

YOURS SINCERELY

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Tranquil. Serene. Quiet. Every word that could describe peace was what the air smelled like that fateful morning. Yet, I felt nothing of such. It was a Saturday morning and there was no work. I could laze about all day. I had been awake since 5 am, yet I couldn't point out why I was deeply unhappy. I was in a constant state of flux every time, work keeping me occupied most of the time, but weekends were often the worst.

I had nowhere else to go, and I was left alone to face my demons. I looked at my phone and my first thought had gone to Sharon; my ex-girlfriend had bought it for me and it was a constant reminder of everything wrong with me. The phone was a Samsung A12 phone, the 4GB and 64GB variant. You can trust her to be diligent with her choices of gifts.

Oh, Sharon, that sweet, petite girl that gave me everything: her body, her love, her time, her energy, and what had I given her in return? Pain, upon pain, and heartbreak after heartbreak. Often time, she would get mad at me for not reciprocating, for not being thoughtful, and she often said, and I remember in her sweet voice, "I am not the reason you were not loved as a child" albeit more forcefully than words can ever express, her face contorting in anger, and her voice rising to pitches I could never quite muster.

I met her at a dinner organized by my office to celebrate the end of the year. She was alone and looking resplendent. I laugh as I remember the events of that day. When I saw her, I lost track of time. Everyone seemed to float, and she was the only person in the room. "Hi Angel," I said, albeit too animatedly and excitedly. I noticed the furtive glance from the raise of her eyebrows. "Hi" she responded.

The response was a tad dismissive, yet I couldn't shake off the thought that this was the person for me. I could already picture us in a relationship, going for dates, sitting on a couch, watching football together, doing things, and slowly making love.

All of a sudden, I couldn't remember that the hall was perhaps the best I had ever been to, I couldn't even respond to my colleague, Chinyere, who I knew had eyes for me in the office. I didn't want to pursue anything with her because of two things. First, there was a rumor that she was a loudmouth, and it was also said that she was a cheerful giver who hadn't quite mastered the art of saying no.

"Can I sit with you?" I asked. The expression on her face was starting to annoy me, I had seen it enough times to know that I was being a pest, but this girl is different. I would wait. I would be calm. "Yes you can", her face, possibly masking what she actually felt. I knew I was handsome, so I knew my physical features were not a turn-off at first glance.

I wondered how I'd strike a conversation, but thankfully the stars were aligned with me, she asked me a question, "What do you think about events like these?" "I find it quite unnecessary" I answered, and that brought a smile to her face. The ice was broken; we could talk freely now. I still remember the way she laughed, that deep throaty laughter that only came from someone truly at ease with life.

We hit it off from there. I found out that she was 23, a recently-retained corper who worked in customer service. We even laughed about it, the fun or not fun of working with a company that had over 500 full-time staff. She laughed, and said, "Well, familiarity breeds contempt". On the day of our first major fight, we had come from her friend's birthday party. Her friend's boyfriend had done the mistake of proposing and I knew that the "talk" would happen again that night. At that point, we had been dating for 2 years, and while I was the "perfect" boyfriend, I had resisted every overture to take things further.

"Did you see how romantic the proposal was? I wasn't even expecting it" She said as soon as we stopped at a traffic light. I had been waiting for that moment when she'd talk about what happened at the party. But I thought it'd wait till we got home. I muttered something incomprehensible, expecting her not to pick on it, but lately, she had been less forgiving of my, in her own words, "not reading between the lines".

"You haven't said anything," she said, her voice rising a bit. "Well, there's nothing for me to say. I wish them well", I responded. She looked at me with what looked like disgust and tried to say something, before deciding not to, her shoulders heaving with the weight of things unsaid. I drove off in silence, which was deafening. That

was the first weekend we didn't have sex apart from when she was on her period, and it would signal the beginning of the end of our relationship.

Every talk of me taking her to see my mum had been met with a very sharp response of, "We'd do it soon". She complained about not knowing my friends, me being a recluse every time, immersed in my books, not willing to talk about my past, shutting people out, being defensive, and being generally annoying. Sitting on my couch, I remembered the day I should have started seeing the signs. She had gone to see her parents for Easter. I didn't like her going to see her parents. She'd always come back moody and easily irritated. "Babe, how far?" I asked her as he came in. She looked at me and hissed. I was expecting that, but not that quickly.

Often time, we'd have had hot, steamy sex, and with puppy eyes, while she said, "What are we doing? We are practically living as husband and wife. Why can't we make it official" albeit not with force, but with expectation, highlighted by the fact that she had been sated with sex.

That day was different. I remember receiving her text. She had stayed back at home while I went to work, saying she'd call in sick. She had serious menstrual cramps and would work from home. Around 2 pm, I got a text, "I am leaving you. It's for the best. You are not capable of showing love. You are broken. I have a therapist friend. Call her. Once she says you are okay, we'd get back together. I will give you 3 months to fix yourself. I still love you, but I love myself more".

The last 5 words were hurtful, but I was stubborn. She'd come back to me. She didn't. Two weeks later, I am on my couch. I pick up my phone and call the number. Mohini. A beautiful name for someone who'd take me back to where I didn't want to go to.

She picked on the first ring, "Hi, my name is Mohini. I have been expecting your call." This was not a good sign.

It's Monday, and my appointment with Mohini is less than 3 hours to go. I had fixed it for close to lunch period. I wanted to be done with it in record time, and perhaps catch lunch at Zubby's, that new restaurant off Adeola Odeku. A part of me looked forward to the "session". I was excited and scared at the same time. Will I be categorized as a nut case?

