

## THE FOURTH

This was the fourth one. My fourth pregnancy and I was scared. The first one was over before it even started. Lost it during the first trimester. I didn't even know the gender. The second one, a girl, a fighter, you could tell she wanted to stay but I guess my body just wasn't strong enough to hold her; I was 5 months gone, went for my regular checkup and realized she was no longer breathing. I had to flush her out, it was one of the most painful experiences I had ever encountered. My only consolation was Bez. It was during my second pregnancy that I realized I made the right decision getting married to him. He'd always say "let's try again" "I believe this time, she'll stay". He always wanted a girl first and we did try again.

The third one was no different, I lost him at 5 months. This time I started to believe that my body could no longer carry a child past its fifth month and was the least enthusiastic when I realized I was pregnant the fourth time. I didn't want to tell Bez, honestly? I actually thought about terminating it. To me, It was just another foetus that would eventually leave my body but I changed my mind. I told him and he was so excited, I didn't get it. "Why be excited for a foetus that we were certain would leave my body by the fifth month?"

This one surprised me. One Saturday morning, when I was just 2 months gone, I woke up to damp clothes, I remember thinking I had wet my bed. "Maybe I now have latchkey incontinence" Which was impossible by the way, given that I had never had to push a baby out. I laughed at my ridiculousness and tagged it to maybe having a dream where I had to urinate and ended up urinating on my bed. Nothing prepared me for what I experienced when I stood up. Immediately, I felt a stream of this liquid trickle down my legs. I looked down and realized it was blood. A pool of blood on the bed and a little puddle where I now stood. Too stunned to speak, I rushed into the bathroom and trickles of blood followed me. I panicked. "Is my body now that weak? I can't carry a pregnancy past 2 months now?" I sat on the toilet, contemplating how I'd pass this message to Bez. "We need to get you to the hospital now!" It was Bez. He had seen the blood and looked like his eyes were about to jump out of its sockets "There's no need. I've lost it." "I don't care about that right now! Muna can't you see the blood that's gushing out of you?" Gushing was the right word because this blood kept flowing like a river, it just wouldn't stop.

“Look Bez....”

“I really don’t want to hear any excuses right now Muna, We have to go now!” He reached for me and dragged me up from the toilet seat and Just as I stood up, It was almost like they turned on the tap in me, fresh blood started gushing out into the toilet seat.

“Jesus! Jesus!. Muna, please, please...”

I took one look at Bez and knew I had to indulge him. I already knew the routine at the hospital and wasn’t ready to be told I had lost my baby again but this looked like more than just a miscarriage.

I remember the Doctor applying the cold gel on my belly. He placed his instrument on it and began to scan. He moved to the right, then to the left. Poured more gel on my belly and moved his instrument upwards. He paused, took a long hard look at the monitor, at Bez who was holding my hand and then at me.

“You say you’re bleeding?”

“Yes. Heavily. I’m even wearing a pad”

“Hmm” The doctor went silent and began scanning again. “I can’t see anything wrong o. The baby is fine and..”

“Is the Baby is still there?” Bez interrupted with a quiver in his voice

“This is the heartbeat” The Doctor pointed at the large monitor in front of us.” I can’t see the gender because your baby just wants to show us his or her butt cheeks but your baby is fine.” He laughed. We didn’t. Then he stopped laughing. I’m guessing he understood how serious we saw the situation. Not even a needle hole space was available for humor at the time.

“So you’re saying I didn’t have a miscarriage”

“Madam, your baby is very fine.

“Then why the hell am I bleeding like this?!”

With the blank look the Doctor gave us, we knew he had no idea.

I bled continuously for three months. Every single day, I’d wake up and check my pad, praying to God that somehow the bleeding would cease. I was disappointed every time. We went to five different hospitals and the Doctors always said the same thing. “We have no idea why you’re bleeding but your baby is very fine. We’d advice that you go on bed rest, hopefully, the bleeding would stop”

One day, during my fifth month. My mother in law called. She was informed about everything I was going through and luckily for me, she understood.

“Muna, I heard about this Doctor...”

“Mum, I don’t think I want to see any Doctor now” I was already frustrated by this time and just patiently waiting for the miscarriage to happen. Afterall, I always miscarried at 5 months.

“Is that how you want to give up?”

“Mum, Isn’t it glaring already?”

“Nothing is glaring. So far, every Doctor you’ve been to has said baby is fine. This bleeding might just be something they are missing”

“How can five Doctors be missing something?”

“This Doctor I want you to see, he’s old. Very experienced. Who knows, he might be the solution, you’re praying for”

I wasn’t looking for a solution at this point, I had already resigned myself to my fate but I wasn’t going to tell her that, so I agreed to see this Doctor one last time.

Doctor Uche was not like the others. He was too tall, had a hunch back, long fingers and had this air of superiority, the “I have a cure for all the sickness in the world”kind. Bez took a liking to him immediately, I on the other hand felt like he would be too backdated to even understand my predicament. I had a feeling he’d peg it to my village people. He disappointed me, he didn’t.

“You see enh, bleeding in pregnancy, sometimes, even we the doctors would not know but a lot of times, these things do happen”

I wasn’t comfortable with how he structured his sentences but in retrospect, sentences weren’t going to cure me.

“So what’s going to happen now is that, I’ll do a scan, whatever we see, we take it up from there. Ok?”

I nodded and looked to see if Bez was Ok with this, he was already standing ready to move to the scan room. He was more than Ok with it.

Doctor Uche was eerily quiet. He looked at the monitor quizzically, then looked at me. He scoffed, then laughed and went back to looking at the monitor. I was very uncomfortable with these reactions.

“Doc is...”

“Shhhh...I’m checking something...”

