

**DIARY
OF
A
FUSSPOT**



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For wives and mothers
everywhere.

January 15, 2015

Dear Diary,

There are so many things in life that we have no control over. Whether the sun will rise or not, whether the day will be cloudy or not is not for us to decide. We have no control over life or death either. But what about the things that we do have control over?

My friends have described me as a chronic worrier. I worried about everything. When I was twelve, I worried that I was too tall.

When I was seventeen, I worried that I was not tall enough. I worried about whether it would be Ike or not when I wanted to marry.

I worried for three years after Ike was ready until one day he told me he wouldn't take it any longer and literally pushed me to the altar. I worried about what I would do after I was married. And then it hit me. It was not as if worrying added anything to me.

Sometimes I just preferred to fuss. It took me a long time to make this decision but I realized there were some things that I did

have control over.

Like my deciding to be a stay at home mother despite my degree in Business Administration. I've been asked over and over by my friends if my husband pushed me into it but the truth is this is something I decided on my own. It had nothing to do with Ike. My therapist friend has asked me if maybe I was trying to compensate for something in my life perhaps I did not have enough motherly attention as a child, what with my mother being a medical doctor. But it was none of that. I just wanted to be at home, make a home for my children. Was that too much to ask?

The women libbers should take a chill pill: I think I am liberated enough. Perhaps later I shall consider running my own business from home to 'empower' myself. But for now my mind is made up. Stay at home mom all the way.

My first baby is almost a year now. When I look into those little brown eyes its simply magic. I cannot tell if it's because she's so cute and tiny or because I was involved in the process of making her but I know I want to be there for every important moment in

her life. I want to be right there beside her when she says her first word which I know will be any moment now. I want to be the first to see her walk unaided. To be there when she writes her first letter of the alphabet. In a world of uncertainty, I want her to know her mother would be right at home waiting for her to come home no matter where she is.

I can smell it. The cake is almost ready. It's nobody's birthday but I'm making a cake just because. One of the advantages of being a stay at home is that you have enough time to do those special things. Anna coos in her cot and I go and pick her up. I rock her to and fro and sing nonsensical songs that only she and I understand. All is right with my world. Until I heard the fire alarm go off. I brought out a soggy blackened mess. How could I have got so lost in thought? Now Ike would not have a chance to eat the chocolate cake I had hinted I would make this morning. For a woman who spent a lot of time at home, I seemed to find it hard to get anything done.

The doorbell rang and I debated whether to answer it. It was probably my neighbor

Christy. She was also a stay at home mum and she was bored stiff of it. She had tried her hands at doing something. Opened a provision store and got bored and tired of it. Got a job at a company but it was too tiring. Her two children were older than mine. One was five and the other was seven and she was all alone at home till they came back from school. Apparently, she wasn't bored and tired of coming to gist with me over some African Magic. The doorbell rang again, louder this time. Couldn't Christy take a hint? I was in no mood for a discussion or speculation about whether our husbands were having affairs with their secretaries or not. People like her made me wish sometimes that I was not a stay at home mother.

“Chinelo, I know you are there now. Open the door,” she said.

I sighed. There was no escaping her.

I opened the door to let her in. The sight of her alone gave me a headache.

“What have you been doing since morning?” she demanded.

“I have a headache,” I said which was actually true. The veins in my head were

starting to throb.

“Ndo o, take panadol now,” she offered as she sank on to my sofa. I wondered if I should bake another batch of cake. I’d already prepared the soup for dinner but I had promised Ike a special treat today. It would be good to deliver on the promise. “Ehen Chinelo,” Christy’s grating voice cut into my thoughts. “Do you know we have a new neighbor on our street?”

How would I know, I mouthed inaudibly. It wasn’t any concern of mine. She suddenly got up from the sofa, walked to my refrigerator and took out a soft drink without asking. I fumed silently. The gall of that woman!

