

Do Bad

When Do Bad first noticed Nyomi he mistook her for white. Only because he heard her before he saw her. It would have been impossible to think her anything but one hundred percent nigga if you were to even halfway look at her because her complexion was *dark*. Even darker than Do Bad's, and Do Bad was dark.

He met her at Passions. Passions was the after-hours spot and one of the places where Do Bad spent most of his time, second only to the pissy snot green hallway of building 13B. It was a grubby, carmine colored hovel with a piquant musky odor that was a unique mixture of marijuana, cheap gin, and knock off Versace cologne. It was situated pugnaciously on the eastern edge of the only black neighborhood in Greenville, which was, naturally, a ghetto.

Do Bad was drunk that night. He was drunk most nights because he couldn't smoke weed. Every time he would get high he would become super paranoid about his feet, super aware of them. It was like they belonged to someone else. They were too narrow. They were too stubby.

The fit just wasn't right. But all of Do Bad's friends were real weed heads, high all the time. So it was important that he was under the influence of something so that they were all on the same wavelength.

When Do Bad got really drunk he was different. Whenever Tony or PeaHead were off the Seagram's 7 they would become like children, full of energy and good will and making conversation with anyone who would listen. But all Do Bad would do was sit by himself and brood.

On the night he met Nyomi he was sitting at the far end of the bar, being solicited by a dusty brown woman, and thinking intently about how ugly she and all the women who frequented Passions were, and how much the one yapping at him looked like his Uncle, a man everyone called Big. He was just beginning to go misty eyed over memories of the lithe and sinewy girls of his high school days when he heard a high toned sparkling voice, sounding almost exactly like that one blonde chick that hosts Good Morning America saying:

"I don't know guys. I just hate the idea of anything basic. I like to see the status quo subverted. So for me it doesn't really matter if Yung Chainz has ever had an encounter with another man. You know, I kind of like to imagine that he has. I find it erotic."

"Oh my God! Do Bad! Dooooooooooooooooo Bad! Nigga I need a shot," Tony stumbled over, nearly in tears, and grabbed Do Bad's arm, forcing him to join civilization at the other end of the bar.

"This girl just said that a man bending another man over and treating him like a bitch is

E-RO-TIC.” Tony began to laugh harder, his roasted chestnut face reddening pleasantly. “I ain’t never heard no shit like that in my life. ”

The girl in question was sitting next to Peahead with the most upright posture Do Bad had ever seen. She looked completely at ease, with her lips upturned in a carefully restrained smile. Her eyes were bright and expectant, as if she knew a fight was coming and she was going to enjoy it.

“I’m Nyomi,” she said extending a slight, beautifully manicured hand in Do Bad’s direction.

“And I didn’t put it quite as tactlessly as that,” she smirked and winked, her eyes twinkling gamely, and Do Bad felt a tightness in his chest.

An important thing to know about Do Bad is that he grew up jacking off to Smooth and King and Black Men’s magazine like the rest of us. He worshipped piously at the church of Gloria Velez for the entirety of his teenage years, and his first ever wet dream was him and Melissa Ford sharing a mint chip ice cream cone. I say that to say that Do Bad had a type, and Nyomi was nowhere near it. First of all she was tall for a girl. You could tell even when she was sitting down that she was 5’10 at least. Second she was bony. She was so bony that Do Bad knew for a fact that if she were to stand up and bend over for some reason (let’s say to tie the laces of the weird little pointy boots she was wearing) that Do Bad would have absolutely no incentive to turn his head even a little. Third, as I said before she was dark, maybe even darker than Do Bad, and that just wasn’t his preference at all.

“Let me get this straight,” Peahead said measuredly, levelling his eyes at Nyomi and making sure he enunciated each word. “A grown man messin’ with another grown man is like a turn on for you?”

“Sometimes.”

“Let me move,” Peahead started to push his stool away from Nyomi’s, but she grabbed his sleeve, stopping him. They both laughed.

