

"But Eyi, you know what you are doing is not right, *shebi*? If not for Ifeanyi, you wouldn't be where you are today,"

I wish Modupe's advice didn't make me want to punch a hole in the wall but it did. I turned my face away from her as if to throw it away.

"I am your friend. That's why I am telling you the truth. What you are doing, you will surely regret it. There are no two ways around that," Modupe repeated herself and I crossed my arms over my chest.

I had made up my mind. Nothing Modupe said mattered to me. Nothing she would say would change my mind.

"You know that I never loved that man, Dupe. You know that I never loved Ifeanyi," I reminded her. She was shaking her head at me with so much judgment lingering in her eyes.

She didn't understand.

She didn't understand what it was like being married to a man out of compulsion. She didn't understand what it was like being a second wife. She didn't understand anything because she was not in my shoes.

"Whether you love him or not Eyi, it does not change the fact that where you are today, you wouldn't be without that man. If he wasn't in your life, you would be starving in that village at the mercy of that wicked uncle of yours. Accept him. With your full heart and chest, accept him and stop all this rubbish you are planning, please, *I take God beg you!*" Modupe sighed and then got up to leave. I didn't have anything more to say to her. No matter what she would say to me, my mind was already made up.

I was leaving Ifeanyi and that was it.

Ifeanyi married me when I was seventeen. To say that I was not in support of this marriage was an understatement. I never wanted to marry him. I agree that he was a good man but he was already married. At the time, he was married with two children and right now, he has three from his first wife, Uchenna.

Initially, Ifeanyi never had the intention of marrying me either. He was happy in his marriage. At the time, he didn't have a son from Uchenna but still, he loved her. He always has. He always will and he has never minced his words about it.

When my father told me to marry Ifeanyi as his dying wish, I didn't understand his decision. Not only was Ifeanyi already married and fifteen years older than me but he was also Igbo. Igbo-Yoruba marriages usually didn't occur without struggles.

One minute, my father was on the verge of death in our small village in Ondo state and the next, before he took his last breath of life, he made me vow that I would accept the marriage to Ifeanyi.

My father and I were very poor. I had stopped my education after my Junior WAEC exams because my father had fallen sick and the little money he was making from farming was all being spent on his treatment. Eventually, I had to abandon my education to help him on the farm and hawk some things by the roadside to make ends meet.

When my father gave up the ghost in our small village house, in my grief, I understood that I was alone and left with nothing. My mother had died during childbirth and my relatives were in the same pathetic condition as us. My uncle was not a good man. He was never kind to either of us so when I looked around and saw that I had no one in my life to care for me from my family and I had no penny to my name, I had no choice but to accept Ifeanyi as my husband.

I understood why my father and relatives as a whole wanted me to marry a man like Ifeanyi. He was quite well-to-do and successful. He was responsible and capable of fulfilling his duties as a husband to me but what I could never understand till date was why Ifeanyi agreed to marry me. As far as I knew, it was not his intention at first. He even directly told me that on our wedding day.

I could still hear his voice in my ears as clear as day when he said, "Eyitope, I did not want to marry you but your father has left me with no choice,"

As far as I knew, everything changed after his conversation with my father one night. Whatever they spoke about, I don't know. All I knew was that the conversation made Ifeanyi agree to take on my responsibility and take me as a second wife.

After he paid my *bride price* and married me the traditional way, he took me to Lagos. In Lagos, he rented an apartment for me and put me back in school. Ifeanyi was kind to me, respectful and considerate. He was very invested in my education and often advised me to take it seriously. I

did and five years after marriage, I managed to get started on my own small business and I'm about to complete my university degree.

After five years, I was finally in a position which I never imagined myself to be in and Modupe was right - it was all because of Ifeanyi. But did that mean I had to force myself to stay married to the man my whole life? I was not happy with him. I could not lie to myself anymore. And Ifeanyi didn't deserve someone who didn't want to be with him.

