

How I Met Your Mother

Yomi Sode

Earlier today, Henry Cassell read a eulogy before friends and family for his son, Ivar, on the eve of his graduation day. Such is the power in his name that no tint could hold the light's persistence through the glazed glass of the church, shining onto those it housed. Including Ethan's father.

Four weeks ago, Ethan ran towards Ivar Cassell, misfiring a bullet at his thigh on the first attempt, then – aware of the blowback – he gripped, firm on the second attempt, firing the remaining rounds into Ivar's chest. Days later, as the community caught wind of yet another senseless killing, biblically, I wondered whether David felt like this, a similar relief, after slaying Goliath.

Before the murder. Ivar pelted Ethan Williams's car with eggs, slashing the tyres and keying *fuck you* on the bonnet for neighbours and passers-by to see. *It's gone too far*, some whispered. Never loud enough to be heard. The crown is not worth that much, but what good are jewels when reasons for wars become a ritual, often lost in translation.

Before the murder, Ethan sat in his local chicken and chips shop, turning each hot wing like a slow roast over a fire pit rationalising violence as the right thing to do. On the TV, we watched boss man recalling him looking tranquil, nothing like a murderer. Nothing like a *front page spread* kid, a *single parent at home* kid, an *acronym branded for life* kid.

Before the children, Silva, a mutual friend of Henry Cassell and Riley Williams, was run over while trying to bring peace to their ongoing feud. A planned reunion gone horribly wrong. Later that evening, the police found a crushed box in Silva's pocket containing an engagement ring. Typical of Silva to put himself before others. I pictured his arms outstretched in the parting of ferocious seas, only to become the martyr of their rage. A young Mercutio comforted to sleep.

Numbness sits in the air when we hear news of another, unalived. The ritual is the same. Fresh flowers bedding the washed concrete. Softening the drop of each tear. We become directors in our dreams, playing back / ~~editing out~~ the stark reality. Lastly, without asking, we become partners in community. Money parting our hands towards the funeral of others. There is no language of reciprocity. We are akin in grief. *Travel safe, we say, with dignity.*

Before the children. Before Silva's untimely death, an argument in the dinner hall spilled onto the school entrance between Henry Cassell and Riley Williams and we don't know who to cheer for. The rumour was that Henry said Riley couldn't read, that Riley told girls that Henry was caught kissing a boy. *That's why they hate each other.*

Before the fight and for the third time that week, Riley had taken all the sandwiches out of Henry's lunch box to eat, then left with a striking blow to his stomach. Within the silence, I hand him my egg mayo sandwich in good spirit, wondering when enough will be enough. *Thank you, I hate him.*

Moments later, a girl taps my shoulder, hands me her sandwich, and I'm faced with such beauty that trying to describe her to you would do little justice. *That was sweet of you,* she said. *What's your name?* Before I saw her, before answering her, I questioned life, and chaos in equal measure.

Yomi Şode

Yomi Şode is an award-winning Nigerian British writer. He is a recipient of the 2019 Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship and was shortlisted for The Brunel International African Poetry Prize 2021 and the Arts Foundation Awards 2024.

His acclaimed one-man show, *COAT*, toured nationally to sold-out audiences, including at the Brighton Festival, Roundhouse Camden and the Battersea Arts Centre. In 2020, his libretto *Remnants*, written in collaboration with award-winning composer James B. Wilson and performed with Chineke! Orchestra, premiered on BBC Radio 3.

In 2021, his play, *and breathe...*, starring BAFTA award winning actor David Jonsson, premiered at the Almeida Theatre to sold-out audiences, rave reviews and garnered four Black British Theatre Awards. Yomi is a Complete Works alumnus and a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen. He is the founder of BoxedIn, First Five, The Daddy Diaries and the mentorship programme, 12 in 12. Yomi's debut collection, *Manorism*, was shortlisted for the T.S Eliot Prize 2022, The Rathbones Folio Prize 2023 and was adapted for stage at the Southbank Centre. Yomi's debut novel, *The Interpreter*, has been acquired and will be published by Viking.

A recording of this piece can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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