

# **THE DIARY OF AN OYIBO**

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**In the immensity in time, it was my pride and joy to share the world with you. Not a lot of people are lucky enough to find a brother in a best friend like I was. With pride as colossal as the mountains, I dedicate this book to my brother from another mother- Michael (Izu) Egbuna.**

## **ROMANTIC MOVIES LIED TO ME**

*Now they argued pretty much every weekend. Actually, a lot after they got married; the schools Christine and I enrolled in, our home being painted blue within instead of the colour white Dad wanted. To this, Mum often said, "The outside of the house is white, why should everything be white? This is not the White house." Mum was not much of a religious person; however my Dad leaned a little towards that end. He insisted we go for the 8am mass at the Catholic Church on Sundays and attend their bible study sessions which Christine and I didn't like very much. Dad allowed Mum to pick some things though, what we have for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and what bed sheets would be on everyone's bed.*

The small television set was controlled by Dad alone. He never allowed anyone touch it. Whenever no one was watching, he would walk away with the remote control. Dad loved sports especially basketball and football, but he loved basketball the most. He paid attention to no one when the games were on. When I was five years old, he got me a basketball and nailed a shooting post to our garage for practice. He always talked about Michael Jordan and promised to buy me a Chicago Bulls jersey if I topped my class. I never got the jersey.

There was always a stench of palm wine mixed with his expensive cologne whenever he watched the games. Christine and I can sometimes hear him scream "What the hell! That was a free throw." Nobody dared talk to him when his team lost. When they won, he would stagger his way to my room, his breath so heavy, lean against the wall of my bedroom and say, "Guess what? The Bulls won." I would smile and pretend to care. Still I loved my Dad very much (Yes I said it! I am a Daddy's boy). I only watched football matches with him because I love football. He

was good to everyone and was very popular in our neighborhood, especially during Christmas when he bought items for everyone in the neighborhood, thanks to the discount on items at the grocery store. Christine is Daddy's girl too. He walked her to school and read her bedtime stories every night.

I loved Mum a lot but I probably loved Dad more. Mum was amazing. Whenever we woke up, there was always and I mean *always* pancakes and syrup on the table with a glass of orange juice or a bowl of my favorite cereal- Corn Flakes with milk. She tickled me a lot and when I tickle back she never laughed, I guess I wasn't so good at tickling which made me upset sometimes. She always kissed me good night. I expected her to stop on my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday but she didn't. She would scream back at my Dad if he screamed at me not minding if I was wrong in my words or actions. Whenever I came home with a dirty school uniform or a plaster on my knee or arm, instead of getting upset she would simply say, "My poor baby... Who did this to you? I hope you didn't get in a fight?"

"Of course I didn't, I was playing football and had a bad tackle", I would respond. She would then kiss the plaster. That's how I got injured all the time –football.

It seemed to have been a great day in school. On getting home, the front door was wide open. The first thought that came to my mind was that we had been robbed. I wouldn't have been surprised if that had happened because our neighborhood wasn't exactly the safest.

I dashed in and saw Mum sitting on the kitchen floor shaking like a leaf. Tears dripped onto her blue blouse making wet cracks on her face. Christine sat on the stairs in her yellow pajamas', looking down at Mum.

My mother used her fingers to flick her blonde hair and her beautiful blue eyes were now red and swollen and said,

"Nolan, your Dad's gone" she sobbed.

"Gone? Gone where Mum?"

She didn't reply. I ran to his room, looked around for signs of his presence, but most of his things were not there. It was then I realized his car was not parked in its usual spot when I got back home, but I assumed he went to get a hair-cut at the barber shop since Mum had kept complaining he was overdue for it.

"How could this happen?" I asked myself. They always argued and many times Christine and I listened to their arguments. I thought it was temporary though. Most of the time, the arguments would be my Mum complaining about how Dad always got drunk.

"Bola, every time you sit on the couch with booze in your hand all day. You're a father and a husband. You're not at the University anymore, you have major responsibilities now!!"

"Be quiet Amanda! Who were you before I married you? You poor white woman, you were nothing before I met you!"

Mum would start weeping "Why did I marry this man? Why did I make such a mistake? God help me! God save me!"

I remember when I was much younger, Mum and Dad would dance to *Fela* every Friday night in the living room. Sometimes, Dad would play *Bad* by Michael Jackson on the music player in the corner of the living room. I remember one time, he tore his trousers from trying to do a split and moon walk. They had their faults; no one was perfect. Even though they argued a lot, it was acceptable because most parents in the neighborhood did. In my eyes, they were the perfect couple. I still couldn't believe Dad was gone!

It made no sense to me, it just didn't. The man and woman, my parents never allowed me go to bed early on Friday nights because of the fun they were having in the living room.

How could he be gone? Who was going to read Christine her bedtime stories? Most importantly, who was going to tell me how to be a man?

He must have gone for the haircut, I thought. Mum must be pulling my legs like she did the other time when she said plantains were bananas planted on special farms, which made them bigger than bananas. Well, I wasn't going to fall for this one. He went for a hair-cut and would be back soon.

20<sup>th</sup> April, 1995

### **WHITE MEETS BLACK**

Mum was the only child of her parents and was born without a silver spoon. She was raised in a small home in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her father was unemployed for a really long time and her mother was a full-time house wife. Tears rolled down her apple cheeks as she told me how tragedy befell her. Her parents were on their way home from a concert when a truck ran into their taxi. She was fourteen when this happened and had to drop out of secondary school. She often wished she followed them to the concert that night.

She later got a job in a low-paying restaurant called Dees&Bees back in the 80s and early 90s where she worked over-night and sometimes weekends. She was a young, beautiful lady with striking blue eyes. I got my fair complexion from her. Back then she had long hair. Honestly I don't know why she decided to cut it short. She was and is still quite skinny. Dad often teased Mum about putting the fan on the highest level so the wind doesn't blow her to a different city.

Dad was the second of five children, and was the only boy. He was raised in a duplex in a decent city in Ikeja, Lagos. His father was a Doctor, his mother a school teacher. My Dad graduated top of his class in secondary school and got a scholarship in a higher institution in the United States where he attained his Masters in Business Administration. He took up a part-time job as a musician at a bar in Denver to

support himself. He called it quits with his band and moved back to Nigeria to pursue something different when he was done with school. He eventually did become the C.E.O of a top firm which took him out of the country frequently.

One rainy Thursday afternoon in the summer of 1986 while dad was on a vacation in South Africa, he walked into Mum's restaurant wearing a black leather jacket, blue faded jeans and black boots leaving foot prints on his way in. She claims she can never forget the look on her face when she first set her eyes on him. His looks left her mouth wide open for over five seconds. She said, "He was a very dark, lean young man (I couldn't really picture what Mum saw because he has a pot belly at the moment), the most handsome I had ever seen. Your father did not cut his dark hair as short as most men did; he let it grow into an afro."

He ordered for their food of the day- burger and chips and for the next three weeks, he kept going to Dees&Bees and always ordered the same thing, I wonder how great the restaurant was and if it still exists. They eventually got talking and on her first date with Dad, she wore a black jacket, black top and blue jeans. She said the jacket and jeans came together. I have seen her wear it before, they are still somewhere in her closet. Anyways, they had a great time and according to her and the rest was history.

Despite their very different backgrounds, these two got married. She claims dad proposed to her on a beach and that was the best day of her life she always says. The best day of Dad's life was when he got tickets to the U.S.A 94 FIFA World Cup.

18<sup>th</sup> May, 1995

### **A CAPE AND A MASK**

Most guys dreamt of becoming Scientists, Governors or Lawyers. My best friend Jack often dreamt of having mansions and driving the fastest cars. I hope he remembers me when he gets those things. I wanted nothing more than to become a Superhero. I needed a cape like Superman or a mask like Batman or Spiderman and a villain as well that I can save the world from, maybe someone like The Joker.

When I began elementary school, I was the fastest kid on the tracks during the school's Inter-House Sports, and also the fastest on the football team in Primary school. My slim physique gave me an edge over the average and fat guys on the football team. I imagined myself just like Flash the Superhero. I could easily save someone from a car accident, someone attempting to jump off a building or even

armed robbers from shooting someone. As the months passed by, my speed and pace reduced a lot. It seemed my super powers had been taken from me, so I told God I was going to join the Church choir if I got my super powers back. I ended up not joining the choir at all, despite the number of pretty girls that were in the choir.

As I grew older, I realized no one had super powers. People are just a bit more unique or talented than others. Everyone was a super hero. We do not need to be from outer space or be bitten by a spider. We do not need masks or capes. All we needed was to be ourselves. Anyways, I still held on to my comic books and action figures. I can be a super hero after all.

14<sup>th</sup> June, 1995

### **A TRUE GUNNER**

I love playing football. My favourite team is the Arsenal Football Team. My best player is Thierry Henry, the present Forward of Arsenal FC. It was always good seeing Thierry Henry in action. His first touch was magical and I bet every Premier League Defender was afraid of him. He sometimes made powerful runs from the midfield and placed the ball in the net once he got close to the penalty box. I often imagined myself in Highbury playing for Arsenal, while the fans chanted my name. I never missed any of their games.

Whenever Dad and I watched football matches, we usually had two prayer points. One, was for our team to win the game and the second was for electricity power to be constant to enable us watch the match completely because Dad disliked putting on the generator during the day, especially when there was fuel scarcity.

Dad usually drove us to a nearby restaurant to watch football games whenever there was power failure at home. Most times, I saw at least two of my school mates there. The restaurant was popular for showing live matches and made a lot of money from doing so because in order to watch, one must at least buy a drink. A bottle of water is what Dad usually got me, while he got a bottle of beer for himself. Dad hoped my interest in football would lead me to the Nigerian football team. He believed I would be a doctor, but I saw myself playing in the Premier League for Arsenal.

4<sup>th</sup> September, 1995

### **MAN'S BEST FRIEND**

My best friend is Jack. He is a thin and short boy just like me, Jack and I had the same emotions at the same time. Whenever I was sad, Jack was sad too, and even so he would try his best to cheer me up. Whenever I fell ill, he was ill too or led Aunt Chioma to believe he was.

Dad always told me that a dog was man's best friend and has been man's best friend for decades. Jack was my closest friend in school but my best friend was my dog, Baxter. Having a pet happens to be one of life's greatest pleasures. Dad told me humans and pets don't have the same life span. Dogs have a much shorter life span. I've refused to get another dog or pet because to me, no pet was going to be like Baxter. I'd be cheating on Baxter if I did.

I still remember the day I got Baxter. I had just woken that Saturday morning with the intention of going to Jack's house to play video games. My plans were cut short when I heard barking downstairs. I peeped through the stair railings and saw a brown puppy with a bushy tail. I immediately became so excited and pretty much jumped down all the steps.

"Now hold on Nolan, what's the rush?" Dad said,

I was thrilled "Is it mine?! Please tell me it is mine Dad! Please tell me you didn't buy it for Mum!!!"

"Calm down Nolan, it's yours. I got it for you. Now what do you want to name it?"

"Hmmm... Wait! I know what we'll name it Dad. Let's call it Baxter!" I had a friend who named his dog Baxter too.

"Okay son, Baxter he is. You know he's a German shepherd breed right?" my Dad said

"Wow! That is cool and even better it's a male dog."

Baxter was two months old when I got him. The bond we developed afterwards became so strong, even Mum became jealous. Baxter grew into a magnificent dog with glistening eyes and huge teeth and it still kept its bushy tail. Baxter loved wandering around the house and chasing street cats. Visitors who came to see often asked if Baxter was locked up before coming in. It never really bit anyone but he did scare a lot of people away. There was a day Baxter was not locked in its cage and Jack came in. I was not so shocked to see Baxter pounce on him. Poor Jack! He suffered what Dad called a concussion. After a while though, Baxter came to recognize him as a friend and not a threat. I still had a few friends that were scared of Baxter because of its size and fierce looks. They stopped visiting for that reason.

Baxter always welcomed me whenever I got back from school. We played different games together. Sometimes we played fetch, other times I gave it stomach rubs when it rolled over, wagging its tail left to right for minutes. Our favourite game was hide and seek and wherever I hid, Baxter always found me; under the bed or the car, inside the bath tub or in the closet, Baxter sniffed me out. We took morning walks together and once it sighted someone it was unfamiliar with, its eyes almost became red. It would bark to scare the person away. Baxter has actually scared away ice cream trucks, groundnut sellers, police officers, mobile tailors and mechanics.

One Monday afternoon, I got back from school feeling a bit frustrated because my parents didn't pick me up. I needed something or someone to cheer me up and Baxter sat on the kitchen floor playing with its ball. I scooped him up to my room and placed him right in front of the mirror. It barked at its own reflection and ran away from the mirror, came back minutes after and barked again. It actually thought there was another dog at the other end. It made me laugh for at least an hour.

I was in the living room playing my video game and had gotten to the final stage on the hardest level when Dad walked up to me and told me Baxter had passed on. The look on my face was that of sheer horror. At that point, I became depressed and lost interest in the game. My dog was dead and I hoped it was a bad dream. Unfortunately, it wasn't.

16<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1995

### **CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR**

"I will protect you from him Nolan" he tapped me on my shoulders and walked me to class. We took our seats, hurriedly trying to finish the homework that was given to us yesterday. My hands began shaking as I let out a wrenching wail which was followed by blatant series of tears. Jack immediately put his pen down, got up and wrapped his arms around me. His hugs always had a way of making me feel safe. If I had my way I would have hugged him for a very long time, unfortunately the class was going to be filled up within minutes and if everyone had seen two guys hugging then jokes and rumors would have gone round the school. I decided to save Jack from the embarrassment so I pulled back, wiped my tears and sat down

I spent the rest of the day being as worried as I had ever been, if he was going to tease Jack and I again front of my classmates it would have been very embarrassing. The bell rang and we gathered our books and shoved them in our bags as slow as we could, we did our best to stay in class for as long as possible. I left the classroom and told Jack that the coast was clear as we raced to the car park to wait for our parents.

Dad came to pick me up from school. We were listening to an album by Michael Jackson when he said, "I have a surprise waiting for you at home, Nolan." I was not a big fan of surprises. My mind was racing. Maybe he put so much money in my piggy bank it couldn't even close anymore, or perhaps he got me a new game console.

We got into the house and my jaw dropped when I saw Mum sitting in the living room with a baby in her arms. With my eyebrows lifted in surprise, I asked,

"Mum please who is this?"

"It's your sister Nolan. We named her Christine."

I was speechless and disappointed because. I did not get the game console nor some money stuffed in my piggy bank, I got a baby sister instead.

Dad often told Mum careful what you wish for; I never really knew what that meant. It was an interesting and very common phrase between them. I had wished for a sister many times and now my wish had come true.

It was quite lonely and boring being the only child. I would sit in my room and play with my Power Rangers' toys. The truth is I needed company. Dad played with me and my toys once in a while, though it still felt like something was missing. He



usually got tired after an hour or so. Mum never really had time to do play with me or my toys. She watched movies and cartoons with me, especially Tom & Jerry. She would say “Jerry is just an adorable Nolan”.

She looked a lot like me. Her skin colour was very much like Mum’s. None of us looked like Dad. Later on, I became happy because now I had someone to take care of even though she was six years younger than me. I decided that I was going to be the best big brother Christine could ever wish for. I thought about tea parties she would want me to have with her, or Barbie dolls she would want me to play with. The TV channels being changed when I am watching a football match, just because PowerPuff Girls is being shown on the Cartoon station. It had not happened yet but I already felt irritated.

On the other hand, I was very excited I had someone to talk to. Not right away though. When she grows older, we would easily get along and have fun together. Christine grew up to be one of the funniest people I know.

She’s cute and adorable with rosy cheeks, tiny lips and a wonderful smile. She could be quite annoying though. She would go through Mum’s stuff in her room and scatter things around even though she had enough toys and dolls to last a lifetime.

She would press different buttons on my game pad or my Gameboy when I was playing. That pissed me off. If she spoils it, I’ll simply remove some money from her piggy bank and join it to my savings to buy a new one. If she asks what happened to her money, I’ll tell her Santa took it to buy her a Barbie doll for Christmas.

19<sup>th</sup> November, 1996

### **LUCKY NUMBER SEVEN**

Today is my seventh year birthday.

It was nine in the morning and my parents are throwing a party for me. I could sense today was going to be terrific. Mum and Dad seemed to be happier than me but their birthday was not for months. I hope they did not have plans to outshine me on my today.

“Get downstairs Nolan and jump in the car. We are going to the supermarket” Mum said.

I raced downstairs still in my pyjamas and jumped into the car before she could say Jack Robinson. We got to the supermarket and Mum tossed birthday hats, balloons and other decoration items into the trolley. We got home an hour later and the

balloons were taped around some rooms in the house. The birthday hats were placed on the dining table where all my friends could see them upon their arrival.

All my friends, relatives and classmates from school were invited and I hoped they were all going to show up. As the time drew close to two in the afternoon, I dashed upstairs to prepare myself before my friends arrived. I brushed my teeth and quickly showered. Brought out my leather jacket, black jean trousers and grey t-shirt from the closet and wore them slowly. I was all set and ready for the birthday to officially kick off.

Noise came from the living room as I walked down the stairs. I walked in there like a prince and saw my classmates, friends and some relatives already present. They were all waiting for me. Everyone looked amazing and seemed to have worn their best dresses and had birthday hats on. I got birthday gifts and everyone chanted the birthday song. I felt like a super star and almost exploded with joy.

My birthday cake had seven candles on it. I was very shy when I was told to cut the cake because everyone was practically staring at me. I was able to put the knife through the cake as everyone clapped and screamed "Happy Birthday Nolan". My Mum spent most of the day in the kitchen. She gave all my friends a piece of chicken wings which they all loved, some even requested for more. Dad arranged all sort of games for my friends and I, from musical chairs to follow the leader. The winner of each game went home with a prize.

By seven in the evening, the birthday came to an end. My friends looked tired and everyone was smiling. Parents came to pick their kids and everyone told me goodbye. Jack's mother kissed me on the forehead. She carefully placed the gift Jack got me on the dining table; they were the last to leave the house. At the end of the party, I opened my gifts and I didn't like most of the gifts so I tossed them into the storage room- a place where I kept the toys I no longer appreciated, The gift on the table was carefully opened by mum, she removed a video game cartridge, it was the one I always hoped dad would buy but never did. I wondered if Santa Claus had changed his giveaway time to October instead of December because I got what I had wished for last Christmas, but it wasn't Santa's doing, it was just my great friend Jack. I needed to get him something better in a few weeks; his birthday was just around the corner.

9<sup>th</sup> May, 1997

### **I WONDER IF JOSEPH IS WITH GRAND MA**

Everyone dies at some point.

Dad said we either go to heaven or hell when we die. Death was not just a big topic for me but a big issue as well. As a kid, I often imagined what the world would be without me. Was it going to be better or worse if I died? I was afraid I would not be able to do the things I loved doing or see my family again. There are a lot of things I would still like to do. I have to be a role model to Christine. I couldn't imagine the darkness and the loneliness.

This thought started around the time a classmate passed away. His name was Joseph. He was a good friend to Jack and I. He had a great personality and good manners. He always loved wearing his favourite blue shirt, black pants and black shoes whenever he came to our house for dinner or to play video games with me and we sometimes played in Jacks' house. He sat beside us in class and his family was friends with mine because he only lived a street away. We studied together and played together. He was only nine years old when he died. He accompanied other students on an excursion. I had the intention of going along with my classmates but I couldn't because I was ill, Jack may have been on that bus too but he was beside me in the hospital when we heard about the accident. The school bus collided with an oncoming truck and he was the only kid that lost his life. Others suffered serious injuries. I recall attending his funeral. So many people cried. I held the hands of my parents and Christine as I knew I was ever going to see my class-mate again.

