

A Short Story

Title: OMOTAYO

Omotayo, a young Nigerian girl, lives in the bustling city of Lagos. Omotayo's world had been crushed when she lost her father at such a young age. She was Daddy's little girl and was always the apple of his eye, which made the loss all the more devastating. Her father had been her mentor, her solace, and her hero.

Her father had devoted his life to serving others. He was an affectionate father as well as an accountant. His steadfast devotion and desire to continually serve people left the family deeply in debt before his death.

Unfortunately, he had been battling diabetes for many years. Despite his health issues, Omotayo respected his courage and persistence. He never let his illness cloud his spirits. He was her mentor, leading her through life's difficulties and teaching to her the principles of compassion, empathy, and fearlessness.

As perfect as her father was, he did some awful things to her before his death that she will remember for the rest of her life. Her mother had left the kids alone with their father on this particular day because she had to go somewhere. When their mother or father are not home, Omotayo and her sisters enjoy sleeping in their parents' room.

Even though Omotayo's mother had forewarned her and her sisters against sharing a room with their father alone, she also explained that they were growing up and had entered the puberty stage.

She warned them about the dangers of becoming too intimate with males, even their father and uncles. But Omotayo felt like her father was an exemption, she and her sisters slept in their father's room that day, because they were too terrified to sleep alone.

While the other children were sleeping, Omotayo's father tapped her and roused her up.

"Omotayo, my dear daughter, I want to talk to you about something important," he said. Omotayo turned to face him, her eyes wide with interest.

"Daddy?" She replied with interest. "What is it?"

“My precious girl, I want you to understand the dangers of getting too close to men,” he said, his voice filled with concern. “Many men will come into your life and try to win your heart in this world. While some may really care about you, others may have a different agenda.”

Omotayo's brow furrowed in confusion. She had always thought that love was a wonderful thing. When her father realized she was confused, he decided to go deeper into his words of wisdom.

“You see, my daughter, there are men who may pretend to love you, but their intentions may be to take advantage of your innocence and kind heart,” he stated, his gaze fixated on Omotayo's eyes. “They will deceive you with false promises, only to disappoint you later, leaving you with a broken heart.”

Omotayo nodded, taking in all her father said. She knew deep down that his advice was given out of love and concern for her well-being.

“Don't let any man touch your privates, no matter how close you are,” he added.

But that night, Omotayo's father made her touch his, telling her she wouldn't miss out on anything. He told her she needed to experience what it was like to be touched by a man, and that she should meet with him whenever she felt like doing so.

Omotayo couldn't sleep that night, since she knew what her father had done was wrong, but she didn't want to confront him that night.

When her mother returned home the following day, Omotayo called her father to a corner and told him she was going to tell her mother what had happened since she was unable to hold it in any longer. “No problem,” her father said.

Her mother moved to the guest room that night after she told her mother what had happened, and the pastor was in the house the next day. They were all speaking quietly, not wanting the other kids to know what was going on.

Omotayo knew all of these meetings were because of her, and she was heartbroken for a few moments before moving on.

Despite the fact that they all spoke with her father and even demoted him from his position in church, no one asked Omotayo how she was doing, they did not care to

know how it had affected her. They all believed she was okay. She's a child, she will get over it.

Shortly after that incident, her father became sick. His condition was so poor that he was unable to move or sit on the bed by himself. During this time, Omotayo admired her mother because she never left his side.

After receiving care at the family hospital, her father was eventually transferred to the Federal Medical Center (FMC) in Abeokuta.

Omotayo's mother believed that Omotayo caused his diabetes to worsen. She believed that God was furious with her husband and that the only punishment he could give him was to make his illness worse. Omotayo's mother asked her to accompany her to the hospital to pray for her father, and she gladly accepted.

She entered the noisy hospital room, the antiseptic aroma permeating the air. The fluorescent lights above seemed excessively bright, giving a sterile shine on everything they touched. She adjusted her colorful head wrap, which stood out against the drab surroundings.

Her heart hammered in her chest as she approached her father's bedside. His slender body lay unmoving, a look of agony etched all over his face. Doctors had tried everything, but she understood that the power of prayer was unquestionably powerful.

Tears welled up in her eyes, threatening to overwhelm her fortitude. She fought back, knowing she needed to be strong for her father. She approached the bed, her voice barely above a whisper as she greeted him.

"Daddy," she whispered quietly, her fingers intertwining with his thin, aged hand. "I've come to pray for you."

Her father's eyes shone with hope, appreciative for his daughter's unfailing faith and forgiveness. His previously commanding voice was now barely above a whisper.

"Omotayo, my dear, your prayers mean everything to me," he added, his voice soft and vulnerable. Please pray that I will have the strength to endure this ailment.

Omotayo closed her eyes, her thoughts stretching up to the heavens. In prayer, she poured out her emotions, seeking peace and healing for her father. She begged God's

own presence to give her father the strength to endure, to find serenity in the midst of the anguish.

As her words faded, the room fell silent. She opened her eyes to find her father smiling at her, a smile pulling at the corners of his lips.

“Thank you, my dear,” he said quietly. “Your prayers have given me renewed hope.”

Days stretched into weeks, and weeks turned into months, but Omotayo's faith never wavered. Her mother's daily visits to the hospital showed her enduring love and support. Her dedication astounded the physicians, who saw the wonderful influence her presence had on her father's health.

A few months later, Omotayo awoke one night uneasy, as if something had awakened within her subconscious. The unique ringtone of her mother's phone boomed through the still house. She staggered out of bed, her eyelids thick with sleep, intrigued to see who had called at such an odd hour.

