

ÒRÌ ÒMÒ

*(Spirit of a child)*

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The office enveloped you in an understated “egg-shell white”. As you waited your appointment, you found yourself contemplating the choice of color, trying to distract your racing thoughts. Despite its spaciousness, the room seemed to close in on you, amplifying the tension mounting within. Seated across you was a poised woman, her perfectly manicured nails adorned with a shade of “vermillion”. You couldn’t help but wonder if she knew the precise name of her office’s paint. Would she simply refer to it as “off-white” and her nail polish as red”? A small, somewhat arrogant smile tugged at the corners of your

lips. In this moment, you felt an odd sense of superiority solely for knowing this was “egg- shell white”. A peculiar source of comfort amidst the turmoil, considering you were here because you needed her help, or so your Ifeanyi thought.

Your appointment had been scheduled for 9 am, a fact delivered by Ifeanyi that morning with an icy tone and a look of disdain. “Leave my house on time; she doesn’t tolerate ‘African time’”, he had admonished. The possessive “my” in his words didn’t escape your notice. The house, where just two weeks after your lavish destination wedding, he’d orchestrated the transfer of property into your name through

his lawyer, now felt more like his than yours. You looked up at Ifeanyi, with your usual pleading eyes cast in his direction, but he refused to meet your gaze, storming out of the room. You assessed the woman before you, scrutinizing her with your corneas wondering if your life and marriage were disintegrating before your eyes. You pondered what your pastor parents would say; their expressions of disbelief, shock, and disappointment if Ifeanyi decided to unveil the secrets you'd guarded for years.

Things didn't begin to fall apart the day he stumbled on your diary after leaving it carelessly; things fell apart entirely that day.

Confusion initially clouded your mind when he kept repeating, “But I deflowered you”. At first you couldn’t fathom what he meant. After all he was your first, and you’d stake your life on that claim. You’d even go as far as wishing dire afflictions upon yourself if Ifeanyi wasn’t the first man to witness your vulnerability. It was only later, when you glimpsed your diary in his hands that his words found clarity.

You remember moments when he’d teasingly snatch the diary from your grasp as you wrote, and you’d playfully chase each other through our mansion with you threatening dire consequences if he dared to read it. You recalled capturing him after

he pretended to slip, allowing you to sit on his broad chest and toy with his hairy nipples. He'd set the diary aside, knowing he'd achieved his objective- luring you into making love. Ah, your clever Igbo husband, you thought with a wistful smile. You reminisced about your passionate encounters, fully aware that Nana, your maid, secretly observed through a concealed crevice in the door.

The guest parlor, painted an elegant indigo, had borne witness to your love-making on the soft Persian rug. This room, intended for hosting guests, remained conspicuously unused for its designated purpose. You wondered if Ifeanyi had instructed Nana to

avoid entertaining guests in this room precisely for clandestine trysts.

Your relationship was still in its infancy, just three weeks old when Ifeanyi brought you to his home. He brought you there because he claimed you were “not like other girls”. You’d always wondered about the meaning behind that statement, as he consistently refused to elaborate. He playfully gave you a tour of his mansion, leading you to the room where your intimate moments would unfold. At one point, you blurted out the color of the room as “bluish-purple”, prompting Ifeanyi to burst into laughter, momentarily collapsing onto the sofa. You felt a twinge of

embarrassment and offense, but he quickly apologized, explaining that he hadn't intended to make you uncomfortable. He then revealed that the color was called "indigo". After he had driven you back to your parent's house, you found yourself immersed in Google searches, committing to memory the names of less conventional colors. Now you can easily discern that a melancholic and subdued shade of purple is referred to as "periwinkle" while a purple hue that teeters on the brink of being chocolate- like is aptly named "Mulberry," just a bus-stop away from that rich tone.

Your parents, particularly your mother, initially resisted your relationship with

Ifeanyi, objecting to his Igbo heritage. “What will people say?” she implored one day when she entered your room to discuss your relationship with an Igbo man. You feigned ignorance, though you knew she referred to the judgement of her church acquaintances. “Tí wón bàsórò é léyīn àbí wón fe sè ìbí sí é, báwò ló fé mò?,” she pressed, to which you replied feigning innocence that Ifeanyi was a devout Christian who would never speak ill of you or conspire against you.

You recalled eavesdropping on a hushed conversation between your parents in their bedroom. Your father urged your mother to accept Ifeanyi since you were of age and

hadn't introduced any other suitor before. The memory of your wedding day and night lingered, marked by your insistence on prefixing "my" to Ifeanyi's name. From that day forward he was exclusively "my Ifeanyi" and no one else. Now you wondered if he would remain "my Ifeanyi" or simply "Ifeanyi" once you departed from this mental health specialist's office.

The day he uncovered your diary and inquired if he was your first, you were left reeling, uncertain whether to tell the truth or a lie. Yes, he was your first, yet somehow he wasn't. How could you explain that you hadn't been with any other man but had been subjected to the horror of

sexual assault at the tender age of five, inflicted by your teacher, Aunty Joy?

Aunty Joy had been your class teacher, always taking you to her home during breaks to breastfeed you. She'd instruct you to latch onto her breast, whispering incantations you couldn't comprehend. You obeyed because, in return, she rewarded you with candies and ice-cream, making you the envy of your classmates. She warned you never to disclose these visits and you never did. Even at such a young age, you sensed something was amiss as she often took you to her apartment. You remember these visits, despite your parents' relocation to another

state.

