

## "CROSSED WIRES"

"How long did we have to stand?" she sighed wearily. "I just want to go home, have a nice bath and sleep throughout the day." It was Christmas, the long awaited time of the year but it had not really been Blessing's day. She was exhausted from the just concluded Christmas carol program in her church that Tuesday morning. Her calves ached from standing so long with heels because she was the protocol head. As if that was not enough, she definitely did not expect to be bombarded with meetings after service. She looked sideways at her husband who was driving, and caught his light chuckle before he straightened his face. "Oh! I'm amusing you *abi*?" she said, pouting. She loved this man to death but sometimes wished she could result to violence.

Blessing and Elvis had met during their final year in the university and had gradually gone from enemies to friends, and then lovers. To Blessing, being with Elvis was a rollercoaster ride and she loved every part of the journey.

"We're home" Elvis announced as he drove towards the underground parking lot. He had gotten used to how his wife got lost in thoughts, and it was one of the things he found endearing about her. Slowing down, he maneuvered the Toyota Camry towards their usual space. He parked there the first day they moved into their apartment and had done so ever since because of its easy accessibility. He put off the soft background music, quickly fetched his purse and got out of the car to meet his impatient wife.

Blessing waited for her husband to open the door and smiled when he extended his hand towards her. "Such a gentleman" she teased. It was an inside joke that always cracked them up. Shaking his head, Elvis wrapped his hand around her as they walked towards the elevator.

...

The elevator dinged open and Blessing immediately raced towards their apartment. With shaky hands, she searched her bag for the keys. "Oh my God" she groaned, remembering her husband was with the keys. They had decided to add the house key with the car's because of how often it got misplaced. Tapping her heels, she waited for her husband as he sauntered towards her.

"Were you looking for this?" He held out the keys but snatched them back when she reached out. "Oh come on!" She exclaimed in disbelief, looking for a way to smack her husband without being aggressive. "Why are you in such a hurry?" he said, smiling crookedly at her.

"I need to change out of these shoes. My legs are killing me." Earlier that day, she had dismissed the need for slippers. She was very comfortable with heels, even felt better with them and had assumed service would be fast. She could not have possibly foreseen the uncountable meetings she would be dragged into.

Elvis, knowing his wife was close to biting his head off, quickly inserted the keys and swung open the door to avoid being torn apart. Removing her heels with a deep sigh of relief, Blessing walked straight into the kitchen, grabbing a tissue on the way. The first thing she did was to pick a fight with the big, fried chicken lap she had left specially for herself the previous day but could not deal with that morning because of the early service. Apart from getting rid of her heels, she had daydreamed about eventually enjoying the meat she took a long time to prepare the day before. Wrapping some tissue around it, she got to work, biting and savouring each big chunk of meat.

Hearing footsteps, she turned to see a surprised Elvis entering the kitchen. With a satisfied expression, she gave her husband a toothy grin while picking her teeth with a broken bone.

Elvis looked at his wife amusingly and shook his head "What is wrong with you today? You've been impatient since we left church earlier." Turning back to wash her hands, she replied "Nothing, I'm much better now" she said, shrugging. "I need to floss" she singsonged as she left the kitchen. Laughing, Elvis called after her "Floss and get over here." He had been busy a few weeks before Christmas and wanted to spend as much time as he could with his wife before he resumed the next year.

Blessing popped her head out the bathroom door. "Why not take a break today? We've been going at it like rabbits since Thursday" Walking towards her, he replied "My dear, I'm just getting started."

...

