

Zavin, On the Night Shift

Ask him; he laughs about it now.
It was a Rock 'n' Roll war,
bang-bang-shoot-em-up
in the Muslim sector of Beirut;
an eight-hour day shift, a job.
Afterward, he and his buddies
would knock off, retreat
to the Christian side for pizza,
change their clothes, clean up
and maybe go out dancing.
This was the routine.
There were still plenty
of unshelled buildings
in the Christian quarter then.
Then a bullet grazed his temple;
he packed his bags and left.
Here, in Maiduguri,
venerable Muslim capital of Bornu,
he works with Arab bosses
and Nigerian day labourers,
is foreman for a Nigerian/Lebanese
steel and engineering firm.
Now he inspects rivets,
oversees the welding of
school desks and building trusses.
Weekends, spends himself
in the lithe black bodies
of Cameroonian whores he says
drain his spuds and ask for more.

One woman in particular,
given her druthers, chooses him;
sometimes gives him “long time,”
does things — special things —
sometimes just to be with him,
and they’ve become friends.
All night, every two weeks or so,
he looks for her. Ask him.
She’s good to him and knows his kinks.
All night he shoots his rivets into her,
hoping, one day, they will
come out the other side maybe.
Like banging bullets flat on either side,
he hopes to bore through her to daylight,
hopes the rivets will hold him together
the way a bullet can’t
no matter what side you’re on.
And now, for this “short time,”
they will fit their legs together,
begin to pivot on a still point
like steel callipers,
precise, unerring in the truss they make
to hold the weight of their lust.

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