After popping open the drink, she continued. “I only saw one woman with two small children. I didn’t see her husband. The one that late Chief Baiyero was living in. I’m not sure they are that comfortable sha. I only saw one Jeep in the compound. She said her name is Titi Lawrence or something like that.”

I gave an involuntary shudder as I heard the name. Could it be the same Titi Lawrence I knew in Uni? If it was her, then it meant my

arch enemy had suddenly gotten closer than I wanted. What was she doing moving into my street? Life had suddenly become very unpredictable of a sudden...

January 17, 2015

Dear Diary,

The first time I saw Titi Lawrence in the University I knew she was trouble. She suddenly bumped into me on my way to the hostel and then looked at me as if I had upset her apple cart. Confused, I muttered a 'sorry ,' and then she laughed. She had a tinkling sort of laugh. Even from that first day, it grated on my nerves.

"It's me that should be apologizing my dear," she said patronizingly. "Don't mind me. I'm just in a hurry to get to class. My name is Titi."

"Chinelo," I offered hesitantly.

"Alright Chinelo. See you around," she said and sauntered off.

I thought no more of it till I saw her in the

cafeteria that same afternoon. I was mildly irritated. Was she following me around?

“Hi again,” she said cheerily as she stood beside me. “What course are you studying?” “Business Administration,” I said trying not to show my annoyance.

“Oh. I knew I had seen you somewhere before. We are in the same department.” Nice, I thought. Gritting my teeth I thought she would never leave me alone.

Out loud, I said: “Ok.” And then proceeded to carry my tray to a nearby table. Sure enough, Titi was following close at my heels. After a while, I decided to enjoy her chatter and relax. She knew all the campus gossip and was eagerly pouring out every juicy detail over her plate of rice. Besides as an established loner, I didn’t have many friends. I needed all the friends I could get and Titi seemed willing to be one of them. That was my first mistake.

Christy’s shrill voice broke my reverie again. She had come to visit once more.

“Chinelo did you see that?” she shouted.

“That woman turned into a snake! I knew she was possessed.”

I hissed inwardly and sighed aloud. Christy

and her obsession with African Magic. I needed to get her to leave so I could concentrate on other things. Like plotting how I could see Titi Lawrence without being obvious. But before then...

“Ehen Christy did you give the new neighbor a welcome present?” I ask Christy. Christy turns her face towards me, momentarily confused. “Welcome present? Biko, which one be that?”

I scrunch my eyebrows. With all her TV watching, didn't she watch *Desperate Housewives*?

“Christy.” I say with exaggerated patience. “When a neighbor moves into your street the proper thing is to go and say hello to them and offer them a welcome gift. It's usually food especially baked goods. It's a sign of being thoughtful.”

Christy laughed. “Thoughtful kwa? That one na oyinbo business o. It no concern me.” I was not to be deterred. I shook my head determinedly.

“No Christy. In this our estate we will do the right thing. So you and I will take a cake over to that Titi Lawrence's house to officially welcome her into the community.”

Christy shrugged. "As long as you would bake the cake."

I had expected this. "Of course I will."

"You get time," Christy observed and yawned. "Chinelo I'm hungry o. Haven't you cooked anything?"

Now was the time to get her out.

"See, Christy you just reminded me. I have a lot of work to do. I need to dust the furniture before I start cooking so please you will need to excuse me."

Christy got up and stretched. "So you are driving me away abi?"

I didn't answer. "See you tomorrow Christy." And I closed the door behind her. I got a rag and began dusting the furniture. I had no idea what would happen when I came across Titi Lawrence again.

January 20, 2015

Dear Diary,

I was nervous as I stood in front of the two story duplex. Christy loudly smacked on a wad of gum. I had written: "Welcome to the neighborhood," in spidery letters across the

top of the cake. Now as I held it, it looked like a childish scrawl. The last thing I would want is for Titi Lawrence to poke fun at my famous chocolate cake.

We knocked lightly then slightly louder. No answer. We waited and knocked again. Then suddenly a pale red rimmed face appeared at the door. I almost did not recognize her. It was Titi. What could be wrong with her?