I step out of my house and try to look at it anew. I have this feeling I would be a changed man by the time I come back. I have been staying in that house for close to 2 years and I have never noticed that the paint on the house was starting to fade. I look around me, and like those foreigners, I look at everyday things with wonder in my eyes.

I see Mama Ngozi in her kiosk; Mama Ngozi, who tried to get me out of my shell but failed because I simply didn't let her. Mama Ngozi, that nice woman, mother of three, who had a smile and "God bless you" for everyone, with what I presume to be genuine, unlike those overtly religious "brethren in my church.

I smile and wonder what the other tenants think of me. I must have been labeled as proud and arrogant, as though one word couldn't quite muster the aloofness I portray when I am at home. Our tenant WhatsApp group is full of conversations ranging from electricity, estate dues, and even politics, conversations that I read, but never quite chime my two cents on.

My cab driver is waiting patiently in his car. A classy, white Toyota Corolla, and I wondered if he, like those Bolt drivers I had seen on a thread on Twitter, had struggled to get a job after graduation, and only took to e-hailing as the only alternative. His car smelled good, and the air condition was in prime condition. He looked defensive, as though spoiling for a fight, and when I used the everyday conversation starter in Nigeria, "Omo, this country hard o", he broke into a smile, and the ride was eventful after that.

He would go on to tell me that he was married with two kids and that he used Bolt as a side hustle alongside the interior decoration outfit he ran alongside his wife. I would mainly do the listening, and speak very little, and time

flew by, till we got to Mohini's office. My old fears will come rushing back, and I felt like a child drowning in a swimming pool without any adult nearby.

There is a big signboard outside that gives the name of the company; "Beautiful Imperfections" and for a minute, I can't but admire the genius that coined that name. The office itself is welcoming: warm colours infused with a lot of art and nature, and the impulsive nature in me wanted to move the vase to the middle of the center table just a little bit. I ignored that impulsive self.

I walk to the receptionist. "Welcome to Beautiful Imperfections", she spoke in a dreamlike, almost robotic voice of someone that had said the same thing a thousand times. "I am here for an appointment with Mohini at 12 noon" checking my wristwatch, and trying to sound very important, in the faux way I presented myself in public. "My name is Christian" I added, with a little bit of impatience. She checked her laptop, and said, "Yes. 12:00 pm appointment for Christian Obi with Mohini Ugbele".

I searched for Mohini Ugbele on Google. She was unlike what I had pictured in my mind. She had dreads and had the most genuine smile I had ever seen. It was no wonder she was a therapist. At 12:29, the receptionist calls my name, and I am shown a room where Mohini is waiting for me. As I walk on, I hope this gets over and done with, but a part of me knows what I am carrying is too much to be solved in one hour.

I see Mohini, and that now-familiar smile is the first I notice in the room before I see the familiar combination of colours, art, and nature. "Please have a seat," she says, and her voice is not at the same pitch of professionalism that I had first heard two weeks ago. I say, "Thank you" and I think she notices that I am a bit uncertain. After all, it's not every day a grown man is forced by his girlfriend to come to therapy.

"Tell me when it started," she asks a bit forcefully, as soon as I sit down. I am a bit lost, and she adds, "Your depression assessment test results show that you have been battling chronic depression for years. How have you been able to cope, up to the point of not being suicidal?" In my mind, I am wondering if this is how the session is how to go. The sessions I read online were full of a lot of words such as closure, empower, let it go, and the most mind-boggling one, "forgive yourself", but in the last 10 minutes Mohini has been speaking, she has not used any

of such words. She has focused more on listening to me, and I decide to tell her the truth I haven't ever told anyone, ever before. Not even Sharon.

She would tell me that we have 4 sessions and that the first part of my rehabilitation is to inform my parents of what I had just told her. When I ask her if what we had shared was confidential because I didn't want Sharon to know, she looked offended, as though I was crazy to even think of it, but she assured me, and I felt at peace.

I decide to write a letter to my parents. I will use the post office to send it, instead of sending it on WhatsApp. I will write as my 14-year-old self and while I know the last 13 years can't be erased, it will offer a way of escape, and perhaps I will start living again. I wonder how they'd take it, my parents who were the model parents in our hometown.

I start writing, "Dear Mom, I know you think I am a perfect child, but I am not all that. You have loved me, you and Dad, but I have failed you. Aunty Bisi, our maid, has been touching me inappropriately for the last 2 years, and I have performed a lot of sexual activities with her that I have lost count of. You and Dad were gone a lot and trusted me with her, but your darling sister used me as cannon fodder for her sexual fantasies.

Because of your absences and method of withdrawing love, especially when I didn't meet up to your expectations of me, I have become selfish, withdrawn, and become addicted to sex. I started masturbating at 12, and now at 14, I am so addicted that I can't stop it, even at school, taking countless toilet breaks to relieve myself. I am writing this letter to let you know that this bad habit will continue for the next 13 years. I will read books upon books, go for countless deliverance sessions in the church to no avail, and when I stop going to church altogether, I don't feel an iota of guilt.

I feel nothing and I know my decision is right. I am not totally at fault here, you are also complicit for not forming a bond with your only son in his teenage years. I blame you too, Daddy and Mommy. Please find it in your heart to forgive me. Your son, before Aunty Bisi, will come back to you soon. He will see a therapist after getting an ultimatum from his girlfriend, but everything good will come. Please pray for me.

Yours sincerely, Christian."

The tears can't stop flowing. I still have 3 sessions left with Mohini. I am not sure Sharon will ever come back, but I will take care of myself now. I love her, but I love myself more. Sharon's words come to mind, and instead of crying, this time, I smile.