I sighed for the fourth time as I scratched my forehead. I've been rummaging through these boxes for hours and again I have decided for the seventh time since the past months that I'll have to do it another time.

Pacing softly across the hallway I opened the door, it creaked but almost inaudibly. I peeped into the nursery to see my niece sleeping soundly. Yawning, I walked in and I sat on the floor by the cot. I picked up the picture frame that was on the table beside me. It was a picture of my sister and her husband, Fred, that they took on their forced vacation in Paris. My sister had a wide smile which was usually one of her favorite features and was held by her handsome husband. But her eyes was sad. The vacation had been forced because they planned it just after Fred step mother came to the house to embarrass my sister on their childlessness. She had claimed that my sister had to confessed about the numerous abortions she has committed because everything has been revealed to her by her native doctor. Efe had taken all the concoctions and herbs that her mother in law had brought until the day her husband noticed and told her to stop. Mama claimed that all the women that has ever taken those herbs conceived easily, so she was convinced that there has to be a grave sin Efe had committed. Fred had been so shocked to here the woman he had looked to as his mother since his biological mother died could say such horrible things about his wife. He had flared up and rebuked his step mother while she had started to cry loudly and also loosened her scarf, folded it and using in place of handkerchief, dramatically sniffing it and wiping her nose "You know it is what will be beneficial to you I'm after, and you're talking to me like this because of this woman, ehn? You see now, she has made you forget your real family" she continued crying while glaring at Efe.

"Mama, please go. Come back when you're ready to talk to my wife with respect" Fred has retorted.

"Ehn? That is how it is now? Okay o. As I'm going home now, i'll let your siblings know how you and your wife sent me out of your house o. I have never seen how a son fights his mother because she is fighting for his good" she said standing up and carrying her bag while sniffing.

"Just know that when I come back here, I'm coming with a virgin girl who has not killed all the baby in her womb" She left angrily.

After her departure, Efe had cried her to sleep. Nothing we did, Fred and I, brought her comfort. The next morning when I was leave for work to go to work, she had told me that Fred had convinced her that they should go on a vacation to Paris.

"It might be just the miracle we need" she had said while picking at a sequin on her gown. They had travelled the following morning leaving me in their large house with the security man but it didn't bother me as I had work to go to every morning and spending little time in the house, except on weekends.

One of the weekends I couldn't forget was when Mama came back. she had banged the gate so loudly. The security man dressed in his properly starched and ironed uniform ran out of his quarters to see who It was. I stood by the window in the living room that gave a clear view of the gate, peeping.

"Oga is not around" the security man was saying to Mama as she pushed her way into the compound without waiting for him to clear the road for her.

"Open the gate very well, let my girl drive in" She didn't come alone as she had promised. I squinted to see the person driving the car but I could not. A young and beautiful lady came out of the car. She looked to be in her early 20's, well educated and well dressed. You could see at a glance

that this girl had never struggled to get anything. I was envious, imagined how life may have turned out differently if I had been able to achieve certain things when I wanted to. Mama and the young woman came in together and I quickly changed my position from standing by the window to sitting on a couch.

“Ah, Mama welcome.” I said with a smile that was really a smirk. I’d have welcome her in a boisterous manner but after her actions towards my sister, she didn’t deserve a warm welcome from me.

“Where’s my son? She asked ignoring my greetings.

“They travelled” I replied as I sat down on the couch, tired of being nice to her.

“Who is they? When did my son become they?” She said hissing as she retied her wrapper then stood akimbo.

“Your son and his wife now. He travelled with the woman he married to avoid being disturbed” Mama was glaring at me and if looks could kill, the daggers which were her eyes would have pierced my heart that second.

“Your son is married?” The young woman swung her face towards Mama for the first time after looking at the interior design of the living since they got in.

“Not really. She is just the woman he is about to divorce” she said loudly and too sweetly with a wide grin “It is nothing to worry yourself about, they don't even have an evidence for this marriage”

“They have a marriage certificate from the court, that is evidence enough in my opinion” I said under my breath but loud enough for everyone to hear.

“Mama you should have told me now. At least let me decide if I want this drama or not. You just told me you would like to introduce me to your son and he is not even here to receive us” She said frowning.

“No o. She wants to force another wife on her son because they are yet to have a child” I inserted.

“Shut up, you cannot blame me for wishing what is good for my own child” She fumed.

“Ah mama, what happens when I’m unable to give him children too? You will treat me same way?”

“God forbid. Look at you now, you have beautiful children in your womb. I have checked, they told me you’re perfect” Mama frowned at her for even speaking like that. The young lady gave Mama a disapproving look that I knew Mama was going to have to scout for a new candidate.

