

It was on the tenth birthday of Ashanti when she slumped as they were about to cut the cake that they discovered that she was SS.

Adjei and Solape met in Accra. Solape had gone for academic research in Burkina Faso and was trying to make her way back to Nigeria when her car developed a fault in Ghana and she had to spend the night.

She was a Ph.D. student of French Language at the University of Lagos and had gone to Burkina Faso to make research for her thesis. She got a cheap motel in the capital city of Ghana, Accra, and was booking a room for herself when she heard a baritone voice behind her, one she later confessed to being the best male voice she had ever heard. "Mademoiselle? Pius-je vous aider avec votre charge?"

"Yes, please", Solape said he could help her with her bags. She was impressed with his accent and wondered how he could speak French so fluently. "There you go, madame", the young Ghanaian man said to her and stalled, hoping he would get a tip.

"Merci. What is your name?", she asked in English, "I'm Adjei Benson", the young man replied respectfully. Solape studied him for a while, a beautiful face, taut chest, smooth skin, dark and curly hair, deep voice. She stopped herself from drooling and collected his bags from him after tipping him generously, the young man thanked her effusively and walked away while Solape stared after him. She eventually inserted her keys in the lock and eased herself in.

Somehow, Solape was able to get his number the next time Adjei came to deliver a new set of bedspreads to her. "For further room services", she had said when Adjei raised a brow. He knew that she knew he wasn't convinced, but he gave her his number anyway, after all, she looked good.

Solape called him days later after she had checked out of the motel and had gotten to Nigeria. "It's me, I collected your number for 'further room services' the other day", she introduced herself, and they both laughed. "Where did you learn to speak such French so fluently?"

He was thirty-two, an only child who grew up with his parents in Ghana, he went to his tertiary institution in Cameroon and studied Home Science and Management, where he learned to speak French, he came back to Ghana to look for a job and after searching for two years, he got a job with the motel where he met her that night. He told her about himself.

"You're quite interesting", Solape said, then she told him about herself. She was twenty-nine, the first child of three who grew up in Lagos and lived most of her life there. She went on to tell him what she was doing in Accra and how she found herself in the motel that night.

"I like you, I do", Solape told Adjei. "I like you too!". And that was the beginning of their relationship.

Adjei would come over to Nigeria to see Sola and Solape would go over to Ghana to visit him. This, they did and everything was going well with their relationship. "Why don't you move down to Nigeria?", there are better prospects for your course of study here than over there, Solape asked one day. Adjei had come over to spend the weekend like he always did. They were snacking over a plate of chin-chin and

groundnut and Adjei's head was on Solape's laps. "I've considered that several times, it is just the fear of starting over that is stopping me", Adjei told her.

"You have nothing to worry about, I'm here and I promise to stay by you till the end. Babe, I'm not afraid to start from scratch, and with you, I'm ready to build from the beginning", and those were the words Adjei needed to hear to make the big move.

Six months later, Adjei moved to Nigeria and started searching for a job, their relationship waxing stronger all the while, by this time, Solape was almost done with her Ph.D. and everything was going smoothly.

It was on the day Solape was going to get her doctorate that Adjei popped the question. "Will you marry me?"

The duo got married four months later, Adjei had gotten a job with a big but still growing hotel on the Island by this time. It was as if they knew what the universe had outlined for them as everything seemed to align. The universe was in their favor and the sun shone brightly upon them.

Solape and Adjei welcomed a baby girl twelve months after their wedding, it was a beautiful baby and Adjei cried. It was so pretty. They named her Ashanti.

Ashanti was a big baby, and pretty too. She was smart and quite outspoken for her age. Every time Solape looked at her, her heart swelled. She had very dark and curly hair like her father's and a long smooth nose like her mother. Her skin was the color of caramel and her smile could brighten the world if the sun refused to shine. She was pretty.

"Mommy, I want a birthday party, I'll be 10 soon", her mother laughed. "Talk to daddy, baby". Adjei looked up from his computer at this point and Ashanti threw herself on him in a mock hug. "You'll have a party, Angel". "Yipee! Thank you, daddy, thank you mommy. Love you!", she kissed her parents goodnight and bounced back to her room.

May 10 was the day Ashanti would celebrate her tenth birthday but she slumped as she was about to cut the cake. She was rushed to the hospital by a panicky Solape and a worried Adjei. Ashanti was admitted into the ICU and treatment commenced immediately.

The doctor called the parents into the consulting room some forty-five minutes later. "Your daughter suffered from a partial stroke, please calm down, she is stable now. After the series of tests carried out on her, we found out that she is a sickle cell patient and...".

"You say what?", Solape was the first person to find her voice. "That can't be possible doctor, we know our genotypes, at least, I know mine...", Adjei was saying when Solape cut him short, "Why didn't you tell me your genotype, Adjei?"