"Baby girl, I've missed you" It was just 9am and Elvis was already calling his wife. "*Abeggi*. That's what you always say and then you get home and act as if it wasn't you that was being all lovey-dovey throughout the day." It was the second week in February but it looked like her husband wasn't quite ready to leave the cocoon of romance they were in during the holidays when they were "keeping the love alive" like he termed it. It was like they had been on another honeymoon. Trying but failing, she wore a big smile after Elvis promised to get her flowers on his way home. "Okay boo. See ya later. Bye"

"Why didn't you..." Jessica chipped in. "Shhh!" Blessing, with a racing heart responded. "Oops! Sorry." Jessica whispered. Jessica had been listening in on the conversation, expecting Blessing to eagerly tell her husband that she was pregnant. Still on the call, Elvis had faintly heard Jessica's cut off statement. "What? Did you say something dear?" he asked. As calmly as she could, Blessing told him it was someone else and quickly ended the call. With a sigh, she dropped her phone.

"My bad. I thought you already ended the call," a smiling Jessica said.

Blessing had still not gotten over the fact that she just met someone from her past. She thought she would not have to see any of them again "No *joor*. He almost heard you and I don't want to tell him yet" This made Jessica give her a weird look. "What's so bad about being pregnant that you can't tell your husband?" Jessica still did not get it.

"I'm just not ready to. I don't know how he'll react to it yet" Blessing didn't like that Jessica knew about her secret but the extracurricular activities she and Elvis had performed during the holidays had resulted into pregnancy.

Elvis left before Blessing that morning so he did not witness her drowsiness and failure to eat breakfast. Having a bad feeling, she had reluctantly fetched two of the pregnancy tests she had at home. The results had stared back at her as she wobbled on her feet, contemplating what to do. On her way to work, she bought extra tests in case the ones she had at home malfunctioned and excused herself to the restroom immediately she got to work. While she stood dumbfounded, holding the confirmation of her pregnancy, Jessica walked in. Jessica, who was her colleague's fiancée had been elated to see her again and congratulated her on her pregnancy. They were still trying to catch up when Elvis' called.

"Get rid of it then" Jessica said conclusively. "No! I will do no such thing," a dumbfounded Blessing replied. and said "What do you mean you won't?" Jessica snickered "And why are you acting surprised? I was there that last time remember?" she asked, eyebrows raised.

Blessing was initially confused at what Jessica said but when she realized where she was coming from, she knew it was time to clear off the past misunderstanding.

...

Bola's parents married her off to a rich man who already had three wives, and they did not care about their daughter's welfare as long as they received monthly allowance from the man. It took a long time for Bola to

get pregnant and when she eventually did, she died during labour. Before she died however, she named her daughter Blessing. Blessing's childhood was difficult as her father didn't really care much about her because she was a female. He hardly provided food or clothing for her and was even less concerned about her education.

She was sixteen years old when it happened. She was preparing for Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) exams and her father had travelled for a few months, leaving her alone with one of her stepmothers who only allowed her to get limited food. It caused her to regularly drink water from the tap in school and eat stale leftovers at home. A few weeks to her exams, she had nausea and started vomiting.

She tried to hide it to avoid unnecessary talks at home but failed at it because there was no how she could hide how weak she was.

"You're pregnant abi?" her stepmother asked. "You better take that bastard child to the father. If not, I'm going to tell your father and he will disown you." Blessing pleaded with her, trying to explain she only had similar symptoms but it all fell on deaf ears. "I'm not pregnant, I promise. I'm just sick, that's all." she tried to explain. "You're still lying?" At this point, her stepmother's eyes started flaming and Blessing knew she had to back down.

"Look for the father of that child or get rid of it before your father comes back. If not, I'll make life miserable for you" the woman threatened before storming off. Blessing decided to go to a registered pharmacy and explained her symptoms. She was told it was stomach flu and was given some medications.

The next day, she stayed back home to take full care of herself so no one in school would contact the infection. When it was evening, she was sent on an errand and was on her way back home when she met Justin, her school principal's son, who was just coming back from school. Justin was your typical bad boy and had been turned down by Blessing countless times. To make matters worse, she also caught him smoking once. Justin's big ego however, would not allow him back down until he won. He tried to stop her to speak with her but she politely dismissed him as she was in a hurry.

