

LETTER TO TOKUNBO

Dear Tokunbo,

'Kù ijò mètà.' I hope this letter meets you well. You have always been a good girl, an 'ómóluàbí,' and I know you will continue to make us proud.

'ómólàbàkẹ, ómó bàbà rẹ, ómó ólórì iré. Kàrélàyé!'

We are all doing fine here. My first daughter, Yemisi, just gave birth to a set of twins, 'ìbẹ̀jì lantì, lantì,' both boys.

You need to see them. 'Àdùpẹ̀ nì ọ̀dò Ọ̀lòrún ọ̀jàrẹ̀.' We give God thanks for everything.

When we were young, I used to join in singing that popular song:

'Èpo mbé, ẹwà mbé o,

Èpo mbé, ẹwà mbé o.

Èpo mbé, ẹwà mbé o,

Èpo mbé, ẹwà mbé o.

'Àyà mí ọ̀jà,

Àyà mí ọ̀jà látí bí íbẹ̀jì,

Èpo mbé, ẹwà mbé o.'

I have beans and I have palm oil. So I cannot be scared of having twins. Oh yes.

How was I to know Èlèdúmàrè has purposed to send me my twins through my daughter?
May His name be praised.

Her husband came to visit me with a big goat days after she delivered them. You know, this is the second time he will be doing that since he married Yemisi; he did the same upon discovering she was a virgin after their wedding last year.

Your mother is doing very well. Now and again, though, she complains of rheumatism. What can we do? We are no longer as young as we used to be so it is to be expected.

Your siblings are all doing fine too.

Tokunbo, your life is a miracle; I don't have to remind you of that. Who would have believed you will ever school in America? You who lost her father quite early in life. That scholarship you won due to your exceptional performance at your Senior School Certificate Examination, S.S.C.E, is Godsent. You must never forget that.

My daughter, our elders say a toad does not run in the daytime for nothing; there must be something after its life. It is for a reason I am writing you this letter.

'Òmọ mì,' I saw you on Facebook recently and I am happy by the way you have grown. When your father, may his gentle soul continue to rest in peace, left us, you were barely ten years old and very small.

From what I saw in the picture, 'Kì àṣà mà dúpẹ.' We must continue to give God thanks. You that used to be a 'lépà'— a skinny little girl, have added weight in the right places, and you now look very 'takeaway.' You must, however, ensure you do not become an 'òrọ̀bọ̀' with flesh dangling all over your body especially as you are still single.

When you eventually get married and start bearing children, you can then afford to let yourself go and become one. 'Kàrélàyé!'

Tokunbo, you must resist every attempt by those Americans to turn you into one of them, 'tòrì Ólòrún.' I am begging you in the name of Ògún, the god of iron, that we serve. You that used to plait your hair like the African Queen that you are, now wear bone straight hair. 'Kìlódé? Are you now ashamed of your African heritage? How many of those Americans do you see plaiting their hair as we do here? 'Rònú ò.' Meditate on this.

I also saw the way you were dressed. Leggings 'lówó,' leggings. You had on leggings, and your breasts were very visible, jutting out at dangerous angles through the transparent top you were wearing. A well-brought-up girl from Ibadan o.

From the way you looked, I know you must be eating shawarma, hotdogs, pizza, and other 'òrìshìrìshì' in that America. You must also be drinking soda as well. Oh, yes. I decoded all that from just my first glimpse of your picture.

I have no problem with that o, but, please, make deliberate efforts to eat our local delicacies like mọ̀ìn-mọ̀ìn, àmálà served with gbégìrì, èwèdú, and ẹ̀rán ìgbé, etc. while you are there. It is such seemingly little things that will not make you forget your home and spur you to return as soon as you are through with your studies.

Also, remember not to call these delicacies foreign names; this point is very important.

Shawarma is shawarma everywhere, hotdogs are hotdogs everywhere. So are pizzas, macaroni, cheese, etc. So, àkàrà must remain àkàrà and not be renamed bean cakes, gàrri cannot become cassava flour, élúbò cannot become yam flour, and ìyán must remain ìyán and not pounded yam.

Think about this: how come we the Yoruba, do not translate hotdogs to 'àwòn àjà gbìgbóná?' That is the offense you commit when you call *iyán* pounded yam. After all, we go to Chinese restaurants here in Ibadan and ask for *suchi* without giving it a local name, though, our tongue can only allow us to pronounce it *súsi*. A word is enough for the wise. 'Pélé pélé di ómóluàbí ó.' We must resist every attempt to return to the colonial era using subtle methods.

