

It was on that same beech shelf, by my mother's dust-filled desk for over a decade. The entire reason it was even in her office all those years was because of a unique sale.

The day my mother brought the big blue ball, as I called it, home, I was eight and still called Roro, instead of Rose.

“Gbemiga! Roro! You will not imagine where I got this and how much it cost me?”

As usual, my austere father sat, unbothered to pretend to listen. As my mother spoke, daddy's eyes dug deep into the content of the day's chaos in the newspaper. My mother, Grace, undeterred, continued about the globe.

Being five foot seven with skin that glossed in the sun, it was difficult to miss a woman like my mother. In a busy market, with eyes closed, fists clenched and zero worry about the bag snatchers who waited to catch you off guard. Her purple, wrapped, head scarf added two inches to her height, and the slenderness of her shoulders created an almost figurine type statute of the “African woman”.

When she opened her eyes, she felt for her bag, gladly collected herself and made sure all was well. She looked at the stall beside her and saw the boy, no more than nine years old, as he walked around selling a globe.

He called out “come and see the world o” and slowly moved through the little spaces in between people much taller than him.

Grace gleamed. This was God. Her eyes were shut in prayer earlier, as she sought confirmation to travel.

“He sent me a sign”, she reassured herself and jumped for joy, “through a little boy. He wants me to see the world”.

She broke away from her statue pose and rushed towards him. She smiled at him and asked him of the price. He smiled too.

“It costs 3000 Naira ma. *But I can give you for 2k* if you can spin it and land in the country I am thinking about”.

Grace laughed.

She thought it very unusual to have a boy in the market doing this. But wasn't that the beauty of my mother's personality? She entertained everything out of the ordinary.

“See this boy o. Okay, can we agree on landing on the continent you are thinking about instead?”.

He nodded in agreement.

She chuckled, a strange boy with an unusual sales method.

Grace stooped, not to conquer, but to calibrate his feelings, or maybe the honesty of his heart. She asked for his name, and he responded by gesturing to the globe in his left hand, a blue ball, bigger than the one on his right.

“Do you really think you can land on the continent I am thinking about?” he asked.

“I do not see why not”, she riposted, with a sly smile.

They stood in the middle of the aisle of stores. To the others, it looked like an adult admonishing a child or haggling prices. Yet Grace did not lean over or get up from her stoop. She looked into his eyes, then at the blue ball, then she spun fast, creating a whirlwind for the eyes.

Her rolling eyes could not move as quickly as the globe did, so she looked away. The older she got, the worse the astigmatism she had carried all these years.. The boy's eyes did not leave Grace's. The globe slowed down in a movement similar to a car struggling to come to a halt from a burst tyre. Grace refrained from saying another prayer, not because she was worried about stressing God —she knew He would be happy to be involved in the intricacies of her life— but because she already felt equipped with enough favour. The boy smiled as he saw the pin on the globe land in Egypt.

He squealed.

“I chose Africa in my mind!”

She screamed “yes!”.

They laughed with a laughter of familiarity and joint hope. She collected the globe from him, paid him two thousand five hundred Naira for good pleasure and measure. They smiled and parted ways.

Grace immediately remembered that it was rather strange for a learned boy to be on the streets selling when he should be in school. He knew countries and continents well enough, she thought. Could it be financial? Then surely he would not be interested in giving a discount up to a thousand Naira. She turned around to ask him about school, and his name but he was no longer there.

She looked across the market within eye view but did not see him. She was convinced he was an angel sent from God.

After she narrated this story to us, my father lifted his head, smiled, nodded at the information and asked.

“Will you be going to Egypt, my love?”

Gbemiga knew his wife. She was hopeful, yet seldomly did her hope translate to actions.

She grumbled, accusing him of not being happy for her and walked away with the globe, placing it on her newly made shelf, by her office table.

My mother repeatedly made mental notes of the plans she needed to create in order to start touring the world. After all, she had gotten confirmation from God through an angel.

But the globe sat there, for days, then weeks, and finally years.