I avoided contact with Mama for the rest of their stay. After they had eaten and rested, they left.

When my sister and her husband got back, I narrated everything that happened to Fred and he assured me that he would take care of it. I however didn’t tell my sister about the incident because i didn't want to diminish the happiness and hope the vacation brought.

That was the year they decided to give IVF a try.

Since daybreak today, I've engrossed myself in one activity or the other in the hope of not breaking down in tears or thinking about this painful memory.

But with the end of activities came an overwhelming force to relive it and I really do not have the power to keep it away as I was tired in all sense.

I was in her house when I heard her chanting 'No no.... this can't be happening

I rushed to the bathroom where she was and found her in a small pool of her blood. I stood transfixed to the spot, thoughts whirling but unable to move a limb.

Her shrilling screams and cries tore through my heart and I felt like it was physically shredding. I picked her up carefully, even as she made it clear that she wanted to remain there.

She only allowed me to help her when I told her that getting to the hospital quickly might save her baby. We made our way to the hospital and it was confirmed there that she had lost the baby conceived through IVF. For months we grieved, it was a painful loss.

My sister had been married for seven years

without a child and the pressure from all sides had mounted too high. I watched her go from a

strong and self respecting woman to a desperate and self loathing one. She had to convince her husband about going

through with the IVF procedure which he agreed to. Now it had failed.

They tried it a second time. This time she called

me over the phone 'Tega, I lost my baby. I couldn't keep him alive.'

She sounded so resigned and I felt chills all over my skin.

" I've come to terms with the fact that i'll be a bad mother and they don't want to stay with me' she continued while sniffing. I assumed she had been crying.

“Don't say that, you can't possibly believe that”. I chastised gently.

Efe has been a mother to me since she was only eighteen. Our mother died and left us orphaned and we really didn't have relatives who cared about our welfare. The only time they showed any type of care was when my sister was to get married and they found out that her husband was wealthy. We suddenly had them checking up on us and asking for small favours which were rather always monetary. A number of time, some relative even came to the house with their children with the intention to leave them behind for Efe to take care of them. I have personally handled returning the children back to their families after they have stayed for a week. Left to Efe, she would have taken up that extra responsibility, forgetting that these people didn't extend such grace towards us as we struggled. Our extended family was not a closely knitted one and I wasn't going to left Efe forget that.

She juggled jobs and ensured I stayed in school. My sister became my mother and did an amazing job of it. So being a bad mother cannot be a description for her.

Then six months after she conceived. No IVF, no medication. She was overjoyed but avoided talking about her growing tummy anytime the topic came up. I knew she was prepping for the worst. Honestly, we were all holding our breath. Her house became my permanent resident, I wanted her to take as much rest as she could. She would object but it was obvious that she saw the wisdom in that. Seven months into her pregnancy, her water broke. I had to rushed her to the hospital while trying to calm her rising hysteria.

She delivered a tiny baby girl but we all cooed and commented on how beautiful this bundle of joy looked even though the baby was kept in neonatal intensive care.

Life became beautiful and bright. Baby grew stronger and mother radiated happiness. Efe took motherhood so well, she seemed to enjoy the feeding, bathing and playing with her newborn. She made it seem so seamless and I was in awe of my sister again.

My Sister's bubbly self was coming forth again and it was great to see. Although I thought she looked tired too, she wouldn't listen to any talk of rest. So I gave up --too easily, now that I think of it.

On the day our lives nosedived. She had been expecting a delivery, some new dresses she shopped for her girl. So when the doorbell rang, she sprang up from the floor where she'd been playing with her nine month old baby and I was folding clothes too.

“Watch my princess” she'd said.

Laughing I said “okay o, I hope it won't be the case of what I ordered versus what I got” still laughing.
"They dare not” she joined in the laughter.
A loud thud rendered me still. I don't understand how I knew what happened even before I saw it.
I ran out of the room and found my sister at the foot of the stairs. Apparently she has slipped. Icy chills ran down my spine.
Just like that.
I found myself screaming and begging God for a miracle, a second chance, anything that indicated a sign of life.
One moment we are laughing and the next I was running around the hospital then making calls to the morgue.
Her husband had been out of town on a business trip but got back that day. I saw the wild look in his eyes, I was bewildered myself. we exchanged sorrowful glances and cried in each other arms.
I lost a mother again and became a mother in a twinkle of an eye.
Yes, our lives changed and after four months it still doesn't feel like it would be better. I wish I had insisted that she took more rest, or gone downstairs for the delivery.
How does one deal with an irreparable loss? My niece coughed, jolting me from my reverie. I patted the sleeping form softly and said “you and I will do just fine... or we'll try”