I have discovered that being born into a family, we are given siblings and relatives, but having friends is a decision we have to make. Joseph was my neighbour and a very good friend. Now he was gone.

It will happen to the man who sells groundnut on the street, the woman who sells biscuits in her kiosk opposite our street, and even to Dad and Mum too. So I had to stop being afraid of death. Instead, I have to start appreciating family, friends and loved ones and learn to enjoy life.

4<sup>th</sup> December, 1997

### **DID I WIN A LOTTERY?**

Most times, I consider myself very lucky. Some would say I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I grew up very comfortably in Lagos and as kids my parents spoiled Christine and I silly. We ate at the most expensive restaurants in town. We never lacked food or went hungry. There was always food on the table, made by Dad or Mum. Bacon, scrambled eggs, sausages and toast bread for breakfast. Then she

made plantain and French omelette for lunch. Her sweet potatoes or fried chicken wings and *jollof rice* for dinner was always memorable. Everyone loved Mum's cooking but there is a part we didn't like, and that's the food time-table she had cello-taped to the kitchen wall right above the microwave. Nobody liked Wednesday's dinner-beans and *gari* or Friday's lunch-*amala and okra soup*. If I lost even a tiny amount of weight, then it's because I skipped those meals.

Mum and Dad said I had been to England for winter to experience the snow and South Africa once to see where she grew up. Sadly, I don't remember even though there are pictures to prove it. I had a magical childhood many kids in our neighbourhood wished for. I had a lot of game consoles and that's why every parent in our neighbourhood who had a son wanted to become my friend. We didn't like too much people coming over though because there was a time my Street fighter cartridge was stolen. My Mum tried to tell me it was missing and we would find it soon, but I knew it was stolen. I cried everyday for a week because it was my favourite game and Ken, my favourite character.

Dad never took education for a joke and why should he? His mother was a school teacher and he topped his class since the day he put on a school uniform. He always made me read dictionaries and some books in his Library. Most times, I walked up to him and complained, "Dad, this book is boring." or "Dad, what does this word mean?" I often sat on his lap while he removed a dictionary from under his pillow as we searched for the word together.

Mum helps me with assignments in the little way she can and always gives me life lessons. "Nolan, always envision where you are going and remember where you come from..." I never knew what envision meant, but one thing was clear, I liked where I came from.

Dad loved helping people. He travelled to different countries helping kids in orphanage homes. He even talked about having a Foundation to help guys stay in school instead of them robbing houses and ruining people's lives. Mum made her famous homemade chicken pie and sweet potatoes for neighbours during Christmas periods.

Whenever Mum travelled for summer holidays, she travelled with one suitcase and returned with three suitcases. One would be filled with clothes she got for herself and Dad, the second with Christine's and mine. The third suitcase was my favourite because it was filled with a lot of candies, chocolates and snacks. We stacked them up in the fridge to prevent them from going bad. Christine and I always did our possible best not to finish them before school resumed so we could share them with our friends.

My parents showed up for my school performance when I played the character, Jafar in my first drama, Aladdin and when I advanced from White to Yellow Belt in my Taekwondo class. I actually believed I could beat anyone on the planet after then. On our way home that day I told my parents, "Dad, armed robbers dare not come to our house, if not, I'll beat them till their parents cannot recognize them anymore." Mum laughed all the way home.

The day of my football match is a day I would hardly forget. I came off the bench to put two past the goal keeper. I heard a male voice in the crowd say, "That's my son! That's Nolan.. my boy!" My Mum was there too with Christine in the baby stroller. When we came home from the football match my Dad said "Maybe one day you'll play for the Super Eagles of Nigeria". Maybe I was naturally talented or just overjoyed that my parents made it to my football game that sunny afternoon.

To me, my parents were the best. They gave the clothes Christine and I outgrew to orphanage homes in Lagos and Edo State. I couldn't really understand why other children were given the opportunity to wear our clothes for free. If my parents loved giving so much and freely, then why didn't they give away the beans we never ate? That's because nobody likes beans. Not even street dogs and cats.

You could say some people were jealous of Mr. Bola and Mrs. Amanda Omolade while others were in awe of them, but as time went on, people in our street began to notice some changes in them, so did my little sister and I.

10<sup>th</sup> January, 1998

### **VANILLA ICE CREAM & BRUISES**

My best ice-cream flavour is Vanilla. I love how it melts in my mouth. I hated Chocolate. Christine likes it so much and I don't know why. I didn't get ice-cream every day of the week. Mum said it was bad for me and it could make me fall very ill. She reduced the amount of sugar we put in our cereals, which made it not so tasty. Anyways, it's very easy to get your own way if you really want. I had to find a way to get ice-cream whenever I wanted. I needed a way.

I got back from school one sunny afternoon with my school uniform looking very dirty. There was a nasty cut on my left knee which I got when I was pushed to the floor by a classmate because he saw me talking to a girl he liked. Mum saw it and told me to wait in the living room.

"This looks bad Nolan, what happened?" she asked,

"I fell down when I was playing football," I lied.

She brought out her First Aid kit from her bedroom and told me to take a shower so she could clean it up.

"Mum, can't we just let the pain go away? I don't mind skipping showers for two days so I won't feel too much pain."

"What nonsense! You will shower every time so I can apply this to your cut. Can't you see your school uniform is very dirty too?"

"No!"

"Okay I'll buy you ice-cream after this."

Once she said that, I was in cloud nine. I quickly took a shower and didn't even know when she applied cotton wool soaked with spirit on my bleeding knee. I felt no

pain and didn't even scream. She threw the cotton wool into the waste basket, applied anti-biotic cream and covered it with plaster. I therefore came up with a plan, a new way of getting ice-cream.

The following week, I had a strong craving for ice-cream, so I hit my leg against the car with force but nothing happened. I hit my leg against the gate and still nothing happened. Then I hit my leg against the edge of the dining table with so much force, blood began gushing out from a deep cut down my leg. When Mum got home from her friend's place, I quickly sat in a corner of the living room, shedding fake tears while holding my leg. She didn't say a word when she saw me. She drew her eyebrows up and gave me a knowing look.

"Mum I am bleeding!" I cried,

"How did you hurt yourself?" she asked.

Before I could reply, she added,

Mum ran her knuckles down my cheeks "Nolan, if you want ice-cream just ask. Instead of hurting yourself and trying to be smarter than me"

I felt very embarrassed and promised not to act smarter than her ever again.

I wasn't concerned about my bruises, I was concerned for Jack. When we spoke on the phone he told me he had a few cuts on his leg. I already figured he would have told Aunt Chioma that it happened during a basketball match but I know it was that boy that caused it, the one who refused to stop teasing and bullying us.

I called Aunt Chioma and told her that I was coming over. She was preparing lunch when I arrived at their house. She told me to join her and Kim but I ran upstairs to Jack's room. He laid in bed playing a basketball video game. I was surprised he had the strength to play video games considering his condition. He cracked a smile when I sat next to him.

"I heard what happened"

"It was him wasn't it" as I cupped my hands and whispered into his ear.

He responded with a nod and laughed.

"What's funny Jack?"

"I told Mum I got injured during a basketball game and got free ice-cream." He replied.

"You get free ice-cream when you're injured too?" I asked him as I stole his pad from him and promised I would win the game. He chuckled and slapped my back and I smiled, silently thanking God the cuts were not as bad as I imagined.

24<sup>th</sup> April, 1998

### **TIME FOR DINNER**

Mum pulled the earphones from my ears.

"Nolan, why don't you go help Dad bring the food to the table"

"But Mum I helped last night."

"Nolan!" she snapped.

"Okay, but the only thing I'll be doing tomorrow is washing my dinner plate and maybe the pots," I replied with my face all squeezed.

The kitchen was a bit of a mess already, I knew that I would have to clean the place up after dinner since Christine wasn't of age to do anything about it.

"I think dinner is ready. I hope my food tastes very good," Dad said as he wiped the sweat off his face with his t-shirt.

"I am not sure Dad, let Mum be the judge of that" I replied.

This is not the first time he has said that. The last time he said it, I did not finish dinner. Dad's cooking is not that bad, his pancakes and his toast with scrambled eggs and sausages were genius, though some don't consider that cooking.

Mum's screamed dad's name repeatedly, it was as though she had not eaten in weeks.

"Where's the food? We don't have all day Mr. Chef", she yelled.

Christine's plastic fork and knife bounced off the table. She wasn't of age to use metal cutlery yet. I was seven years old when Dad handed metal cutlery to me like it was rare kitchen ware. I remember looking at it saying, "Does it make the food taste better Dad?"

"Dinner is served" Dad announced as he walked into the dining room. We applauded his arrival. This was because he finally beat his former record of serving dinner by twenty-two seconds. Dad just made chips and chicken which makes us wonder why it took him so long. I was certain that dinner wouldn't put me to sleep this time around.

Mum scooped the chips off the plate with her lean hands and served us all. We served the chicken ourselves, well except Christine. I helped put food on her divider plate, else Dad was going to raise his voice on someone and I did not want it to be me.

It didn't take long to finish my meal. Christine didn't go far as I could see her eyes closing slowly.

"Mum, let me take Christine to bed" I requested as I got up from my chair

"Wait, I'll take her. I have to read her a bedtime story anyway and take my pills too" Dad insisted. He kissed Christine on her forehead and lifted her off the chair.

There was still a decent amount of food left on the table. On a good day, I would eat the remaining food on the dining table but I couldn't do it this time which surprised me. Mum stood up from her chair and told me to put the rest of the chips in the microwave. She stared at me with her dark ink long eyelashes and ocean blue eyes, the beads on her neck stuck to my face as she kissed me on my forehead and walked upstairs singing her favourite song- Georgia on My Mind by Ray Charles.

18<sup>th</sup> September, 1998

### **RAIN FELL ON MY BED SHEETS**

Mum stared at my bed sheet for a long time as if she knew that was not the bed sheet she laid on my bed yesterday morning. I cleared my throat and grabbed my school bag.

"I'm going to be late for school, I have to leave now", I said as I stepped out of the room very confident that she wouldn't see the bed sheet I tucked under the bed.

This was not the first time this was happening. The last time, I had to spread and tuck my duvet into the bed and spray air freshener all over it. I didn't get to do that this time because I was running late for school and Mum refused to stop staring at my bed sheet.

On my way to school I wondered what was going through Mum's head. *She must be asking herself over and over if that was the bed sheet she put on my bed yesterday or perhaps how much of a good boy I was today to change my sheets myself.*

*It would be weird if I returned home from school and still saw her staring at my bed sheet. What would be weirder is if I saw her holding the blue bed sheet under the bed in her hands.* These thoughts and many more went through my head the whole day; I could not concentrate in class. I'm sure I failed my Math Test because I wasn't concentrating or I didn't prepare for it. I refused to go for recess or lunch break. I told Jack what happened and he laughed so hard while holding his stomach, I knew he wasn't trying to make me feel bad because I would have laughed at him if he was in my shoes. I sat in my class all day till Dad came to pick me up from school.

Afternoon traffic was hectic and I wanted it to remain that way. I bit my finger nails as I sat at the back seat of Dad's car. I bit them ten times faster and worse than Christine and Kim did the day they attempted to paint part of Dad's room pink. They claimed it wasn't pretty enough. The room was dark blue. Christine believed half of it should be pink because it was Mum's room too.

When I got home, I ignored Mum and didn't say a word to her. I just ran upstairs to check if the bed sheet was still there. Sweat dripped down my face as I literally ran from the car to my room.

I got to my knees to see if the sheet was still under the bed but decided that a minute prayer would be a good idea so I prayed that Mum hadn't found the bed sheet and that if she did, she wouldn't give me a harsh punishment. What a relief! It was just where and how I left it. I raised my head and Mum was staring right at me.

"What are you doing down there, Nolan?" she yelled

*Had she seen the sheets? Oh no! She knows! My heart beat accelerated.*

"I um...I was.... looking for my pencil, I have Fine Art assignment which is due tomorrow."

"Okay, go downstairs because dinner would be ready soon."

I was smiling while watching TV as my stomach began to ache. I was very hungry so I decided to check lunch was ready. I opened the kitchen door and Mum was right in front of me again just like she appeared in my bedroom, only this time she was holding my urine-stained and smelly bed sheet.

"Nolan you are going to wash this bed sheet and your sister's until you stop wetting the bed"

I guess God answered my prayers because the punishment was not as severe as I expected.

I soon became a Laundry expert because I have been washing the bed sheet for three years in total, counting all the times she found out I peed on the bed and how many weeks and months I had to wash them for. There was a time I was told to wash the bed sheets for three months. So this is not so bad, not a problem at all.



2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1999

### **MEN RARELY CRY BUT WOMEN CRY ALL THE TIME**

The most popular reason people cry is because they lost a loved one. Even so, it is very difficult for men to cry while women practically cry over very little things. I don't cry whenever I forget where I kept my Walkman unlike Christine who cries throughout the night whenever she misplaces her teddy bear. Then there's Mum who cries the most. She cried whenever she watched romance soap-operas, she wailed when my dog Baxter died. The only time I understand why she cries, are situations where Dad screams at her when he's in a bad mood or when they argued.

Dad and I rarely cried. Perhaps, I should be honest. Dad cries a few times, and unlike women he always has one excuse after another for crying. When Nigeria lost to Cameroon in the African Cup of Nations Final, he said the reason his eyes were watery was because he had just helped Mum cut onions. Also, the time he was given an injection when he was very ill, he said he was given an injection that made people cry. Christine bought that. I would have if I was her age too.

I had a few excuses of my own too. The night my mini cell phone was snatched from me while I was walking home, I cried but no one would know because it rained that evening. Mum laughed at me because I cried after watching her best soap-opera. I told her it wasn't tears coming down my face but the excess amount of eye drop I used. She simply said Dad and I were the same.

"There's no shame in crying sweetie. Everyone does."

While Dad often cried when his favourite football team or basketball team lost, I was known for crying if I didn't play well on the football field. I always left the football field in tears whenever I didn't get on the score sheet or lost to another school. I always got upset when I was open for a clean chance or a one-on-one opportunity and my team mates refused to pass the ball to me; whenever the referee gave yellow cards or no card to players who tackled me; or the time I didn't receive the Best Sportsman Award in our school even though I deserved it and Jack did to but it was given to an average player on the football team.

I promised to try my best to stop crying.

12<sup>th</sup> July, 1999

### **COME WITH ME, LET'S FLY AWAY**

My Dad always believed that I would be a doctor or a footballer. As I got more interested in aircrafts, I believed I would eventually disappoint him because I wanted to be a pilot. This idea of mine to become a pilot started at the ripe age of nine. My Dad was good friends with the pilot of a local airline who usually shuffled between Lagos and Abuja. I had the privilege of meeting with him when I accompanied my Dad to Abuja for a Christmas holiday. On that specific flight, I had the privilege to sit in the cockpit throughout the flight. I watched the pilot closely from the take-off

time till we landed. I imagined myself handling the controls and trust me, it felt good. If the imagination felt that good, flying the plane would have felt even better.

I built my first model paper aircraft when I was nine years old but I didn't do it alone, Jack and his sister, Kim helped too. The airplane suspended from the ceiling in my bedroom. It didn't last long up there because after a month, Mum removed it when she wanted to install the ceiling fan and get rid of the standing fan in my bedroom.

Maybe I'll become a pilot, maybe I won't. I do know this for sure, I enjoyed my first flight and I hope to have many more to come, either sitting in the economy or business class or in the cockpit.

My first time travelling unaccompanied was a memorable one. I was going overseas for holidays. Dad booked the flight for Friday. I had mixed feelings when we got to the International Airport that afternoon. I was going to miss my parents and Christine. Christine didn't travel with me because she had malaria. She gets to travel this Christmas or next summer as compensation.

Dad didn't mind me travelling alone but Mum was worried. "Call me once you arrive," she requested.

I arrived at the counter a bit late and requested for a window seat, luckily I was able to get one.

The lady who issued the tickets was very kind to put in my luggage without an extra fee. I went through Immigrations with ease and waited at the airport lounge for an hour before my flight time.

The plane was big and spacious. When the pilots started the engine of the plane, it gave such a loud vibrating noise. I looked through the window from where I was seated and had an exquisite view of Lagos State as the plane rose into the sky. The houses looked like Lego land toys and I couldn't spot anyone. I even tried to look for my house but couldn't find it. The plane glided smoothly in the air over cities and rivers and I slept throughout the journey.

Upon arrival, I filled the Customs form with some assistance from a gentleman seated next to me. The airport was so big that buses were used to move individuals from one terminal to another.

I got to security, submitted my form and was asked a few questions which I think I answered correctly to their satisfaction. When I went to get my luggage, a couple beside a white man in a suit held up a placard with my name on it. It was my Uncle and his wife.

13<sup>th</sup> July, 1999

### **AM I IN HEAVEN?**

The fourth maddening buzz of the alarm in woke me up as I slid out of bed yawning. Today was going to be wonderful and I could smell the pancakes and bacons coming from my Aunt's kitchen. We were going to Disney Land and we were going to be late because of me. I had forty five minutes to get ready and I still hadn't brushed my teeth, showered and had breakfast. I brushed my teeth while I ironed my brown t-shirt which often brought me luck. Whoever said you can't do two things at once clearly hadn't met me.

I ran downstairs and shoved the pancakes on my plate into my mouth one at a time then ran upstairs still trying to swallow them. I had fifteen minutes to spare, I had the choice of wasting time in the bathroom like Christine and Mum often did but I didn't. I was out of the shower in five minutes; my Uncle was downstairs already, he had been waiting there for me and my Aunt it seemed.

"Women are always known for wasting time Nolan," my Uncle said.

I guess it was a good thing I showered quickly. or else my Uncle would have teased me throughout our drive to Disney Land and probably even on our way back to his house. We finally got into the car and began our journey.

"Disney Land here I come!!!" I smiled as I pumped my fist in the air.

I have dreamt of this day for a very long time and I have a feeling when we do get to Disney Land, I may not return. I sat in the back seat with strict instructions to fasten my seat belt which I didn't like because my view was restricted. Within thirty minutes, I got bored so I put on my Walkman and listened to music while playing video game at the same time which wasn't a smart thing to do because the batteries died almost simultaneously.

I was delighted when we finally arrived! There were lots to do and lots to see and pictures to be taken especially to make Christine jealous. While we walked the streets of Disney Land, I saw Mickey Mouse and was very excited because I was a huge fan. I was about to go pose for a picture with Mickey when I spotted Cinderella and ditched Mickey. I took a picture with Cinderella, Jasmine and Beauty. The only male I took pictures with was my Uncle. My best ride was Tower of Terror. I was a little bit scared and was highly disappointed in my Uncle and Aunt who sat beside me screaming all the way. We also had rollercoaster rides. We enjoyed ourselves and I made new friends.

At the end of the day, we lodged in a hotel because it was too late to go home. I barely slept all night. I had so much fun and I would never forget my trip to Disney Land. I'm sure I'll go there again, sooner rather than later. I watched television a little before finally falling asleep.

25<sup>th</sup> April, 2000

## **THE GIRL NEXT DOOR**

I learnt from Mum that a crush is not the same thing as love; love lasts forever if necessary while a crush fades over time. I don't know how true that is because I have a serious crush on my neighbour and I have had a crush on her for over five years.

I remember the first day I laid my eyes on her, I was riding my bicycle just as I did every other morning and only this time I forgot to hit the brakes when I saw a girl with braided hair possibly held back by an elastic band. She placed one hand on the railings of her balcony and held an ice-cream in the other. I didn't see her face well but the fact that she was licking ice-cream was enough to send me crashing into our trash can and I bruised my right leg in the process, but it was worth it.