"You didn't ask either", Adjei countered.

"I didn't bother because I didn't think there was a need to. I'm AA".

“Well, if you’re AA, how did we give birth to a child that is SS?”, Solape was crying by this time. Angry tears.

“I don’t know, babe, I should be asking you”

“You can’t be asking me. I know my gen...”

The doctor intervened at this point and asked that they both get tested again to confirm their genotypes. The two parents didn’t say a word to each other as they left the doctor’s office for the laboratory where the test is going to be carried out.

They both got their blood samples taken and were told to come back for their results the next day.

Adjei tried making small talks in the car on their way back but Solape would not say a word. She was angry and felt foolish for not ever asking for Adjei’s genotype all through their years of courting and even after marriage. “How could she have missed such an important part of their lives?”, “How could she have been so gullible enough to have assumed Adjei was AA, even if he were like he claimed?”, “How could she...?”, those were the thoughts that filled her mind as they drove home in silence and pent-up annoyance.

She also wondered why Ashanti never got sick till that day, and why she didn’t look sickly nor have yellow eyes like sickle cell patients do.

Later that night, it was Adjei’s turn to ruminate. He was sure he was AA. He rarely got sick and one of the very few times when he did, he was taken to a hospital and a genotype test was carried out on him, the result said AA and that was it. He had never gone back for any other genotype test after that. That was years ago and he was 19 or 20 years old then. How could his child then be SS, he thought.

He didn’t remember asking Solape for her genotype either. In his head, he felt there was no need to ask, after all, he was AA and he could marry anybody. Now he blamed himself for being stupid and ignorant and for loving blindly.

Those were his train of thoughts till he fell asleep.

Morning came and it was time to go get their test results, it was also the day Ashanti was going to be discharged from the hospital. The two lovers still didn’t speak to each other as they drove in silence to the hospital.

The doctor ushered them in and gave each one their result. Solape was the first to speak, “I know I’m AS, what I don’t know is how my child got to be a sickler...”

“Our child”, Adjei interrupted. His voice was cold and even he was taken aback by the way he sounded.

“Warrior. We called them warriors, not sicklers”, it was the doctor this time around. “Sickle cell patients are called warriors because the term ‘sickler’ is said to be derogatory”.

Adjei was the next to speak, “Is this result for me, Doctor? I’m AA, why am I seeing AS here?”

“That is why I asked for a rerun of the genotype test on both of you. You see, there might have been a mistake where you did the previous test years ago, hence, the mix-up. You’re AS and your wife is AS, that is why Ashante, did I call her name well...?”

“That is why Ashanti is SS. Notwithstanding, if you’re not satisfied with the result, you may want to confirm in another lab different from here”

“Ashante will be discharged today. Sickle cell disease is not the end of the world there are a lot of people that live with sickle cell disease, yet making waves in their line of profession. Avoid stereotypes and superstitions that say sickle cell patients die at the age of 18, or that sickle cell patients are ogbanje. No, those are just baseless facts conjured out of pure ignorance by ignoramuses”

“You can manage a warrior by making sure they take their routine drugs like folic acid and multivitamins, eat healthy foods, foods rich in iron, vitamins, proteins, fiber, etc. Also, make sure that they take enough water, this is very important, ensure that they take enough fluids. Do not give them drugs that are not recommended by the doctor, make sure that...”

“You caused this!”, Solape yelled

“But it is not my fault, I didn’t know”, Adjei cried

“You should have checked again

“You should have asked”, and the blame game continued.

“But how come Ashanti never got sick before now? And she looks so big and healthy, her eyes are not yellow, neither are her legs thin. So why? Why? Why? Why?”, Solape wailed.

“As I said, those are just stereotypes that the society has created for warriors. Not all warriors look sickly, not all warriors are thin, not all of them have yellow eyes and thin legs. Another important thing you should know is that the severity and the frequency of crises differ. They are never the same for two warriors.”

“You will see warriors that once they lift a chair, they run a crisis, likewise, there are warriors that carry heavy things and do arduous tasks, yet, do not get sick. Every phase and intensity of a crisis is peculiar to each warrior.”, the doctor explained.

“Ashante will...”

“Her name is Ashanti. Ashanti”, Adjei interrupted

“My bad, Ashanti will be discharged now. Please bring her to the hospital regularly for checkups and ensure you follow all the tips I’ve given earlier. I wish you all the best”, the doctor smiled.

Ashanti was discharged minutes later, she looked tired, unlike her usual bubbly self. Solape hugged her so tight and wept, Adjei joined in the hug and the small family remained like that for minutes.

The once beautiful and lively family of Adjei Benson had lines of worries on their foreheads as they drove home in silence, this time, there was no anger. All the previous anger had dissipated and was replaced with uncertainty, worry, and resignation.

The stars that once aligned looked disjointed and a cloud of rain pulled up above their heads.