Would she recognize me?

“Hi, welcome to the neighborhood,” I said and offered her the cake.

She took it and smiled but her smile didn’t seem to quite reach her eyes.

“Thank you very much,” she said softly.

“I am Christy and she is Chinelo,” Christy offered in between smacks of chewing.

I saw something that looked like a flicker in Titi’s eyes. Was it recognition?

“My name is Titi. Titi Banjoko. It’s so nice to have such wonderful neighbors,” she said absently.

Beside me, Christy was nudging me to take note of something but I couldn’t see whatever it was she wanted me to see.

“Well we live over there,” I said pointing to my modest bungalow and Christy’s more opulent duplex.

“We’re very sociable here. Feel free to drop in anytime,” I said hoping she would invite me too.

“I’ll be sure to take note of that,” Titi said. “Thanks again Chinelo and Christy. My family truly appreciates this.” She made a move as if to close the door.

“I do not mean to be rude but I really must go now as I have some pressing matters to attend to.”

“Of course,” I mumbled. “Not a problem.” “We understand,” Christy added and we backed away.

On the way back home Christy was full of chatter about Titi. About how red her eyes looked and how old her weave-on was and that it needed changing and how expensive her brocade material was.

I was concerned with only one thing. Titi was sad for some reason. And I wanted to know why. I was fairly certain that to maintain her image in the community she would try to repay us with a culinary feat of

her own. Perhaps when she did it, I would have my chance to talk with her.

The baby was soaked when I got home never mind that I had left her with her grandmother who had come to visit for a few days. But granny was interested in the intriguing characters on African magic. I was beginning to hate those TV stations. The things it does to good women.

I had barely got the baby changed and dinner on the cooker when Ike arrived. He was earlier than usual and he did not look happy. It seemed he was trying to hide it from me because he tried to act as if nothing was amiss. I waited till after dinner to ask him but he wouldn't say.

"It's nothing dear. I'm just tired," he said planting a kiss on my forehead. My internal radar told me that that wasn't all. But I didn't want to push. He did look tired. My brain was very active though wondering what it could be. It wasn't that he was getting laid off work, was he? Did his business deal go sour? Would we have to move from this house? Perhaps I should find a job immediately. I managed to stop myself.

Breathe, Chinelo breathe, I told myself.

God's got this, whatever it is.

Titi showed up sooner than I expected. I was rounding up some business online the next day when the doorbell rang. It was Titi with her culinary feat. She had made a batch of homemade cookies. She appeared brighter than the previous day and she said nothing about recognizing me from an earlier time. I was quick to invite her in and then I took one of the cookies she had made. It was absolutely scrumptious. I had expected nothing less. Titi at her competitive best.

"These cookies are amazing Titi. Your husband must be truly lucky to be able to enjoy such wonderful cooking," I said as she sipped on a glass of lemonade.

To my shock and dismay, she suddenly burst into tears. She wept profusely for about five minutes while I awkwardly put a hand on her shoulder and got her a tissue.

Then she dabbed at her eyes with a tissue and looked at me with a tearful smile. "I'm really sorry Chinelo. I've just been stressed a lot lately with the move and all and my nerves are not handling it very well."

I looked at her with concern. Her skin looked almost translucent. “Are you sure that’s all it is?”

“Yes. I’m fine.” She seemed embarrassed or standoffish and she got up to leave. “Thanks a lot Chinelo. See you around.”

I walked her to the door with many thoughts swirling through my mind. Clearly she was hiding something but what? And how could I find out?

January 21, 2015

Dear Diary,

Unfortunately, I wasn’t the only one who saw Titi’s tear stained face the previous day. Apparently Christy had seen it too when Titi was walking back home because by midday the next day she was knocking on my door. Somehow that woman manages to see everything from her window. How she does that in between watching African magic and forever fixing her nails I’ll never know. Ok, maybe I exaggerate a little.

“So what was wrong with her?” Christy demanded to know.

Did she think I was a psychic?

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