

My Horrible Trip to New York

Nkemakolam Odu

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My Horrible Trip to New York is the haphazard story of eleven-year-old Samantha, who discovers that her absent father was kidnapped years ago. She decides to find him, but her plans change after her mother announces that she is getting remarried and Samantha will have stepsiblings. Though Samantha is upset about the changes in her life, and she argues with Paige, her new stepsister, the two girls travel from the United Kingdom to America in search of Samantha's father.

Written by eleven-year-old Nkemakolam Odu, *My Horrible Trip to New York* shows glimmers of creativity and touches on some important family issues, as Samantha comes to the realization that perhaps living with her newly blended family is better than holding on to illusions about her father. The international-travel angle could have provided the basis for a good adventure mystery, but Odu's story has some problems, which are not unexpected given the age of this new author. The plot is not fleshed out, and it contains far too many incredible story lines and disconnected tangents with oversimplified or convenient resolutions to conflict.

The dialogue is often weak, which adds to the story's overall lack of cohesion. During a phone call between Samantha and her mother, Samantha explains that she and Paige are lost in a forest somewhere in New York. Before the call is cut off, her mother replies: "What? Your [sic] lost...in a forest?"

A lack of details in areas of the story where one might expect some elaboration is a problem, too. For example, beyond mention of Heathrow Airport, "crisps," and "pounds," there's very little description of the differences between the United Kingdom and the United States. In another instance of insufficient detail, when a hungry Samantha is offered a bite of what appears to be a raw rat, her response is simply that, "it tastes a lot like chicken." While this response is somewhat amusing, it is indicative of the lack of sensory descriptions in the narrative.

The use of first person makes for some illogical exchanges, such as when Samantha falls down, and her friend Nathan tries to communicate with her: "'Sam, are you okay?' he shouted. I did not answer because I was unconscious."

In addition to its disjointed plot, the story suffers from distracting spelling errors.

My Horrible Trip to New York would benefit from more development in plot and narrative to reach its potential as an intriguing mystery for grade-school children.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (February 12, 2013)

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