“Now two women, I can understand that. That’s sexy. Everybody know that. But two men...”

Tony grimaced as he passed shots around to everyone. “Right Do Bad?”

Do Bad frowned into his gin, pretending to really think about it. As drunk as he was he could still sense when a good ol’ knock down drag out political debate was brewing. His heart began to beat a little faster. He was starting to get excited.

“I think it’s all fucked up,” he said. Tony and Peahead, stilled, stared at Do Bad, incredulously.

“It’s all shit we not supposed to be doing at the end of the day.”

“Oh. Ok. I think I know what you mean.” Tony put his hand on Do Bad’s shoulder breaking the silence, tentatively trying to regain his confidence in the homogeneity of their little crew.

“*Technically* it’s all wrong. But everybody does shit that’s wrong. Ain’t no getting ‘round it. But two men....” Tony gulped his shot and shuddered twice as hard as before, his skinny body quaking, and then turned towards Do Bad pointedly. “Right Do Bad?”

Do Bad swallowed, his heart really pumping now, and two ice cold beads of sweat raced each other through the hollow of his left armpit, leaving a pungent trail in their wake.

“Actually, I think two bitches is worse.”

Tony and Peahead went dead silent and the corners of Nyomi’s mouth began to twitch.

“Excuse me,” Nyomi intoned crisply, the anomalous precision of her newscaster’s voice accentuating the grime of their corner of the bar. “If homosexuality is immoral, then it’s immoral for everyone. I don’t see how gender or biological sex—“

“GOD MADE WOMAN FOR MAN!” Do Bad shrieked, preacher-like, banging his enormous calloused fist on the bar top. Then he lowered his voice and cooed in a maudlin almost whisper, his voice cracking. “A woman without a man is a horrible thing.” The idea of a woman without a man being so heartbreaking that, not knowing if it were terrifyingly terrible or horrifically horrible, Do Bad chose a drunken hybrid of the two. “A horrible, horrible thing.”

“That is true. The Bible say that,” Peahead said evenly.

Tony perked up. “It do! See the man is supposed to lead the woman. You know leeeeeeeeeeeead her, and the woman is kinda just supposed to, you know...”

“I doubt the three of you could lead a Yorkshire terrier,” Nyomi snorted derisively. “On a leash.”

Do Bad had made a point. Despite the unbearable weight in his head and on his tongue he had made a very salient point and was hurtling triumphantly towards ruining this smug little bitch’s fun. “What can two women do for each other anyway? Huh? Two men have the equipment to at

least make *something* happen. Right? Nasty as it is,” He giggled happily. “But what can a chick give another chick? Carpet burn?”

Tony began to guffaw loudly slapping everybody sitting at the bar on the back. “Carpet burn! Oh my gawd! This nigga said carpet burn!” Peahead chuckled quietly to himself. Nyomi began to smile in earnest and took a straw from the bar top, twisting it truculently between delicate fingers, then she looked Do Bad directly in the eye.

“Something you know nothing about I’m sure.”

“And what’s that?”

“Pleasure.”

Do Bad’s expression went dark. “What?”

“You heard what I said,” she smashed the straw beneath two obscenely white teeth.

Do Bad pressed his face to Nyomi’s, the dank heat of his breath blanketing her upper lip with a thin layer of sheen. “Little girl,” he snarled. “I will fuck the shit out of you.”

Nyomi pressed her face even closer to Do Bad’s, her big doll like eyes flashing arrogantly.

“Little boy,” she said. “I’m not interested.” She swiveled on her bar stool and waved her hand with a flourish. “Juicy!” she barked, summoning the bartender, a short thick girl who looked like she’d rather be anywhere else. “Give us another round please. “

“Double or single?”

“Double of course. Well--” she looked at Do Bad skeptically, munching on the defeated straw.

“You should probably make his a single. He looks a little flushed.”