I left my bicycle on the floor and limped my way into the living room. I picked up the house landline and informed Jack that I got a bruise because I had just seen the most beautiful girl but he showed little interest and instead dared me to ring her doorbell the next day. It took me three weeks to ring her doorbell.

I soon discovered her name was Femi and she was the only daughter of her parents. I followed her everywhere like a love struck puppy. Sometimes I wished she was a guy so I could sleep over at her house or she in mine. I never saw what her bedroom looked like because I never got past her living room.

She is taller than I am so I always prefer shaking her hand to hugging her. Her brown eyes happen to be the best feature of her face. It wasn't just her physical features that made me attracted to her, it was her personality too. She was the only girl in my age group that played video games with me and the same taste in music. She's very respectful to my parents and I am to hers.

We became so close, it made our parents uncomfortable. My parents told me to stop going to her house due to complaints from her Dad, but one boring Saturday I decided to jump our fence into her house because I had knocked on her gate for ten minutes without an answer.

I made my way to her living room but she wasn't there so I climbed the steps like a thief in the night, I didn't want her parents to hear my footsteps. There were two bedrooms upstairs and one of them was hers but I didn't know which one was hers. I could actually go into the first room and be in serious trouble with her parents or get my first kiss. I couldn't risk getting scolded and wondered what my Dad would do to me if I got caught all in the name of getting kissed by Femi, so I walked back downstairs the same way I came up, headed outside and jumped the fence. As I landed in our compound, coming down I saw Dad getting out of his car, at the point I was praying for an eagle or helicopter to carry me away to anywhere really but as gravity will have it I landed on the floor.

Dad's eyes turned red like the flames of an erupting volcano. I could tell I was in trouble, bigger trouble than the time I mistakenly broke Dad's favourite cologne. He kept staring at me and didn't say a word until we got into the living room. "Nolan we are going to the Zoo in Ibadan tomorrow since you have decided to become a monkey." I preferred his harsh words and sarcasm to being flogged..

I didn't see Femi for a week and I was warned not to go there again or jump the fence, else I was going to have bananas for breakfast, lunch and dinner for weeks.

I was beginning to miss her, especially that tremendous smile of hers. Whenever her father's car honked I would race to the balcony and I was always happy to see Femi. She would flick her braided hair and cat walk. She knew I always watched but acted like she didn't. Christine was not mature enough to have the conversations I usually had with Femi so I often told Jack which sucked because he always told Aunt

Chioma about it. There was no way I would tell Mum half of the things Femi and I discussed at her house or whenever she visited.

I believed Dad was jealous because he is not so close to Mum like Femi and I, so he stopped me from seeing her. I doubt it had anything to do with the amount of times I went over to her house.

It was only a matter of time before another girl came along but Femi was never forgotten. I guess Mum was right about crushes... or was she?

12<sup>th</sup> August, 2000

### **TIME TO PAY THE PRICE**

It was the last week of the first term of my JSS3 class and I couldn't wait for the term to be over. A few minutes before the bell rang, the Social Studies teacher reminded everyone in class to remember to give their first term report card to their parents. The school staff came up with a new system for students like me, who do not show parents their school term report card. They send the results to parents' emails too. In the past, I lied about my results after tearing them and throwing them away, but this time I was like a mouse trapped in a corner.

There is a window in my class where students can check to see if their parents had arrived to pick them up. I peeked through it and did not see Dad's car. I was happy not to see the car. I would even prefer using a taxi home. Like a security guard, I watched different cars come in and leave the school premises. I paced to and fro in the classroom, biting my nails (bad habit), dreading the honk of Dad's car or seeing it pass through the school gates. I didn't want to go home because I knew that my game console and Walkman were going to be seized. The thought of this alone made me depressed and it was a hard pill to swallow.

Jack called out to me to come play basketball while I waited for my parents. I grabbed my school bag and raced downstairs. I loosened my school tie and rolled up my sleeves on the way down the stairs, already thinking of the amount of three pointers I was going to make, certainly not more than Jack because he was after all the captain of the basketball team.

"Nolan I've been calling you, your Dad has been here for over fifteen minutes."

How did I miss his entrance? I had not even bounced the basketball and we didn't have any PE class that day, yet I was sweating like someone who just ran a marathon. Sweat irritated my eyes and I quickly used my hands to wipe the sweat off my face but it didn't make much difference because my palms were sweaty too.

I walked out of the school gate pretending not to know where Dad's car was parked. My plan was to call for a taxi and hope that Dad won't see me doing so "Nolan!"

I turned in different directions like I couldn't find his car.

"Nolan. I'm parked over here. I couldn't park inside because there was no space. Hurry up, let's go home. I have to help your mother with the vegetable soup". He yelled.

I held my school bag to my back like it was glued to it. When I got into the car, I pretended to fall asleep and before I knew it, I really was. When I woke up, we were home. The sun was already setting in our neighborhood. I pushed the car door open and suddenly my heart accelerated as I unzipped my bag to check if my report card was still in there. It was. I needed to stay calm. I walked around the house thinking of ways to tell my parents about how I flunked the term.

I raced upstairs straight to my room and slammed the door shut as I struggled to catch my breath. I unzipped my school bag and carefully removed the report card from it. I took the correcting fluid in my drawer and my hand shook as I wiped it over one of the numbers so it looked like I was 2<sup>nd</sup> in class and not 22<sup>nd</sup>. Mum never looked at the subjects and grades, she just looked at the position you got in class. Dad was the problem because he looked at every single subject and grades you got. Sometimes he'll say stuff like,

"Why didn't you come first, does the person with first position have two heads? In my time, I was first in the class."

Maybe he was always first but what was strange was almost all my classmates said their parents used that line, which makes me wonder who came last then. When I have my kids, I'll tell them the truth. Yes! I'll tell them I came 22<sup>nd</sup> but not today. Nobody can know now, especially my parents.

I was about to resume biting my nails some more but couldn't because it seemed I had bitten too much in class with almost my flesh left to chew on. I had to tell my parents my results so I walked up to my Dad's bedroom door and knocked but no one answered. This meant that he was either downstairs in the living room or dining room, and the best place to tell him bad news is his bedroom, the worst is any place downstairs.

I had to go downstairs and I did so in a snail pace. I got to where Dad was seated and mopped my forehead with the bottom of my school uniform shirt. Dad was watching the local news; it seemed like a decent time to deliver the news to him.

"Dad I have my report card here with me"

"Let me see it." He took a stern look at the paper and said, "You were second? Yet you failed six subjects? Did you think I won't notice the correcting fluid and I can still check my e-mail to see your real position? What is wrong with you? Now get out of my sight". He was frustrated with me and resumed watching television.

I headed for the stairs like it was the gate of heaven looking rather depressed, Mum walked out of the kitchen,

"What is wrong Nolan? Did you have a bad day at school?" she was bothered because I covered my head with my hands.

“Mum here is my report card, just take it”. I leaned over the stairs and stretched my hands towards hers, she grabbed the report card from me and I was expecting a slap on my face or she yelling at me so loud the neighbors would hear but she didn’t.

“You were second in class? That is amazing Nolan.” She rejoiced and danced.

My Dad laughed so hard, I knew Mum thought he was laughing at something he probably heard in the news, but he was laughing at the fact that Mum could not figure out the trick I used. Sooner or later, Mum will start looking at my grades and when she does she will seize my game console and my Walkman. I hope such a day never comes.

I was 22<sup>nd</sup> in a class of twenty five students. It was weird because it’s never happened before. Well, there is a first time for everything.

10<sup>th</sup> May, 2001

### **HOME ALONE**

This was the month I almost burnt the house down. The month I was grounded more than other times I did stupid stuff. The month I was home alone. I should have done better last term, especially in my exams. I didn’t travel with Mum, Dad and Christine because of my poor performance in school. They got plane tickets to England and would be gone for two weeks. As if that wasn’t punishment enough, Dad also seized my game consoles and other entertainment gadgets and kept them in an unknown location. His reasons were that he wants me to do some reading and not get distracted.

Dad held his travelling bag in one hand and dragged Mum’s suitcase down the stairs with his other hand. Christine followed behind Dad swinging Mum’s hand and laughing at me with a unique facial expression. Mum walked up to me, hugged and kissed me on my forehead. Dad just waved. His friend came to pick them up. Dad sat in the passenger seat and Mum and Christine sat in the back seat. They waved at me as they drove off. *How did they know I was looking through the curtain?*

Mum called me when they got to the airport and I waited till she called again to say they were about to board. I had plans of sleeping out at a friend’s place. I couldn’t imagine if they came back home that night and noticed I wasn’t around, I would be a dead man walking.

The house was going to be mine for two weeks. There was nobody to tell me to reduce the volume of the television or to ask me why I haven’t washed my plates.

No rules. This was going to be fantastic! I emptied my school bag of its contents and stuffed some clothes into it. I was set for three days of madness with Jack. He and I used to hang out every weekend. It was either he came over to my place or I went to his until Dad stopped me from going to his place because he believed it was another reason I didn't get good grades in school, which was not so far from the truth because Jack always got good grades in school since the day I met him

I had plans of going to two houses I was banned from. First on the list was Jacks' which was going to be interesting because his mum and sister weren't around too or at least that's what he said over the phone. I did wish Kim was around because she always prevented Jack from doing silly things. I got to Jacks' house by 7pm in a taxi and knocked on the gate. He was playing basketball when the gate man opened for me. He stashed his comb into his thick afro hair and tossed the basketball from the gate to his rim bragging that he made it from there yesterday. He dared me to do same. We placed a bet with our next lunch money.

*"Oyinbo na true o! Oga shoot from there yesterday, the ball enter three times, even me I shock"* the gate man said in his Yoruba accent.

*"Na only three times? Me I fit make ten naw and Jack go owe me money"* I replied in my awkward pidgin accent.

I stood there for over an hour trying to earn what was supposed to be the easiest income I'll ever get but couldn't. I was already sweating profusely when I stepped into his living room as I panted heavily.

"So do I owe you ten grand?" he asked. "Hey, look you know if it was a football test you'll definitely owe me by now and I never claimed to be Michael Jordan. Besides, you are leaner and shorter than me that is why you have better ball handling skills"

"I am not shorter than you. We are the same height Nolan" he giggled.

"Go have a shower buddy; you're stinking up the living room!!"

I chuckled as I removed my sweat-drenched shirt while heading up the stairs. I quickly freshened up and returned downstairs. After dinner, we watched TV till past midnight. Jack was strong enough to drag himself up the stairs to his bedroom. I couldn't move a muscle and ended up sleeping on the couch which was quite comfortable. It was not the first time I slept on the couch at Jacks'. His mother often complained and would drag me up the stairs but she wasn't in town so I rested on the couch trying to wrap my head around the fact that I didn't make those shots.

By noon, the house help placed pounded yam and banga on the table. It was my first time seeing this yellow round meal which Jack loved so much. He taught me how to roll into a ball and dip it into the soup. I wasn't good at this as my shirt had drops of the brown soup on it.

I couldn't move once again because I had eaten too much. I could be mistaken for a pregnant lady if I was given a wig and high heels because my belly was quite swollen. Jack was in a worse state, he laid flat on the kitchen floor licking his fingers, how he ate so much and never gained much weight or grew taller remained a mystery to me. Afternoon time went as fast as the morning did. We played video games for hours till dinner time. I spent the second night on the couch, only this time he tossed me a pillow from upstairs because he knew there was no way I was going to leave the living room, and if I did, it would be to the kitchen to grab a quick snack.

I ended up spending a week at Jacks'. I got tired of playing the video games and food I was entertained with. I needed to leave, head back home or somewhere else. Good thing I only packed a few clothes in my bag.



Jack was still snoring in his bedroom so I left a note on the kitchen table telling him I was going to Femi's house. I told him that we would see each other when school resumes and we would only see earlier should he come to my house for a visit before school resumption. It was quite a sunny afternoon. The gate man helped me board a taxi, after minutes of driving I stopped the taxi driver before we got to my house.

"Oga the white gate please" I said. "Ah yes! It's been a while. I hope Femi is home."

I repeatedly knocked on Femi's gate and was willing to stand there till the sun came down. Thank God I didn't have to wait until the stars were out in the sky too. She opened the gate and froze like she had just seen a ghost. I looked like I had seen a ghost too, I have seen Femi without make up several times but this time she looked like a witch from the cartoons - her hair which was longer now since the last time I saw her was clearly not brushed and stood out like spikes, she had one or two pimples that were very visible on her round and beautiful face. I was beginning to wonder if she could not recognize me but cleared my doubts from the tight bear hug she gave me. Her parents were out so early for an occasion. We had the house to ourselves till evening. She held my hand as she led me into their kitchen.

"What's cooking Femi?"

"You like the way it smells, right?" She asks.

"I only ask because I haven't had breakfast and I'm starving" I reply.

She hissed and followed up with a smile, a beautiful smile Dad had deprived me from seeing. I would have taken a picture of her smiling but my phone battery was dead. While she was staring into the pot to see if the food was ready, I was surprised that she had lost so much weight. She made me promise to do the dishes since she originally had the intention of cooking for one. I hated doing dishes, especially at people's houses but what choice did I have? This was Femi and this was not the first time I was washing plates and pots in her kitchen sink, so I considered it a good trade-by-barter. We had lunch together, nothing fancy, just the classic white rice, stew and plantain and extra turkey I stole off her plate.

We tried to catch up on the latest updates in our lives and by the time I got to the living room to tell her I was done with the dishes, she was fast asleep on the couch. She was still in her pyjamas which meant she hadn't showered. Oh no! I can't believe she hugged me with a morning stink body, but I was calling a kettle black when even I haven't showered too.

I wanted to head home but I couldn't help but stare and watch her sleep, didn't know when I was going to get such an opportunity again, so I basked in it. I thought it was going to last for a lifetime but it only lasted for about an hour. When she woke up, she gave a lengthy yawn and headed up the stairs to shower. I was about to follow her but she instructed me to wait downstairs.

She was downstairs after thirty minutes, I wonder if she only went to shower or clean up her room and then shower. Well, it didn't really matter how long she took, because that witch, scary look had transformed into a princess look. She was wearing a blue blouse on a black skirt and white rubber slippers.

"Going somewhere fancy, Femi? Which guy is coming to pick you up so I can jump the fence?" I teased.

"No. I just want to stroll with you silly," She giggled. "Hey, that time you scaled your fence did you get caught?"

"What do you think? Why do think I haven't been to your house in over a year? It's because my Dad banned me from doing so."

“Wait a minute! My Dad banned you and yours did too?!” She asked and we both laughed yet we felt betrayed by our fathers.

We walked outside under the warm sunlight and despite the noise in the neighborhood with kids playing hide and seek and riding their bicycles, I did not need to shout while talking because Femi had ears worth whispering into. We talked about many things. She told me they were moving out the following week. Not just to a new neighborhood but to a different State entirely. I would have given her my discman to remember me by, but I wasn't ready to let it go.

We eventually sat under a tree to protect ourselves from the fierce sun as we laughed and talked for a really long time. I returned home later that evening and as usual there was power outage so I had to put the generator on. I had a quick shower and got into bed almost immediately after.

The humming sound of the generator woke me up the next morning. It was oddly loud and obnoxious. I dragged myself downstairs to see the problem but before I got there, the generator went off and I wonder if Casper the friendly ghost had a role to play in it, if he was so kind to help me switch it off, else it meant we were most certainly out of diesel which ended up being the case.

I still had a week of fun, maybe I'll return to Jacks' for another sleepover or stealing visits to Femi's place regularly to spend more time with her before she leaves would not be a bad idea. I was still yet to decide when my thoughts were interrupted by continuous blasts of a car horn. I looked out the window and noticed a taxi come to a halt right outside our home. I took a binocularly look and spotted my whole family in the taxi!

I paced to and fro the living room restlessly. I may never get my discman back, maybe my game consoles but not my discman. They leave me for one week and I ran one week's amount of diesel in thirteen hours.

I ran upstairs and my prayer was that we wouldn't have to make use of the generator that night or if possible for the rest of our lives. The front door creaked open and Christine's laughter brought the living room to life. I waited for my name to be called and went down in feigned surprise when it was eventually called. I was sure glad to have them back home. I went through the stuffs Mum got for me as Christine rambled on in my ears about their trip. When the lights went out by seven in the evening, I heard my name,

“Nolan! Nolan go put on the generator,” my Dad yelled. I remained in bed and didn't move a muscle.

“Nolan!” ten seconds after.

“Nolan!!” Five minutes later, “Nolan!!!”

He must have shouted my name over twenty times and maybe even lost his voice while doing so. One thing was certain, I was not answering him or going downstairs that evening no matter how hungry I got. I acted like one fast asleep.

14<sup>th</sup> March, 2002

### **THE NARROW ROAD**

The road leading to my school is a one-way road. It is really narrow and quite busy. Just on that road alone was my school, a clinic and a small supermarket. Even before the school bell was rung, one could see traffic building up through the

windows of the classrooms. It was sometimes impassable as cars, bikes and buses jostled their way through.

There was no permanent traffic warden. Sometimes, policemen would appear out of nowhere to help reduce the traffic madness and general chaos the street was known for. One had to drive carefully to avoid accidents which frequently occurred.

Today I witnessed an accident.

They had just rung the closing bell. Students ran across the road to where their parents were parked and some cars honked impatiently at them. A little boy ran across the road, trying to get to the other side before the traffic light turned green. He couldn't have run faster than he did. I remember a bike man waving his hand, instructing the little boy to move out of the way. The bike man hit the little boy whom instantly fell to the ground. His bike came to a complete stop few steps from where the boy laid on the road. The boy was bleeding and many people had surrounded him. Some held the bike man willing to tear his shirt, others rained insults on him and a few attempted to beat him. He survived the onslaught as a police van arrived at the scene to calm things down.

The little boy suffered some bruises and a major concussion. He was rushed to the clinic close to our school. A traffic warden was thereafter appointed to the road permanently to help in preventing such incidents from recurring in the future.

29<sup>th</sup> March, 2002

### **THE EMPTY CHAIR AT THE DINING ROOM**

I woke up this morning hoping it was all a nightmare... A bad dream... One I never want to have again. I went downstairs still yawning. Christine was already in her school uniform swinging her legs on her seat at the dining table. Mum had a cigarette stick in her mouth as she served our pancakes.

"Mum, why isn't Dad down yet? I'm going to get him his morning paper." as I turned the knob of the door and pushed it up.

*Dad was the guy that couldn't have breakfast without reading the morning paper, starting with the back page Sports section and then to the front page afterwards.* When I stepped outside, Dad's car wasn't there so I assumed he went to get the newspaper himself and maybe a few other stuff. I went back inside to finish my breakfast. Mum was acting quite edgy with a short temper to go with it.

"Sit down Nolan!" She screamed. "What do you think you are doing? Eat your pancakes and hurry up so you walk Christine to Miss Amaka's house."

I got upset and lost my appetite. *There was my Mum lighting cigarette after cigarette and I had to be the one to take Christine to Mrs Amakas'. Doesn't she know I have other things to do? I sure hope Dad returns from his morning errands early. I'm sure she'll behave herself then and stop screaming at me.*

"Nolan, get some pepper and tomatoes from the grocery store. I need powdered milk too. Do not get the evaporated milk. You come right back home after school, have you heard? Right back home," she demanded as she shoved some money in my hand. I didn't bother replying her.

Our neighbor's car was parked right in front of our house. They usually take Christine to school and bring her home too. Dad takes me to school, but he hadn't returned from his morning errands so I used a taxi instead.

School went well. I was a genius in every other subject except Biology. As it so happens, my Biology assignment was due that day and I was yet to do anything about it, which meant I would have to copy from Jackeven though his hand writing was like chicken scratch. Who am I to complain?

