

A Visitor to *The Star*

by Chris Rose



Anna Winter pulled on her Gucci sunglasses and sprayed herself with the extra-strength mosquito repellent she had bought in the airport. That was the biggest problem about her work, she thought. Mosquitoes and things like that. Bad hotels, and bad food. How could she be a front-line, award-winning, adventurous journalist if she had to stay in bad hotels and eat bad food?

Anna Winter thought her job was very difficult, and she told everybody about this. As she landed in Lagos airport, she worried about the hotel where she was staying, and how she would be able to eat for the week she was staying in Nigeria. Perhaps that would make a good article, she thought. Lots of local colour.

Joseph Adoga collected a printed copy of the article he was working and put it in his bag as he left the small office of the Star. The Star was a local paper in Lagos. It came out every evening and had a mixture of stories – politics, current affairs, local news, human interest stories and sport. It was only a small newspaper, but Joseph enjoyed his job. He liked finding things out, and informing people about what was going on in the city, in Nigeria as a whole, in Africa generally, and in all the world. When he heard that the famous international journalist Anna Winter was coming to Lagos to do a story he was interested, and was even more pleased when her agency got in touch with Joseph. “You should be able to help her” the agency said, and Joseph hoped he could help her.

Instead of driving out to the usual part of the city where he lived, tonight Joseph drove into one of the rich areas of the city. He stopped outside one

of the big hotels and went in to meet Anna Winter.

Anna Winter was disappointed by the hotel. It was one of a big international chain, so she expected more. The air-conditioning in her room wasn’t working properly, and there were mosquitoes inside. She hoped that the local journalist she was going to meet would be able to help her.

“Let’s go to somewhere really characteristic to eat” said Anna to Joseph when they met in the hotel foyer. “I want a really typical little place...the kind of place where I’m sure you go to eat...somewhere full of local colour...”

Joseph thought hard about a place where they could go and eat. Eventually he thought of somewhere and took Anna in his car to a restaurant he knew where they served traditional Nigerian food. Joseph really liked the place, but Anna wasn’t happy.

“Hmmm...it’s very clean” she said. “Very clean and very quiet...”

“What did you expect?” asked Joseph.

“Well, erm, something more African” said Anna.

“How do you mean?” asked Joseph.

“More noise, more colour...lots and lots of people...”

“Well” said Joseph. “Lagos is quite a noisy and a colourful city, and there are a lot of people who live here...but we like to eat good food in good surroundings...like anyone else!”

Anna looked disappointed. “But I’m not getting a real feel of Africa here” she said.

“Anna” Joseph tried to explain. “Africa is a continent. There are 54 countries in Africa, and 900 million people. Nobody even really knows how many languages are spoken in Africa...hundreds!”

Joseph wanted to explain to Anna that it was impossible to talk about “Africa” as if it was just one place, but Anna wasn’t listening. Joseph changed the subject of the conversation.

“So, what are you going to write about Nigeria?” he asked her.

“I’m not sure yet” said Anna. “I want to look around and get a feel for the place first.

Something about guns and crime, perhaps, and I

need some pictures of starving people...starving people with guns if possible..."

Joseph thought for a minute. "Well, like any big city, there is crime in Lagos...sure. But I'm not sure how interesting that is. You won't find many starving people here though.." He pointed to the plates of food on their table. "Here we eat pretty well!"

"Tell me what things you write about in your paper." said Anna.

"All sorts of things" said Joseph. "It's only a small paper, so I have to write lots of the stories. Sometimes there are crime stories, yes. I can show you those if you like..."

"That could be interesting...I think I can use my influence to change things..."

"I've got a good idea" said Joseph. "Why don't you write an article about everyday life here in Lagos...you know, so many articles about Africa are just about famine or war or corruption...but that's not the reality of many of our lives."

Anna look confused. Joseph continued.

"Why don't you write about some ordinary scenes, a restaurant like this, happy children at school..."

"People don't want to hear that" said Anna. "It doesn't sell. I need big sunsets over the Serengeti, and I need to contrast with the darkness of Africa...I've already got my title, yes, 'Darkness at noon' I'm going to call the article..."

Joseph sighed and wondered why people always talked about "darkness" in Africa. Joseph had been to London in December – now that was darkness! It was dark at three o'clock in the afternoon. Nigeria was the brightest, lightest

place he'd ever visited. Anna ignored him and continued.

"And I need to contrast that with the nobility of the people..."

"I see," said Joseph, "but be clear... there are some noble people here, but there are also some very bad ones. We are not noble just because we are African. Why not write about some of our Nigerian writers and intellectuals...there are many – Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Wole Soyinka...they have some fascinating things to say..."

Joseph could see that Anna wasn't interested. Anna thought she was the only intellectual and writer who mattered.

A few days later Anna was on the plane back to London. "I have to file some copy...what can I write...?" She took out her laptop and began to type...

"As soon as I got off the plane I was in love with Africa. Like a noble man, disappearing into the huge sunset, Africa is impossible to know, but it will always haunt you..." Yes, this is good thought Anna to herself..."Joseph Adoga is one such man, a face of Africa, a noble journalist, fighting for the cause of free speech in the Dark Continent...and without our help, he is in trouble..."

At the same time as Anna was typing, Joseph was sitting down to read the latest edition of The Star. He began to read his own article in it. "European journalists are strange people..." it began.