

The Wound of a Heart Too Kind

by Esther Obi Smith

In a small town in Biafra, during the war with Nigeria, Adalene Laroque, a nurse from France, was helping aid the wounded in a makeshift hospital, surrounded by other volunteers. She was truly young-looking, which made the patients distrust her at first, but it turned out she was a wonderful nurse. Every day, she took care of the patients and was overjoyed when she saw them return to health.

One day, she was checking on all of her patients, taking note of their progress, when she noticed someone new. Brought in by volunteers while she was asleep was a man, wounded and unconscious, around her age, tall and skinny, with a bandage around his heart. She looked at him and felt a curiosity that she had never felt before, like a magnet pulling her towards him.

“There is something very peculiar about this one,” said a doctor who had approached Adalene when he saw her turn towards the young man’s bed. “We have tried operating on him to close the wound but with no

success. No matter what we do and what we try, we can't seem to close it, or even figure out what caused it in the first place." That day, Adalene continued checking on her patients. However, she couldn't help but think about the strange man with the unhealable wound.

Days passed, and Adalene visited him more and more often and, eventually, decided to start spending her lunch breaks by his side. She sat down and, almost without thinking, took his hand in hers, softly. She marvelled at the beauty of their skin contrast. Suddenly, the man's eyes opened, and he spoke.

"Where am I?" he asked, as if Adalene's touch had brought him back to life. He looked down at their hands. "I guess we became friends while I was asleep?" he said in a friendly tone. She became aware of how strange it must have been for him to have a woman he didn't know close to him, so she stepped back.

The moment their hands stopped touching, it was as if the man suddenly remembered he was wounded. His calm face turned into a grimace, and he began crying in pain.

They tried operating on him time and time again, but the unhealable wound stayed open. Adalene continued to have lunch by his side, and now that he was awake, she began to learn more and more about him. His name was Muyiwa Hanifat, and he was as kind as someone could be. With each story he told, Adalene felt that the pull towards him became stronger and stronger.

Muyiwa had been injured while bringing food to starving children, sharing the little that he himself had. He didn't know how it happened, and he remembered no one around him when he fell to the ground. Filled with compassion, she held his hand again while she listened to him talk, and his pain faded miraculously, just like it seemed to the first time he awoke.

From that day on, Adalene spent as much of her time as she could helping him eat or bandaging his wound.

“You’re my painkiller, Miss Laroque,” he would say, and she would smile.

“Just while you keep entertaining me with your stories, Muiyiwa, it’s a fair trade.”

On a hot summer morning in August, Adalene was just beginning her shift when she noticed Muiyiwa was missing from his bed. She felt a wave of sadness, but then, hope. Maybe he had finally healed and had left. Why would he leave without saying goodbye?

“Doctor, what happened to the patient with the unhealable wound? Muiyiwa Hanifat, where is he?”

“Adalene, we’re going to have to move him to another hospital. I’m afraid you have grown quite close to him, and that is... frowned upon. We help these people because they need us, but you see, Miss Laroque, this doesn’t mean they are like us.”

Adalene was taken aback by the words of the doctor. This man, who was supposed to care about all people equally, was allowing skin colour to raise a barrier between his patients and those who cared for them.

“There is no place for you with a black boy. There’s definitely a man back in France who comes from a good family and can give you a good life—and beautiful children.”

The doctor said ‘beautiful’, but Adalene knew what was really meant: white.

Adalene glared at her superior, “There is no young man more wonderful than Muiyiwa, and your thoughts on who I choose to love are frankly irrelevant. There is no room for racism in this place of healing and care,” she told the doctor. She finished checking on her patients in silent disbelief, wiping tears from her cheeks all throughout the day.



When lunchtime finally came, she decided to look around for Muyiwa; the doctor had said he needed to be moved, which meant he had not yet left after all. She found him in the operating room, staring at the ceiling blankly, with wet cheeks and sad eyes.

“Muyiwa?” she whispered, and his eyes shot towards her, lighting up almost immediately.

“Oh, Adalene! They’re moving me...”

“I heard! They want to separate us, but they can’t.”

She leaned in and softly kissed him, for the first time and what they thought may be the last. Just as their lips separated, something incredible happened: there on the bed was a small pile of tourmaline stones—not the usual blue but black with white stripes. And Muyiwa and Adalene were never seen there again.

Nobody ever really found out where they had gone. Maybe they ran away together, somewhere far away from war and prejudice, and built a beautiful family with whom they lived happily ever after.