

"What Love Is, and Is Not"

Loss and resilience

Ummi

In the heart of Kaduna, where the vibrant markets and bustling streets painted the canvas of daily life, my world was defined not by the city's lively exterior, but by the echoes of pain and the unwavering strength residing within me. Nestled in the embrace of Northern Nigeria, where the rich tapestry of our culture and traditions unfolded, I found myself on a journey marked by trials and resilience.

As the warm African sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows over the city, I sat on my modest porch, my thoughts drifting to my children who had left this world too soon. I couldn't help but wonder why fate had chosen me for such a cruel trial. I had just lost my daughter, Aisha, to sickle cell anemia, a disease that had already claimed four of my children.

"How did I, of all people, end up here?" I whispered to myself. My journey had been one filled with heartache and hardship. I had lost five children in total, each loss cutting deeper than the last. It is a pain that no mother should ever have to endure.

My path to motherhood, as they say in Hausa, "Kai tsaye ne ke aikata, had been fraught with challenges right from the very beginning.

Love was not a choice I made; it felt as if it had been plucked away from me like a ripe fruit. My heart remained a stranger to the concept of love, and my marriage to Danladi had no roots in this elusive emotion. Despite societal pressures bearing down on me, I held steadfast to my convictions. It wasn't until I reached the age of 29 that I found myself walking down the aisle with Danladi. This union wasn't fueled by love or desperation; it was a bond forged in the fires of curiosity, an exploration of life's mysteries. I bore the weight of expectations, not only from my family but from the ideals I had set for myself. Adding complexity to the equation, Danladi's financial status was far from opulent, casting my choice in an even more unconventional light. In hindsight, this decision would come back to haunt me, shaping the course of my life in unexpected ways.

The evening breeze often carried with it the distant sounds of laughter from neighboring homes, a stark contrast to the pervasive sorrow that had engulfed my life. I found solace in the stars above, their silent presence offering no answers to the questions that tormented my soul.

As I closed my eyes during those quiet moments, tears trickled down my cheeks, mingling with the memories of the children I had lost. I couldn't rewrite the past, but I was resolute in my determination to shield my surviving children from the cruelties of life. My three precious gems, untouched by the disease that had cruelly claimed their siblings, were my beacon of hope.

They were the reason I found the strength to endure the unimaginable weight of my grief. In that solitary moment, as I sat on my porch, the burden of my sorrow pressed down upon me, threatening to crush my spirit. Yet, I refused to be defeated. I had

resolved to honor the memory of the children I had lost by ensuring that my living ones would be blessed with a future brimming with love and boundless opportunities.

Oil and Water

Fareedah

From the shadows, I observed my mother, Ummi, bathed in the warm embrace of the golden sun. Her eyes held a complex mixture of sorrow and strength. Ummi, a name that meant "Mother" in our beloved Hausa language, embodied that title with unparalleled grace and resilience.

Silent horror gripped me as my father's rage erupted once more. The all-too-familiar sound of my mother's head colliding with the wall echoed through our modest, dimly lit living room. This distressing scene wasn't a novel occurrence in my life, but it marked the moment when I realized I could no longer endure it.

Ummi, my mother, had taken us on an endless journey, navigating from one mountain of prayers to another. Her unwavering faith in the supreme power of God had sustained us through countless trials. In her eyes, every challenge was a test of our faith, a test we were meant to endure.

However, for me, this was the last straw. Aisha, the literal jewel of our family, had just succumbed to the cruel clutches of sickle cell anemia. I had witnessed her pain and suffering, and it had broken my heart. Aisha was more than just a sister; she was my confidante and the one who had always brought laughter into our home. Her absence left a void that nothing could fill.

As I gazed at my mother, a woman who had endured so much, I couldn't help but feel a surge of anger, frustration. It wasn't that Baba, my father, was a demon. He wasn't a saint either. They were simply not meant for each other, like oil and water stubbornly refusing to mix.

