

Hideous Roads.

I've heard that life is a game for fools and a dream for the wise. I know many dreamers. And many a time, few made their dreams a reality, and the lot kept dreaming that their dreams turned tragedy. Don't get me wrong, it is good to dream, I love to daydream one or two times between seasons, and travel far from my reality. I was a fool, I had to play games and fight my way through my reality. Many judged me when they asked if I had any dreams and I said nothing. Their eye questions and their smile mocks but they never dare to put them in words. But the facts remains, having dreams is a luxury and I was taught at a very young age that dreams are for the privileged, and I was no privileged. Life for me was moving from one kiosk to another by a family of eight. We were initially seven but my dad said seven was an unlucky number. My father said a lot of things. A woman's place is in the kitchen and a woman has to take care of her kids and teach them good morals, he also said a woman has to be submissive and that includes all the extreme bullying and beatings my mom had to receive when my father came back from town and did badly with hustling. My father was rusty when it came to keeping a job. "My boss is difficult, my boss is unappreciative, my boss this, my boss that..." and even if he managed to keep his job for a week it was mostly spent heavily on getting drunk. I felt abashed when I had to pick him up from the bar almost every time he got some money and hence every time he came home by himself our brains would automatically inform us it was a bad day, funny how the body works. I could still hear the sounds of their sexual activities on the bed and the way their activity would vibrate the whole kiosk. The way my father would demand disgusting things so he is pleased. I gave my head a shake to repress such memories from running wild to escape my subconsciousness.

"Mary." The voice was calm and it slowly woke me up from my hypnosis. "Are you even listening?" "Yes, I lied." "You zoning out, but trying to avoid this situation won't do us any good." I look at him disgusted. How did I get here, I vowed a vow that my marriage would be perfect. That it wouldn't be like my mom and dad and I succeeded, at least until I found this out. "So you mean you like..." "Yes." He didn't even let me finish. My head became very heavy, now everything made sense. I respected him and for sure I did. Love I didn't know if I did. He was the perfect dad, he loved his kids. You taught them football and made them snacks for school. He taught me how to have nice things. I never had any nice things, the most I had

was when my father brought home one man thousand fish with Kenkey. My mother would measure the fish with a teaspoon and share it with the eight of us. Or when we would mix sugar with water and have it with tea bread as dinner before bed. It was one of the things that happened once in a blue moon but how I desperately wished that it last forever. The “blue moon” suddenly brings peace to the chaos and I feel safe, so safe that it becomes uneasy. “You are damaged, much damaged.” I said and he laughed. “Really?” he said, I didn’t know if he meant it as a real question or if it was a rhetorical question. “Look at you for a second, take a day, and look at you for a second. If I’m damaged then what do you think you are? Mary, do you even love me? Do you know what love is?” I looked up as if the answers were from above. “I do so much for you Max, I cook, I clean, I make sure the house is in order and I do everything you ask me to do, and you stand here and ask me what love is?” he looked shocked. “What happened to you? Who made you like this? Mary if I wanted a servant then I would not have married you. Mary, do you even know how damaged you are?” “But you still married me anyway didn’t you?” I said in a way to defend myself. “Yes I did, my only mistake was to think I could fix you,” he said. “The only person who needs fixing is you.” I cut in. “You don’t take risks, for about ten years we’ve been together you’ve never taken any risk. You had so much potential, you are one of the best designers I have ever seen, but all that dream ended in our basement. You could have started something big, you could have been something big, it’s even not too late to be something big.” “Something big, like what huh?” I asked “I have done so well for myself but how would you know? You were one of the privileged, how nice to have dreams, but I didn’t have the privileged to dream, to desire. I only had the instincts to survive, and that has brought me this far. I did the unthinkable which got me here, the struggle, oh the struggle.” My mind went far. I remember that day, the day I decided to leave my family, change everything about me and be better for myself. The day survival instincts kicked in. It was an unusual day.

I had started my hustle at Makola market. I did all kinds of things, like Kayayo, sales girl and even pickpocketing. My family had become smaller. My father left after uncountable fights. The last fight ended when he smashed my mother’s head into the wall. All I could see was blood. It was just me, my mother, and my father. Fear crept me. My father left, facts fled and the only thing I could do was find water and try to stop the blood by washing them away. I remember I cried, I pitied my mother. The blood eventually stopped, but throughout the whole week, my mother complained of headaches. We become very small. The family of eight

turned four. Before my father would leave, my four older brothers left. They got up one day and decided to leave. My mother didn't even try to stop them. They said they were too old to be hearing their sexual activities now and then. I could see the embarrassment on my mother's face as she let them go. I used to see them once in a while when I started to look after myself because we barely had anything to survive on. It was just me, my mother, and my two younger siblings. What made me move out completely was when my little brother started complaining every time he went to defecate. He complained of blood in his fesses and he always complained of pain, when he did, my mother would dismiss him. I always thought it was strange but I had so many things to worry about. It wasn't until my brother passed away that I heard the truth. When Mr. Sammy, a father figure from the church we attend, visited us. He brought rice and other things. Once in a while, he visited and preached the word to my little siblings. He would always advise me to be better and tell me I was the one to save my family and that I was very special. I went out to get him water like always when he came around. When I was about to enter our room after I got the water. I heard my mother cry "You killed him." I become stiff. "Stop making a fuzz he said. "Just take the money and pay for the rent. I gave you money to buy drugs for him, but you made your husband spend all that money on alcohol." He said. My knees were weak. I remember I was half on the floor already. "You should have stopped having sex with him when he was becoming weak." That was the last thing I heard, and that was the last I heard or saw my mother. My sight was almost blurred with the tears that filled my eyes, and that is when I came to reality again. I looked at the man in front of me and this time the tears flowed freely.