I remember the first time Ifeanyi touched me. It was nearly two years into our marriage when he came home one night and the air felt different. He usually came home to my house whenever he was in Lagos because he lived with Uchenna and their children in Enugu. He had his businesses in both Enugu as well as in Lagos so whenever he was in Lagos, he stayed with me and whenever he was in Enugu, he was with her.

For what it was worth, the truth was that he did manage to split his time between us fairly because half the time, he was with me and the other half, with her. Except, I had come to wish that he wasn't such a fair man.

After dinner that night, when Ifeanyi came into my bedroom, I understood that he did not come there to ask about my exam preparations as he usually would.

When he loosened my *wrapper* which I had tied around my chest, I didn't have the courage to ask him what he was doing. I understood what he was doing and even if I wished to, I couldn't stop him. I didn't stop him when he pulled the *wrapper* fully off of me. I didn't stop him when he pressed me to the mattress and spread my legs to claim his marital rights from me and I never stopped him anytime after that, no matter how much I might have wanted to.

All I remembered thinking as he took me to bed that night for the first time was that I was happy that he had waited so long. I even felt like I should have been grateful for it.

Indeed, I should have been because once he opened that Pandora's box of our relationship, he never relented upon it. Even when his son was born a year later from his first wife, he still made sure that I warmed his bed.

Up until the birth of Tobeckukwu, I could swear that he slept with me so often in his effort to impregnate me because Uchenna had given him two daughters and he had told me that his mother often complained about how she wanted a grandson.

Ifeanyi wanted a son. He never shied away from the fact that he craved a male successor and whenever he would say that, I pretended like I didn't hear him.

But when his nights in my bed were still rampant after the birth of Tobechukwu, I understood that it was never about impregnating me with a successor to begin with. It was about the fact that come what may, Ifeanyi had accepted me as his wife and in the same vein, that was the duty of a wife. Whether I had accepted him as a husband or not did not matter to Ifeanyi.

Why would it matter to him? After all the money he had spent on me, my well-being, my education and my small business, why would it matter to him?

Even as I laid in bed next to Ifeanyi now, I cursed my fate. He was not a bad man and sometimes, I wished he was. My need to separate from him would have made sense if he was bad. Yet, in five years of marriage, he had never laid a finger on me. He had never called me names either and even our nights were never physically forced upon me. I just felt obligated to perform my duties despite him never actually verbally voicing that out.

Ifeanyi woke up with a start when his phone started to ring and annoyance filled my veins.

It was Uchenna *again*, I knew it.

She always found every excuse in the world to call Ifeanyi whenever he was with me. I wished it didn't bother me. Ideally, it shouldn't have but it did. Whenever she called him, it was either to fight with him or create stories about his children. Their middle child, Ify, was a *sickler*. She had sickle cell anemia and this was the main excuse which Uchenna often used to cause Ifeanyi to worry so he would return back home to her sooner.

For obvious reasons, she hated me and if I was being honest, I didn't blame her because I hated her too. Maybe I could have brought myself to love Ifeanyi if Uchenna and her three children were not in the picture but that was not the case. Maybe I could have loved Ifeanyi if Uchenna was not Igbo like him while I was Yoruba and I was constantly reminded that I couldn't compete with her. But worse of all, maybe I could have loved Ifeanyi if Ifeanyi didn't love and adore Uchenna.

He never hid his marriage to me from Uchenna and she loved him so much that she stayed. She had just given birth to Ify when Ifeanyi informed her about me and felt that if anyone should leave Ifeanyi, it should be me and not her.

She thought Ifeanyi married me so I could give him a son since she had just birthed a second daughter and for a while, I also thought the same until six months of marriage had passed by and

Ifeanyi hadn't touched me. I deluded myself into thinking he never would, forgetting that he was a man.

As Ifeanyi spoke frustratedly in Igbo, my unusual anger began to boil beneath the surface. Ifeanyi's whole family hated me because I was Yoruba. Apart from Uchenna, his family didn't even care that he had married again. They only cared that he married a 'Yoruba village girl' according to them. The insults I had received when his mother came to this house and insulted me alongside his elder sister were not insults which made accepting my marriage to Ifeanyi any easier.

