

## When The Wind Rages

I sat there and watched my spirit, as it forcefully left my body and took everything on its way with it. Aunty Bola called out my name for the second time, "Simi, will you answer me? We don't have all the time in the world. Where do you want us to bury them? This is your decision to make, you are not a child and desperate times call for desperate measures. I don't enjoy this, but we need to act fast". Those words were like arrows piercing my soul. Just forty-eight hours ago, they were here, forty-eight hours ago, Femi was here, my mother was here, and now, they have left with the winds, and here I am, burdened with these decisions. Aunty Bola didn't even realize I was having a panic attack or maybe she chose to be blind to it. "Simi, it's best to bury them as soon as possible, nothing fancy, since you're the only one left. It saves us the time and money you don't have". I had no time to stress myself over the money jab she took at me. I needed to leave this place, so I could be alone with myself and fully grasp what had happened in the last forty-eight hours. Uncle Ade asked what day of the week was today, and someone in the room answered "Tuesday". That word was like a thorn in my skin. They were here on Sunday, and now, here I am, in a world, devoid of their love and care.

'Mummy bought a plot of land in the Ogolonto area of Ikorodu and there is an uncompleted six-bedroom duplex on it. We can bury them there, it is what she would have wanted.'

My mind drifted to the first time she took me and Femi to that land "This is going to be yours someday and I would want to be buried here, when I die, someday in the future". She giggled after saying this, But someday wasn't supposed to be today; someday, it was supposed to be six decades from now. "Oh, she has landed property? This is good because we won't have to spend money to get two spots in Aton. We can use the money for other things. How much is in her account?"

'I don't know, but as of Saturday afternoon, she had six hundred thousand Naira in there'. I replied, "OK, you will go and check her balance at the nearest ATM so we can plan well". Uncle Ade held my hands and whispered "You know they loved you and we are here for you". I sighed, he meant well, but the words rang hollow. Our plans and the future I had envisioned with them will no longer come to fruition. I was physically debilitated. The thought of a life without them was like an acid in my system. I couldn't let that happen, if they both left me, then I must join them. We were supposed to be in this together; I thought to myself, I am going to withdraw the money for Aunty Bola and give them the proper goodbye, then I will go home and kill myself, that's it. I just have to tolerate Aunty Bola and this empty world until the burial. They deserve this much from me. Those words were like an energizer, I regained my strength and told Aunty Bola that I was ready to use the ATM, so Uncle Ade volunteered to drive me there. As we walked towards the car, my mind drifted to our car rides every Sunday after church. It was our special karaoke day. The thirty-minute drive from the church back home was always fun.

My mother was a single mother of two and she threw herself into it. She met my dad during her undergraduate days at Unilag. My dad's cousin was also a student and he usually came to spend time with Him. My dad was a young prophet of God and whenever there was a crusade he was invited, as a minister. Unlike his cousin, Uncle Jimi, he was not a student. My mother met him in one of those crusades on campus where he prophesied about my sick grandmother.

She claimed he was accurate and weeks later, she found out he was related to Uncle Jimi, so she got in contact with him to say thank you and give him a box of towels as a gift. It was during that meeting he expressed interest in her. He was a 6'6ft dark-skinned Yoruba man, he was very appealing to the eyes, and his special gift made him the prayer point of most ladies. When they started dating, her family was opposed to him. He was not in school, so my grandfather forbade her from seeing him, but she was in love at this point. She saved up to buy him a Jamb form and tutor him; he gained admission to study Accounting in her 3rd year. She believed her parents would accept him if he went to school and had something outside of prophecy and church. During her service year, she redeployed to Lagos just to be with him and saved up to get an apartment that they shared. They lived together and after National Service, she got a Job with Lagos State Inland Revenue. By this time, he was in his final year. She was helping with part of his fees and house bills. By the time he was done with school, he had become a popular preacher/prophet and had decided to start a church. It was during this time she became pregnant with me and my grandparents consented to the marriage before it became obvious that she was pregnant. They didn't want her to bring shame and disgrace to the family. My grandparents were deacons and that meant a lot to them. By the time I was two, she was pregnant with Femi. He traveled more for crusades and programs. She was shuffling work, being a mother of two, and being the mummy GO. Femi was 6 months old when he told her that she was a witch and was out to get him. He claimed several prophecies confirming this from other prophets of God, and like a joke, it became a scandal. He left home and wouldn't listen to any appeal to take her back. Before Femi's one-year birthday, he was married to a single lady from the church. The same lady who relocated from the US and has been trying to befriend her with gifts for years.

Over the years, the ministry grew bigger and he became more popular, but he didn't care about our welfare, let alone, check up on us. She was a witch that needed to be avoided. My grandparents died in the years that followed and she relocated from Yaba, Lagos to Badagry, Lagos just to get away from everything.

We were a close-knit family and our motto was 'Three of us, against the world'. Femi's urge for success was driven solely by the desire to give her a better life. "She has been through hell and I intend to take her away from hell to paradise". He would say this to me. It was supposed to be three of us. I am a third-year, Linguistic student at the University of Ilorin and Femi was a year one, Medicine student at Unilag. My mother postponed going for her master's all these years because she wanted us to be in University before going back to school. This was supposed to be that year since Femi was now in school. Over the years, I watched her choose our welfare over parties. She would say "The money I will use for this Asoebi is enough to buy foodstuff for one week". She was all about us and this was the year, she was supposed to start doing things for herself since her children are now undergraduates.

