

A NOTE FROM THE BRIDE

By Gillian Asiedu-Danso

I am going to kill you today.

Fisayo stared at the mirror in the bathroom and rubbed his eyes. Bloodshot eyes stared back at him. There was a party balloon in the shape of a female genitalia taped to his forehead. He splashed some water on his face, urging himself to wake up. Today was his wedding day for crying out loud. Yet here he was, still hang over from his bachelor party yesterday. Next to his reflection was an unsettling message – written in red lipstick.

I am going to kill you today.

The message did not upset him as much as the familiarity of it. He would recognise that handwriting anywhere. He knew this because the first night he met her, she had slid her number to him on a beer napkin, her phone number written in ruby red lipstick – just like on the mirror.

“Oh my God! your handwriting is beautiful!” He had exclaimed and she had laughed, making him also laugh. Conversation with her always came easily and that was why he was marrying her.

Before he could ponder more over this, his mother came barrelling into his hotel room.

“FISAYO!” She yelled from the bedroom. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Mom...” Fisayo began, searching for a reasonable excuse while wiping the message on the mirror. He did not want to freak his mother out. However, before he could finish his sentence, his mother made her way to the bathroom where he was.

“WHY ARE YOU NAKED?!” She yelled again. Fisayo tried not to cringe as his head was still pounding from last night.

His hands instinctively reached for his crotch, covering his privates when he met his mother’s gaze. He didn’t even realise that he was naked. Folake ignored his attempt to cover up, considering she had birthed him. He was a thirty-year-old man. He had to hide his nudity – even from his mother.

“You are of big age now, about to take a whole wife and start a whole household.” She began to lecture him. “You can’t keep making me dote after you like you are a toddler. And for Heaven’s sake wake your brother from the floor!”

Fisayo stared down to see the outline of his younger brother's buttocks staring back at him. Funmilayo, his brother and best man was also naked and asleep beneath the bathroom sink. Another thing that he had not noticed.

What on earth had gone on last night? Fisayo wondered.

Was it enough for Diane to want to kill you? A voice at the back of his head added.

"Bro, wake up." Fisayo said, kicking Funmi gently on the back side. There was no response, except for Funmi gently stirring and releasing a silent fart.

"Oh, come on!" Fisayo exclaimed, kicking Funmi harder – enough to jolt him awake.

His mother interrupted. "It's your wedding day. Make a conscious decision to grow up today or give the poor girl back to her family."

"Mom I..."

"Not another word from you." His mother replied icily. "I am going to check on our guests and in ten minutes, if I return and you are not ready, I am going to kill you."

You wouldn't be the only one who wants to. Fisayo thought.

He watched his mother turn on her heel, her golden *gele* headscarf bouncing with each movement. She turned her back to him once more, to issue a final warning.

"Don't embarrass me in front of the Ghanaians."

And there it was! The silent competition his mother had concocted with Diane's mother. Folake had a bee in her bonnet that Esi, Diane's mother thought she was better than her. Right from their first exchange when Esi had corrected Folake's mispronunciation of Diane's name.

"It's Diane, you don't pronounce the 'e'. Like princess Dian-a." Esi had said. Folake had been taken aback. For months, she had been calling her Dian-'e', with a hard 'e' and Diane had never corrected her. Yet here Esi was, blatantly picking at her illiteracy within two minutes of meeting her.

"Then why didn't you just call her Diana?" Folake retorted.

"Because her name is Diane." Esi had countered. A tense silence ensued.

"Does anybody want some bread? I got it fresh from the shop this morning." Funmi had intervened, quickly changing the topic.

Fisayo sighed again, dispelling the memory from his head. He just needed to get through the day. If he got through today at all. The message unsettled him. Diane had always been a bit

on the serious side and was not one to play such pranks. If she said, she was going to do something, she usually did it.

Like if she said she was going to kill you today... the voice at the back of his head returned.

He left the bathroom to search for his phone, passing the orange thong that was draped on the TV and a black spray paint on the wall that said: *"Fisayo loves Diane"*.

Fisayo found his phone wedged between the cushions after he pulled a long line of condoms that had been punctured. He hoped someone had a video of what happened last night because how exactly does one explain condoms with holes?

He looked at the wallpaper on his phone and smiled.