I agree that I came second. I agree that he already had a wife and children but just because I was the second wife, was that enough reason to not have the rights of a wife? Every holiday, Ifeanyi went home to the village with his first family and every holiday, I spent it alone at home feeling like an unwanted orphan.

Ifeanyi was embarrassed to introduce me to his circle because most of them already knew Uchenna so he rarely took me out for fear of having to explain who I was. Ifeanyi never even let me meet his children because apparently, the only time when he brought his eldest daughter Chidera to meet me, Uchenna lost her mind.

I was married yet I wasn't married.

My marriage wasn't even constitutionally recognised because Ifeanyi after all was a Christian. In front of Uchenna, I had no rights over the man who had inserted himself into my life as a husband because I didn't come first, someone else did.

Even when I wanted to love him, I couldn't let myself because I knew that yes, maybe Ifeanyi cared for me but Ifeanyi did not love me. Why would Ifeanyi love me when he was married to his high school sweetheart and they had three beautiful children together? I didn't expect him to and he never lied to me that he did either. Knowing all of this, it made me feel like I was a burden to him. It made me feel like he only cared about my body, not my heart.

When Ifeanyi ended his call with Uchenna, he sighed deeply and said several things to himself in Igbo. I wasn't sure I wanted to ask what Uchenna had said again. All I knew was that I needed the courage to end my relationship.

I met Samuel a year ago online.

It started off as just casual chatting at first but soon enough, it grew into something more. It grew into something deeper. I had never intended to fall in love with Samuel. I had never intended to

cheat on Ifeanyi with another younger man. Where Ifeanyi was thirty-seven, Samuel was twenty-five: a little over a decade apart.

I never intended to sleep with Samuel. But then again, when has meeting another man in a hotel or his home ever been a good idea?

Before I realised what I was doing, it was already too late. I had already drowned myself in the frustration of being Ifeanyi's second 'evil' wife who was destroying his first home. Samuel gave me support. Samuel understood me. But most of all, Samuel loved me. Samuel loved me the way Ifeanyi loved Uchenna and Samuel wanted me to leave Ifeanyi.

"Ify is in the hospital again," Ifeanyi sighed into his hands and I sat up straighter. I was summoning courage. "She was upset because I couldn't make it to her birthday party and apparently has been running a high fever for two days. Uche called me to bite my head off. I don't know what to tell her. She knows I come here to work also but she thinks I run to Lagos only for my pleasure,"

I grinded my teeth together. Ifeanyi was stressed. He wouldn't fall asleep now. Ify was dear to him. The way I knew Ifeanyi, he would take the first flight out of Lagos within a few hours. I needed to break my news to him but wasn't sure how to begin.

"I'll have to go to Enugu, Eyitope," Ifeanyi got off of the bed. "Is there something you want to talk about? You seem like you have something on your mind. You haven't slept all night,"

I forced a smile onto my lips. I couldn't tell him now. He was so consumed with the ever-present fear of losing Ify that I knew this just wasn't the best time. When I shook my head, he went into the washroom.

I pulled out my phone. Samuel's message awaited me on the screen.

Have you told Ifeanyi that you are leaving him, yet?

I inhaled deeply before I replied. The time I had been dreading all night had finally come.

No, because I am not leaving Ifeanyi anymore. Up until this morning, I was prepared to leave him but now, things have changed. I cannot leave him anymore. I'm sorry, Samuel but I am pregnant with Ifeanyi's child. Whatever we have is over. Please, find it in your heart to forgive me.

I sent that message despite my shaky fingers. I was scared. The whole night, I didn't know how to tell Samuel that I had changed my mind because of the pregnancy and wanted to end our affair but it was done now. I had no choice. I also needed to share the good news with Ifeanyi once he got back from Enugu.

I was pregnant.

If only I knew who the father was.