

MY PAST RELATIONSHIP

One of the first things I remember from growing up besides having a lot of books always was being reprimanded by my Mother for coming back to her in tears from school for the reason that a friend of mine had stopped being friends with me.

If there's one thing I know with certainty, whatever is said or done to a child almost always sticks with them even till adulthood and forms what is called 'childhood trauma' by psychologists.

1.

It's 2023 and my friends are staging an intervention for me because it's been two (2) months since I broke up with my partner and I have yet to talk to them about it other than to mention it passively, which they thought was weird because they could not seem to understand how I could have broken up with someone I claimed to love a lot, and still had not confronted or cried to them about it as I kept moving like everything was the same, except to adamantly avoid mentioning her in any sentence.

I should have known it was going to be a dramatic weekend when they called that morning and this was precisely the conversation we had.

Ola- "Zia, we are coming over today to hang out, prepare for us" she said casually, as though I had nothing better to do with my time but to wait for them and just prepare my home for unsolicited visitors.

I wasn't shocked with the way she said it though. I have known Ola for five years and have gotten used to how she spoke so carelessly like she expected you to be at her beck and call, but

this day was the first Saturday in a while I was going to have free as the last Saturdays had been dramatically busy, and before I could reply to object to the intrusion, my other friend Ijay spoke up;

“Oh, yeah we didn’t tell you too late right? Not like you have any plans anyway, so this is the perfect time to spend together.” She took a deep breath, and I heard clatters from her end and suspected she was getting her baby ready for the day. A baby I cannot believe she had. “We have not had an opportunity to do that in a while and I miss you.”

Ijeoma and I have always had a deep relationship that I don’t think Ola gets most of the time, and granted our relationship was centered on her looking after me, considering how uncaring I can be and without her constantly nudging me, our friendship would have phased away long ago. Which is why it isn’t shocking that she is a mother now and though I can never understand it, I did understand needing a break from it all.

The excuse I had just got swallowed down as I gave up and resigned myself to the fate that somehow I had to entertain my friends.

I sighed before answering, and was sure they picked up on my resistance “Fine, but y’all will have to get the snacks cos I most certainly will not be leaving this house today, and will just send the money.” I reconsidered what I was about to say but still said it. “By the way, why didn’t y’all tell me long before now, You know how much I hate things being sprung on me”.

They took their time before Ola answered with the voice I detested hearing from her, like she was trying convince a wild animal not to attack her;

“Zia, it is not like that, We just have missed each other and you mentioned that you were free this weekend and we thought why not? And we also kind of want to check up on you.” Of course, I had a feeling they were going to want to talk about this. I mean I kept giving them excuses as to why we should not meet up and they were patient, and I was shocked they had not barged into my place as they would normally do during our uni days whenever I isolated myself more than necessary.

I knew I was frustrating them, but my meter for hosting was really low and though I didn't exactly have to host them, the truth was that I did miss being near my friends and that was the reason I told them I was free this weekend and as much as I claimed I didn't want to see them, I wanted to see them.

I sighed heavily and tried to fix a smile into my voice, telling them they could come over but not to forget to get things while coming.

2.

“I remember when I went to Zia's office one evening to drop off a document she asked me to get from her house and I had to answer a bunch of questions before they could let me in, and it wasn't until she called me personally to find out what was keeping me, was I given access, it was hectic but made me realize what an important job Zia did for this country that I forgave them for the stress”

Ijay was saying while chucking back champagne like she had not had it in a while and if she didn't have some would immediately combust.

I remembered the story she was telling. It was one of those days that I despised what I did, well not really since the security was to protect us but the way she narrated it when she eventually

got to my office irked me because an irritated Ijeoma was not one to trifle with.

“And I’m sure Zia said nothing to them right?” Ola asked why turning the food in the kitchen. She was the cook in the circle. I hated any form of cooking and couldn’t neither would I ever try to do so, gathering like this was usually an opportunity to eat food prepared by Ola in real time. One of the best moments.

Ola’s question I’m sure was not meant to hurt, but sometimes the way she reacted to the things made me feel there was always tension in her words.

She reiterated how she hated how I reacted to things and how I could not often properly emote.

That used to hurt me, because I thought I put in the effort to improved but apparently not.

Her question right now made silence reign in the room and I was sure that it took Ijay back to that day, while simultaneously reminding me about my breakup that I had yet to properly talk about or mourn in the way they expected me to and the look they shared made me feel cold, though brief was loaded with tension and so turning away from them I picked up my wine, took a sip and tried to search my brain for a change of subject and just as I found one, Ola seemed to want to double down.

“Have you heard from her since the breakup?”

I tried to pretend like the question was not being thrown at me but the silence in the room was way too loud that i was fidgeting and though I asked myself why I was reacting that way to a mere question, it didn’t stop the discomfort I felt from being asked the question but I also knew I couldn’t avoid it for so long and letting them into my house meant that I had agreed to finally talk about it.

“No, I thought I mentioned that she went travelling after the breakup?” I took a sip of my wine before continuing, “You do know she was equally hurt from the relationship ending right? We were together for so long.”

I looked to Ijay for help to make Olanna stop this questions but she pointedly tried to ignore my gaze.

“And you weren’t?” Ola returned.

“Of course, I was hurt as well.”

“How were we supposed to know when you do not share your feelings or thoughts with us?”

I knew she was going to bring this up, but somehow I prayed she was going to wait until she had fed us and everyone was in a food coma but apparently not.