It was his favourite picture of them. Diane's nose was covered in vanilla cake frosting and she was trying but failing to lick it off because her tongue could obviously not touch her nose. Her entire expression was silly and goofy. And there was Fisayo next to her, staring at her in awe. They had been dating for two years but it was in this moment that he realised he loved her enough to marry her.

Two years later and here they were, getting married. Fisayo quickly dialled Diane's number with shaky hands.

"Hello baby..."

"Diane! Oh my God, I need to talk..." Fisayo's sentence was cut short by a collective eruption of feminine laughter.

"This is not Diane, this is Divine. The real Diane cannot come to the phone right now."

Fisayo sighed, trying not to get upset with Divine. Divine was Diane's best friend whom he did not like. Divine never outright said it but Fisayo could bet on his current account balance that she was always dragging him for filth in the group chat.

She had once in a few words hinted at it. It was the day he had disagreed with a comment she made about a contestant on the reality TV show – *90-day fiancé*.

"Watch yourself my dear. I will certainly be at Diane's next wedding. You? Not so sure."

Diane had been engaged to him for only a week when Divine made this fine declaration. Fisayo hadn't appreciated the candour or the context then. He certainly didn't appreciate the candour now.

"What did he say?" He heard Diane whisper on the other end of the line.

"He is not speaking." He heard Divine whisper back, probably with an eyeroll.

“Tell her to call me back. It’s urgent.” Fisayo said and hung up.

Fisayo congratulated himself at how quickly he got ready for the wedding. One minute he was stark naked, and the next minute, he was in a magenta *agbada*, a traditional attire that transformed him from the hooligan he looked like thirty minutes ago, to a gentleman who deserved a bride. He loved the detail of the outfit including the colourful ends which had been made from *kente* cloth to match Diane’s attire and pay homage to her Ghanaian heritage.

As he rushed Funmi to finish getting ready, he thought about one of the touchiest conversations he had had with Diane.

“What happened? Why are you crying?”

Fisayo had asked when Diane showed up to his door distraught after having lunch with an old classmate from high school. In between tears, Diane had narrated the harrowing tale of her ex-fiance who had mysteriously died on the day before their wedding. This old ‘friend’ had brought it up and hinted that Diane may be cursed. Fisayo had consoled her that night and had never told another soul – not even his mother.

Folake would have called the wedding right off. He could even imagine her response. She would say: “Bad omen is like the flu... it won’t kill you unprovoked but if you hug a sneezing person, then...” She would then shrug, and her voice would trail off as if the remaining wisdom she was yet to wield from her mouth only had to be inferred.

“He just slept and never woke.” Diane had said. But now Fisayo wondered. *Had he also been a recipient of a note from the bride?* One sentence, seven words detailing the misfortune that would befall him.

Two hours after noon, Fisayo found himself at the altar, waiting for his bride. He saw his mother in the front row, whispering to his aunt. Probably expressing her disapproval of everything. From the light daisies Diane had chosen as her flower decoration to the magenta outfits that she had insisted everybody wore.

“She wants us to wear red?” Folake had exclaimed when she heard the request. “Does she think we are cultists?”

Fisayo looked towards the door where Diane would be walking through a few moments later. His throat felt dry, and his heart rate doubled. Funmi shook his shoulders playfully as if to calm him like he could feel Fisayo’s uneasiness.

Funmi had always had a sixth sense. Like when they were teenagers and he suddenly warned Fisayo one afternoon:

“*Don’t get sister Tayo pregnant oo*” right before he got Sister Dayo, their live-in maid pregnant. Then, a few weeks later like clockwork, he had asked him: “*What evil have you done?*” without fully knowing that Fisayo had forcefully made Sister Tayo get an abortion. Fisayo had denied any wrongdoing. He had denied everything and even swore on their late

father's grave that at fourteen, he never snuck into twenty-two-year-old Sister Tayo's room at night. That he had never squeezed her breasts when she placed his hand on her bosom and said, *"Take care of Sister Tayo like a good boy."*

Funmi had not asked him anything this morning. They had been busy after all, preparing to get Fisayo married. But he was sure Funmi knew. Funmi always knew.

Diane was a sight to behold when she came down the aisle. Her coffee brown skin had an angelic glow and she looked ethereal, Fisayo was tempted to reach out and touch her to confirm that she was real. The magenta, mixed with the *kente* patterns complemented her complexion and the outfit hugged her curves like a second skin. Fisayo felt himself overcome with emotion. She was so beautiful, and she was so his. His chest tightened and he was so happy, he thought he would die.