I got back home after shopping for Mum. Dad didn't come to pick me up so I took a taxi home. The only thing I could think of was my bed. Mum was just where I left her, this time drinking a glass of Dad's favorite liquor; Jack Daniels. I ignored her and headed for my room but before I could get there, my shirt was pulled back. I turned back to face her and a word had not left my mouth when I received a back hand slap.

"Is something wrong with you? What's the time?" she yelled.

"Erm.. emm.." I mumbled looking at my watch. "Its 6pm and I know I'm late. Dad was supposed to pick me up, I waited for long but he didn't show up."

"Shut up! Just shut up!" she hit me on the back and kept repeating "Shut up Nolan, shut up! Did I not tell you to come back home after getting the things from the store? Where are they?"

I removed the items from my school bag, put them on the kitchen table and ran upstairs. I slammed my room door so hard; I thought the hinges would fall off.

It was time for dinner and I repeatedly heard Mum call my name but I refused to go down. I was prepared to go to bed hungry. I decided to take a short nap, wake up and play Street Fighter on my Play Station. I wasn't successful in playing the video game though because when I opened my eyes, the sun had come up. Lo and behold; it was morning!

Christine was applying make-up on her pinched nose and cheeks when I went downstairs for breakfast. I still hadn't seen Dad. Instead of the normal bowl of cereal, I saw three plates of *akara and ogi* on the dining table.

I walked right past the dining table and into the kitchen. I opened one of the kitchen cabinets, as I reached for a box of cereal. My mum walked up to me

"Put it down now. Breakfast is on the table" Mum said.

"Why are we eating that food? Dad won't allow it." I argued.

"Of course he won't, he's gone! I am not rich like your father and I cannot afford to buy you and Christine take-out or food from expensive restaurants, okay? So from now on, we'll be making a lot of adjustments around here. You will now eat what I put on the table. A woman on the other street made them for us."

I didn't believe her and ran upstairs to my parents' room which had obviously now become Mum's rooms. I did not see a single item that belonged to Dad. They were all gone! The portable radio he listened to every morning before he came down for breakfast and his mini fridge which stood by his side of the bed were now replaced by Mum's make-up drawer. I opened his closet, his clothes were gone too. The television and remote control were the only items visible in his bedroom. Otherwise, it seemed like a burglar came and took everything he had. It felt like all his personal items were sold at an auction. The house definitely seemed roomier and the garage had some tools missing.

He was truly gone and it was not a dream. This was reality and it was suddenly beginning to dawn on me.

I walked downstairs in a trance-like motion. I took a look at the food on the table in disgust and fixed my eyes at the dining chair Dad always sat on.

Later that evening, Christine asked me, "Is Dad coming back today?"

"I don't know Christine. I don't know why he left and if he will ever come back."

Dad's chair had become the empty and probably the unnecessary chair in the dining room.

5<sup>th</sup> April, 2003

### **EVERYONE FALLS IN LOVE**

I played football games for our school and I was the Captain of the team. Maybe Dad was right, I could play for the Super Eagles someday. Being the top scorer for the school team, I was one of the most popular students, Jack had his ways with the ladies too because he was popular on the basketball team. Despite this, we still remained the only guys in class that were single and even though every girl in school fell at our feet, most of them were either not my 'type' or they were not that beautiful as far as I was concerned. I don't know the perspective Jack had, but I guessed we shared the same view on the ladies else he wouldn't have been single too.

However, there was a girl every guy in school was dying to date or kiss. Tolu Akinsumi. She was one of the prettiest girls in school. She had long dark hair and looked like the kind of person that spent every weekend at the hair salon. She was the only girl in school that wore eye contacts. Her chocolate brown eyes could be spotted from the school gate. The guys in school praised her body especially her long legs, long hair and her general body figure. It's no wonder people always stared when she walked down the assembly or dining hall. What attracted me to her most was not her physical appearance but her personality. She was very open-minded, smart and kind, plus she had a great sense of humour.

She had been my classmate for two interesting, yet weird years. She sat right behind me in class which was very annoying because it made it difficult to turn back and look at her beautiful face.

There was a particular day I kept turning back to look at her, Jack warned me that I would get seen by the teacher but I refused to listen and eventually the teacher caught me.

"Nolan, teachers are usually in front of the class for a reason. It's so everyone can see them. Yet you keep turning back young man. Come out here and solve these questions," my Mathematics teacher said in a harsh tone.

Jack laughed at me but despite the embarrassment, I solved every math problem on the black board and even corrected a mistake the teacher had made. I never got an A+ in Mathematics, just A- or B+ and I feel it is all because of how I embarrassed my Mathematics teacher that day.

I remember the first day I spoke to Tolu. It was after lunch break and the sun was shining brightly without a cloud in the sky that Thursday afternoon. I had to gather a lot of courage to get it done. I had been dying to talk to her for a long time now.

Tolu was already in class and she was all by herself. I embraced the opportunity to get to know her. After talking to her for what seemed like hours but was only fifteen minutes, I requested for her phone number. To my surprise, she

readily gave it to me and I was very excited to see what would come of what seemed to be our new friendship.

A month later, Tolu and I became the latest couple in school and maybe even the best. We had the same taste in music, movies and even sports. That's right! A lot of weird things happened, and they usually happened during recess or lunch break. We kissed a few times. She never allowed me to French kiss her and there were times I would try to touch her in certain places and she would immediately push my hands away. I couldn't blame her.

She was the religious type. I mean what kind of a girl denied a guy his chance of getting to second or third base, after all, many of my friends had gotten there. I was the odd one out, okay maybe Jack and I were the odd ones out.

At first, when Tolu and I began dating, I hated her friends. Now that I think of it, I don't think there was ever a time I liked them. I detested her friends and I didn't think they liked me either. They constantly called me the devil's son.

We were about to finish our Yoruba class which was the last and most boring class we had on Friday afternoons. People were already putting their books and writing materials in their bags even before the school bell rang. I gave an excuse that I wanted to use the bathroom and escaped with my school bag while the class was still going on and waited outside for Tolu. I had no idea what excuse she was going to give to leave that Yoruba class because our teacher was very strict and knew we did not like her class so she always did everything to ensure we stayed until the school bell rang and sometimes would even keep us five minutes or so after the bell rang. Tolu was lucky to be out of the class not long after. I asked how she managed to get past Mrs Akanbi, our teacher.

"Oh, I just told her my Dad was waiting for me downstairs and we had to go see my Mum in the hospital who just had an accident"

"Your Mum had an accident? Jesus!"

"I lied to Mrs Akanbi, it was the only way to get out of her boring class" she said. "Nolan it's time for you to meet my Dad". She said grabbing my hand and swinging it.

Immediately she said that to me, my heart began beating fast. I had painted this picture that every Dad who had a daughter over the age of thirteen had shotguns, one in the boot of their car and one in their bedroom at home, not for thieves but for boyfriends that never met their expectations. I wondered if he was going to judge me. I also thought of the times I refused to follow Tolu to Bible study and the days I said silly things to irritate and upset her. I do not even entertain the possibility that she may have said something bad about me during their family dinner.

When I approached her father, I reached for his hand and greeted him.

"Good Afternoon sir"

Smiling he said, "You must be Nolan. You should join us for dinner tomorrow. We will be eating at a Chinese restaurant".

"Looking forward to it sir" I replied.

Tolu gave me a hug and got into the back seat of her Dad's car. They both gave me a wave as they exited the school premises.

The following evening, I wasn't sure whether to go to the Chinese restaurant or Tolu's house. Her house seemed like a better option since I didn't know the venue of the restaurant. I got to her house by 6pm in a dark gray suit and black polished shoes.

As I approached the doorbell, I panicked a little, for some seconds I couldn't breathe properly. I rang the doorbell twice. I heard footsteps come down the stairs and towards the door.

"Please let it be Tolu or her Mum, anyone but her Dad," I whispered to myself.

"Hello Nolan. You made it. Why don't you wait for Tolu in the living room, she'll be right down" her Dad said.

"Thank you sir," I said.

Their home was beautiful. The living room was exquisite. I paused for a minute to observe the bottle of wine on the dining table.

"Nolan is that you?" I heard Tolu ask. "Come to kitchen and give me a hand".

I swung the kitchen door open and saw Tolu washing rice in the kitchen sink while her Mum was peeling plantain. *Aren't we going to the Chinese restaurant anymore or perhaps they are cooking tomorrows lunch or dinner tonight?*

"Good evening Mrs Akinsumi. Can I help you peel some plantain? My Dad thought me how to do so."

She wiped her hands on her apron as she said, "Nolan dear, that's sweet of you o! Just in time for dinner. Tolu why didn't you tell me that your oyibo friend cooks and he is punctual too. Hmm... I think I like him already" she winked.

"Mum!! Nolan, please help me wash the rice while I peel the plantain." Tolu said.

"Don't be a bully Tolu, let the boy peel the plantains. I want him to peel the plantain" Mrs Akinsumi insisted.

Things were always awkward between Tolu and I whenever she did not get what she wanted. When I was done, I went back to the living room and met her Dad seated at the dining table tapping his fingers on the table.

"Nolan, do not go in there next time, you could come out there with gray hair if you get what I mean" he whispered.

There was absolute silence at the dining table for about fifteen minutes. I did not know what to say to Tolu's Dad and it looked like he had zoned out in my opinion. Luckily, the silence was broken when a big white bowl filled with rice was placed on the dining table by Tolu. I walked into the kitchen for the second time hoping not to come out with gray hair. I grabbed the bowl of stew from Tolu's hands. Her Mum followed closely with two plates of chicken.

We sat down to eat and I said grace since I was the guest.

"Thank you Lord for a great meal set on the table. Thank you for provision and the beautiful day we had. Amen" I prayed.

"That was wonderful. Well, let's eat," Mr Akinsumi said.

The meal was cooked to perfection. We didn't talk so much and I answered every question thrown at me as best as I could. After dinner, I took a quick look at my watch and it was 8:00pm.

"Sir I'll be headed home soon, I live far away from here," I said.

"That's okay. We are glad to have you over for dinner" M. Akinsumi said.

"I'm sorry I couldn't assist you with the dishes Ma," I said to Mrs Akinsumi.

"Maybe next time dear" She replied.

Tolu stood and held my hand as she walked me to the door. We said our goodbyes with hopes of seeing in school the next day. Dinner went well. I was proud of myself.

Over the next couple of months, arguing became a regular thing in our relationship and most of it was done over the phone.

“Who was that girl you were talking to after school today?”

“She’s my friend. What? I’m not allowed to have female friends?”

“Why didn’t you call me last night? I called you and you didn’t pick up”

“Sorry babe, I was watching a football match”

“So now you prefer a football match over me?”

We argued about basically anything and everything.

She had trust issues. I recall her yelling at me for hugging one of her close friends. I could barely understand what was going on and it was only a matter of time before our relationship sank like the Titanic and it was triggered by an incident.

There was an empty classroom where guys took their girlfriends to; a place where you could do all sorts. My friend had told me to be there by 1pm that he was going to be there with Angela, a girl whom he had a crush on for a year. I couldn’t get there by 1pm sharp because I had to return a book to the Library. So I got to the empty classroom by 1:45pm and it wasn’t Angela and my friend. It was Tolu I saw kissing a random guy and he had his hands roving all over her breasts and her backside. It was a kick to my stomach. I pushed the door open so she could see that I had observed the sin she had committed and then walked away in disgust. So much for a religious girl.

She called me for weeks on the phone but I never picked up her calls and I never spoke to her when I saw her in class. We had practically broken up. I didn’t have to tell her, she already knew. Also, I never had to turn back in class again, except to borrow a classmate’s textbook on the days I didn’t bring mine to class.

I didn’t believe in romantic movies anymore. All the romantic movies and novels made it look so effortless but that was so far from the truth. It was fun while it lasted with Tolu. She has a very special place in my heart. We had disagreements, fights and lots of drama but also had laughter and smiles to go with it.

19<sup>th</sup> August, 2003

### **GRADUATION DAY**

I remember how shy I used to be before Secondary School. I didn’t know much about myself and life in general but now I’ve become quite confident about myself.

I’ve made some pretty good friends and learnt some valuable lessons. It was a hectic yet great experience, one which I would soon miss and one I would have barely survived if not for Jack’s belief in me. Leaving Secondary School had not really hit me and I don’t think it was going to anytime soon especially because Jack said his parents wanted him to school in the U.K.

Today was my Graduation day.

This meant saying goodbye to a lot of subjects, teachers and some students

I was still looking for the suit Dad bought me sometime last year to wear, too bad he wasn’t around.

“Hurry up. You’re going to be late Nolan,” Mum commanded.



“Coming, coming” I replied.

I didn’t want to be late for my graduation. Christine was already dressed in a white dress and her ballerina shoes. She looked amazing and I was very pleased that I didn’t have to quarrel with her over what to wear.

“We have us a Cinderella” I said. She smiled as I kissed her on the forehead. My Mum waited for us in our neighbour’s car. I was glad I didn’t have to use a taxi, which would have been very embarrassing to my reputation.

We got to school on time. The guys looked sharp, the girls as exquisite as ever. We all stood on stage according to our names which placed me in the second row. The Principal came on stage and gave a very boring speech and shortly after that, we were all presented with our certificates and awards. I topped the class and if Dad was here, he would have had my Chicago Bulls Jersey in his hand or waiting at home for me, but it was just Christine and my Mum waving at me and smiling.

Afterwards, parents hugged their kids, friends said goodbye to each other and everyone seemed to have a phone or camera in their hand taking pictures. It was a memorable moment for everyone.

“Nolan come over here and take a picture with your Mum” my Mum commanded waving her hand in my direction.

I walked to where Mum was standing, Christine was next to her licking sweets, we all smiled for the camera, except me because Tolu was not too far from where I stood.

Once I was done taking pictures with my family, Tolu walked up to me and said, “Can I take a picture with you Nolan?”

I ignored her and walked up to Jack to take pictures with him, Kim and Mrs Chioma.

While pictures were being taken, I saw a white Toyota parked outside and Mum walked towards it so fast her heels almost came off. She got to the car and even though I couldn’t see who was in it, I had a feeling I knew who it was. From Mum’s body language, she was arguing with the person and the car drove off. She came to us and said, “Let’s go home.”

Our neighbor arrived in about ten minutes to pick us up. Mum lit up a cigarette asking if she was allowed smoke in the car.

I whispered to her, “Not in here, Christine is in the back seat!”

She did not listen to me. She was boiling and it was really obvious.

“Who was in the Toyota Mum?”

“No one” she said.

She was venting and I knew why, looks like Dad had gotten a new ride. I know he was the one in the car and I was upset with my Mum because she wouldn’t let Christine and I see him. I mean for all I care he probably had my Chicago Bulls jersey in the car and Mum wouldn’t let him give me. I felt on top of the world when the day began and half way in, I feel six feet under because I did not get to say hi to my father.

15<sup>th</sup> January, 2004

### **WHO WAS MY MOTHER REALLY?**

Word got out that my parents had split up and the few who really knew my Dad were on his side. The married women around weren't so comfortable with this new situation. They believed her single status may draw the attention of their husbands closer to her but the men weren't interested really out of respect for my dad. Now that Dad was no longer around, everywhere Christine and I went, we became everyone's sweetheart. Mrs Amaka brought us Coconut rice and Chicken every weekend. *Was she happy my Dad was gone? Perhaps she disliked him. Or did she just feel bad for my Mum, Christine and I?* Truth be told, I want the answer but I don't know if I'll ever get it.

People treated us with kindness, too much kindness I'll say. My mother on the other hand did not. Maybe it was because the divorce rate in Nigeria was not high and men did not leave their homes in the middle of the night or day never to return. I did not know a single kid whose parents were divorced.

Whenever people filed for divorce, the blame is usually assigned to someone. Mum suffered the blame. Whenever she went shopping at the grocery store or we went out, friends avoided her and said negative things behind her back. Rumors were going round that Mum cheated on Dad several times. She was called a prostitute. Mr Ebi, our neighbour told stories of how Mum always came to his house begging for money whenever Dad was out of town or the country. I recall an argument she had with Dad. I hid in Dad's closet because Christine and I played hide and seek.

"Who bought you this red dress?" Dad screamed.

"It was you honey" Mum replied in a sweet tone.

"It wasn't me, don't lie to me. It's either someone bought you the dress, or you've been using my credit card without telling me or you're getting money from someone else and if so I demand to know who!" he yelled. Seconds after, he smashed his hand into the reading table in his bedroom and went straight to the kitchen for some alcohol to quench the thirst and anger I suppose.

Still I refused to be in support of the false accusations about my Mum.

*Did Mum do these things people were saying? Were these comments and remarks even true? And if they were, then did Dad leave Mum because she was sleeping around with other men? These people definitely gave me sleepless nights putting all these thoughts in my head. I should know her better than these people or shouldn't I? She is a part of me and we talk about almost anything.*

One time, she came to my room and asked,

"Who's your girlfriend Nolan? My son must have a girlfriend by now" she would say.

Let's not forget the times she tried to watch basketball games with me and ruin the games for me by asking questions like,

“Who is that handsome man? What team is playing?”

“I thought these two teams met each other yesterday?”

I would fume and boil inside like the engine room of the great Titanic. I’ve pushed her away in other ways too. I did not like walking beside her in the grocery store. I squirmed from the kisses on my forehead or cheeks. I was unhappy that she was the only woman in the neighbourhood, maybe even the whole of Lagos that was divorced.

Maybe she wanted to know her son better. Maybe if I had opened up to her, she would have opened up to me about this issue. How was I supposed to defend her though when she always smoked at least four sticks of cigarette and drank half a bottle of liquor every day? This was the same person that always screamed at Dad whenever he walked around with liquor in his hand. Dad was gone and he left his bad habit behind which Mum picked up with a big bear hug.

1<sup>st</sup> May, 2004

### **WE DON’T WANT ANOTHER FATHER**

Mum must be thinking of getting remarried. She’s been on several dates over the past few months. She reduced the amount of cigarettes she smoked, from four sticks of cigarette a day to one stick per week. Going on these dates prompted her to get her act together.

There was a knock on the door by eight one evening. A man probably in his late 40s in a black long sleeve shirt and a pair of blue jeans stood holding a bottle of champagne. I was about to snatch the bottle from his hand and slam the door in his face but I he had flowers in his other hand so I decided to let him in.

“I’m here to see Amanda. You must be Nolan”, he said in his deep voice.

I didn’t respond. All I did was point my hand in the direction of the living room. He balanced on the couch and asked for the remote to the television. I declined his request and headed for Mum’s bedroom with a half-disgusted facial expression. I knocked on Mum’s door three times; any more would make her think it was Christine.

“It is open sweetie”, she called out.

My lean fingers twisted the knob and pushed the door open. She was wearing her famous designer turquoise blue gown which she always wore for good luck.

“Mum there is a guy downstairs. He came with flowers.”

“Keep them in the vase in the kitchen and get two wine glasses and place them on the living room table.” Get two wine glasses? How she knew he brought champagne was a mystery to me, he must have told her on his way here.

When she was finally going downstairs, I was headed for my room with no intention of coming out until the next morning. Late at night, she screamed my name with a slurred voice. I looked at my watch, it was ten thirty. I rushed downstairs. The man was gone, the champagne bottle was empty and so were the glasses. I wondered

if Mum drank it all or if it was shared 50/50. I placed her hand over my shoulders and helped her to her bedroom. I didn't know what happened downstairs and I really didn't care as long as she didn't bring another man to the house. The way I saw this was that Mum dating was going to make her happy, at least that's what she told Christine and I. I hope it works.