"I came to his place to escape, growing up I heard things about the state. I heard America was heaven. When I left home I began doing all sorts of work. One of the work I landed on was to work in a Casino in Tema, and that was the only time I had the chance to watch a television. And oh it felt like magic. I knew then that I had to come here and that is how I got here. That was the only time I had a dream and that was to leave Ghana and come to the state and all my trouble would disappear. But getting here was another hell. The reality hit me hard than ever. It was hell, but the only thing that saved me was your father's church. I began my school thanks to him. I did something big Max, coming to the States at the age of twelve was big enough. That is something big Max." I said. "Starting all over and getting into a school here wasn't the easy road I thought it would be. Do you know how many times I tried to end it all, end this filthy life of mine, the accountable unsuccessful suicide I had planned and executed?

“He looked at me so surprised. “How would I know, you were always this strong woman, nothing could break you.” He said. I was strong, yes, and maybe I’m still strong given what you just told me. Maybe I always knew but tried my best to shy away from it. I realized I desperately wanted to be nothing like my mother but ended up like her.

I looked up at my husband once again. “So what now? It is a sir or a madam?” “What?” Shame was evident on his face. “Sorry, not trying to be rude, a lot is going on, on my mind right now. You didn’t even want marriage until I was with child and the only reason we married was because your parent didn’t want to be a topic since they headed a church.” I laughed, “Oh, and now you are here talking big, you are a good dad, I would give you that but don’t stand here and be like you gave me the world. You can leave now. I’m not about to stand here and try to fix things. It’s already broken. I wonder what your parents have to say about this. But thinking about everything I think they already knew. But it was I that was a fool maybe in the beginning. You fooled me once, shame on you but I was fooled twice and that’s on me. “Did we mean anything to you? Did I mean anything to you? Did Caleb and Brian mean anything to you? Remember when you said that you would do anything for them? Remember when you first met me and you smiled?” No one had ever had that kind of smile for me. My Father never smiled like that to my mom. “In this life I had only one dream and that was you. Our marriage. I did what I knew best to keep you. Only for you to say you like a man. Why not a woman?” I asked but no response. I didn’t even notice but everything in my heard stared rushing out

“I feel sick when I look at you not saying I hate you, maybe you vex me but Peter? Guy is skinny I know you love slim by damn he is bony I’m even scared to hold him, to break him.” I said. “How do you do it?” “You are not one to handle fragile.” I began to fix myself a drink. “I’m a local, not saying I hate gay but you gay?” I swallowed, and fix another. “Oh I’m surprise though, caused we laughed at little Jonny together saying, millennial trying to be wok now remember?” I asked but he didn’t answer. “Not sure why I called him little Jonny but you called him little Jonny first and we imagined if he wears diapers. I feel bad for little Jonny now”. I smiled. “Enough Mary.” He said as he tried to grab the glass cup from my hold. “You know that man was old but not enough to be your dad. Can’t believe you are thirty ...thirty never seem to be an age of silliness Max. I understand your dad wanted a girl and your mom dressed you as a princess and you played with dolls and named your cat ‘pink’ but I thought you

did therapy and you said “Therapy was good Pee” remember that too?” I asked “no initials of my name began with P Max, my name is Mary as in Grandma Mary, as in Mary the mother of Jesus Christ but you would never know, because you never went to church. My name was Mary Grand there is no e in my Mary Grand but you said pee meant pretty but now we know don’t we” I walked to the sofa and allowed myself to relax in there.

“You are an ugly person Mary. Very ugly. He said. We both know I was one of your games to beat life. You wanted me for security, you wanted me for a green card. You never touched me, you never told me you loved me.” He paused and then resumed like he was thinking hard. “Remember you always called me silly when I say something big or desire something big. Yes I never went to church but is it a safe place if those that went have this mindset. You think you are better.” You also broke us, maybe you were already broken. You can’t be fixed Mary...we can’t be fixed, its useless to even try. And I’m scared that our boys will turn out to be us.” It hit me, his words hit me, our boys. Were they damaged, did I damage them? Did I damage us? The tears rolled. I looked around me, I had come a long way. Achieved things I never thought I would, but why did it fell as though it’s all falling apart. I was lost and all that control I had were lost too. My father’s voice creped in. “life is a game for a fool.” I was scared. I’m I losing this game too?