He probably just might, the more he thought about it.

"Umm Hi..." Fisayo blurted when she stood next to him on the altar.

"Hello Fisayo." She replied meeting his gaze and he felt his knees go weak.

He always loved how she said his name with her accent. The power this woman held over his senses after four years of dating had to be studied. The ceremony went by in a blur except for during the vows when Fisayo had noticed how Diane stressed a few sentences. He had not liked the way she had said *"In life and in death."*

He did like the part where he got to kiss the bride. She had always been a great kisser and he couldn't believe he got to experience her kisses for the rest of his life. He tried to talk to her throughout the ceremony to get an explanation of the eerie message that had been left on his mirror, in her lipstick.

He finally got the opportunity to do this, during the sermon, when she initiated a conversation.

"How was your bachelor's last night?"

"Was pretty chill." Fisayo replied. "Just chilled with my brother and the guys." Fisayo ignored the mental image that crept into his head of genitalia balloons, orange thongs, punctured condoms, spray paint and nudity. "It was so uneventful." Of course, he had to double down on the lie. The trick was to leave as little room as possible for doubt to creep in.

"Oh." Diane simply said to all that.

"What about you?" Fisayo asked.

"The girls and I went to the club, but your mom kept calling your cousin to check-in, so we called it a night. Watched *Bride Wars* on Netflix instead and slept early."

"Oh." Fisayo also simply replied, wondering if this was a lie. A web of deception she had spun around him like a comfort blanket, the same way he had for her. To spare her feelings and protect her. A cushion of lies to shield her from any possible harsh realities of their relationship.

Like how he never mentioned the visit from Sister Tayo last year and his eventual unfaithfulness. Yes, he was not a saint but he by no means deserved to die for his sins.

"I need to ask Diane, were you in my room last night?"

"Whatever do you mean?" Diane asked with a puzzled expression.

"Never mind." Fisayo replied when the priest gave him a stern look for talking during the sermon. Diane shrugged. Fisayo couldn't let it go however, it gnawed at him like a paper cut. He was sorely aware of it.

"Diane, did you leave a note..." Fisayo's sentence was cut short by Father Cletus' clearing of his throat and glaring at them. Fisayo smiled sheepishly at the priest and let the man finish his sermon. He did not get a chance to speak to Diane for the next three hours. There was always an interruption one way or another.

His mother wanted a picture.

Diane's high school debate team wanted a picture.

His mother wanted to introduce him to Auntie Temi's daughter who lived in Canada.

It was time for cake.

He did not bring it up during their first dance, mostly because it was too intimate for that, and he was lost in the moment. She placed her forehead against his chest as they slow danced in a circle of lights and a fog machine - that he had vehemently protested its purchase during the planning of the wedding. It cost a whopping 800K Naira! He wasn't annoyed anymore about it. It was doing its work and adding to the illusion that they were in their own little world - without any snared looks from both families and doubtful stares from friends.

It was just them. Fisayo and Diane. A Nigerian man and a Ghanaian woman. A businessman and a doctor. Just two souls tethered together by the threads of love and marriage.

"You are dating a Ghanaian babe? *Wawu*." Lateef his best friend had blurted out when he told his friends about Diane.

"Yes, why?" Fisayo had asked.

"Yes, Lateef why?" Issaka, their other friend had countered. "They are the best kind, no drama, very docile, they remind me of doves."

“That’s my issue exactly with them. The quiet ones are the most dangerous ones. I would sleep with one eye opened, my friend.”

The ceremony went on. There were lots of dancing and alcohol and the more Fisayo drank, the more paranoid and convinced he became that Diane had indeed threatened him. The same paediatric surgeon who cried when his car mistakenly knocked down a bird one afternoon when they were driving to her parents. There was something in her eyes that made him afraid. A flash of darkness that he could not recognize.

“Diane.” He called to her, even though she was next to him. “Did you send me a note?” It was hard to hear himself over the roar of the music and the feral crowd including the people who kept interrupting to congratulate the happy couple.

“I cannot hear you, my love.” Diane replied.

“I am asking if you came into my room!”

“Pardon? Sorry Fisayo, you are going to have to speak louder!”

“Are you going to kill me?!” Fisayo yelled.

He watched Diane read his lips, trying to register what he was saying then she smiled, a smile he could only describe as sinister and wicked.

“Of course, darling, that’s a promise!”