Do Bad’s senses were heightened. He hadn’t had one of these types of chicks in a while; the feisty ones. They always put up the hardest fight, but in the end, like any other female, he had them running behind him like stray dogs.

“Put it on my tab Juice,” he said impassive, never taking his eyes off of Nyomi. He was going to take his time with this one. “A man should always treat.”

She looked at him, unfazed. “I don’t need a man to do anything for me.”

“Nothing?” He unfurled his previously crumpled body to its full height and breadth, hovering over her like some sort of winged beast. She held his gaze.

“Absolutely nothing.”

Do Bad motioned towards Juicy again. “Make mine a double too while you’re at it.” Juicy squinted at him.

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

Do Bad was having more fun than he’d had in a while. He hadn’t gotten a chance to break down one of these snooty so-called educated bitches yet. Hadn’t gotten close enough. Black bitches with degrees, thinking they were better than someone when they were nothing but niggas, getting fucked by white boys like it was some sort of privilege. He was looking forward to this.

You like white boys huh?” He leered at Nyomi, showing all of his teeth. She smoothed her hair again.

“I’m single, but I like who likes me.”

“But you was wit a white boy huh?”

She widened her eyes, mocking him. “You got me Sherlock.” She feigned a gasp “How’d you know?”

Do Bad leaned in closer to Nyomi, slightly sweet musk seeping from his pores and enveloping her in a cloud.

“I know your type.”

Do Bad had been around this type before, back in high school, and he didn’t respect them.

Bitches. Bitches black like him. Shit, some of them blacker than him. They spoke in big words about nothing and thought that they were better than him. They thought they were better than anybody from the streets, but really they were no better than any other hoe on the block. Do Bad knew what they wanted.

“Well, I’m sorry to burst your bubble Mr. Perceptive, but you’ve got me fucked up. I only deal with women.”

Do Bad laughed out loud. “So you’re a dyke? TONY!

And Tony, being Do Bad’s right hand man, materialized instantly.

“This one got carpet burn right here.”

It wasn't funny.

“Awww man, what?” Tony chuckled politely. “So I know her and Peahead gon' have a good time.”

Do Bad was confused. What did Peahead have to do with this? He had almost forgotten that he was there. Peahead, the quiet one. He was as ubiquitous and as imperceptible as Do Bad's own breath. Do Bad had, as usual, lost track of him, but there he was, sitting absurdly close to Nyomi, and stroking her leg.

Nyomi was smiling, tickled by Do Bad's disbelief. “We're on a date,” she shrugged.

That didn't bother Do Bad. He had borrowed plenty of women from Tony and Peahead and given them apathetically back, and it had never been a problem. It was just a part of their dynamic. As friends.

“I'm tryna see what's up with this whole Yung Chainz thing,” Peahead made himself flesh again, clearing his throat. “So you really think this shit cool?” He pulled up an image on his phone and showed it to Nyomi, and then, after a moment, to Do Bad.

The image was of Yung Chainz, Do Bad's favorite rapper, clad in a neon pink dress, his dreadlocked head hanging like a wilted flower, and a look of profound resignation on his face. Do Bad thought of his mother, of himself as a very small child. He was so startled that he felt sick.

“This shit crazy huh bruh?”

Do Bad was frozen for a moment. He covered his face with his hand.

“I know that ain’t my nigga Yung Chainz.”

Nyomi grabbed the phone from Do Bad, her hand touching his, and stared at the picture closely.

“I like it.”

“Why?” Do Bad snarled. “You like to think about him getting fucked?”

“No. I think it’s beautiful.”

“What’s beautiful about a nigga in a dress?”

Nyomi laughed.

“It’s not the dress. It’s what it represents.” She leaned in closer and Do bad could smell the citrusy effluvium of her shampoo.

“But look at his expression though. You can tell that it’s a painful statement for him to make, but the intensity of the color of the dress shows that it was something he *had* to do. You know?” She sniffed and her lips bunched into a little pursed rosebud in the corner of her face. “It’s really moving.”