Today, I passed by my late mother's room, heading to her home office where the globe sat. She died a week ago in her sleep. Grace was tired that evening, glancing around, weighed down by the day to day weariness that held humans in the evenings; not understanding the state of mind she was in. Going on with herself, she assisted my dad in making and serving dinner. While we sat at the table, I told them about going back to school that weekend. It was a Thursday.

As we emptied our plates, Grace got up, kissed me on the forehead and told me to wake her the next day.

“With how I feel, I might sleep through my alarm” she yawned and stretched, slurring.

Standing upright, she continued “So please wake me tomorrow morning Rose, your father might already be up at his study so wouldn't want to bother him”.

Gbemiga interjected “It's okay my love, really”.

They smiled at each other, and Grace left the table to the room, where she slept into eternity.

When I tapped an unresponsive mother the next morning, I screamed for my father. I did not call him by his name like I was used to.

My hands patted my right thigh vigorously as I panted and paced. Gbemiga tapped his wife on the shoulder, she had an injury there since her teenage years that always reacted to touch.

Grace was by now only a body without a soul or spirit, just a lump of body lying, waiting to be carried away. Gbemiga shook her by those shoulders, pressing in on them and watched her motionless body.

When Gbemiga bent his head forward, and covered his face, I confirmed what I already knew but was too afraid to say. Neither me nor my father cried for the first five minutes.

“Mummy, wake up.” I finally said as I shook my mother the hardest I ever have, calling her mummy instead of Grace.

With no response, the waterfalls of sorrow and disbelief flowed.

I screamed, cried loudly, and held my mother so tightly as my father's watching eyes, already welling up, gave way. The last time we were all together alive was at the dinner table on Thursday night. The three of us surrounded by the 6 by 6 bed realised it was the last time we would be together again, in flesh, dead or alive.

Nobody was alerted until noon, when Gbemiga's friends kept calling about his absence and my phone kept receiving calls and messages. Neither of us could muster the strength to move Grace. She was still the very same way she was when we found her over five hours ago.

Then Grace's phone rang for the first time and it was her best friend- Amina. I looked into my father's face and read the concern about who must shoulder that responsibility. Gbemiga mostly revealed his true self to Grace, myself and two of his friends from university. His ability to go back into his shell had been his way of life for decades. He kept his nature of few words, few emotions and searching expressions to himself.

Gbemiga remembered the way Grace felt at dinner and questioned his mind, exhausted. Was it more than it was? Was this really a random death in her sleep or was something to it, was the fatigue a warning? Should he have done something? Guilt ate into his heart, perhaps, he should have been waking her up often to check in.

All of a sudden, he thought he realised the moment she died. They slept in each other's arms every night, wrapped around each other. That night, nothing was different. He

climbed into bed a couple hours after her, wrapped himself in her as usual, kissed her face and watched her until he slept.

They slept that way, and through the tossing and turning of the night, they serendipitously located one another's body and reached for it. Towards the morning when his mind and body was beginning to gather itself in moments of wakening, Gbemiga reached for her but she did not reach back. He didn't think anything of it, he never did. Now, he circled back to that moment, putting it in a freeze frame, causing him to reflect if that very moment meant something.

He wished for the same thing all humans seek in such a time, to go back to that moment and shake her, maybe bring her to life before death ran ahead. A dark cloud was hovering, and he could have dispelled it, he pondered and the pain hit harder, different.

I looked to my father as he cried louder, his face overcome with sorrow. I watched as my father did not leave my mother's hands. He held them that way since they found her. He was afraid to let go again, his eyes bloodied with grief.

His sweaty palms and tired feet became sore from clenching. He might have held his breath longer than he thought, because the more he wept, the less air was left in him. It was coming, the overall understanding of the permanent, infinite nature of this loss.

So today, as I walked by the room, the heaviness of my emotions startled me. I haven't been in the room since last Thursday, so I scurried along, side-eyed into my mother's office.