She finally got comfortable with a great guy. He's a widower and they look quite happy together. I think marriage would be a bit extreme at this point, but all I can do is be happy for Mum because if she's happy, I'm happy. The woman has been through a lot.

Now this guy was great, but he was definitely not my Dad and will never replace my Dad. The fact that he was not even into sports made me wonder if he was once a woman in his previous life. This was a hard adjustment for Christine and I especially because we had to be on our best behaviour to be comfortable and figure out the kind of relationship we would have with him.

I had no intention of being close to Mum's boyfriend or whatever his name was. What was more important was getting closer to Mum and ensuring she didn't get hurt. The situation seemed to be different for Christine; I could tell she was keeping her emotions bottled up. She still talks about Mum and Dad sharing a bedroom in the future.

I told Mum the other guys she had gone out with were creepy, but this particular guy was okay. We laughed about it and even made jokes. She listens to what I have to say sometimes because I speak from a man's point of view and probably knew how men thought better than she did and also because I was generally supportive of her interests. If Christine said anything though, she was almost completely ignored. Mum didn't listen to her because she knew that Christine would not approve of anyone she dated. Maybe I should have been on Christine's side because that so called nice man cheated on Mum. Mum returned to her bad habit; smoking at least three sticks of cigarette a day.

11<sup>th</sup> September, 2004

### **OFF TO THE UNIVERSITY!!!**

Today I became a freshman.

This must be the second happiest day of Mum's life since she married Dad. It is every mother's dream.

I had gotten seven Distinctions and one average grade in my WAEC examination. An examination every student had to take and pass if they were to be guaranteed admission into any University in West Africa. You must have fantastic grades if you were going to a top University. My grades were fantastic and because of this, I was offered scholarship by a University in Ghana and they decided to pay half of my tuition which put a smile on my mother's face.

Jack was back from his summer holiday. I didn't know which University he was applying for. I did know that Mrs Chioma decided to send he and Kim abroad and if she did I was going to miss them both; I wish Dad was still around, if he was I would have been headed for the United Kingdom myself. I couldn't believe that Jack

and I were going to be in different schools. It already seemed weird, I begged my mother that I wanted to school in London but she couldn't afford the school fees.

Now, I am not so holy or the "type" for the born again girls who wear skirts up to their feet with big Bibles in their hands and I didn't pray that much. I was however willing to wear ties and drag my trousers up to my belly, carry a massive Bible around and become born again only if ever I saw Tolu again.

The sun had just come up when I came downstairs. Mum had prepared the best breakfast. Everything was on the dining table: pancakes, bacons, sausages, eggs, cereal. This was too much food for the three of us, but I had to maximize the moment because tomorrow we were probably going to return to *moi-moi* and *garri* for breakfast, which I most certainly was not looking forward to. Mum had probably put on the best dress in her closet too. She looked amazing. She had put on lipstick and decorated her eyes with mascara and eye liner. There she was in her blue dress, covered up in her bright yellow jacket and blue high heels and to top it all off she had a scarf around her long hair and she wore her sunglasses. This must have been a big occasion for her but she was not the one going to University. I was.

"I want to see the Library, your dorm, the restaurants and the girls" she said.

"Yes, the girls," Christine mimics.

"Shut up Christine!"

We finally arrived on campus. We were surrounded by guys in tank tops and shorts, some in shirts, trousers and a bow tie. The girls were in pleasant skirts and shirts.

"I'm never going to leave this place. This is certainly not Secondary School" I thought out loud. Everywhere we went, Mum kept pointing at things.

"Look at the tables and chairs at the Cafeteria.. The Library book shelves are huge.." she said. She had a comment for everything we saw. I was doing my best to tolerate it because in a matter of time, she and Christine will be going back home. We finally arrived at my dorm.

"Here we are, Nolan" she said. I wondered why she said "we" instead of "you. I hope you have all your toiletries and clothes..?" I wish she never said that because beautiful girls were passing by. This was clearly the height of embarrassment.

They were finally ready to leave after I had settled down. I squatted and Christine pecked me on the cheek and she began crying. I could see she was struggling to say "I'll miss you Nolan". I made a promise to bring her a gift when coming for Christmas. My intention was just to peck Mum on the cheek but she jumped on me and threw her hands around me. I could smell her perfume, body lotion and hair spray. Tears slowly came down my right cheek as I pecked her and said "I love you Mum". I was going to miss them both.

I guess I was not so mad she came along with me after all, because this was the closest my mother would ever have gotten to University.

## BIG ROOM BIG MOUTH

The size of my hostel room was a little bigger than my bedroom back home. My novels and notebooks were kept on the reading table. I couldn't really figure out where to put my lamp yet. It was either going to be on the reading table or right next to bed in case I wanted to read while lying down. As I rubbed my hands together, I smiled and put my Michael Jordan poster right next to my Arsenal FC poster on my side of the room. I brought out my clothes and hung them in my closet which already had hangers. I told Mum taking the hangers from my closet at home was unnecessary but she did not listen to me. I dashed to the toilet/bathroom and saw how shiny the tiles were. It was so clean, just as if no one had ever used it before.

I sighed and went back into the room and stood over my suitcase. Just as I was about to zip it up, I saw a framed picture. I pulled it out and saw Dad in his green *agbada* and Mum in her white blouse and blue skirt. Nice going Mum, very sneaky! I bet she put it in my suitcase when she told me to come down for breakfast. I missed Dad so much. I hadn't seen him in over sixteen months now. I miss them all. I cried, a little. Just a little. I grabbed the frame and put it on the table and saw my cologne which was the last thing in my suitcase. I bent down to get it and as I stood up my back hit the table, and the picture went to the ground. For some reason I believed I could catch it. I saw it fall in slow motion, and as it hit the floor the glass shattered and the frame came off and hit the dust bin.

My roomdoor swung open and I in walked this funny looking Asian fellow.

"Hello. My name is Stanley Chang," he said.

"Hi I'm Nolan, Nolan Omolade"

"I'm Chinese" he said.

"I'm Nigerian"

"You don't look it"

"Well, my Mum's South African, she's Caucasian"

He rolled his suitcase to his side of the room. Great! I got a Chinese guy. I was hoping to get a fellow Nigerian or South African or mixed skin guy like me. What's this guy going to teach me? Kung-fu or how to use chop sticks to eat noodles? Then I heard, "Hey Nolan, I asked if you were an Arsenal Fan and you didn't reply."

"Yes, yes I am. You?"

"I don't watch football much".

You probably watch Jet Lee, Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan."

Why did they give me a roommate who doesn't know the beauty of football? First, I cannot watch football with my Dad anymore and now I cannot watch football with my roommate. Can they bring a third bed in here, so I can have a roommate to watch English Premier League with, I thought to myself.

"Nolan, I'm going to turn the lights off if that's ok. I have an early class tomorrow," Stanley said.

I turned back to look at him and noticed the guy was done unpacking. Either I had zoned out for too long or Stanley did not have too much stuff in his suitcase.

"Give me a second, and then you may turn the lights off. Hey! What are you studying?"

"Agricultural Science"

"That's interesting." He came all the way to Accra, Ghana to study Agricultural Science? Are there no farms in China? I asked myself.

"Actually there are farms in China... there are farms in every country Nolan" Stanley said.

Wait a minute, he heard that? I am beginning to wonder if everything I had said earlier about Mr Chang were to myself or not.

“I’m studying Engineering and you can turn the lights off now” I said.

I’m happy Stanley sleeps with the light off, I hate sleeping with the lights on, it’s...” I quickly use my hand to cover my mouth to put a stop to what I was saying just in case I was speaking out loud this time. If this is a habit, it’s a bad one and I must stop this soon before it gets me into any trouble.

The lights went off.

6<sup>th</sup> November, 2005

### **NOT WHAT I EXPECTED**

Becoming a freshman at the University is one of the biggest transitions in a young adult’s life. I couldn’t agree more.

University life is so different from that in Secondary School. You could skip classes then and get away with it but I learnt that if anyone missed classes in this University, then you missed out on important lessons and lectures. In the event that one did not come for classes, the person must have a medical report from a Doctor or a valid excuse stating why they were unable to attend classes because attendance was taken very seriously. If someone did not make seventy five percent of the attendance for each class in a semester, the person was considered illegible to sit for the semester examination.

You can’t always get what you want and I did not get what I wanted. I had not achieved the grades I wanted. I was not as popular as I wanted to be. The worst of it all was from being the captain of my secondary school football team; I had fallen to a substitute player for the University football team. I was always disappointed when I saw social media photos of parties my classmates attended I was not part of. Luckily, it didn’t matter too much because I discovered joining a Club was a fantastic way to make friends and meet captivating and diverse people. So I joined the Media Club. We were up to date and kept our readers excited on what was happening on school campus and outside school as well. I missed Jack already and couldn’t wait till exams were over. He said on social media that he wouldn’t return to Nigeria until 2009. I wish Mum had enough money to send me to London for a summer holiday but thank God for social media which kept my friendship with Jack alive.

17<sup>th</sup> October, 2006

### **MY GOLD AND SILVER HANG OUT SPOTS**

“Don’t get carried away, you came here to study,” Mother told me.

It was a brand new experience for me. I certainly could get used to this and in a few months I did. People from different countries were in my school. Nigerians, Chinese and Kenyans but the Ghanaians had the highest percentage of students.

I had settled in and grasped the school environment in no time. One of my favourite hangout spots was the cafeteria. It was not as huge as the dining room in my secondary school, but it was certainly exquisite. I never really came there for the food even though the menu was spectacular. My main reason was to watch Sports and I was never alone. Students from different dorms did too and it was especially crowded when big games were played. I made more friends in the cafeteria than I did in the classroom. A decent number of students had cable television in their rooms but Chang and I didn’t. We recently talked about getting one and a game console. This didn’t mean I was not going to watch Sports in the cafeteria anymore, it meant I had to spend less and save more.

My second favorite spot was the Library. I went there four times a week. My intention one particular Wednesday was to read but I couldn’t concentrate. There was a girl sitting opposite me, she was the kind of girl that belonged on the cover of a magazine. She was beautiful and everything about her physical appearance was striking. I later got to know her name as Mary and she defeated Femi in terms of looks and I’m hoping in terms of personality too. She had short hair with the middle dyed dark brown. There was a tiny mark right above her lips. She was taller than the average girl. She had deep set chocolate brown eyes and cupid bow lips. I took a quick glance at the textbook she was reading and was pleased to see Micro Economics in front of it. She was definitely a 300 level student. I hoped she would tutor me the next year. She finally noticed me one afternoon when I went to return a book she had an interest in. We got talking about the book and from time to time, we became good friends.



19<sup>th</sup> November, 2007

### **OUR ROOMS ARE ALIKE**

This was the first time I didn't go to the Library on a Wednesday. I was down with flu so I was just fine reading in my room. Besides, I didn't want to give Mary the flu. I sat on my bed as I tried to finish an assignment. I was interrupted by a knock on my door. Chang jumped off his bed and raced towards the door. "The pizza guy is here! The pizza guy is here!!" He chanted as his lanky hand twisted the knob.

"The pizza.... Hi. My name is Chang. I'm Chinese not Japanese; some people think I'm Japanese."

A soft voice laughed and replied, "I'm Mary. Is Nolan here? He didn't come to the Library today."

"Yes. Yes. Nolan! Your girlfriend is here. Nolan talks about you every time"

I was worried Chang was going to ruin everything for me. I placed my book under my pillow as I stood from my bed, grabbed the tissue paper I had put on the reading table and blew my nose heavily.

"Hello Mary. How did you know my room?"

"You told me two weeks ago. I didn't see you in the Library so I decided to stop by. Are you okay?"

"I don't feel so good. Nice of you to drop by but I am fine"

"Okay. You can lie down there and pretend to read or you can follow me to my room and I can prepare you chicken noodle soup and a cup of ginger tea. See you next week". She said as she turned to leave.

"Wait". I ran into the bathroom, washed my face, brushed my hair and told her to turn around so I could remove my shorts and put on trousers. She laughed and said "I have two elder brothers and one younger brother, do you think I haven't seen all colours of boxer shorts before?"

"Okay. I'll go in shorts then". I said.

We were about leaving when Chang asked, "Can I join you guys?"

I was about to tell him "Hell no!" when Mary said "Actually Chang you can't but I'll give Nolan a bowl of chicken noodle soup to bring back for you okay? Chang shook his head repeatedly, smiling like a child whose Mummy asked if he wanted toys for Christmas.

The distance between my dorm and hers was just five minutes. It was a bit awkward as we didn't say much to each other until we got to her dorm which wasn't my territory so I was quiet and very observant. She inserted her room key into the key hole, turned it clockwise and pushed her room door open. The design of the Boys' dorm was not too different from the Girls'. Theirs was painted yellow, ours was painted white and I think that was the only difference. Everything else was exactly the same.

She walked into a corner of her room and where Chang and I kept our suitcases, was where she kept pots, plates and cutlery. I quickly assumed this was her kitchen and I was really impressed.

"You can sit on my bed while I prepare you chicken noodles soup and boil some water for your tea" she said. I sat on the bed on the right and was staring at the teddy bears on the bed.

“Wow, what are you doing with five teddy bears?” I asked.

She turned and said “What are you doing on Fifi’s bed? The other bed’s mine.” While the chicken noodle soup was on fire, she sat beside me and asked, “So what do you think?”

“Think of what?”

“My room, silly”

“Oh. Mine is better”

She hissed and punched me on my shoulder, it was so painful I couldn’t tell if she was upset or it was just a playful punch.

She turned to see if the water had boiled. She turned back and looked at me with her deep set brown eyes and before she could say anything, I leaned in to kiss her on her lips.

“No way Mr Flu man! I am not getting flu.” I laughed hard as she stood up to check on the noodle soup. It was far from ready. I told her I needed to finish up my assignment which was due the next day. I promised to return to her room when I was done and she made a promise as well to bring Chang and I the noodle soup within the hour”.

She held my hand as I stood up, walked me to the door, gave me a bear hug and kissed me lightly on my lips.

“Hey, you want to become Mrs Flu all of a sudden?” I teased.

She smiled and said “I couldn’t help myself Nolan.” She waved at me and slowly closed the door. I ensured her room door was closed, clenched a fist and punched the air. This was going to become my favorite hangout spot in the whole school campus. Even though the kiss was not as long as the one I always see in the movies, I didn’t care because I had just kissed the hottest girl I knew.

22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2008

### **ONE NIGHT ONLY**

I was one of those guys that didn’t believe in love until I met Miss Mary Akua. I fell in love with her completely. It was quite evident that after four months of good friendship, three dates inside and outside the school campus and sixteen times of going over to her room and twenty four times of her coming to mine, was enough evidence that Mary was my everything.

We were close to the end of the school session. We had just one more day before we would head home for holidays. Therefore it had to be today, yes today had to be the day I told her how I truly felt, even though I had a feeling she was very much aware and was just waiting for me to say the L word or ask her to be my girlfriend. I had called her on the phone the day before, telling her I wanted to meet with her in my room the following day. She didn’t have a problem with that, so I went ahead and ironed my white shirt, pressed my pants and polished my shoes so good I could actually see my reflection in it. I was ready, or at least I hoped I was because deep inside I was shaking.

Mary was going to be in my room in forty five minutes time. I ran to the bathroom to see if the toilet was flushed. It was but I still did not hesitate to use an air freshener to nullify any odour that may or may not have hijacked the air we causally inhale and exhale. I came back into the room and did a quick scan around. I walked outside and came inside to see everything from Mary’s point of view because she

must only be minutes away. The beds were laid, there were candles and flowers on the floor and jazz music playing from Chang's deck.

"Yes! Everything is perfect" I said out loud. Where is she? Did she stand me up? Oh my God, she stood me up.

There were several knocks on the door, each now separated by four seconds, this assured me that it was Mary.

"I'm coming. One second"

I opened my closet and some clothes fell out. I had to throw them back in one by one, then grabbed my blazer and wore it. I took a moment to ensure I had knotted my black tie to perfection and dusted my pants. I closed my eyes and cleared my throat, coughing a little in the process. I held my breath as I stood in front of the door for seconds. I opened my eyes and exhaled as I twisted the knob and opened the door for the girl of my dreams.

"Hello Prince charming"

"Hello Queen Elizabeth. Oh sorry. I meant to say Queen Mary Akua"

She laughed and gave me a peck on my left cheek.

She looked amazing. She didn't wear makeup which I have always considered true beauty. She wore a red gown and painted her finger nails red. I cannot remember if her toe nails were painted red too because her silver high heels obstructed me from seeing her tiny toe nails.

"Why can't your room be like this every time Nolan. It really looks amazing tonight."

"Maybe that's because you're not here every time." I said.

She looked at me, smiling sheepishly.

I cleared my throat and said, "I have something to tell you. Mary we've been friends for a while now and it's no secret how much I like you. I love and adore everything about you and I was, well... I'm wondering if you could be the girl whose hand I hold in the park, the girl whom I brag about to my friends and family, the girl whom I cherish for as long as possible.. Would you be my girlfriend, Mary Akua?"

With tears streaming down her face and a huge smile, she said, "Yes. I love you so much Nolan. Yes, I'll be your girlfriend and hold your hand wherever we go and brag about you to my friends and family. Actually I already have". She said.

I wasn't expecting that answer or short speech from Mary which rendered me speechless. The tension in the room was like a boxing match, you know the one where one boxer delivers a left hook and the two boxers in the ring pace for a while before a right jab is followed up. I did not want to move directly or drastically. I really didn't want to be rejected or embarrassed, yet I remained tenacious and propelled onward. I couldn't hold back any longer. We stared into each other's eyes as she slowly walked backwards and I was afraid she would fall. She put her back up against the wall. I leaned into her and could feel her breath on my face. With one hand around her waist and the other behind her head, I pressed my lips against her soft lips which tasted like milk coffee with a touch of liquor. Her Chanel perfume she had probably sprayed on her neck and dress gave the room a lovely smell and I placed my hands on her chest and felt her heart beat heavily.. We stopped kissing after two minutes and I was more than delighted because I just successfully crossed two things off my bucket list; date the girl of my dreams and be French kissed like actors in Hollywood in their romantic movies. What a night to remember! What a memorable evening for Mary and I.

"Please stay" I pleaded.

"No Nolan. I can't. I may be tempted to have sex with you".

“But...but you’ve stayed longer hours at my room many times” she said.

“True, but then I wasn’t your girlfriend and I wasn’t this crazy in love with you Nolan”

I hugged her and pressed my lips against her once more.

“Good night Nolan. Or should I say boyfriend??”

“Good night Mary”

She opened my door and faded into the hallways of my dormitory. I closed the door, staring at my room. We never even touched the food I bought from the restaurant right across my dorm. I hoped Chang would want it when he came back from his Badminton practice.

It was so clear I had fallen in love with everything about Mary. The way she laughed, the way she bit her finger nails whenever she was nervous. I was madly in love with the way she ate swallows like *gari and fufu*, it was like the world paused till she finished. I had drowned myself in the belief of loving her and taking care of her till I was old and grey-haired, the ultimate belief that I had not only found my best friend but also my soul mate. I certainly did not plan to fall in love with Mary Akua but I did.

19<sup>th</sup> December, 2008

### **HOME BITTER HOME**

Her fourth phone call woke me up. I was about to grab the phone when it stopped ringing. All the missed calls were from Mary. I called back immediately.

“Have you packed your stuff? I’ve got my stuff packed and do hurry because I’m going with you to the airport” she said.

There wasn’t too much to pack. I just threw some clothes, my cologne and a few text books into my luggage and zipped it up. My luggage was most definitely lighter than it was when I first arrived here. Chang took a long time to fold his clothes, I doubt if he was in a hurry. “Where are you spending Christmas, Chang? Going back to China?”