Omotayo walked silently on the floor as she moved along the tiny hallway to avoid waking her sisters. As she came closer to the living area, she could hear a faint murmur of voices. The sounds were muffled, but tinged with grief and despair. She hastened her pace, concerned.

Peeking through the slightly ajar door, she noticed her mother crouched over the phone, tears flowing down her cheeks. Her voice trembled as she struggled to process the tragic news she had just heard. Her father had unexpectedly died in the middle of the night.

Omotayo's heart sunk, as the gravity of the situation struck her all at once. Her little footsteps echoed through the silence as she rushed into the room. Her mother became aware of her presence and immediately wiped her tears away, seeking to shelter her from the agony that filled the room.

“What happened, Mama?,” “Why are you crying?.” She asked, her voice shaking with fear. Her mother, unable to find the perfect words, clutched her closely before slowly sharing the news of her father's tragic death.

Her world was shattered into a million pieces. It was as if a piece of her had been taken away, leaving an emptiness that could not be filled. Every minute they had spent together as a family flashed before her eyes, memory intertwined with joy, laughter, and love.

The next day, Omotayo walked slowly towards her house, exhausted. School had been unusually tedious that day, and all she could think about was her father. But as she got closer to her house, she noticed an unusual sense of melancholy in the air. Something was wrong.

Her heart fell as she opened the front gate and saw the crowd gathered inside her house. The candlelight seemed to flicker with anguish, and her mother's and siblings' sobs pierced the air. Her father had always been a source of strength for her, and the prospect of him being gone was almost painful.

Confusion clouded Omotayo's mind as she sought to make sense of the sudden surge of mourners. She knew her father had died, but she had planned to return home to a quiet house where her family could grieve in privacy. Instead, she was surrounded by a sea of unknown faces.

As she passed through the crowd, she noticed the fake embraces and tears. Her rising discomfort was fuelled by their bogus professions of sadness. It became clear that these people were not actually mourning her father, but rather taking advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate their seeming love and affection for her family.

People who had hardly acknowledged her father's existence when he was alive now paraded around, delivering empty words and phony sympathies. It disgusted her to see them take advantage of her family's fragility, exploiting it to promote and glorify themselves.

A week later, Omotayo stood in front of the mirror, adjusting the gele on her head. She took a long breath to calm herself down. Today was a day she feared as well as looked forward to, her father's funeral. As a Nigerian Yoruba girl, she understood this would be a day packed with custom, ceremony, and tremendous grief.

Her father had been their family's rock. He was a well-respected elder in the church and at work, recognized for his knowledge and generosity. His untimely death had created a vacuum that felt impossible to replace. Today, though, they would come together to celebrate his memory and say their final farewell.

The compound was a hive of activity. Relatives have traveled long distances to pay their respects and express their condolences. Omotayo's mother sat in the center of the gathering, surrounded by close family members and friends, draped in beautiful lace. Her mother refused to wear black because she believed she was honoring a life well lived.

The traditional Yoruba hymns filled the air as the burial procedures began. Omotayo stood there, watching as her father's body was slowly dropped into the earth, surrounded by loved ones, friends, and the warmth of their prayers.

Tears flowed down her cheeks as she said her final goodbyes, speaking a sincere goodbye to the man who had influenced her life. She had forgiven him for his actions, and also wished him eternal rest.

Although Omotayo forgave her father, the memories of what he did that night remained with her. Her mother refused to discuss what happened that day, and she didn't bother to ask how she was feeling or how it had affected her. Omotayo finds it difficult to believe in love, marriage, or men.

She hardened her heart and refused to give love a chance, slamming guys at every opportunity. She believes she does not need a partner to be happy and that she can be happy on her own.

Omotayo stepped onto campus with a sense of purpose and a burning desire to make a difference in the world. However, there was something else brewing within her. A deep resentment towards men.

Growing up in a society where women were frequently neglected and sidelined, she had observed numerous incidents of unfairness and cruelty involving her acquaintances and close family. These experiences had hardened her feelings toward males, leaving her with a lasting bitterness that obscured her perspective of them.

In her classes, she found herself continually battling her male classmates, their words, and ideas frequently fuelling the fire that raged within her. Omotayo was a force to be reckoned with, her brilliance and enthusiasm visible in every discussion and debate she participated in. However, as she continued to clash with her male peers, she realized that her repulsion to men was impeding her own development. She couldn't even make room for a romantic relationship.

She came across a book named “The Power of Forgiveness” on a nearby shelf one day as she was relaxing in the university library. She reached out and drew it towards her, intrigued. The book, written by a well-known Nigerian novelist, spoke about forgiveness's transformative power and the significance of letting go of bitterness and resentment.

She began reading because she was intrigued. With each page, the weight of resentment became heavier on her shoulders, and she knew that her hatred of men was a burden she needed to shed. She was aware that her hatred was clouding her judgment, which was stopping her from viewing the world clearly and openly.

Determined to change her outlook on life, she sought for ways to communicate constructively with her male classmates. She participated in study groups, sought out collaborations, and approached each meeting with a desire to learn and improve.

Eventually, Omotayo found herself making strong and profound friendships with some of her male classmates. She understood that by letting go of her rage, she had opened herself up to a world of possibilities, to individuals who were eager to listen and understand.

She pondered on her journey after graduating from university. She'd gone from loathing males to developing friendships based on mutual respect and understanding. Her experiences had taught her that change begins within, with the release of hatred and embracing forgiveness. She had been able to create a more inclusive and harmonious environment for herself and those around her.

After graduation, Omotayo and her partner decided to go on a lifelong journey together. Their marriage was a beacon of hope, representing the triumph of love over bitterness and the transformative power of love. Omotayo's attitude had shifted from resentment to forgiveness and understanding, demonstrating that hatred and prejudice could be overcome with time and the proper person.