“You know it is not like that” I tried to explain. “I barely even think about it and do not want to think about it so much.”

“But why?” This time Ijeoma asked. “I know you loved her very much, I mean besides the way you never ceased talking about her, we have seen both of you together and the way you seemed to glow around each other was so apparent.”

“Ijay, stop this now, of all people, you should know by now how I react to certain things, you make it sound like you are just knowing me and you have known me longer than Ola.”

“Yes but still...” she gave up mid-sentence and the thick silence returned, so we just listened to the clangs from the kitchen while watching the tv silently.

It had not even been two hours and I was already done with the day.

3.

I could hear whispers from the kitchen from my vantage point on the sofa. Ijeoma had gotten up at some point to join Ola

while she was plating the food and though I knew they were talking about me, I was not particularly curious about what they were saying as I dreaded it, and it was becoming increasingly clear that there was a different agenda behind their coming to visit me besides checking up on me.

We finished the delicious meal and were just chilling having light conversations when Ijay called for my attention.

“Yes?”

“So, you know how you like to learn new things right?”

Okay, this was weird. “Um... yes?”

“Right, so there is this word that we wanted you to check out.”

“Okay? For what?”

“I wanted you to check it out first, it might explain some things and we thought we should share. The word is Alexithymia”

The word felt familiar but at the same time unfamiliar so I picked up my phone to check what they meant and didn’t miss the look they gave each other.

I found it relatively fast and at first glance, I knew why they had exchanged the look above my head and suspected that this was the main reason for their visit.

The definition given by Wikipedia was straightforward, “*also called emotional blindness, is a neuropsychological phenomenon characterized by significant challenges in recognizing, expressing, and describing one's own emotions*”

The minute I was done reading this, I chuckled, and then burst out in laughter and amidst that, asked them, “This is it?” “As in, this was why y'all decided to visit today?”

They shared another look between themselves as though deciding who would speak first but I beat them to it.

“So both of you think that I have alexithymia? That’s like on the autism spectrum?”

“No, no!” They hurriedly replied before Ola continued, “we don’t think you are on the spectrum, but we noticed some times that you don’t react well to things particularly, emotions.” I remained quiet and just listened to her while she continued to list things like, my past relationship and how I was yet to cry once even though they knew how much I had loved her, my lack of empathy in situations that evoke emotions, and that the relationship I had just come out of was my first formal relationship, which they doubted would ever happen.

I watched her also occasionally turn towards Ijay who concurred with a nod of her head while she continued to snack on the cake in front of her, with the juice she swapped for the wine she was having before.

There was nothing I could say to their observations if I were being honest. When most days I wake up wondering what was wrong that I had not properly felt sad over the end of my 6-year relationship.

4.

It was 11:30 pm when they decided to leave. Ijay was already being called back home as her child had refused to quieten since waking up from her nap. Kids, why I know I wouldn’t be having them in the future.

After they left, I got up, walked to my bathroom did my nighttime routine and got ready for bed.

After hours of tossing and turning, I gave up and decided to read up on my ‘unprofessional diagnosis’ and this led me to

thinking that maybe I did have an emotional block that I had ignored for a long time.

After giving it some thought, I picked up my phone and decided to call my therapist, it was probably too late to call, but I knew she was the only one I could call as she had been helpful when I was grieving the death of my parents two years ago.

She picked up on the fifth ring...

"Hello, Tina." I said, "how are you doing? Sorry to call so late."

"Oh hi, Zia" she replied yawning and I knew I had woken her from sleep and felt a twinge of guilt.

"I'm good. Why are you calling so late?"

"Oh! I'm sorry. I just really needed your help with a thing and I couldn't sleep without hearing from you."

"Okay, what is it?"

"Have you ever treated a person with Alexithymia or from our time together would you diagnose me with it?" I could hear her sit up from the phone and knew she was trying to get a better understanding before answering me.

"Um... Zia, we've discussed this before particularly in regards to how your home was growing up."

I kept silent but let my mind get cast back to one of our meetings where we talked about my family and how having busy emotionally unavailable parents, leading to me bottling up emotions was perfectly understandable.

She was still speaking but I only clicked back to what she was saying when she was getting to the tail end of her speech.

"... I wouldn't go as far as to say that you are alexithymic Zia. Yes, you might react differently or slower

than most people would emotionally but you aren't alexithymic. And wherever did you hear this word?"

I was close to telling her the truth, but gave up,

"I just came across the word and was disturbed and so thought to ask you." "Thank you for picking up my call."

"Zia." I could hear the motherly undertone in her voice. "There's nothing wrong with you in the same way that there is nothing wrong with people who have bouts of depression. I have told you this before, every human being has what is weighing them down emotionally but we all learn how to navigate such emotions to stop it from consuming us."

I heaved a sigh but remained silent.

"I don't know where you saw whatever it is that put you in this mood but I want you to take a moment and think about how far you've come okay? The last time we spoke you were reminiscing on the good from your past relationship and said that it was the best time of your life and you don't want to dwell on the sad part." I remembered saying that. "So, Zia whenever you remember that, it should tell you that you are working on who you are and that however you define emotions does not make you less than the next person."

"Thank you very much Tina, I really appreciate you taking the call at this time."

"Oh don't worry about it, I was happy to. Good night"

"Goodnight."

The call ended and I thought about calling Ijeoma but decided against it as it was past midnight. I wanted to understand where and how they came up with the word but I could feel the sleep creeping in and lay down on my bed.

My last thought before I lost consciousness was ‘I’ll have to call them in the morning...’