Tony had wandered back over with another drink in his hand.

“A nigga gotta be a nigga.” Tony snatched the phone from Nyomi’s tiny fingers. “And this ain’t no nigga. This right here ain’t nothing but a bitch.”

Nyomi grabbed Tony’s hand. She was giggling, but her eyes were sad.

“Am I a bitch?”

Tony looked puzzled.

“ You a female ain’t ya?”

“I guess. Yeah.”

“Well then. Yeah. If you wanna get into technicalities about the shit you would be considered a bitch.” He coughed. “I ain’t tryna be funny or nothin”

“So let me ask y’all this.” Nyomi’s eyes pierced Do Bad’s. “Was there ever a time you resented being a ‘*nigga*.’” The word nigga, mundane as it was, sounded eerily jarring cloaked in her brittle librarian’s voice.

“Nigga hell naw,” Tony burst out.

But Do Bad wasn’t in Passions anymore. He was a kid. In Passions he was big. Over 200 pounds and a whole helluva lot over 6 feet, but in his head he was tiny. He was so small that his mama, who was a nymph of a woman, barely 5’2, seemed enormous. Growing up it was just him and her really, and every time he would make some type of mistake, that mighty woman, would raise her mighty fists, and make them rain down on him. And no matter how bad the pain was, he couldn’t cry, because that’s not what boys do.

“Come here lil nigga,” the giantess would scream down at him. “You look just like yo’ black ass daddy,” and her fists would come and come and come.

“Nah,” Peahead chuckled softly.

“Hell naw,” Do Bad said, and somehow, he meant it.

“You ever wish you wasn’t a bitch?” Tony grinned at Nyomi significantly. “My bad I meant to say a *WOE-man*.”

Nyomi smiled sadly. “All the time.”

Tony looked puzzled. “But you a pretty girl.”

Nyomi looked even sadder. “I know.”

“Do Bad,” Peahead made himself manifest again. “Nyomi took me to this new spot the other day. It was real chill. I think you might like it. I mean, it’s alright.”

“Oh The Bazaar!” Nyomi perked up. “And they have 3 dollar beers tonight.” She began to tug on Peahead’s arm. “We have to go. Like, right now!”

Do Bad was brooding again, having become mired even deeper in the dank swamp of his thoughts. “Where it’s at?”

Peahead shuffled, obviously uncomfortable. “It’s by the college. But it’s not like that. It’s cool.”

Do Bad hated going near the college. He hated seeing all the ruddy young faces, smug and plumply rounded with the knowledge that they would soon inherit the world. He hated the easy confidence in their movements, the uniform display of their affluence in bookbags and flip flops and shorts that amounted to more than his mama's rent. He hated being one of the only dirt smudges in a sickening sea of ejaculatory white.

"Man don't nothing be over there but a bunch of white folks."

Nyomi hopped off of her stool and looked up at Do Bad. She was tall for a girl, sure, but her head rested comfortably beneath his chin. She beamed up at him.

"No Do Bad.

His name sounded so sensual the way she said it. So noble.

"It's a mixed crowd."

The difference was striking, between Passions and The Bazaar that is, but not in the way you would expect. The décor was oddly similar in fact. The Bazaar's cerise velour walls called companionably to the crimson walls of Passions, and the walls of Passions grunted gruffly back. But where Passions was homely, The Bazaar had somehow taken the exact same theme and furniture and accents and made them all slick and urbane. It was like they were a set of identical twins, with one of them being obviously much more appealing than the other, although no one could be sure why. Do Bad didn't know if it was an actual difference in the feng shui, if you will, of the place, or if The Bazaar's seeming sophistication came from the fact that instead of the manifold brown and black heads that floated around the room and lined the bar in Passions, The

Bazaar was filled with physiognomies colored with nothing but the purest whole milk and clotted cream.