In the little English language I studied, I know I should put *èwèdú*, *àmálà*, *mòìn-mòìn*, etc. in italics or within quotation marks but I will not. After all, I did not put *shawarma*, *hotdogs*, *suchi*, etc. in italics or within quotation marks. Why should I be biased against myself 'tóri Ólòrún?'

The latest onslaught of the West against us is to claim bush meat, I mean *érán ìgbé*, is responsible for the current outbreak of monkeypox, even in London. Can you imagine that? Meat our forefathers and we today devour almost daily with fresh palm wine— *ògúrò*. These people will not kill someone 'ójàré. Kìwòn kùìgbé!'

I can also predict from that Facebook picture that suitors will soon be flocking around. 'Ódì dándán'.

'Ómó mì,' you must give an Ibadan man the right of first refusal before any other o. If we don't find a suitable man, which I doubt very much, then we can spread our dragnet to other Nigerian tribes. If this does not still produce Mr. Right, then we can try other African tribes. The American man must be the last, I mean, the very last option. Do you hear me? It is like you want your children to be saying "I wanna, I wanna," all over the place, I mean, 'kàákìrì ìlú,' through the nose for that matter. How can anyone be speaking through the nose for goodness sake? 'Àbùkù ómà nì kánwá ó.'

You will not be able to teach them to 'dòbàlẹ́,' I mean to prostrate on the ground to greet elders, 'àwọn àgbà ilú.' Instead, they will just throw up their right or even left hand 'gán pàápàá' and say "hi!"

Imagine that. 'Èmì' hi? Me, hi? 'Èmì ọmọ ìyàláró', hi? Hi 'kó, hàyà nì.'

Not only that. You may end up marrying a man named Mr. Stone. Yes, that is the kind of name Americans give their children. They will name 'ódìndì ọkúrìn', Stone.

Now, suppose you give birth to a son, and your husband decides to name him Wood, he now becomes Mr. Wood Stone instantly. I mean 'lẹ́sẹ́kẹ́sẹ́.' Are you seeing my point now?

Instead of dancing to Àpàlà, Fújì or Jújú music as our people do here, the young lad will, most likely, be dancing breakdance— that dance where they shake their bodies like people suffering from epilepsy. Can you imagine a son with the blood of the Molete, Ibadan people flowing in his veins dancing such? 'Éwó! ki àmàgbó'.

He may even take to Rap music and be shouting "Yo! Yo, men! Yo! Hit'em!" all over.

Americans should leave me alone 'ójàré.'

Tokunbo, 'Kì ọjù sì ìwé ré ó'. You must face your studies squarely like you have always done and make us proud again. 'Sébì' Accounting is what you are studying? Face it squarely and return home so you can help banks, multinational corporations, or even the government 'pàápàá' to be counting their money. 'Wó, wàjàyépé!' You will enjoy life and live long too.

Imagine my little Tokunbo of yesterday helping to count money running into billions and even trillions of naira. This is surely the way to greatness. 'Àdàrà fún ẹ.' It is well with you.

It is the same course Lamidi studied. Lamidi, the son of the butcher, the 'èléràn' that has his abattoir in Dugbe Market. Come and see the way he cruises around town in different cars. Today, Lexus Jeep, tomorrow, Mercedes Benz Jeep, and so on.

Seeing him now, you will not believe he is the son of a butcher except for the tribal marks of the Ibadan people that he has on both cheeks which give him away at short notice. I hear he is the one counting their money in a multinational oil company with an office here in Ibadan. For now, he is the most eligible bachelor in town; young ladies now fight over him openly. Imagine Lamidi who went to school through community assistance o. He is now behaving like an 'àjé butter' who was born with a silver spoon instead of the 'àjé pàkó' that he is.

Just a few days ago, Sikira, the daughter of Alhaji Waidi, the industrialist, and Biliki, the daughter of the local government chairman, met at his house and a big fight ensued that left both of them naked in public. It took the concerted efforts of neighbours to separate them. I learned the king of Dugbe, Baale Idowu, handled the settlement. The worst part is he is not even interested in marrying any of the girls. I have it on good authority, he is more interested in Folake, the daughter of 'Ìyà Ólògì' who hawks pap around. Such is the irony of life.