“No, I’ll be here in Ghana with a friend of mine, she has an apartment.”

There was a knock on the door, it had to be Mary. I picked my suitcase up, hugged Chang and opened the door for Mary.

“The taxi driver is downstairs Sweetie, are you set?” she asked.

I hugged her and said, “Yes, but I have a feeling I am forgetting something else.”

“Then do a last check and please be quick about it,” Mary said.

I checked under my bed and couldn't believe I almost my sneakers. I held them in my left hand and wheeled the suitcase away with my right hand. The taxi driver was an old man with grey hair. I preferred them to the younger ones who barely knew the way and usually overpriced. He got out the taxi and placed my suitcase in the boot of his car. Mary and I occupied the back seats. I couldn't wait to get home. I had so many questions to ask.

*"How was the house without me in it?"*

*"Did Christine take over my room?"*

The flight to Lagos was delayed for two hours. Mary and I stared into each others' eyes like it was the last time we were going to see other. We sat in the airport reading a magazine until I was told to check in. I gave her a bear hug and told her I would visit during Christmas, hoping my Mum would give me the permission to do so. I must have slept throughout the flight because I woke up to the sound of the seatbelt sign which was already switched off. People on-board queued up to leave the plane. An old woman gave the air hostesses a hard time telling them what an unpleasant flight she had. When I got into the airport, I yanked my luggage off the carousel. I boarded a taxi and headed home.

I was very excited to be in my neighborhood once more. I was even more excited to see our white gate which had the top carefully wrapped around in barb-wire, and our house which was once painted white but lost its colour a little. The gate was padlocked from outside which was a bit confusing. It was just noon, they should be home. I removed the spare key to the front door from the under the trash can right beside the gate and quickly opened the gate. I slowly rolled my suitcase in until I got to the door, it was ajar.

"Mum! Christine! I'm home." I yelled as I dropped my school bag on the floor.

The house was very silent, more silent than it should have been. I ran to the kitchen, there were plates in the sink. I assumed they had a heavy lunch, maybe *gari* and had passed out on their beds as a result. I went up the stairs quickly to play a surprise prank on them. Mum's door was wide open and so was her bathroom door, but no one was there.

Maybe they were in Christine's room so I knocked on the door severally, but nobody answered. *What was I thinking? She's not in her room anymore, she's probably taken over my room by now and that's where her and Mum had to be. They had to be there!* I kicked my door down and said "Freeze! You're under..." My room was empty, just how I left it...or not, there was a teddy bear on my bed. Could Christine have taken my room or did she just sleep here once?

I went downstairs completely jaded; if I ran up the stairs again, I would have fainted before reaching the top. I walked outside scratching my head and was pleased to see Mrs Amaka talking to a friend in front of her gate. As I approached them, her voice reduced to a whisper.

"Nolan you're back! How are you my child? Your Mum will be back from the hospital shortly. You can wait in my house," she said out loud.

"I'm doing fine and I'll wait in mine. Thank you very much Mrs Amaka," I replied politely. I went back into the house and sat on the couch facing the television. I remember how Dad sat there whenever he watched sports or listened to the evening news. I dozed off while reminiscing.

There was a twist to the door, I quickly opened my eyes. It was my Mum and Christine! They looked a bit shocked to see me. Mum had lost so much weight; she

probably was on a diet. She walked up to me, placed her lanky hands on my face and started crying. Christine just stood from a distance playing with her phone. She looked different but still beautiful. She was twelve now and I was twenty two and it had been a decade since Dad walked out the door. Christine and I were all Mum had left now. I had so much to say and I couldn't wait to tell them about Mary.

"Mum, I have girlfriend now. Her name is Mary, Mary Akua. She's Ghanaian".

She dropped an envelope and a white piece of paper on the dining table, brought out a stick of cigarette and lighter from her purse and lit it and blew tremendous clouds of smoke. Christine and Mum marched upstairs and I had a feeling I was left in the dark about something. They hadn't said a word to me.

I walked up to the dining table breathing heavily. The white piece of paper caught my attention. The words written on the note were barely legible but I was able to read a few things that when put together she was terribly ill also it seemed she had made an appointment with an oncologist. At this point I was defenseless and unable to do anything. I fell to my knees screaming. I buried my hands in my face as tears made a track down my cheeks as if I just lost a family member but the difference between losing a family member and this was not much, death is inevitable, we all die but Mum was going to die painfully and soon, very soon.

What was once home sweet home had become home bitter home. Dad was gone and now Mum was going too, going to heaven that is.

21<sup>st</sup> December, 2008

### **MUM GETS THE BIG C**

December 21<sup>st</sup>, that is the day that changed everything. She had noticed a lump earlier but ignored it several times. She could no longer over look it and therefore made an appointment with the doctor.

I followed Mum to her appointment the doctor examined the lump and wanted her to have a CT Scan. The next day Mum was off to the hospital for a mammogram. Christine and I insisted on coming but Mum did not want us to, she did not want to be an object of pity by anyone especially her children.

A biopsy was going to be performed on Mum. Christine and I sat in the waiting room. I paced to and fro, paused to drink a cup of water from the dispenser even tried talking to a patient that was beside me but I found out I was barely talking and he was talking a lot. The doctor in a crisp lab coat came out thirty minutes after the biopsy and said the words no husband, child and friends would want to hear "its cancer. Your mother has breast cancer, I am sorry".

Christine did not know what cancer was but just for the fact the doctor said he was sorry, she started crying and I begged her to keep it down but she didn't listen. I

remember the look on her face; it was one I wished I was never going to see again. Even I did not know anything about cancer or the risks involved. This was all new to me. I had never met anyone that had cancer; Mum became the first and hopefully the last. I have heard all sort of pensive stories about it.

Mum decided to find a way to tell everyone. She told Jack's parents, then she told the grocery store owner, the neighbours, the market woman whom she regularly bought vegetables from and she also said she'll tell Dad. I was happy when she said that Dad will be informed. The man deserved to know what was happening got Mum.

She had a few days to decide the type of treatment she preferred. She picked chemotherapy and were told that the treatment would shrink the lump and then surgery would remove it.

Mum has never been as scared in her life as she was the day she went to the hospital for her surgery. Christine and I were in tears as she was wheeled into the theatre. After a day of the surgery, the doctor told me that the cancer was gone and her right breast was cut off.

Mum's chemotherapy began a few weeks after the operation. The chemotherapy was going to kill all the cancer cells, at least that's what the oncologist said and we didn't have a choice but to believe him. She began talking endlessly about how she didn't want to lose her hair and how she did not want Dad and us to see her like that and I couldn't blame her because at first glance even strangers would be able to know what is wrong with her.

You know what; cancer did not change my Mum much. She was still a great Mum, a good friend to many people and a celebrated woman in our community.

She began complaining of how having one breast made her feel like a freak and how she would give anything to be normal once more.

Mother is a good and strong woman. I admire her ability to pretend like everything was normal and fine.

Learning about her illness I am trying to let some stuff go, especially those things that I disliked about her.

Mum was very fund of complaining about my clothes being on the floor all the time, I actually give it a name, I called it *floordrope*. Only God knows how much time Mum had left on earth. Now am I really going to keep arguing with my Mum about my ability or inability to keep my clothes folded and my room clean? Well not anymore.

Dad visited the hospital after Mum's second appointment with her oncologist. He bought me a camera to record and catch Mum's activities henceforth. He also told my Mum to get a journal to record whatever she loved and each moment that passed by.

Dad, Christine and I came over and begged my Mum to focus on the positives and pleaded with my Mum to remain strong.

Suddenly everyone who had said portentous things brought flowers over and became very bland to my Mum. On a Friday afternoon, an enveloped was slid under the room of the ward Mum was admitted to.

I opened the door but no one was in sight except nurses and doctors walking past the halls. I opened the envelope and it was the hospital bill which was covered by Mr Bola Omolade, Dad had taken care of Mum's hospital bill and I was very grateful.

Mum was doing much better after her right breast was taken out. We returned to what seemed to be the life we used to live. We visited different churches and asked Pastors to pray for my Mum.

Later that month, we travelled to London, my Dad paid for the tickets but he did not join us on our exciting trip. My Mum needed it after all she had been through. Jack and Kim were not in London while I was there, they went home briefly to spend time with his mother, I wondered how she was doing and promised myself that I would see her when I returned to Nigeria.

I gave returning to school a serious thought and I decided that returning would not be worth it after all there were many under graduates that were still employed and not just here in Nigeria but around the world too.

12<sup>th</sup> January, 2009

### **MARY DID NOT FANCY ME ANYMORE**

I remember when Mary and I started seeing each other. She was the most perfect girl I knew. We were just like the perfect couple. We spent our first months holding hands wherever we went. My life was complete with her by my side.

The next month she was quitting University in Accra and going to Scotland to continue her studies, it was rather strange that in the days leading to her departure, her replies to my text messages became brief.

Our phone conversations became awkward. A blissful lady who always sent smiley characters in every text message suddenly started giving me one word replies, which should have been my first clue.

I had gotten her a huge teddy bear and a silver necklace; my intention was send it to Ghana. I really needed to give them to her but she told me not bother sending them, instead she begged me to save my money, which should have been my second clue.

On the night of her departure, she was very blunt and rude to me, she refused to reply my text messages for over an hour and when she finally did, she said "Take care of you Nolan. I'll miss you". I quickly replied with a very long message, telling her how much she meant to me and letting her know how much I was going to miss her.

She was already gone one week and I became lonely and withdrew from everyone. I stalked her on the social media, liked every status she updated and every photo she posted whether or not I was tagged in them. I sent her messages on the social media-wrote on her wall and sent her at least four e-mails. A week later she replied telling me how sorry she was and how busy she had become. I read her message which was very short; she asked me a question that almost gave me a heart attack "Can we just be friends Nolan?" I sunk deep into the couch, completely disgusted and filled with outrage. I did not believe or come to terms with the decision Mary made.

Seems to me she had made her decision and done so while in Scotland. She had decided to break up with me, with no concerns whatsoever of how I was felt or was affected by it.

The girl who made my world shine, who made me belief in myself when nobody did, who was basically the driving force behind everything I did was gone and was



never going to return. I mean she was probably going to return to Ghana but I very much doubt she was going to return to my life.

I continued sending her messages but she never responded to them. Perhaps she did not want to talk to me anymore.

Two months later her relationship status on the social media changed to-In a Relationship with Matthew. I felt like a door mat because all the while Mary and I dated, she went on and on how it was not a requirement for her and me to change our relationship status, now she was with a charming white dude and didn't hesitate to let everyone know about it.

At this point the hope I had that we could still be together vanished. Mary was gone for good. I didn't know how long Mum had left but it seemed like Mum and Christine were the only significant ladies I had in my life from that point on.

I used to be afraid of heights, but now I stand at the top of tall buildings, Mary assisted me in conquering my phobia and I wished I could go back to that guy that shivered even when on the sixth floor of a building.

I clearly was not the same anymore, I couldn't even find the rap songs on my iPod anymore, and it seemed someone had deleted them or I did so unknowingly, my iPod suddenly became filled with depressing r&b and soft rock songs. Jack returned just in time, he was a bit taller than the last time we saw each other. He had developed a thick mustache which he played with every thirty seconds. He told me that it was actually a good thing that Mary broke up with me; he claimed he experienced something similar while he was in London. He assured me that single life was the best thing that could happen to any guy because he could easily focus on himself. I tried my best to be happy and said "I'm single". Finally I can blast music in my room, I can watch football and basketball matches with Jack continently without being interrupted by phone calls almost every five minutes, I can save some money finally- no more buying gifts or paying for expensive meals whenever we went or dates and my phone bill was going to be low this time around." I was optimistic about being single.

I purchased one of Mary's favourite movies "50 first dates", half way through the movie, I switched of the television and DVD player because it reminded me too much of her. Jack removed it from the DVD player and broke the CD.

"No more girls Nolan, we have a lot to catch up on" he tapped me on shoulder and smiled.

"True. So tell me Jack, how was London?" I returned a smile.

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **WHAT GOES OFTEN RETURNS**

The cancer was back and we could see that Mum was miserable, as were Christine and I. I could sense that this time she didn't want any treatment but was willing to support her with whatever decision she made in the end. Luckily she did agree to do the treatments which consisted of various blood tests and chemotherapy. There was a point when she was on tablets in chemotherapy form and saw the oncologist bi weekly.

Mum had said several times that she wanted to pursue her goal of selling clothes in her store. She actually worked very hard and had saved up a good sum of money but couldn't go through with opening her shop because the cancer had returned. Even house chores and making us food became very hard work for her because she was dealing with cancer once again.

I was sickened because the cancer that the doctors claimed was gone wasn't after all. How could life be so cruel to Mum after all the good she has done to people? I was very mortified, as for Christine not a day went by that I did not have to use tissue or a handkerchief to wipe her tears away. My faith in God began to diminish, why would he just sit back and watch cancer destroy my Mum, why wouldn't he do something about it?

Things started to change negatively. I could barely recognize Mum because she had lost so much weight and she had lost her appetite too.

On a particular Sunday evening she complained of breast pain and collapsed on the kitchen floor. I quickly rang Dad, he came over and we were able to carry Mum into the back seat of his car and he drove off to the hospital. He weaved his way through traffic as horns blared at him angrily. For some reason I had a feeling that was the last time Mum would sleep in her bed, use her toilet, cook for us and watch television in the living room.

Mum was admitted to the hospital once more and I informed Dad about it so that he could handle the bills again and if possible visit Mum. She was in the hands of fantastic and experienced nurses and we hoped for the best. The next morning the oncologist came to see me and told me that Mum was very ill but he and his staff would do their best to keep her going.

I headed to Jack's to cool off because I had terrible headaches from thinking too much about Mum and wondered what the final outcome would be. My phone rang and my Dad's name appeared on the screen. I picked up the phone and heard my Dad weeping terribly. "Your Mum is no longer with us my boy. Your mother is dead". I remember waking up on Jack's bed; Jack was sitting next to me on the bed flipping through the channels looking for a basketball match to watch.

"How are you now?" he pulled his eyes from the television and tapped me on my arm.

"I could use a glass of water Jack"

He walked out of the bedroom and when he did I grabbed the remote and turned up the volume, a way to distract myself from the conversation I had with Dad. He returned with a glass of water. I snatched it from his hand and gulped the water down as fast as I could. Jack wore a nervous facial expression that concerned me; I could tell he felt my pain. Mum was dead and I didn't want to believe it and I could tell Jack didn't want to as well

The rest of the day went rather quickly. Jack didn't leave my side. We boarded a taxi and headed for my house.

I did not even have the opportunity to tell her that I loved her very much, not even the chance to tell her everything was going to be okay, like she often told me whenever I had nightmares and ran to Dad and Mum's room or when I spoiled Dad's radio and knew I was in big trouble but she told me that everything was going to be okay. My mother had died, and it wasn't of old age as most people would want or hope for, rather it was to the common fatal breast cancer, I never thought it was going to be breast cancer that would kill her, I thought she would die of cancer then it should have been lung cancer considering the amount of cigarettes she smoked on a daily basis.

6<sup>th</sup> June, 2009

### **THROW SOME SAND ON THE CASKET**

My Mum had passed away a week before the funeral, there was the option of burying her in her hometown in South Africa but we chose to bury her in Lagos which made some relatives furious and they called us names and didn't like the fact that we did not want to bury her in South Africa. It was a difficult decision for us to make but I wanted a good cemetery for Mum, and one I would be able to visit often and not one in South Africa which was not only far away but a place that I would have constantly feared that I was hunted by ghosts, although I feel the one here will be hunted by witches and *juju* people.

Breast cancer had taken my Mum away from Christine and I learned a lot while being with her during that ill-fated period. I remember when Mum began having pains in her second breast, it's like she knew death was already knocking on her door and she suddenly spent a lot of time telling us more about her childhood, her dreams and goals which she never achieved and her perspectives on life. During that sad period, I cherished the conversations we had and got closer to her than I had ever been.

On the day of the funeral Christine, Jack, Kim and I had a nourishing breakfast. Aunt Chioma prepared pancakes, bread and scrambled eggs and a bowl of cereal. I had a very long cold bath and chose to put on the suit Mum had gotten me for my last birthday. A taxi arrived at our house, it was parked outside. Aunt Chioma and her children waited for Christine and I to get ready so we could go attend Mum's funeral.

The service for the funeral was at St James Catholic Church, not far from where we lived. It was filled with people I knew, some by faces, others by name. There were a lot of people at the funeral I had never met and also some I had not seen or heard from in years. Mum was loved and respected by a lot of people, I was so proud of her. I embraced the opportunity to reconnect with some people. We talked about various stories about my Mum and different stages of her life up until she died.

A lot of people wept and I was in that category. Christine was quiet throughout the whole funeral service; she did not even utter a word to me, Dad or any relative or Jack.

I never slept well a month after Mum's death. I often had dreams that she was back and often times I saw her in the kitchen cooking or in her bedroom brushing her hair,

I must have been hallucinating and began wondering if I needed to see a doctor. I yearned for her voice but never heard it. My brain ran through her last moments over and over again.

Months after Mum had died people were still sending flowers to our house. Even Mary tried minutes of small talk with me before asking how Christine and I were holding up. Others sent messages on social media asking if I was doing well. Of course I was not doing well; weeks later I deactivated all my social media account and decided I was going to re-activate them when I felt I was stabilized physically and mentally.

Nothing seemed significant anymore. Dishes always piled up the sink and Christine was always kind enough to help me wash them. There was even a time I did not brush for two days and shower for five days.

Jack and Kim often came around to make sure Christine and I were okay and whenever they noticed we were depressed they would call Auntie Chioma and she would console and motivate the both of us. He and Kim always brought Christine and I food his Mum cooked for us to eat and they slept over multiple times.

Other times Mrs Chioma invited Christine and I over to spend time with her and her children which was no surprise, Jack's mother was a woman that always treated me as though I was her son. She's a woman after God's heart and has been a blessing to me from the moment I met Jack.

A lot of people that had experienced the death of a loved one told Christine and I that it was going to get better in due time.

Mother inspired a lot of people especially her children- Christine and I. She went through the pain to bring me into the world and even though we were not best friends I still loved her dearly.

She was with me when I took my first step, said my first word which was not the usual Mama or Dada but I was told I said car. Whenever I wailed she would put me on her back and tie a wrapper around her waist singing the song she claimed her mother sang her whenever she cried. Whenever I was hungry she fed me *cerelac* and *golden morn* which I still enjoyed when I was a teenager.

I can say my mother taught me everything from how to tie my shoe lace, how to be respectful to my elders "Put your hands behind your back when talking to your elders Nolan" she always said. She made me eat healthy by lying to me "Nolan did you know that eating your vegetables makes you strong like Popeye the Sailor man?" and I believed her, still she occasionally spoiled Christine and I with all the junk food whenever she went grocery shopping or ate out at restaurants.

She played video games with me and you know who always won already, whenever I would defeat her in fighting games she would tease me

"Nolan you can't even beat your mother on perfect, I thought you were the best in your class"

I usually got upset whenever she said that, stayed up all night, practicing and learning new moves with different characters and the next day I didn't win with perfect, as a matter of fact I never did.

No matter the scenario my mother always made me feel better and made me smile. She loved me to bits, too much at times and I was often afraid that I was going to stop allowing her enter my room or tell her to leave me alone but I'm sure that every guy that has or had a mother has felt that way at some point. We as guys have all had the moments that we did not want our mothers to hold our hands on our way to school and kiss us on our forehead, then wave us goodbye as we walked into our classrooms.

I missed her pancakes and her *jellof rice, fried rice* and spicy chicken. In my eyes she was the best cook on the planet and everyone in the house enjoyed her breakfast, lunch and dinner.