“Mixed hell,” Do Bad grunted.

“Be quiet Do Bad. Lupe is about to sing. You’re going to love her.”

The room, which had been filled with the static of the inebriated in communion, became unearthly still. Do Bad had never heard of Lupe, but apparently here she was a big deal.

The lights dimmed, turning everything the color of an after dinner port. Even Do Bad, as irritable as he was, was hushed. Something was about to happen. Do Bad’s attention was drawn to the stage where little stars had begun twinkling in impossible shades of lilac and cerulean and champagne. A bitter red curtain was opened and out slipped a true to life ghost.

The girl that came out of the shadows and the voice that came out of her could not have been human. She wasn’t even white; her skin was translucent like that of a fish or an insect. She was wearing the tattered red fragments of what Do Bad supposed used to be a cocktail dress that only covered the most vulnerable parts of her body. She was impossibly thin, which was weird because her voice was ominously bottom heavy. It was so deep, so rich that it hardly penetrated Do bad’s senses at all. It was more a feeling around the edges of his consciousness than it was a sound. Do Bad had to sit.

“What is...” Do bad said helplessly. “What is...” But Nyomi just shushed him.

The ghost began to writhe and moan in pain. She began to groan in abject despair. She was as alluring and as repugnant as the Black Dahlia. She was lonely and her self-esteem was

bruised, but she was sexy and she knew it. Everybody knew it. And she could *dance*. Do Bad was drunk and he knew that life was a waste of time with nobody worth a damn living it, but even his old irascible bones began to rock to the rhythm despite themselves. Maybe it was the liquor.

The dim little bar, its commercial cruddiness, and its store bought stink began to come alive. The whole place was palpitating. The walls began to sag with genuine sorrow. The bartenders began to actually put alcohol in the drinks. A few women were crying, their faces running in rivulets into their Sauvignon Blanc. Do Bad missed his mama.

His mama could sing. Not like this, but she could sing. Sometimes, when she was sad over somebody's dad, never his he couldn't remember that far back, but maybe his little sister's dad or one of his little brother's, she would sing. And what she lacked in technical skill she made up for in guts. She eviscerated herself in sacrifice to the singing of those songs. Everything she felt, but couldn't say, having no one but little kids to talk to, she would snatch up those old sad songs and fill them with it whether they liked it or not, giving new life to the campfire stories of Aretha or Anita of...of....

"That's Etta!" Do Bad staggered to his feet, spilling a drink inexplicably into somebody's bristly straw like fur. "That's fuckin' Etta! That's motha fuckin' Etta James you *bitch*!" The room was quiet. The ghosts were gone. He was alone.

"You alright buddy?" It wasn't a question. A frat boy security guard was standing over him. His blonde hair tousled playfully in a stark contradiction to his red dessicated mug. He had

a rough hand on Do Bad's shoulder and was guiding him sternly out the door like the father DO Bad never had.

"Oh I'm leavin. I'm leavin." Do Bad slurred. And then he was on the curb, pensive and deeply, deeply wronged.

"Are you kidding me? What the hell is wrong with you Do-... What is your real name? You can't possibly expect me to keep calling you that- that shit!"

That one chick from Good Morning America was there towering over him and apparently quite dead, her face the color of the guts of a blueberry pie.

"Please," Do Bad said meekly. "Please leave me the fuck alone."

"Why would you do something like that? I am mortified. Completely fucking mortified. You know that's exactly how they expect you to be right?"

Do Bad held his head in his hands.

"Expectin' me? How they gon' be expectin' me? I don't even hang 'round here."

The woman from Good Morning America knelt down next to Do Bad and he saw that she wasn't dead at all. She was just a very angry Nyomi, the black girl from Passions. She fumbled in her purse for a cigarette, lit it, and began to puff, tugging on her hair.