We were all supposed to be in church that morning, but I woke up with menstrual cramps, so mummy asked me to stay back. I got back from Ilorin on Friday night for the second-semester break, and since Femi schools in Lagos, he often comes home for the weekend. They left for church that morning while I was in bed. I didn't want to take any drugs for the pain because my roommate, Hadiza, told me it was damaging, but after struggling with the pain for hours, I gave in to the urge to use Ibuprofen. I got up to go shower when my phone rang. It was Mummy lfe, she was my mom's assistant as the head of the ushering unit. "Where are you?" "I am at home, I

replied. Mummy and Femi left for the church over an hour ago, haven't you seen them?' I asked, her voice was shaken and she stuttered "Ehnn.... I am...I am not in church. I just wanted to confirm that she has left home." 'Ok ma, she has left home. She is in the church,' I replied. She hung up. I went to shower, I had plans to see my secondary friends today, Tobi and Derin. It has been a while since I saw them. Tobi is at Covenant University and Derin is at Ekiti State University. They are also home for the break and we planned to go to the cinemas this evening. I would wait for mummy and femi to come back before going out.

Around noon, my phone rang, it was Aunty Dami from church. She called me "Simi". She was in tears. "I am so sorry for your loss" 'My loss?', I didn't lose anything, "Oh, they have not told you"? 'Told me what, Aunty Dami!' "I am sorry" she hung off.

I quickly dialed my mom's number, it rang but she didn't pick up. I was starting to panic. I called Femi, it rang and he didn't pick up. There was a knock on the door, so I ran towards the door with a sigh of relief. They were almost home and that must have been why they didn't pick up the call. As I opened the door, I saw my pastor, his wife, and about four church elders, my mind was adrift and the world stood still. 'Please, tell me they are alive', I said, and they all looked stunned. "Did anyone call you?" my pastor's wife asked, 'Yes, Aunty Dami called me. Please, I just want to know if they are alive.' My pastor's wife ran towards me as I collapsed on the floor with my palms covering my face. "I am so sorry" she echoed. I fell into a battle of tears. My pastor told me they had sent some elders to go and inform my Aunt, my mother's sister, Aunty Bola. She had two siblings, Aunty Bola and Uncle Ade. He went on to narrate what had happened as I battled with the tears. Their car was run over by a trailer on their way to church. They were pronounced dead, the moment they rushed them to the hospital.

'I need to see them'. I said, My pastor's wife replied "You will see them. Your aunty is on her way here". 'I cannot wait that long, please take me there.', but my pastor replied, "We will all go together when your aunty and uncle get here". Time began to crawl as my mind spiraled. I should have been in the car with them. Why didn't I convince them to stay? Why did God spare my life and take them away?

Femi will never learn how to drive, he won't fall in love, he won't graduate from medical school, he will never be a doctor, and he won't buy her the house he wanted to get for her. My mother will never know what it is to be a grandmother. She will never witness the convocation of her children. She will never go for her master, She will never reap the benefit of motherhood. She would not complete and sleep in the house that she was building. She will die as a tenant.

In those moments, I wished myself to die. I do not want to be here. I need to be with them.

Aunty Bola, Uncle Ade, and his wife arrived hours later and Aunty Bola threw herself on the floor wailing as my uncle's wife sat beside me. My uncle asked loads of questions, but my soul had left the room at this time.

Forty-eight hours later, I am being bombarded with questions about what to do with their body, and the money in my mother's account. Uncle Ade turned down the idea of allowing me to see the corpse. He claimed I am too fragile and every attempt to make them see reasons proved abortive. Aunty Bola said there was no need for a big burial and since I am the only child and sibling left, we should bury them that week. She claimed to be broke at the moment, and I don't have a job, so we must resort to using my mother's money for the burial. She won't even get a proper burial, I thought to myself.

Uncle Ade drove me to the ATM and when I checked her balance, I found six hundred and eight thousand Naira, and I printed out the receipt. I had a plan and I will follow through with it; I will stay around for the burial and after that, I will kill myself. I said this to myself over and over again in the days that followed. My uncle suggested reaching out to my father, but I shot it down. 'I would rather die than reach out to him'. "Don't say that, he said to me. I hope you know he is still family." 'The only people I considered famous are dead'. "You are hurting right now. We will talk when you are calm", he said. There won't be any, again, I said to myself. I will be out of here soon.

We decided we'd bury them that Thursday. The faster we bury them, the faster I get out of here, I thought to myself.

We will have a church service and then head over to Ikorodu to bury them. The church contacted us that they would bear the cost of the burial. My pastor also volunteered to pay for my fees and cover my upkeep. We buried them side by side. My mother was buried that Thursday and Femi the next day. As I eulogized them I wept for myself, Femi should be eulogizing me because there is no one else to do it. Femi was buried on her right side and I visibly gauged my spot on her left.

I will leave here and that night I will kill myself, I told myself as we left Ikorodu. My pastor's wife asked if I could go with them since Aunty Bola said she had to go home. She has been with me since that Sunday. I won't have access to the hypo bleach I intend to drink, so I told them I can stay alone till my aunt comes back, but my pastor and his wife insisted. "suicide delayed is not suicide denied" I said to myself. I will find a way, but now I won't go along with the plan on Friday. That night, my pastor and his wife kept talking about the importance of continuing with my life because that's what my mom and Femi would have wanted for me. They reminisced about my mom, and his wife cried. It was like they knew my plan, he said, "Suicide is not the way. They will throw your corpse into a bush. You won't have the opportunity to be buried beside them. I don't think you would want that". I burst out crying 'I just want to die and be with them,' I said amidst the tears. "I know that it hurts and I cannot imagine your pain, but they didn't die by choice. Death happened to them. If you take your life by choice, you would be mocking them and what they went through. Imagine the last few seconds before they died, they must have been fighting for their life. Don't take yours, please." My pastor said he decided with his wife that I needed to see a therapist and I agreed.

"Journaling is therapeutic ", consider it.