There was a time I had malaria for a week, she passed sleepless nights in the hospital, praying for me which often interrupted my sleep and brought me noodles or pepper soup with *energy drinks*.

She taught me right from wrong and always encouraged me to do the right things. I missed her smile because it seemed whenever she smiled, the world smiled with her, although when she frowned, it seemed that world frowned with her.

Four months after Mum's death Mrs Chioma told us to come live with her but Christine and I decided that we were going to move in with Dad.

4<sup>th</sup> November, 2009

### **ADJUSTMENTS, THAT'S PART OF LIFE**

Life for Christine and I continued to be difficult after Mum passed on. I made decision to move to Dad's apartment, he told me it was a safe and quiet neighbourhood. Dad had given me the description and address to his apartment and a spare key in case he was not going to be around when we arrived. One fine morning Christine and I packed our bags.

"Christine, I hope you are not forgetting anything"

"No. Let's just go, I want to see Dad's place, besides if we forget anything the lorry Dad hired will take them"

"Okay. Let's get a move on" I said.

We stopped a decent taxi and put our bags in the boot.

"Lekki Phase 1" I said while giving him the piece of paper I wrote the address on.

"*I sabi the place, oya enter. Make we go*" the taxi driver said.

There was a bit of traffic on the way so we arrived at Dads' much later than we expected we would. I paid the taxi driver when we got there and took out Christine's bags and mine as well. I walked close to see the gated apartment complex which was colossal, once I saw the soft white paint on the building and copper tone coloured shutters on each window I was very excited. The apartment building was incredible but even more impressive was the location.

We walked up four flights of stairs because the elevator wasn't functioning. 4 B, was where Dad lived, there was a brown welcome mat on the floor, I slowly brought the key out of my pocket, and put it into the key hole and turned it clockwise, the door slowly opened as I told Christine "Brace yourself sis, this should be a new adventure".

We walked in and it didn't seem like Dad was at home. The television was still on, and on sports channel no less. "I can see Dad is still a sports fanatic" I told Christine. The living space in the apartment was enormous and it was time for Christine and me to explore our new home.

I wanted to check out the bedrooms but Christine was already walking towards the kitchen so I followed her. The colour of the kitchen was a welcoming yellow, the kitchen seemed quite simple. It had a one door refrigerator, a gray microwave, a stove and a dining table for four. There was a washing machine in a tiny room that was part of the kitchen but was not noticed at first glance.

In the living room there was average size and a big dark blue carpet at the centre of the room. There were two long couches, one faced the television and the other faced the balcony.

I dragged my bag and suitcase to my room, it had a white door and the walls were painted pink with a teddy bear on the medium sized bed. Wait a minute this is not my room, its Christine's. I turned around and the door opposite was white as well, now this must be my room. The walls were painted white; the bed was medium sized as well with a reading table and a lamp on top of it. There was not too much difference between my old room and the new one.

Dad's room was adjacent mine, I wanted to peek in but didn't have the opportunity to, his room seemed to be locked.

I was satisfied with the place, and a three bedroom apartment suited Christine and I perfectly.

Dad was going to be home late so I stayed up and waited for him. I prepared dinner for Christine and if I was not careful I would have burnt the kitchen down. I dozed off on the couch but woke up to the sound of footsteps. The room was dark, I could barely see anything.

"Dad is that you?"

"Dad?"

I thought Dad said this neighborhood is safe. I raced to my room and picked up the first weapon I saw, my old Engineering textbook. *This is the perfect weapon! He won't see it coming.* I slowly walked out my new bedroom as the sound of the refrigerator being opened assured me that the thief was in the kitchen. *Thieves usually steal money, why is he stealing food from the fridge?*

I crept silently into the kitchen, took a deep breath, raised the textbook over my head and slammed the book into his head and his back as the glass of milk fell out of his hand and splashed on the floor. He fell to the ground soon after and I kept hitting him with the book.

"Stop it! Stop, it's painful" he yelled.

I was about to slam the book into his head when I paused. *Wait! I recognize that voice. "Jack?" but why was my best friend stealing milk from my dad's fridge?*

"How did you get in?" I mumbled as I walked towards the wall to flick the light switch.

"You idiot! Your dad came to pick Kim and I up. She is in Christine's room and I was in your room but I stepped out to get milk and that's when you beat me up with your book" he nagged.

"Hey Jack next time I take milk from your fridge without asking you know what to do right?"

He smiled and rubbed his palms together. As if I'll be stupid enough to take milk from his fridge without asking.

6<sup>th</sup> December, 2009

### **WAITING TABLES**

This was not my dream job but I needed the money, I had the feeling I wouldn't have been waiting tables if I had graduated from school but being a waiter is not the worst job in the world. On my first day of work, I threw some boiled plantain into my mouth, leftover from dinner last night. I didn't have time to prepare breakfast or else I was going to be late. I kissed Christine on her forehead and waved Dad goodbye.

"Hope you enjoy your first day Nolan, you know your Mum was a waitress when I met her and she enjoyed her job. I'm serious o!" my Dad said.

"I have a feeling I would enjoy this job Dad, although it's just temporary" I said.

I got to the restaurant by 8:30am; the resumption time was 8:00am. I figured my boss would not be upset but he was and repeatedly screamed at me asking if really wanted the job or not. I was just doing this to save up and buy a car and learn how to be independent; of course I needed the job.

I was handed a uniform which I wore from 8am to 6pm everyday of the week excluding Sundays. It was starched white shorts sleeve shirt and black pants and a black face cap with *Kemi's kitchen* written on it, I would have to wear my own shoes and they had to be black in colour. There were three things I needed to learn-how to interact with customers, how to work with my colleagues and learn punctuality because if I was late tomorrow or any other day I just may have been fired.

Being an *oyinbo*, my first thought was that I was going to be behind the counter asking customers what they wanted to order; to my surprise my prediction was false. I was that guy that collected the plates on the tray from the counter and served them immediately but if it was any consolation I could get tips and there are no tips for the folks at the counter.

Our supervisor sat me down; I was the only the only half-caste and newbie in the restaurant which made me feel nervous, very nervous indeed. He welcomed me warmly and showed me around the restaurant. The guy was a slow talker with a very funny Yoruba accent and took him ages to say a sentence; anyone can be in spot for a very long time just hearing what he has to say. He explained to me what he wanted from me and walked me through the steps and the most important which was that I had to memorize the menu and the prices too, as well as the daily special. He told me he had the feeling it was going to be fun for me, that I would meet all sort of customers which I was looking forward to and said if impressed him on the first month or any month I would have my face of the Employee of the month board, that should amazing on my resume.

In my first days as a waiter, I messed up a few orders, okay actually a lot. It would have been very easy to blame it on the guys in the kitchen but instead I told them I

made a mistake and apologized for it and the customers were understanding and appreciated my honesty.

The truth is most children do not sit in restaurants telling their parents that “I want to be a waiter when I grow up” as they licked their ice cream and watched the waiter refill Dad’s wine and Mum’s glass of orange juice.

My first month was a bit difficult. The worst of it was when people said I brought the wrong order. As I walked down aisle of tables, people always called for more coffee or salt and pepper, ketchup, toothpick, straws and new cutleries.. I became very knowledgeable by listening to a lot of customers conversations, my colleagues were jealous of me they said customers liked me because I was an *oyinbo*. People often sat and talked over a cup of coffee or plates of sandwiches or beans and plantain. Some discussed business deals, some discussed problems. Others talked about their marriage and their rude children.

I had a lot of regulars I knew by name and also knew their regular orders. Whether my customers had a food allergy or disability I was always the guy they called because I always went the extra mile.

During my fourth month of being a waiter I discovered that the people that always gave tips were business men, young lovers or mature couples that celebrated their anniversaries and parents whom brought their children to the restaurant to celebrate their birthdays. I never expected tips from secondary school and university students because they only cared about themselves which was no shock because I never tipped waiters, maybe waitresses and only because some of them were pretty.

16<sup>th</sup> April, 2010

### **BACK FROM THE DEAD?**

It had been raining all night and by now the morning sun had just ushered me into a beautiful day. This being April, there was less open space in the sky. I put on my sunglasses to shield my eyes from the sun. I had not been to my parents’ home in a year and some months, piles of leaves covered the entrance of the house and some covered up the gutter. There seemed to be more trees than the time I spent here in the neighbourhood. . I looked down the street and saw nobody; the street looked deserted like everyone had travelled or moved out the same time when Christine and I moved out.

My Dad and I decided to keep the house after Mum died, hopefully it will be worth something someday and maybe then we can sell it, although frankly I did not anyone that would want to live in a place where someone died but when you think about it Mum did not die at home, she died in the hospital. One thing was for sure I didn’t have the stomach to sell it.

I still found the key where we always hid it; I couldn’t believe our house was never robbed because frankly even a five year old would know a spare key was there. I walked towards the gate, opened the padlock and pushed the gate open.



I took very little steps towards the entrance door and pushed it open. The house was stale, and an inconsiderable smell of spoiled fish. I entered the kitchen, it still had its cream tiles which got dirty usually after one walked around the kitchen in less than a minute, and the light brown cabinets were still intact, as was the refrigerator. I swung it open to see if that's where the spoiled fish smell was coming from, I took a quick look and there was leftover plantain, evaporated milk, orange juice, a bottle of beer in the fridge but there was no sign of fish or sardine in the fridge which made me wonder what caused the awful smell.

I opened the large cabinet adjacent to where the refrigerator was there were powdered milk, Lipton tea, a pack of sugar, cookies, potato chips and unopened sardine cans.

I grabbed a mug and put two cubes of sugar in it. I was about to boil water when I heard a voice coming from upstairs. I left the water running in the sink and walked up the stairs as my hand shook like leaves during a storm. My heart accelerated very fast; I felt like I was trapped in a room that some sort of gas was pumped into leaving me unable to breathe. It took me what seemed to be a very long time to get upstairs and by the time I got there I was out of breath despite the fact that I took my time to get there. I could not figure out where the voice came from, it could be Christine's room, mine or Mum's room. It had to be one of the three. As I was about to open my room door, the voice was more audible and it sounded exactly like my Mum's voice.

I put my ear against my Mum's door to determine if she was there, I stood there with my ear against the door for ten minutes, I was about to head back downstairs when I made up my mind to bravely walk into the room. I then opened her room door and there she was sitting on her bed, brushing her hair. She looked up and said to me "Don't you knock anymore? I always told you to knock before entering my room Nolan."

I could not explain what was going on. My mother was there right in front of me, sitting on her bed. *She was alive or was she? Could it be that I was hallucinating? Should I approach her? Should I answer the question she had just asked me? This was too good to be true, the only time people come back to life are in video games and for that to even happen you have to gain or pick up and extra life or more.*

"Nolan, why is your face white? You look like you just saw a ghost."

Mother was wearing a yellow top and her gray pyjamas bottoms. My mother or her ghost or whatever it was that was in front of me suddenly stood up, dropped the hair brush in her makeup drawer and laid down on the bed.

"You have lost a lot of weight Nolan sweetie. Are you skipping dinners again? I hope not."

I refused to accept that this reality. I recalled Mum's funeral like it was yesterday. I remembered where we buried her and I remembered when I put a handful of sand on the centre of her light brown coffin. She couldn't be alive, it was impossible.

"Nolan the day you were born the weather was exactly like this, very hot. "

I had so many questions to ask Mum but I did not know where to begin.

"What are you doing here? What was the real reason Dad left you on that afternoon? Why didn't you defeat cancer?" but the words and questions could not leave my mouth.

"I remember the year I had you Nolan, it seemed that your father and I would not have any children. People in the neighbourhood and some of my friends laughed at me, others prayed for your father and me. We had been trying for four years. I had been trying to get pregnant but I just couldn't have any kids and we started to think we were cursed."

She started twisting her hair and smiled saying

"I eventually got pregnant and I had you Nolan, our prayers were finally answered. You are a blessing to me and your father." I wanted to correct her by saying "Mum it's to your father and I, not me and your father" but I didn't.

I had tears in my eyes and I walked towards her and hugged her, I thought my hands would pass through her body just like it did for characters in the ghost movies I used to watch as a kid and teenager but it didn't, it rested on her hospitable back and I felt her soft skin below her yellow t shirt on my hands. I really did not expect to be able to hug her.

The sun had come down as I laid there right next to my Mum on her bed, the last time I saw her she coughed and puked all over this bed sheet after which she was rushed to the hospital, but here she was now in perfect health, she had gained the weight she once had lost to breast cancer. She placed my head on her chest after I had yawned severally, it didn't matter if this was temporary or permanent insanity. I just needed to be here with her for as long as possible.

"Mum"

"Yes Nolan"

"Please be here when I wake up"

"Of course, I'll be here. It's my bedroom isn't it? Nobody will take it from me; this will always be my bedroom and my house."

"How is my dearest Jack?"

"Oh he's fine. We often talk on social media"

"Good, very good and how is Mary?"

"How's Mary" she repeated.

"She's doing fine, we're doing fine" I lied having absolutely no idea of how Mary was doing.

"Mum, Mary dumped me right after....well, Mary dumped me"

"Mum I said Mary dumped me" I whined.

I turned towards her but she was already fast asleep, so I puffed my pillow, kissed her on the forehead and decided to sleep too.

I closed my eyes and had a good dream for the first time in months. The chicken that always crowed on the street woke me up; I suppose that would be my temporary alarm clock since the real alarm clock was over at Dad's apartment. I opened my eyes and turned towards Mum but she was not there. Maybe she had gone downstairs to make me breakfast, I'm guessing pancakes and cereal. There was power outage and I almost tripped on my way downstairs because I could barely see anything. When I got downstairs I used my phone to assist my vision but Mum wasn't in the kitchen. I shut down the tap which had been running since yesterday afternoon; she was not in the dining room or living room either. I raced back upstairs and checked her bathroom, my room, Christine's room and my bathroom and Christine's and they were all empty and dusty too.

A part of me knew this was not reality, maybe it was even a dream and I thought it was reality, for all I knew I must have dozed off on the bed the moment I stepped into her room and thought the conversations were real.

Whether or not it was reality, I was left with a message and that was not to sell the house. I didn't know whether to tell Christine and Dad what I had just experienced, they would not have believed me anyway; even Jack whom always believes my awful lies would not have believed me.

18<sup>th</sup> April, 2010

### **MOTHER DESERVED BETTER**

I was still shocked by my encounter with my Mum back at our former house, a place that may eventually deserted for eternity because I was never going to sell it, although I needed to convince Dad not to because the house was still in his name. I drank a few bottles of beer on my way home and reeked of alcohol. I still had a bottle in my hand which would have been finished with one or two gulps. I was frustrated, flabbergasted and deranged.

Mum had answered some questions I always wanted to ask her and even answered some I never would have asked, but the key question which I never had the opportunity to ask was why Dad left her.

It was finally time to confront Dad and find out why he deserted us, I needed him to come up with an answer whether he was to be blamed or not. The worst part was I only had the opportunity to hear just one side of the story and had no choice but to believe it, and whoever was to be blamed I needed to find in my heart to forgive the person, although it was difficult to do so but I had to do it.

I got back home, very late that night and my eyes were red and heavy. I opened the door to the apartment and staggered my way in. Dad was sitting on the couch, watching television, I did not bother to find out what he was watching, and I yanked the television plug from the socket.

“Are you crazy? I was watching that, and why are you coming home by this time of the night very drunk?”

“Why did you leave Mum?”

“Look son, we’ll talk about this tomorrow, go to your room and sleep”

“No. I am not leaving this room; we must talk about this today. Why did you leave Mum?” I punched the wall several times demanding an answer.

Dad sighed and told me to take a sit on the couch but I refused, I think I preferred standing, even though it was going to be one of his two hours chat, I did not mind standing.

“During my Masters I met a girl. We fell in love and I really did not know how long our relationship would last. She made me feel secure and happy but I had to return home, back to Nigeria after my Masters but she had no intention of leaving America.”

“I don’t understand I’m confused” I said. Are you telling me that...?”

“Son, relax let me finish the story.”

He sighed “When I realized that Angela was not going to come back to Nigeria. I told her I would find a way to move to the United States of America sooner or later and be with her”

“Two months, after my return to Nigeria. I walked into a restaurant and that’s where I met your Mum and not long afterwards we got married.”

“Did Mum know about Angela? Clearly you guys had not ended your relationship” I said.

“Yes she knew, there was a girl named Angela but I told her we were not exactly dating anymore.”

“What do you mean not exactly Dad, I can’t believe she still agreed to marry you” I screamed.

“Calm down Nolan. There was a time I went to America on a business trip and I ran into Angela. I never told your mother, as a matter of fact I never told anyone. I got Angela an apartment, a place we would both stay whenever I found myself in America.”

“Your mother became suspicious when my business trips became too frequent. I had to travel there a lot to see how Angela was doing, I had to buy her a small car and this was eating a chunk out of my monthly salary.”

This was unaccommodating news for me. I tried to picture my father meeting this Angela of a woman. I tried to picture what she looked like; I imagined how hard it would have been for Mum when she found out that most of Dad’s trips to America were for the reason of seeing Angela and ensuring she was doing okay. I did not know anything about this strange woman and I was not willing to.

“I remember a night when I came home, your mother was waiting for me right in front of the gate and I could tell that I was in trouble. She had pictures of Angela and I in her hand, I don’t know if she sent someone to investigate me or I mistakenly and stupidly put them in my suitcase on my way back to Nigeria after my winter holiday. I could tell that she was not willing to listen to any more of my lies, and I was not willing to come up with more. She held me by my shirt and dragged me all the way into the kitchen and shut the kitchen door. She exploded and screamed at me for hours, and then I decided to come clean. I told her that I got an apartment and car for Angela and that I lied about some of my business trips, but that some were real.”

“She fell to the floor and cried that night and refused to sleep in the same bed with me for a week. She slept in Christine’s room; you wouldn’t have known because you are always in your room and never come out except to eat.”

“The next week your mother walked up to me, and slapped me on the face and asked me if I had another son. I said no. Then she said maybe she was not clear enough and asked again if I had a son for Angela. I said yes, I had only found out a year to that heated argument with your mother and I tried to explain to her that I had an obligation now in the United States but she didn’t listen to what I had to say after I had confirmed that I had a son for Angela. She was heartbroken and torn.”

“Your mother has forgiven for all the frivolous things I had done in our marriage, but I could tell that this in particular was unforgivable. I had betrayed her, you and your sister.”

I tried to picture what Angela’s apartment looked like. I tried to picture my Dad shuffling between Lagos and America. I knew his clothes were in the closet upstairs as I often took his watch to wear to school sometimes but I couldn’t imagine that he had some more clothes in America, did he buy them over there or did he take some from our house here in Nigeria. I did want to know what Angela’s son looked like or what his name was.

“Nolan, your mother was frustrated that night and other nights too. She reminded me of our vows when we got married and how it did not have anything to do with another woman or having another family or being the head of two families, lying to her children and lying to her. She blamed herself for not ensuring that I did not have anything to do with Angela’s when we were about to get married.”

“A month after the compilation of arguments we had been having. She told me to leave the house along with my stuff. She didn’t care where I went, whether it was a hotel here in Lagos or to my apartment in America.”

Dad got up from the couch and put his arm around my shoulder, he tried to offer me comfort. I jerked away, a million ideas raced through my mind on the proper way to react. I clenched my fist, look Dad right in the eye and walked away.

I finally knew the reason why Mum sat on the kitchen floor in tears on that unforgettable day. I did not care to know if what the neighbours said was true about Mum cheating on Dad, at this point Dad had risen to the top of the list of people that had wronged me in life.

