

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 10th 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.

20th 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.

18th 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.

14th 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.

4th 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.

16th 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.

19th 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.

9th 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.

4th 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 Christines' 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.

10th 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 Aunty 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 Aunty 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.

24th 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.

18th 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.

2nd 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.

12th 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

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