

He drove through Beirut Road to avoid the congestion at the Ibrahim Taiwo Road junction. It was 8 O'clock a.m. and he had to be back to the Audu Bako secretariat before 9 a.m. when the Judges sit and court begins. The city wakes up early and business kicks up long before the sun rises. Trailers were loading and offloading goods. At Bata, smaller trucks struggled through the narrow roads, narrowed by traders whose goods spilt out into the road competing with tricycles, motorcycles, bicycles and pedestrians for the right to use the road. The traffic policemen were already busy into their day, stopping vehicles on one lane with one hand and beckoning to others on another lane with the other hand. It is one of the most tedious jobs in the country, Mustapha thought and in the heat of the Northern sun, it is likely the most hazardous too. Nigerians do not obey traffic lights. Everyone is in a hurry to be held back by a red light and even when one is not, it is important to keep up the appearance of been in a hurry. There is something inconsequential about the traffic lights. It doesn't bark orders at drivers; it doesn't hold a government issued gun and no matter how heated an impasse it does not threaten to shoot an obstinate driver, so that even when it is there working, there still needs to be standing beside it a traffic warden shoeing the traffic in the orthodox way. There is something foolish too about the way the traffic light continue to do its job diligently even when there was someone to do it. It's a most unnigerian conduct. The traffic warden, in his orange coloured shirt and black trousers gets the traffic moving smoothly. Minor offences are punished by showing the offender the warden's five fingers spread out and the palm pushed forward with a thrust as if to shove it in his face, a gesture which means and is usually accompanied with the insult 'your mother'. More serious offences are punished by the warden by collecting a negotiable sum usually proposed by the offender. He will then be sent on his way with an advice to drive carefully. Refusal to propose to pay is remedied by keeping the driver by the side of the road for some period depending on how serious his offence is and how earnestly the warden believes in punishing traffic culprits to ensure the safety of the roads for road users.

A motorcyclist sped past the red light with four bags of rice loaded on the seat

of his motorcycle. He sat on one of the bags, his legs barely reaching the gears. He had to lower himself down from the bag down to the tank to engage the gears. The warden hissed furiously and threw an insult after him.

“Your mother’s vagina.”

“Have some respect for the world’s entrance,” the cyclist threw back as he sped away.