When Blessing got home, it was to meet another dramatic act from her stepmother. The woman was standing outside the house with arms folded across her chest. "I just got off the phone with your father and he said he'll be back next week." Just like she had threatened the day before, she refused to allow Blessing into the house. "You're not entering this house until you do the needful," the woman said.

Unknown to Blessing, Justin had followed her home and was hiding around the corner. While Justin watched, Blessing pleaded with her stepmother, telling her she was much better, that she had taken drugs. "So you have gotten rid of the bastard inside you?" Not knowing how else to convince her, and being

exhausted from not eating, she nodded "Yes". She had practically fasted throughout whole day, too worried to eat or drink in case the sickness worsened. *"What's there to lose? I'm even too exhausted to argue this night."* She thought, quickly shuffling inside the house to avoid further confrontation. *"Tomorrow mor... no evening, when I'm back from school, I'll try to explain what really happened. Make she no para say I wake am early"* she thought as she went to get something to eat. They lived in the same house and she was going to use the whole weekend to explain if she had to.

The following day, she was off to school in high spirits, feeling much better, not knowing it was going to be a miserable day for her. Justin had decided to put matters into his own hands and told everyone she aborted. That morning, amidst judging looks, the School Principal called Blessing into her office. Justin was her spoilt son and was believed without confirmation. Justin got what he wanted at the end because everyone shunned her.

Blessing was expelled without her side of the story being heard. When her father got back, he refused to listen to her and sent her away to her grandparents because she was a disgrace to him. Her grandparents who now felt guilty for their neglect and took care of her, then a few weeks later, she wrote her exams and passed. Since she had good WAEC results before being expelled, it was easy for her to let go of the bad memories and start all over.

...

Blessing shook her head and sadly smiled. "I didn't abort any pregnancy and I wasn't even pregnant in the first place to begin with." She was just tired of having no one to believe her, and felt there was no point insisting, so she decided to go with the flow. "Justin had spread that rumour because I didn't give in to his advances."

At this point, Jessica was speechless. Swallowing, she felt bad for judging Blessing all those years and apologized. "I'm so sorry. I'm sorry I even thought of that in the first place and never attempted to hear your own side of the story." She felt really bad as she realized Blessing was never like that. "I didn't mean to... No, I did. I mean..." Internally face palming, she felt extremely embarrassed.

Blessing tried to assure her and said "It's really okay. It was bad how I left everyone to assume the worst of me too. It's all good really. I'm just glad I got to see you after all these years." She laughed, diffusing the situation.

"So how are you?" She enquired, trying to change the topic. Lighting up, Jessica smiled and replied "Wo, I'm just there o. So now that I've seen you, I'd like to invite you to my wedding..."

...

Speaking with Jessica and clearing the air about the past made Blessing realize how important it was for her to tell her husband the truth. Although not quite sure about it, she resolved in her mind to do so. She went about clearing the whole house from top to bottom because of the unwelcome nerves, all the way praying under her breath for a favourable outcome.

Elvis was concerned. He knew something was up with his wife but he could not place his fingers on it. Just when he stepped foot into their apartment, his wife blurted out, "I'm pregnant!" A shocked Elvis was glued to a spot, and seeing this, Blessing tried to explain "I know you said we should wait. I promise I want to too but it just happened. You know..."

While rambling, Blessing looked up and saw her husband was smiling. "You're not angry?" she asked amazed.

Elvis dropped the bouquet of flowers in his hands and took a step towards her "Why will I be angry? I'd be lying if I said I didn't put extra efforts during the holidays" he looked at her lovingly. "Come here" he said, pulling her close.

Blinking away tears, she melted into the warmth of his arms. Then he felt her shaking from sobs. "Why are you crying?" He asked puzzled. Her words were muffled by his shoulder and her sobs "I was so scared and didn't know how to tell you." Sniffing, she said, "Thank you for remembering the flowers too" Smiling, he brought her closer to him and tried to cool her down. When her sobs died down, he held her face gently "From now on, tell me everything that is up and we'll deal with it together. Okay?" She looked deeply into his eyes and replied "Okay."

The end.