In the midst of our chaotic household, I had to make a difficult decision. It was time to confront Ummi and convince her that we could no longer endure this cycle of violence and suffering. Aisha's death had shown us the fragility of life, and I couldn't bear the thought of losing Ummi or witnessing any more violence.

With trembling hands and a heart heavy with grief and determination, I knew I had to speak up. Our family was on the brink of collapse, and I refused to let it crumble completely. As the tears welled up in my eyes, I realized that love was not supposed to be this painful. Love should be a source of strength, not anguish.

Ummi

Life Choices

Marrying Danladi transcended the realms of romance; it was a distant dream, a luxury beyond reach in that turbulent chapter of life. Love often took a backseat amid life's relentless challenges. What consumed me was an intense yearning for responsibility, the promise of children, a profound longing deeply rooted within my soul.

Danladi, on the surface, exuded responsibility. In youthful innocence, I embraced his words as unwavering truth. He claimed to be AA, and I, in my desperate yearning, clung to his words as my lifeline. In hindsight, I acknowledge the folly of such absolute trust in a single letter. Hope, at times, veils our judgment in mystique. My heart longed for the family I had always envisioned, for the enchanting melody of little feet and the uproar of children's laughter. It was a dream that uplifted me in the darkest hours, a glimmer of hope in a world shrouded in darkness. In my unwavering pursuit of family and the allure of a brighter future, I made a choice that would not just influence but carve the path of my existence.

As time unfurled, my union with Danladi laid bare its foundation, constructed upon the ethereal scaffold of hope. I embraced this hope with unwavering fervor, believing in the compatibility of our genetics. With my AS status, I saw in him the potential for healthy offspring, liberated from the looming specter of sickle cell anemia.

In the grand tapestry of life's complex narrative, I would ultimately come to realize that love transcends the confines of a mere word. It emerges as a multifaceted masterpiece woven from the threads of emotions, sacrifices, and the unexpected turns of fate. It's a story that speaks of resilience, of dreams deferred and redefined, and the enduring human spirit in the face of daunting odds.

Fareedah

Bridging Generations

We broke free from Baba's tumultuous world against all odds, a remarkable triumph. Ummi, our guardian of newfound freedom, orchestrated our escape with profound wisdom and unyielding determination. She made sure we didn't leave a single possession behind, every item she had gathered during her time with Baba, a bold statement of her reclaiming her independence, a rarity for women in our society.

Every time I look at Ummi, my heart swells with pride. She endured the harshest of storms, losing nearly all her children, yet emerged stronger, standing tall like a queen. Her resilience is a testament to her indomitable spirit.

Ummi imparts us with life-changing lessons that go beyond textbooks. Her dedication to education goes beyond the classroom, covering financial independence and literacy, empowering us to steer our own destinies.

Ummi, a forward-thinker, bridges the gap between generations, and I fondly call her "the GenX-GenZ Mama" for embodying our generation's forward-thinking spirit. She guides us in navigating the modern world and seizing unconventional financial

opportunities.

Among her unconventional lessons, cryptocurrency shines. Ummi firmly believes in its transformative potential, encouraging us to invest through platforms like Busha, a platform she wholeheartedly supports.

According to Ummi, Busha is more than just a cryptocurrency exchange; it's a gateway to financial inclusion and empowerment. As the saying goes in our Hausa culture, "Dan tsiya ya kama kwado, ya huce waje" (The patient person catches the lizard, it eventually comes out). She explains Busha's mission: to create a fair, transparent crypto-driven economy marked by transparency, and unrestricted access, connecting Africans globally, enabling borderless payments.

What resonates most with Ummi is Busha's dedication to safeguarding African wealth. She underscores the importance of securing financial assets in a dynamic world.

Ummi instills unwavering belief in financial independence, especially for women. Her voice brims with conviction as she imparts, "Be independent, Fareedah." In our Hausa language, she encourages me with the words, "Ka yi tsamiya, Fareedah." She shares her financial journey, recounting hardships and resilience.

Her unswerving commitment to financial self-sufficiency became our lifeline post-divorce from Baba. The period was marked by uncertainty, but Ummi's teachings and cryptocurrency ventures offered hope.