"That's the point. You *don't* hang around here. That's why when you do come to places like this you can't....You have to show....You can't let them think-"

“I can’t let them think what?” Do Bad jumped to his feet, surprisingly agile despite the fog permeating his head, and looked down at the top of Nyomi’s fuzzy little skull. “Huh? Listen, I ain’t got time to be thinking about showing nobody shit. I ain’t no fuckin actor ok. Do I look like Samuel L. Jackson?” Do Bad heard himself say shrilly from somewhere far away. He was screaming.

“Do I look like Denzel? Huh? I’m just me and everywhere I go I’m be me. My name is Do fuckin’ Bad hoe and you better act like you know that shit!”

Do Bad felt a pressure in his muscles, a sudden urge to strike out, to grab something and lock onto it, and not let go until he felt whatever it was give way under his grip, but then his friend Peahead appeared before him, who he’d known since he was a little boy, and the feeling was displaced.

“Do Bad. You good bro. Just sip a little o’ this.” Peahead held Do Bad steady and pressed a plastic cup of cold water to his lips.

“What I care ‘bout what they think?” Do Bad murmured into Peaheads steady eyes.
“They need to be worried about what the fuck I think.”

“Do Bad! Dooooooooooooooooo Bad. Ay yo what the fuck was that?!” Tony began rubbing his hands on his body and wailing like a stuck pig in la crude imitation of Lupe’s performance. He pulled his shirt up and fell to his knees, wriggling around like a cross between a stripper and an epileptic. He put so much energy into it that he scraped his knee and then he even made that a part of the show, his scream of pain and bewilderment oddly similar to the ghost woman’s

crescendo. All Do Bad could think was ‘That’s my nigga.’ And then he laughed and laughed. He laughed so hard he began to puke and that made Tony laugh. They fell all over each other in liquor sick glee, until they succumbed to coughing fits and Peahead came over to them dispensing his plastic cupped elixir like a priest doling out the Eucharist.

“Ay yo Peahead,” Tony said, his breathing labored. “Please explain to me why you brought us to this bullshit ass spot.

“Yeah!” Do Bad said cheerfully. “Bullshit!”

Peahead was looking at the ground.

“I don’t even know man. Trippin’ I guess.”

Tony nodded solemnly. “Yeah my nigga you was definitely trippin with this one. You know what I need after that? A drink. A real drink. And I bet Juicy will give us a round on her tab once she hear about this shit.”

Tony jumped up off the curb and held a firm arm out to Do Bad, lifting him. Do Bad and Tony began to walk towards Passions, but Peahead didn’t follow. He stood completely still, his thumb and forefinger encircling the bony wrist of Nyomi, who wouldn’t look at anyone.

“I’ma catch up wit y’all later.”

Tony began to laugh.

“Awww naw Peahead. I knooooooooooooow you ain’t bout to trade on us for no bitch.” He laughed louder in accusation.

Peahead shook his head at the pavement.

“Naw I’m just sayin I’ma catch up with y’all later.”

Do Bad opened his mouth to protest, but Tony draped his arm over Do Bad’s shoulder and held him in his grip.

“Oh I forgot. She a lil’ dyke so the nigga probably about to have his first threesome or sum’. Whatever bro. Come on Do Bad. We gon’ hear about it tomorrow anyway.”

Do Bad paused, his head heavier than ever.

“Ay yo Peahead,” he said softly, looking down and soberly noting how small his feet were, how miniscule in comparison to the rest of him.

Peahead paused.

“You gon be at Passions tomorrow right?”

Peahead held Nyomi’s arm and began to trudge in the opposite direction of Passions, deeper into a part of town that Do Bad had barely even thought about, let alone ventured into.

“Ya.”

Do Bad wrapped his arm around Tony’s waist and they staggered into the muggy, southern night magnetically pulled towards their corner of Passions, which they knew would always be waiting for them.

“Of course he will” Do Bad thought to himself.

He didn't even know why he'd asked.