In your new neighborhood, my mother arranged for Aunty Bimbo, who owned a hairdressing salon across from our house, to babysit you after school until she returned from work. Aunty Bimbo would offer you a bitter drink that made you drowsy or dizzy, then touch you inappropriately. She insisted you reciprocate these actions, convincing you that it was entirely normal. Unlike Aunty Joy, who showered you with gifts to ensure your silence, Aunty Bimbo employed threats. You also recollected how her friend, Aunty Titi, would visit the salon. The two would engage in explicit activities and you

watched, transfixed. Soon they initiated you into exploring your own sexuality and included you in their rituals. You remember feeling and still feel a deep attraction to beautiful women, occasionally indulging in self-pleasure while thinking about them.

Your mind wandered back to your university days when your roommate invited you to a private queer party on the island, marking the start of your attendance at such events. You also recalled attending a student fellowship in desperate hope of a miracle to pass a failing course, only to hear the preacher emphasizing repentance from what he deemed sinful

ways. The preacher's piercing gaze seemed to lay bare your sins, prompting tears and your decision to embrace Christ during the altar call. You believed you had found freedom and were no longer a permanent stain.

Your memory shifted to the day you first met Ifeanyi at the beach, four years after graduating. he approached you directly, confessing his affection, and you reciprocated without hesitation, sharing your phone number. You recalled your wedding night a year later, an experience you found distressing but pretended to enjoy to maintain Ifeanyi's excitement of being your first. He contacted your parents

the next day, and their pride swelled. Yet, you also remembered dreading Ifeanyi's touch, seeking ways to avoid it. At times, you cried at home, believing you had been cleansed of your desires for women only to find yourself yearning for such contact again. You remember fervently praying and fasting but they didn't stop your desires. Your diary became a repository for long-held secrets, including your vow to end your life if anyone ever read its contents. A few months before Ifeanyi discovered it, you had even searched for Aunt Joy and Aunt Bimbo on Facebook but had only found Aunt Joy. You yearned for explanations regarding why she singled

you out and carried out actions that would irrevocably alter your life. You promptly located her and discovered her place of work. On a Thursday morning, you departed from your residence to visit her workplace. She owned a school now. You couldn't help but ponder whether she continued the unsettling practice of having students latch onto her breasts. The look of surprise on her face when you confronted her about her deeds remained etched in your memory. She had not anticipated you'd recall those events, after all you were just a little girl of five.

You observed as she knelt before you, tears streaming down her face, and begged for

your forgiveness. She explained, attributing her actions to the influence of the devil. She revealed her struggle with barrenness over many years and recounted a visit to a prophet who had instructed her to have a child latch onto her breasts as a demonstration of her faith. She was to repeat this practice until she became pregnant guided by the phrase, “Ori ómò lón pómò wáyè”.

As you gazed at her, you couldn't help but wonder if the spirits of other living children could truly bring fertility to a barren woman. Your curiosity led you to ask her if she had children. She responded by showing you a picture of her firstborn.

You stared at the image contemplating whether your own essence had played a role in bringing a child into existence.

Despite your initial desire to harbor resentment towards her, you felt emotionally numb and powerless. Exiting her office, you knew that this startling secret would remain locked away, taken to your grave. While you drove, your mind wandered aimlessly, filled with questions about Aunty Bimbo's fate- whether she was alive or had passed away. You couldn't help but ponder her marital status whether her husband was aware of her dirty secrets. Thoughts also drifted to her friend contemplating if they still maintained

secret rendezvous. Furthermore, you wondered if Aunty Bimbo had daughters and, if so, whether she fiercely protected them or showed minimal concern for their well-being. All these questions swirled in your thoughts, creating a curiosity you simultaneously desired and resisted.

Now, you find yourself seated before a mental health specialists who simply asks, “Tell me how you feel.” Your thoughts drift back to the room permeated with a scent of lavender. You glance at the woman across from you questioning whether she can truly assist you. Her name remains a mystery, though your Ifeanyi mentioned something like Dr. Seyi or Seye, though you’re unsure.

You scan the room for evidence of her achievements and awards, finding none- It's just an eggshell white space.

Recollections of the promise you made in your diary, should anyone uncover your hidden truth, flood your mind. In that very moment, you resolve to uphold that promise, an obligation to yourself. You convince yourself that you don't need assistance; instead, you long for eternal rest.

Without uttering a word, you rise and glance at the wall clock- it reads 9:20 am.

You marvel at how thirty-five years of your existence on Earth could be encapsulated in just twenty minutes.

Leaving the office, you drove to the beach

where you first met Ifeanyi. It's tranquil and deserted. You revisit the spot where Ifeanyi approached you, expressing his affection, and you silently wish you could have given him the life he desired. Memories of intimate moments in the indigo room surface, along with his whispered declaration of planting triplets in your womb- two boys and a girl. A smile forms on your face, but it's tinged with sadness because you never told him about the morning pills you took, not wanting to burden your innocent children with your past and not wanting them to be victims too.

As you step closer to the water's edge, the

warm sand beneath your feet, you walk until the water laps at your waist, you continue until it envelops you entirely, and you begin to ease into the peaceful slumber you've always yearned for. It doesn't take long for sleep to claim you.