Reflecting on Ummi's journey, I realize her teachings extend beyond academia. She's not just an academic teacher but a life instructor, revealing that financial independence and self-sufficiency are attainable realities.

In a world confined by tradition, Ummi's embrace of new technologies and financial opportunities shines as a beacon of hope and empowerment. She reminds us that, irrespective of circumstances, we can shape our financial destinies, securing futures full of boundless possibilities. Our journey continues, guided by her wisdom and courage.

Love's Unexpected Return

Ummi

I had always told myself that after enduring the heartache of losing five children, with only three surviving, I was done with men. My life's trials had etched deep scars into my soul, and the pain was a constant reminder of the fragility of love and life itself. I had resolved to dedicate myself solely to my children and my career as a teacher.

Yet, life has a peculiar way of throwing unexpected curveballs. It was a quiet evening in Kaduna, the call to prayer echoing through the streets as the sun dipped below the horizon. The soft glow of my phone screen illuminated my face as I scrolled through Facebook.

And then it happened—a message notification from Ahmad, the only man I had ever loved. He had left me years ago, choosing to marry another woman. The news had crushed me back then, and I had struggled to find closure. Rumors had circulated

about spiritual undertones and mysterious kanyamata dealings surrounding his marriage, but I had never been able to confirm the truth.

As I stared at the message, a whirlwind of emotions swept over me. Hurt, anger, and curiosity battled within me. How could he contact me now, after all these years? The message read, "Ummy, I hope you are well. It's been a long time, and there's so much I want to say."

I contemplated whether to respond or ignore his message altogether. Part of me wanted to remain in the cocoon of my self-imposed solitude, to guard my heart against further pain. Another part, buried deep within, yearned for closure, for answers to the lingering questions that had haunted me for so many years.

With hesitant fingers, I carefully typed a simple reply, "Ahmad, it has indeed been a long time. What do you wish to say?" The seconds that followed felt like an eternity, and my heart raced as I anxiously awaited his response.

Fareedah

Rediscovering Love

Seven years had passed since we left Baba's tumultuous house. As I sit in my small room in Rwanda, freshly graduated with a degree in English, I find myself pondering the intricacies of love. It's strange how life unfolds, and how the experiences of the past have shaped my understanding of love and relationships.

Ummy's love story with Ahmad had blossomed in these seven years. Never could I have imagined that I would be here, thousands of miles away from Kaduna, contemplating their love and its significance in my life. Their love story, however, is not mine to tell; it's a tale of two souls finding each other again against the odds.

As I look back on the tumultuous years with Baba, I can't help but marvel at Ummy's strength. She had carried us through the darkest of times, defying all odds with her head held high like a queen. Her determination to provide for us, even when the world seemed against her, was nothing short of inspiring.

Ummy had shown me what love is and what it is not. Love is not the violence and turmoil that had plagued our home when Baba was there. It's not the bruises and scars my mother endured at his hands, nor is it the constant fear that overshadowed our lives. Love is not staying in a toxic relationship for the sake of appearances.

Instead, love is the strength to break free from such toxicity. It's the courage to walk away from a situation that drains your soul. Ummy had taught me that love is self-respect, and it's knowing when to say enough is enough. It's about prioritizing your well-being and that of your children, even when it means leaving behind a life you once knew.

Now, here I am, in a foreign land, a graduate with a world of opportunities ahead. I look at Ummy and realize that her journey has been a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. She had shown me that love is also about self-love, about believing in your worth and pursuing your dreams.

As I contemplate my own future, I know that I need to figure out the application of the lessons Ummi has imparted. I need to find my path, define my own understanding of love, and build a life that reflects the values she instilled in me. It's a daunting task, but I draw strength from her example.

In the end, I may not have Ummi and Ahmad's love story to tell, but I have my own journey to embark upon. It's a journey of self-discovery, of learning what love means to me, how I can carry forward the legacy of resilience that Ummi has shown me, and finding my place in this vast world of opportunities and possibilities.