

Short Story: Under?

Level: B1-B2

I knew it.

I knew it as soon as I stepped onto that filthy floor that I would not stay a minute longer in that place.

If you ever go to a **double-decker hospital** and the medical personnel ask you to sleep under a bed, don't do it.

Run.

Run to wherever you came from.

Run for your precious and irreplaceable life!

Run and don't look back. Just run.

If they insist, tell them you are not a pair of old shoes. Tell them this is the most nonsensical demand you have ever received from anyone. Tell them any sane person wouldn't do such a thing, would he? Or she? Tell them you are fighting against a mighty foe and that you'd better have all the luck on your side. Tell them there is no way you will go into a boxing ring without protective gear. Tell them you will not gamble your life away under that rickety, sickly bed. Never in your lifetime! Not underneath the sun! Not underneath the moon!

If they pin you down and keep you from leaving, be bold and ask them to show you how you can sleep under the bed of a dying man. Ask them to be a good role model. We learn best through examples, don't we?

If they don't do any of this, then you are free to leave.

You are out of harm's way.

You actually have more hope of getting better going somewhere else than staying in such a shabby, dingy and dilapidated hospital.

I am glad to tell you that this is what I actually did. I, Gerald Phiri, took matters into my own hands and decided to save my life-my very own life, my precious life, my beloved life! I, Gerald Phiri, decided that my life was worthy and I would be better off inside than outside that ramshackle **double-decker hospital**. I am actually very proud of what I did! I prized and saved my very own life! My precious life, my beloved life, my one and only life. Hey, I still have so many things to do and experience in my lifetime. Guys, I have a job that I cherish. On top of that, I have a family that I take care of, day in and day out. Who the hell will look after them if I leave this world so carelessly? So, I took the decision to leave that damn hospital. Why would I put my life into the hands of people who want to dump me under the bed of a dying man? It makes no sense!

I left that dreary hospital and I did not look back. I picked up my bags and walked out of that death trap, knowing that I would not return.

The stakes were high. My body was in a furnace- I could feel my blood boiling in every cell. My limbs felt heavy and I could barely lift my feet off the ground.

I ran across the street, even though my head was pounding and I feared I would drop onto the ground in sheer desperation. Hell no, I kept on as if some graceful force was pulling me to safety. I hung onto this lifebuoy, desperately, longingly, until I reached home.

My wife, Jennifer, was in the kitchen. She was preparing the food that she was supposed to bring me to the hospital. My son was still at school. He was in Standard Two.

“Gerald, you are out, Praise the Lord!”

“Don’t take me back to that hospital,” I mumbled before collapsing onto the polished floor.

There was a scream and then nothing. Darkness, oblivion, emptiness.

When I came round, I was in a bright and clean room notwithstanding the old paint on the walls.

I saw Jennifer before she saw me. She was sitting next to my bed in a comfortable chair. Her eyes were red and slightly swollen. She had put on one of her favourite green dresses and her hair was wrapped in a similar headscarf. My wife looked stunning albeit the puffy eyes.

She saw me and smiled wearily.

“Don’t do this again Gera, I was worried sick about you!”

She stood up and hugged me with relief.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “This is the last time I will make you go through such a thing again.”

“You promise Gera?”

“You swear?”

“I swear. I love you dear and I would not stand it to see the children and you suffering from heaven above. No, it would break my heart. I will do everything to keep you out of trouble.”

Later on, while we waited for the doctor to come, Jennifer told me what happened during the time when she thought she would never see me alive again.

“We arrived at three o’clock in the afternoon. Usually, on Mondays there are a lot of people here. We waited endlessly until somebody finally noticed us. When I saw the state of the ward, with so many crumbling beds strewn about, I decided that you were better off somewhere else. Look, you can’t even tell the patients from their

guardians, there is suffering all over the place! No, I knew that you needed all your strength to pull through. Lying under the bed of a dying man, or any other man or woman for that matter, wouldn't give you the necessary strength to fight for your life. I had to take you somewhere else."

Apparently, I was still in the same **double-decker hospital** but I was in a different ward.

There was no one under my bed!!!

"How?" I asked Jennifer. "How did I end up here?"

"No fight is greater than the love that I have for you Gera. I love you Gerald Phiri and I can't imagine spending the rest of my life without you. We will get you out of here alive and kicking, no matter the cost."

Tears welled up in my eyes. It felt good to be taken care of. It felt good to be understood and recognised as a human being. It felt good to know that Jennifer loved me and that she would always stand by my side.

The pounding in my head resumed but I paid little attention to it. What was a pounding head pitted against the amazing care and love that Jennifer was providing me with?

Nothing.

A pounding head was nothing at all.

I was ready.

I was ready for the battle ahead.



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