish your hair.

EMMA

You mean bale the straw, don't you?

AWAGU

I mean the finish the hair I have been fixing for—

EMMA

You're deliberately making it ugly, aren't you?

AWAGU

Emma, the scissors—before we share another syllable.

EMMA

Making it ugly so you can get Spurgeon all for yourself.

AWAGU

(gesturing)

Come on.

EMMA

You've been making it ugly for years—me, a twice-a-month regular trusting you, and you making me ugly beyond repair—

AWAGU gestures once more for the scissors, which EMMA, with only a slight hesitation, hands over. AWAGU snaps them open and shut several times.

AWAGU

Your sweaty hands haven't rusted them out. Good.

EMMA

(without much heat)

Don't smart-mouth me.

AWAGU

Sit down.

EMMA sits down.

AWAGU

Tell me what happened.

EMMA

Nothing happened.

(hesitates)

It's embarrassing.

AWAGU

Embarrassment can equal a waking-up call.

EMMA

Maybe in Ethiopia.

AWAGU

I learned that wisdom thanks to the ultra-modernized West, from a teabag at Boston airport. Tell me.

EMMA

Nothing happened.

AWAGU

Except a "nothing" that was a something embarrassing—

EMMA

Nothing—much—happened.

AWAGU

That "much" make you a liar with your pants all on fire—eh?

EMMA

(hesitate, hesitate, hesitate)

Doing the dishes the other night—oh, a right joke he thought this was!—when Spurgeon was doing the dishes—he reached for the new dish soap, and by chance grabbed the Miracle-Gro—you know how he does his repotting in the sink, which drives me—sorry—

AWAGU

Good—focus—breathe—

EMMA

And he made a grand joke of pretend-pouring it over my head with some sly horticultural digs about roots and wisps and vines—and that's not all!

AWAGU

It never is.

EMMA

Weights, mind you—he’s hefting weights! And his biceps are—

AWAGU

I noted.

EMMA

“No more damn combover,” so he’s shaved himself bald.

AWAGU

I was blinded by the chrome of his dome.

EMMA hesitates.

AWAGU

And?

EMMA

And then there’s the Speedo catalogue!

AWAGU

(with great delight)

His package!

EMMA

He’s circled things like “the lunar luster” and “the electro surge.”

AWAGU

A tattoo, I’ll bet.

EMMA

A tattoo he’s thinking about! How did you know that?

AWAGU

It stands to male reasoning.

EMMA

He’s making himself look good—

AWAGU

Damn good.

EMMA

And then you blabbed out about his trimness!

AWAGU

I was observing what he wants to be observed.

EMMA

Because you want to get me out of the way, don't you, so that you can—

AWAGU

I can what?

EMMA stares at AWAGU.

AWAGU

I can what?

EMMA continues to stare at AWAGU, suddenly deflated.

EMMA

I can't believe I am thinking of saying what I thought about saying. About you. About you. What is happening to me? I should go— I've got to go—this embarrassment is not waking me up at all.

AWAGU holds out the seams of her pants.

EMMA

What? What are you doing?

AWAGU

I don't want these to be all on fire.

EMMA

As in "liar, liar"—

AWAGU

I won't lie to you, Emma Newmark.

AWAGU sits.

EMMA

Are you suddenly going to stick into me one of those revelations that I am sure at my age I do not want to have?

AWAGU

No.

EMMA

Don't tell me that I am going to have to kill you before I leave.

AWAGU

I've put the scissors away. Sit.

EMMA sits.

AWAGU

We have made our friendship through your perms, highlights, split ends, shag cuts, kiss curls, tendrils, chignons—those feathered wing-things—and so I will say this to you: if the universe made Spurgeon available to my hand, I would take him, Speedo or not.

EMMA

You would, would you?

AWAGU

I would.

EMMA

You would.

EMMA and AWAGU carefully look at each other.

EMMA

But, you know, not that you have, right?, with Spurgeon, in the past carnal tense—

AWAGU

Not that I have yet—but there is this new trimness of his—

EMMA

It's good you're smiling or your pants would flaming faster than cherries jubilee.

AWAGU

Who knows if they aren't already? The tides don't stop whoosh-and-whoosh because the Earth is old! Don't you think I don't still miss my Halie [hah-LEE] after all these years!

AWAGU holds up her hand, wiggles her fingers.

AWAGU

That these fingers don't still dance down there under the covers when I picture him as I picture him!