After I sat on Grace's chair, I swirled right and saw the globe. It sat there on the brown, beech shelf. Like a museum ornament that hadn't been visited, the globe looked like a different shade of blue than the first day my mother bought it.

I still remembered the way Grace walked to the home office to place it on the shelf as I trudged behind her, interested in seeing up close this magical blue ball. My mother explained that she was going to Egypt and was excited about the many places she would see.

I stared at the globe, watching the coloured, dividing lines of borders, continents and oceans. I took note of the stand in which it came in. My mother swiped her hand on the shelf, feeling the non-existent dust between her fingers, before placing the globe there.

“So when will you travel to Egypt Grace, and can I come with you?”. I rushed the question, and avoided my mother’s eyes.

“You know you cannot Roro. You have school, and mummy is supposed to explore the part of this world alone. Not to worry, all of us will take a trip somewhere else. I will tell your father”.

Still running with hope, I counted down the days until my mother’s trip and eventually our family trip. By day one thousand, I came to know neither was going to happen.

I picked up the globe, caressing the dust off the base, the axis and the ball. My dustied, blackened hand begged for a release, and I paid it no mind, letting it soak into my flesh.

Beside the globe was Grace’s Bible. Right beside the globe. I wondered, did my mother not read things in the Bible that surely must have reminded her of Egypt?

How did she manage to pick up the Bible that sat beside the shelf everyday, yet forget about the encounter of the globe, the hope of the journey, the actualization of the dream?

I expelled the hardness of heart I felt towards my dead mother. She was good. Not that I believed in honouring the dead as it were.

To me, it was an excuse to let up people who did terrible things while they were on earth. Once as a teenager, I called my late uncle—whom the entire family was aware tried to poison and kill my father—a murderer..

“Do not speak ill of the dead,” My father warned.

“Ill of the dead? You know that you would be dead because of him. In fact, didn't they tell us that he died in a car accident after raging and racing out of the house in anger because he realised you didn't die? What ill is there to say about a seriously sick person? Shouldn't...”

“That's enough Rose. enough! Where is your heart of forgiveness? God forgave us our entire sins, and so we have to forgive him. Leave vengeance for God.” Grace retorted.

I walked out angrily, realising that my mother had found a way to convince my father of forgiveness. Typical.

Grace raised me with the knowledge of God as the first and fourth member of our family. Yet, in my teenage years, I lost the interest and commitment required for the total obedience to serve God when my best friend went into a coma, and eventually died.

The compactness of the memories showed in the spinning of my eyes and the strain in my feet. Sighing a deep breath of letting go, I dropped the globe on the table and finally dusted the blackness of thickened dust off my hands by slapping my palms together.

I sat on her mother's chair, staring down at the globe. The coming of age symbol that opened my eyes to the realness of the world: hope and despair, promises and compromises, regrets and realisations.

Like the sharpness and quickness of a staple pin, I spun the globe not knowing why. I smiled to myself as the globe rolled and my eyes followed. I allowed myself to feel things becoming aware of my spontaneity, almost like I was out of myself, almost like someone was telling me what to do.

I gasped. I was not alone. The globe stopped spinning and landed in Egypt. I screamed, then started to laugh. The first laughter of the house in a week. It came from the depth of my buried feeling. Right in front of me, was Egypt, the land of hope, my mother's hope.

My father walked into the office with a small smile on his face.

"I think I am going to Egypt Gbemiga. I feel like mummy wants me to finish her journey. Maybe mummy wants me and you to do so"? My response, bashful. I didn't stop smiling. And now my father smiled more, walking towards me.

"Would you believe me if I told you that I just bought us tickets to Egypt." he replied, watching the rising, cheerful look on my face. "I got confirmation from the Holy Spirit right before I heard your scream."

I stood, stunned, snorts and all. My father placed my face over his left shoulder, patting my back, easing me into the realisation that God was here, with us. That Grace was in heaven living the promised eternal life.

Gbemiga gently pulled me away and looked into my face and we both smiled. A knowing smile.