4th June, 2011

### **GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE**

I was still frustrated because of the argument I had with Dad weeks ago, I usually played some rock music to calm me down. Tonight was no different; I turned up the volume in my car and nodded to the song that blasted from the speakers of my car. I was not too far away from home; I figured Christine was starving because she didn’t like Dad’s cooking so I made a quick stop by the grocery store to purchase some drinks, chocolates and ice-cream for her. I had the intention of making a turn on to the other side of the road and clearly the light was green which is why I accelerated into T-junction but maybe I was moving too fast because before I could blink, a black car almost the same size as mine sent my car spinning like it was flicked by a monstrous finger. I gripped the wheel of the car to the left and then to the right as my body responded to the movement of the car, I felt my body float off the car seat as the car tumbled and came to a stop when it crashed into an electricity pole.

I was in complete shock and it was as if the world has stopped for me for a few minutes, just a few minutes. It all happened too quickly.

I noticed a large crack in my windshield; this was not much of a surprise because I was not wearing my seatbelt. My head hurt and I had a serious migraine as if I was given DDT by a wrestler.

Blood dripped from the back of my head right to the collar of my shirt. I could not feel my body, the only thing I felt was the hood of the car pressing down on me farther into the ground; it was like I was a prisoner put into one of those tiny cells where you can barely move a muscle. The street in which a lot of accidents usually occurred was empty and on this cursed road, cars drove by and I wondered if my car was invincible like in James Bond movies or if the drivers of the car were solely focused on their destinations. I screamed at the top of my lungs, I prayed for someone to come to my aid, I hoped a Good Samaritan would pass by else I would wait, wait to die.

Loud footsteps approach towards the car and for some silly reason I thought someone was coming to finish me off, just like it often happened in horror movies. The voice in the distance said “Oh my God! *My pikin!* Are you okay?”

I screamed in pain as my heart beat rapidly. To my surprise it wasn't a killer or an assassin, it was a woman probably in her late fifty's that came to my aid. After several attempts trying to open the door on the driver side, she tried opening the one on the passenger side too but that didn't budge either so she grabbed a stick and swung as hard as she could. The force she used shattered the car window

*"Oyinbo! Crawl out, crawl now o!"*

The pain in my leg was excruciating and I already felt paralyzed and imagined myself using a wheel chair for the rest of my life like Professor X in X Men.

"Crawl out my son, *abeg* please too many people have died on this street already o!"

I was still struggling to move so I stretched my hand and she grabbed me by the shoulders and pulled me out of the car, who knew a woman whom was probably in her late fifty's was so strong. I sat on the floor right next to her, as I bled massively like I had just been in a street fight and lost brutally.

She managed to get a taxi after forty minutes of waiting for help, she threw me into the backseat and within seconds I was a hospital, the taxi driver drove so fast I feared I was going to be in two car accidents in one night.

I spent the night in the surgery room. I was in the hospital for two weeks and I missed the days Mum brought me food whenever I was hospitalized. I refused to tell Dad, as far as I was concerned I drove with a negative emotion which was his entire fault. Christine, Kim and Jack visited a few days before I was discharged from the hospital and I told Christine not to tell Dad and I begged Jack and Kim not to tell their mother, they eventually found out because I ended up being in a wheel chair for two and half months.

Life all of a sudden became very precious as I had discovered that in seconds to a minute life can be taken away from anyone. I doubt I was going to forget the moments I laid on the floor thinking I was going to die in the car or when the footsteps approached and I thought it was a serial killer coming to finish me off, I think I have watched too much action and horror movies.

I have heard people say their lives flashed before their eyes, I never really understood what they meant but now I finally did because it only took about ten seconds for my whole life to flash before me like it was a movie clip. I experienced my first car accident today and hopefully my last, it was a terrifying moment for me, one which I would never forget.

I hope no one I knew was ever involved in a car accident especially in my family.

22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2012

### **TIME TO MOVE ON THEN**

I deserved to be fired, I had lost my way. I had not been myself since the night I discovered that Dad cheated on Mum. I was skipping work a lot actually, each time my alarm went off I would always wonder what excuse I would come up with for my boss but this wouldn't last forever. I came to work late, very late. I often came to work under-dressed and a few times came in with a hangover.

There was a day my boss was extremely mad at me. He said “Nolan I don’t know what is going on in your personal life but you better get yourself together or I would replace you. You may be a good waiter but you’re not the best. You have been mixing up meals; you don’t even know the dish of the day anymore. One day I heard you say the dish of the day was fried rice, plantain and chicken instead of saying coconut rice, plantain and smoked fish.

A week later I was fired over the phone. I was told that I did not have to come to work that day and the funniest thing is that I was not planning to go to work that day.

The day I got fired was very cold, it had just stopped raining. I sent a text to Jack telling him that I quit the job at the restaurant. I refused to tell other people because it would have been embarrassing if I told them that I was fired from the restaurant, I would have been a laughing stock, so the only people that knew the truth were Christine, Jack and Dad. I was still mad at Dad but I needed fatherly advice so I told him over the phone and he said “Nolan, it’s an experience and it happens to almost everyone especially when it’s their first job. As long as you are still young, chances are it will happen to you, the truth is I was fired from my first job.” Jack told me “Better jobs would come my way and that everything happened for a reason.”

Dad was ashamed to tell his friends that I was waiter but now he didn’t have to anymore.

The Monday after I was fired was weird. I had already ironed my uniform before I realized I was not going to work that day. My friends carried on with their lives, they wore their suits to work and made great salary. I on the other hand, ate so much food that I gained unbelievable weight in the process.

In the next two weeks I drank a lot as most people who got fired usually did. I basically hated myself because I was fired from a job that was not difficult to get. I was not happy that I had been fired from my first job; it made me feel worthless for a while. The fact that I had joined the list of people that were unemployed made me think I was less valuable as a human being.

A part of me was happy that I got fired because it made me learn who I really was, I knew my inner strengths and I had gained some worth of a reputation in the waiter business plus I had gotten thousand of contacts from regular customers in the restaurant, therefore I believed getting another job will be difficult.

I had to look for another job. I sent e-mail to customers whom had given me their business cards. A lot of e-mails were sent but I barely got any response from anyone.

I called my friends. I called secondary friends, friends from the University in Ghana and friends in high and low places. I loaded at least three thousand naira credit on my phone on a daily basis and spoke to at least ten people a day all in the name of getting a new job.

Just as the first person you slept with did not turn out to be your wife or husband, that’s how it was for first jobs, it’s not like I expected to grow grey there so it was a little understandable. The job was not even the greatest job in the world and I got fired from it, imagine that. I decided to use the opportunity to re-evaluate myself and all my goals in life.

14<sup>th</sup> December, 2103

## **HEADLIGHTS**

My phone beeped. It was a text from Christine ‘Nolan please pick me up. I don’t feel like driving tonight’ She had been at a sleep over at her friends, she would only usually come home on weekends and grab some more of her clothes, it was hard to know if she was slowly moving out of Dad’s apartment.

Christine now drove; Dad had just gotten her a car. He had promised her that he would get her one when she was a fresh man in University and he fulfilled his promise. She had just gotten her driver’s license and adored the freedom it gave her.

She never drank much and certainly never drank while driving; her only flaw was texting whenever she drove.

‘Christine, put your phone down while driving’ Dad once said while he was in the car with her

I called her phone but it kept ringing. She did not pick up. Her voice message said “Hey it’s Christine; you have reached my phone voicemail. Sorry I can’t answer the phone but do leave a message and I promise I’ll call you back.”

I arrived at her friends’ but she wasn’t there, I waited around for a bit and when I didn’t hear from her I assumed she already drove home. I therefore headed to Dad’s apartment. It was when I got home I received a phone call,

“Are you Christine’s brother?” said a man’s voice

“Your sister had an accident and has been taken to the hospital”

“Is she alright? Please tell me she is alright” I said.

“You should call the hospital she is in, they should have more information” he said.

A million voices were screaming in my head and the look on my face was that of pure shock and horror. While my friends were probably at a bar experiencing a fabulous evening, I was experiencing the most depressing ten minutes of my life.

I called the hospital where Christine was and they confirmed she was admitted by nine that evening. She was taken into surgery as they did all they could to stabilize her. I attempted to hide my grief and released the sadness that I held deep inside but I broke down in minutes. Salty tears rolled from my blue eyes dripped into my mouth like drops of water from a tap, I used both palms to wipe the tears from my eyes. I called Dad and explained the situation to him. It took me back to the time I had my car accident and I was wheeled into surgery, although the pain I felt must have been nothing compared to what Christine felt that moment.

Dad arrived and so had some Christine’s friends. We were all terrified and waited for the news.

Hours later, Christine came out of the theatre and we were allowed to see her in the intensive care unit. She was unconscious but she was still able to breathe with the aid of the life support machine. Her face and hands were swollen, I could barely recognize her. The rest of the night was tolerable to everyone except me. I thought of the fantastic times we had and the times Mum and Dad annoyed us, along with the fights we had.

A nurse handed me a bag which contained Christine’s earrings, ring and watch which was already broken. The doctor came in with the bad news saying “Her brain is terribly damaged. I’m sorry but she won’t make it.”



Pearl-shaped tears rolled down Kim's cheeks from her eyes which soon made her eyes red and puffy. I knew she was very close to my sister. Watery snot streaked from Da's nostrils down to his shirt. He used his left shoulder to wipe his face and said "She has gone to join your mother in heaven. *Which kin life be this?*"

All her friends had said their goodbyes, after they turned off the life support machine but Dad, Jack, Kim and I remained in the room devastated and defenseless.

A different nurse walked into the room and gave us the rest of Christine's belongings including her phone.

"Wait there's a text message in the draft" my Dad said tearfully, he pressed the message button on the screen of the phone as we both looked anxiously at Christine's final text message.

"I'm on my way home Nolan, there is no need to pick me up. See you at home" the text read.

It had failed to be sent at 8:42pm. Only God knows if she was trying to send the text message before she crashed.

The next day my Dad and I drove to where Christine had crashed which was a bit far from home, about thirty minutes drive. People had surrounded the tree with their hands over their heads cursing and weeping for the death of someone they never knew. She must have gone off the road and hit the tree.

"I am sure she was speeding. Why would she be driving fast late at night *sef?* I have told her several times not to drive too fast" Dad said.

"She wasn't speeding and she certainly wasn't drunk. She was trying to text me, which cost her life. She was trying to text me and now she's dead. I'm the reason for her death and I'll never forgive myself"

"Nolan, don't say that, you're not the reason for her death. It's not your fault *jare*"

A week after Christine passed on, we all gathered to celebrate her life. Over a hundred people came from different parts of Nigeria to Lagos; some even flew in from overseas. Her secondary school classmates and her friends from University marked present

A lot of friends of mine and I were fond of texting while driving and have gotten away with it for many years. Most of my friends whom usually sent text messages while driving had heard what happened to Christine. I hoped they would stop because I am pretty sure it just took Christine a split second to take her eyes off the road to send a text message and now she is no longer with us. If it was any consolation she was now with Mum, although I didn't plan to join them anytime soon.

Time passed by and it became months since Christine was taken from my Dad and I, my thought process became messed up. My memories were jumbled up. Whenever I reminisced about some things I often wondered if they happened before or after Christine died.

I had lost clarity of my sister. I struggled very much to hear her light voice, the funny way she laughed and the amazing scent of her clothes and her bedroom.

At times I felt I had to go through photo albums to remember some specific details of her face, it escaped me sometimes and I considered that unacceptable.

There was some sort of sadness that has consumed me for two months; it was inevitable at that moment. This sadness consumed other emotions I usually had. I felt like I was currently in a hole trying to dig my way out. I struggled to become happy but it looked impossible and I wondered if it was just the nature of grief.

After months of red eyes and listening to metal rock music I lifted myself back and was ready to face the world once more. I still felt emptiness in my heart but I have to move on.

Christine died too soon and missed out on so much in life. In my quiet moments I looked for ways to be and feel connected to Christine. I looked for ways to achieve closure. I thought about what my life would be if Christine was still here and I wish I had died in the car accident I had on the street my school was located, maybe myself and Mum will be the dead ones, not Christine and Mum.

17<sup>th</sup> November, 2014

### **NO MORE HEART BEAT**

November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, he was only fifty six years old, He had a sudden heart attack, all the pills he popped since as far back as I could remember did not prevent the heart-attack, orphan hood was just a step or two away.

I visited Dad a lot despite our differences. The last time I saw him was Christine's funeral. . The last time I spoke to him was when he called me, I had just come back from church, I told him I was very busy (and I wasn't), I told him I'll call him back and I didn't. I made plans to see him on Father's Day but I had no idea that was my last opportunity of seeing him and for that reason I'll never forgive myself.

The doctor that consulted dad had a plump face and thick black beard that wasn't groomed. He rubbed his pot belly and I had a hard time believing that a doctor as unhealthy as him was allowed to consult Dad given the scenario .Dad was induced in coma days before he passed on.

"My Dad always took his blood pressure medication religiously. Why the hell did he die?" I complained, demanding an explanation.

"I'm sorry but sometimes even the people that take their medications religiously die before those that do not, sometimes it's depression, stress or bad news that causes heart attack." He said with his strong Yoruba accent as he observed dad's chart. He took a look at dad, then he took off his glasses and rubbed them on his lab coat. Putting them back on, he told me that there was a sizable damage to dad's heart and that he required surgery.

I dropped to my knees for a few seconds, and then changed to a sitting position with my back against the wall. My mind began racing, I wondered if I had a role to play in Dad's brutal condition.

Forty eighty hours went by easily after Dad had passed away yet the pain had not really set in, although I was not too surprised that I did not shed tears, maybe it was because I was still in shock or maybe because I didn't like the man after he walked out on Mum.

I had not set a date for his funeral and I wasn't ready to do so because I believed I had buried enough people, Mum always told me parents bury their kids and not the other way around.

The last time I was at his apartment we had a long-lasting argument whereby I screamed at him severally and months later he lost his only daughter, my sister-Christine. I'll love to say that he was in a better place, that place called heaven where Mum and Christine are, I think he was going in the opposite direction.

Witnessing death can change who you are, it changed who I was when Mum died, it changed who I was when I lost Christine and whether it was going to change me now is something I'll had to find out.

I used to be afraid of death, but I am not anymore; I have taken comfort from the fact that when I die I'll see my parents and Christine again, but not today or anytime soon. Although these days I usually panic if I have a back pain or severe cough, terrified that I'll have cancer just like Mum did and I am most of all careful when driving, I have been in an accident before and I refuse to be in another.

I dreamed of Mum and Christine more frequently now, and in my dreams they were both still alive and everything was still the same, I often forgot the pitch of Mum's voice and sometimes it took a decent effort to remember.

We are often made to believe that you can move on quickly when you lose a loved one, they say in a year you'll be better but grief is work, hard work. I still saw myself as that young man who came back from school and found out that his mother was in the hospital.

The most difficult things in losing parents is that no one else really understood what you went through, and I was a hundred percent sure neither Femi nor Lucas could say I know how you feel Nolan.

A friend of Dad's and his sisters arranged the funeral because I was not in the mental state to do so. I lost my Dad, my childhood hero and a point in my life-my mentor.

I most certainly learned important things from the death of my parents and sibling, things I may not have understood any other way. I learnt that one must never let others wonder how you feel because one of my biggest regrets is that I did not tell Dad that I loved him.

I felt different now. Moments my friends showed me the cars their Dad got them sunk me deeper into the ground, Dad never got to walk Christine down the aisle and Christine did not even get the chance to walk down the aisle

Dad always had answers to all my questions; he was book and street smart. Life seemed to go on forever for him and so he never thought about death.

## **THE WEST OF NOWHERE**

I woke up with a sense of dread. It was a terrible feeling. I pulled myself out of bed. I stifled a yawn successfully and sleepily walked towards the bathroom. I flicked the light switch on. I looked into the mirror and could barely recognize the man that stood in front of me. My eyes had heavy circles under them. I looked jaded and hadn't shaved in weeks. I had put on a lot of weight because I ate too much and barely exercised. I turned the sink clockwise; I cupped water onto both palms and splashed it onto my face.

I flicked the lights off and walked into the kitchen. I gently opened one of the cupboards in search of bottle of alcohol. I found half a bottle behind a cereal pack and poured myself a glass of scotch. I steadied the glass and took a few sips. A quick glance at my alarm clock notified me that it was almost noon.

I hopped into the shower and allowed the cold water wash away my pain and anger. I felt refreshed afterwards and got dressed into a simple blue shirt, gray shorts and a pair of slippers.

I need to escape, run, run away from everything, this is what I want and need to do, disappear without telling anyone where I am headed. It is not mandatory but necessary that I escape to somewhere new, neither necessarily far nor fancy, just somewhere where I can make new friends, get a proper job.

I need a fresh start with a clean slate where no one knows my past- my mistakes, the consequences I have had to face because of the mistakes I have made and my past and current situation.

I do not feel at home, not since my mother died even a bit farther than that, not since Dad left. I must leave, and I must do so as soon as possible. It may be a bus ride away or an ocean way, I have no idea yet but what I do know is that when I leave I'll be home once more.

This is not a one day decision, it's a plan, a plan I had all along but could not execute for certain reasons- my sister needed me, she always would maybe until she's married, and even though she had grown up she was still that little baby I stole milk from when she was asleep in her cradle.

Nothing has ever gone right for me all my life, I take a look at the mirror and I am disgusted not at whom I see because I am sexy and handsome but what my life has been and is.

I cannot believe who I am; it is quite difficult to do so especially at this point in time. I hate who I have become. I can't remember when last I had a hair cut or shaved. My fridge which was once filled with soda and water has been replaced with beer, liquor and wine. My closet is filled with clothes I don't wear anymore; surely there are kids or teenagers out there that have nothing to wear.

I don't know if should toss my phone into the river or throw the sim card into the dust bin and sell the phone, it's quick cash plus I have a feeling I'll need money, not too much just enough to make my trip to the West of nowhere.

This would not be the first time that I would travel alone, I have done so many times in the past plus I enjoy meeting new people, learning new languages, experimenting new food and culture.

I have become disgusted with this environment. The place I once treasured began looking like a deserted building. I was sick of everything- the same thing on the news

every day, unstable electricity supply, bike men whom scratched cars and were the major cause of car accidents, the corrupt police men, the traders at the market whom always sold items to me at an expensive price instead of decent one and the taxi drivers that often swindled me no matter the distance I travelled, to the people whom envied me just because I was white skinned and those who worshiped me just because I was an *oyinbo*....the list goes on.

I'll leave very soon for a land unknown. I'll depart with no rules and no regrets. I'll live for the moment and start afresh. I'll figure out where I am going really soon, I could figure it out as soon as next week or next month and even though I have had fun with you- shared my good, bad and ugly life. I remember the day I picked you up from the bookstore and hid you in my school bag and raced home. You've only been outside my room just a few times, yet you've had different stains on you from cooking oil, to blood to tear drops to soup. You made me happy, when I didn't think I could be, people always wondered why Jack was the only friend I had, I guess it's because you and he knew everything about me. No one keeps secrets like you do, and despite how awesome and rich you are (in paper and texture) you'll leave me with things I don't want to remember so you will not follow me, you'll stay behind and I have not decided if I want to strike a match stick and set you ablaze or if I want cobwebs to make you a home just yet but only you would know the decision I shall eventually make. I'll call Jack when I get to my destination, the last time I saw him was after Christine's funeral. He barely picks up his phone these days and for some reason he deactivated his social media accounts. I often worry about him and I really hope he is okay. Well, we had good times didn't we, my dearest Diary. It was a privilege indeed.

Thank you for reading my book.

If you enjoyed it, please take a moment to leave me a review.

Thanks.

Tejiri Oru