I never knew people who count money for others can be that rich 'ójàré.' Come to think of it, why can't they count their money themselves? The rich can be very funny sometimes. Let me mind my business 'jówó.'

Graduate and return home. If you don't emerge the most eligible spinster in the whole of Ibadan, 'pémì lómó àlé.'

Just call me a bastard. You don't even have to work for too long when you return. You can enter politics after just a few years.

Come and see the way common councilors are building houses and buying cars up and down. Can you imagine that? Common school certificate holders like myself. Some even dropped out of school. They live in houses and drive cars even professors cannot afford in two lifetimes. I mean full-fledged professors.

Just graduate, work a few years and join them. 'Kàrélàyé!'

Don't forget your mother and us, your relations o. One dollar is now over seven hundred naira. So that sum you spend on snacks and soda running into hundreds of dollars monthly, if well saved, can build you a house here. Think about that when next you feel like taking hotdogs with soda and adding weight anyhow.

I learned you undergraduates from abroad, in addition to the large sums they receive as a part of your scholarship, also undertake part-time jobs in which they are paid 'under the table'. Take as many of these jobs as possible without jeopardizing your education; things are tough and rough here o.

Ìlú lé kókókó.'

Jobs are scarce and the available ones pay amounts that are badly depleted by galloping inflation. It is nothing to write home about.

I have been waiting for my pension since last year I retired after thirty-five years in service. Can you beat that?

I am expected to 'grease the palm' of someone or know somebody at the top before my file can be given the necessary attention. Yes, that is how bad things have become here, so, any little you can save and send home will be highly appreciated. 'Wà sòrìré.' It shall be well with you.

I should be the one sending you money but not now you are abroad 'nìlú óyìnbó.' America for that matter. Things are not the way they should be. I used to think all uncles were rich until I became one. 'Kó easy ó'. It's not easy at all.

My daughter, hope you are still committed to the service of the gods of our ancestors. There is no excuse for you to leave their service o. If you cannot serve Ẓàngò, then settle for Óbàtálà or Yémójà — the goddess of the seas. These are the gods our forefathers served long before the coming of the Whiteman and the colonial masters to Africa. I must not hear you have joined a foreign faith as they are simply weapons of colonization. 'Émì nì mò sọ bẹ.' That is my position.

Consider how the colonial masters left us with their books and carried away our forefathers as slaves as well as our resources. 'Rónú. Ómọ̀ mì. Rónú.' Ponder over these things.

It has not changed today. The only difference is that it is our people who now set up big organizations and siphon the money of congregants to finance their ostentatious lifestyles. No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Serving the gods of our ancestors gave us a better and more fulfilling life than the one their books are giving us now. Our fathers married many wives and fended for all of them along with the many children they produced yearly.

Today, taking care of one wife and children less than the number of fingers on my right hand is proving to be a Herculean task.

Our politicians are sworn into office with their books yet, they go ahead to steal monumental sums without any repercussion. Tell me. How many of them can steal a dime if they are sworn into office in the name of Ógún, or Óbàtálà not to mention Ẓàngò, the god of thunder,

or Yémójà, the goddess of the seas, as well as Sópónà. The erring individual will either be struck by Sàngò's lightning or by smallpox from Sópónà 'lèsékésé.' Ponder on this.

Hope I have not written for too long, 'Ómó mì.' You came with a good head to this world.

You did not come to suffer at all. 'Òṣòrìré wàsàyé

Òrìbù kò súnmó ẹ ràrà.'

I pray your good fortune, 'òrìré,' continues to take you to greater heights. 'Ògún à gbè ọ. Pélé pélé dì ọmọluàbì ọ.'

My good fortune in taking a second wife when I was younger, is what I am enjoying now. If not, after the death of my first wife, Mama Ogunremi, I would have been alone or searching for a new wife by now. Searching at almost eighty years old.

I wonder why Americans would condemn polygamy and go ahead to endorse gay and lesbian relationships, by the way. Let us leave the matter for Matthias 'ojare.'

Till I hear from you again, peace, 'Iré!'

Yours sincerely,

Uncle Kasali Babatunde a.k.a Ómó ẹkùn, Ómó Ìyàláró, Dodo Mayana, Ókúrìn Mètà