EMMA

Awagu!

AWAGU

And not the same dancing for you?

A longish silence.

EMMA

In the shower for me.

AWAGU

Thoughts of Spurgeon.

EMMA

Yes—

(hesitantly)

—but not only him—

AWAGU

Well, there you go—

EMMA

The internet is a wonderful thing in some respects—

AWAGU

Whoosh-and-whoosh, tide comes in, tide goes out!

EMMA

I have to admit to a small tingle, now that you mention it.

AWAGU

When my Halie died, both you and Spurgeon were a great comfort. I am forever in debt to your help, to both your helps, in helping me start this business. If I ever wanted to climb a man's bell tower again—well, enough said.

EMMA

Yes, enough on that count, I think.

AWAGU

But there's also you. And we're getting older. And I envy you. And we're getting older. And I will always love Halie. And we are all getting older. And mix, mix—mush, mush—slop, slop. Like a stew.

EMMA

Awagu—

AWAGU

Let me finish your hair.

EMMA takes off the apron to show her body.

EMMA

It is not in a particularly good phase, now, is it?

AWAGU

Emma, it's all right—

EMMA

Wait—after he did the Miracle-Gro—I took off all my clothes in front of the mirror.

AWAGU

You like to live dangerously.

EMMA

And the inventory did not raise high the roofbeam, you might say. I took note—hep—don't start, don't even try to smooth it out for me, Awagu, because it is as plain as this straw flapping on the roof that I am a downhill fleshy mess, I am. I am a twice-a-month-get-a-rinse-to-hide-the-goddam-gray-body-past-the-due-date-stuck-up-on-the-shelf colleen! And if those are the only goods on tap—well—why would he want them? Maybe you should take him—

AWAGU waits.

EMMA

You're waiting.

AWAGU

And are you done pissing self-pity in your pants?

EMMA

Awagu!

AWAGU

It feels nice and warm for a moment, but then gets cold and clammy, and only people who are quite stupid and blind never change their pants. So stop it.

EMMA

(smiling)

"Pissing"—from your mouth?

AWAGU

You should be proud of Spurgeon. He jokes for you. He's making himself better—for you. He's teaching you new words, and you better learn the tongue of them, or I will come along and move you right out and climb his bell tower!

EMMA

So—so—upon these mortal thoughts, eh?

AWAGU

(cups her breasts)

Hanging down.

EMMA

Hanging on. Hanging in.

AWAGU

It is said that man is a log with nine holes (we women—lucky for the men—get an extra one). Like a flute the wind can play over the log and the music spills out. But the log falls apart—hair gets thin, bellies get thick—and—

(tapping her head)

—at the same time we see it all and don't want to see any of it at all. Cruel trick, maybe, but falling apart is what we do best—and all you can do is do what you can do to keep the holes open and the wind blowing.

EMMA

Spurgeon and his Speedos. I would hate to lose him.

AWAGU

He just wants someone who is alive, and he wants that someone to be you. If Spurgeon comes down like the wind, pick up your skirts and—

AWAGU hesitates, as if it might be too much to say, then says it.

AWAGU

Pick up your skirts and open your holes!

EMMA pauses, looking at AWAGU, then puts on the apron and sits.

EMMA

(patting the top of her head)

All of it—off. Buzz cut it right off.

AWAGU

I have a better idea. Let me show you what got my Halie really hot.

AWAGU takes off her headscarf to show a head with thin hair—or even bald. EMMA laughs.

EMMA

Ain't much grass on the top of that hill!

AWAGU

Ssshhh! Watch!

AWAGU, in a few swift moves, drapes the headscarf around EMMA..

EMMA

Now, that—

AWAGU

Yes—is a new wind indeed.

EMMA

You think?

AWAGU

I know. Spurgeon will know.

Together they make a whooshing sound.

EMMA

So will I.

EMMA takes off the headscarf. She turns, and with a quick gesture, she pulls AWAGU to her and gives her a full kiss upon the lips. EMMA then sits herself in the chair, hand on her head.

EMMA

All right, Awagu—no foof, no floom, no mousse, no tricks. Short and to the point—the first of many things to be tightened up.

AWAGU leans down and puts her cheek against EMMA's cheek, and they both look into the mirror. Then AWAGU gives EMMA a solid kiss on the cheek, stands, takes the scissors. But does not begin cutting. Waits.

EMMA

Good.

AWAGU

Good.

BLACKOUT