I looked to Bez for support but he simply held my hand and asked me to let the doctor do his job.

“So how many children did all your doctors say was in your womb”

“One” I and Bez replied

“Hmm. You see here?” He pointed to something on the monitor. “That is a sac. Another sac different from the sac where your current baby is in”

“I don’t understand Doc” Bez had a confused look on his face “Are you saying she’s carrying twins?”

“Was”

I laid there, quiet. I thought to myself “Twins? How? I don’t even have any family member that has twins. Isn’t twins supposed to be hereditary”

“Ndi Obodo oyibo people call it “vanishing twin”. This your baby has eaten your other baby. He laughed. We didn’t. He didn’t care, he continued laughing and when he was done, he continued. “The blood you’re seeing now is because this sac has to go down. So you will continue bleeding till it disappears”

I didn’t believe him and he could sense it so he circled the empty sac, printed out a copy and handed it over to me..

“You can go to another place and tell them to do another scan”

“Ah. No need Doc. So what do we do now?”

“Well, just register for antenatal here. We need to just be monitoring her closely till she gives birth, that’s all”

“Thank you Doc” Bez was ecstatic. Finally, we can pin the bleeding to something. No more what if’s, no more uncertainty and as much as I wanted to dislike the Doctor, I found myself being grateful to him for giving me a glimmer of hope that maybe, I’d be able to carry this baby to full term.

By the sixth month, I already knew the gender and was expecting my baby girl. Bez had already started shopping. He literally bought every baby girl item he saw online. We were finally in a place where we were sure that we would welcome our baby. This excitement however, was cut short. I went in for my regular antenatal visit and realized my blood pressure suddenly just shot through the roof. Doctor uche put me on some Blood pressure meds but it didn’t seem to be working. He said he didn’t want it to get to the point where I’d have pre-eclampsia and was keen on making sure that I at least carried till 36 weeks. I started to worry again. What if this baby didn’t want to stay? What if I wasn’t meant to be a mother? These kept running through my mind and affected me so badly. I’d go days without having my bath, I was always lost in thought and hardly remembered conversations. It also took a toll on my marriage as I started to, for no reason at all, stopped talking to Bez. luckily, Bez understood and decided to send me home to my parents, to at least get some pampering.

I was exactly 33 weeks gone when I began to experience some sort of pain. There'd be a tightening in my stomach, accompanied with a sharp pain around my pelvic region. I googled it and google said it was braxton hicks. When the pain got worse, I told my mother. I remember that morning when I told her, she had just finished the twenty decades of the rosary.

“God forbid, you shall not experience pain in Jesus name”

“Mummy but i'm feeling it right now.”

“How are you now talking to me if you're really feeling pain”

“It comes and goes. Almost like it is timed”

“Pain shall not be timed in your life in Jesus name”

“Mummy...”

“Look Muna, smile through the pain. You're not the first woman to get pregnant. I'm going to market now, I'm sure when I come back the pain would have gone”

I really wanted to believe this, I was in excruciating pain and I really wanted it to stop, so I borrowed from my mother's fate and shouted “Amen”

Three hours later, the pain had gotten worse. These were contractions that lasted for about 30 seconds and were Ten minutes apart. I googled it again and google said it could be preterm labor or false labor. I chose to believe that it was false labor, so I took deep breaths, walked around the house, went to my mother's wardrobe, took her anointing oil and anointed myself. I told myself that God would not allow me to experience preterm labor. Thinking about it now, I had no idea why I tried to do everything else except go to the hospital. I went to the toilet to pee, took some tissue and proceeded to clean down there. That was when I felt it. A soft, small ball-like structure lodged between my vagina. No one had to tell me to rush to the hospital.

I ran into the reception like a mad woman. Two nurses were seated

“I'm only 33 weeks old but I'm feeling pain. Nurse! Help me o” By now the pain was as if someone took every bone in my body and crushed it with a hammer.

The nurses took me upstairs to the labor room.

“What am I doing here? I'm not in labor”

“You better call your husband. Tell him to come with your hospital bag. You might deliver today”

Deliver today? How? I didn't even see that as an option. I texted Bez and on a second thought decided to call him. Suddenly, the pain resumed, I didn't know when I flung my phone to the other side of the room and hugged the nurse

“What is happening to me? What is happening to me?” I cried like a baby

“You have to relax ma”

I laughed introspectively. “Relax? With the kind of pain I was going through? You all must be joking”. I screamed and started running around the room. This was my way of trying to alleviate the pain. One of the nurses ran after me and dragged me to the bed. I tried to jump down, she continued forcing me on the bed and it became a struggle till suddenly she landed a heavy slap on my face, calming me down immediately.

“Do you want to give birth to this baby alive?”

“Nurse, I’m not giving birth today. Where’s the doctor?” I began to scream “Doctor Uche! Doctor Uche!”

The Nurse squeezed my mouth shut “There’s no Doctor on duty now. You are currently in labor”

Without warning she stuck her hand into my Vagina. I screamed. She slapped me.

“You have to listen to me ma. You’re fully dilated. Ma, It is up to you to push now and save your baby. Anything that happens to this baby would be on you”

Her words took effect as they calmed me down immediately. This was my fourth pregnancy and I was scared. I had lost 3 pregnancies prior to this and even though this wasn’t what I had hoped. A preemie felt like a good reward for all the other pregnancies I had lost. I lost them because I didn’t have control over them, but seeing that I had control over this one, I took a deep breath, looked at the nurse. “I’m ready”

“Good, now when I tell you to push, push with all your might. Ready?”

I nodded a yes

“Push!” and in one single push, I pushed out the love of my life, Zikoranachidinman which means “ Show the world that the lord is good”