

I LOVE YOU NOW AND ALWAYS

February 10th 2023, was the 2nd anniversary to my marriage to Adaku, my childhood crush whom I finally gathered the courage to ask out in university. It was also the day I finally saw Emmanuel, my best friend since we were 5, after more than a decade of him living in France. He had come back as a form of apology for missing my wedding and wanted to celebrate the union.

February 10th, 2023 was the day mama finally decided to leave the village to enjoy the city life which she always described as digital saying she preferred her analogue lifestyle that was much slower paced and easier. She came to see Adaku as she recently got pregnant.

It was also the day my marriage ended.

I had known Ada since we were teenagers and never expected we would end up together. I had been living in the University of Port Harcourt staff quarters due to Mama being a senior lecture and papa working in the Ministry of Agriculture. Papa thought it was more secure and economical to stay on campus while he planned to build a house in GRA.

July 2nd, 2006 I vividly remembered it being a Friday and mama had come back from work and mentioned a new lecturer was moving into the flat the was previously occupied by the now retired Professor Richard and his family.

The following Sunday, a Peugeot 504 had pulled into the front yard of Profs former house followed by a moving bus. I was playing football with Emmanuel who lived a few blocks away when we noticed the cars pulling up.

"That's probably your new neighbour"

"How can you tell; it could be anyone moving in"

"Prof was the only one that moved out in this area" He insisted

" I just pray this new one is much more friendly"

"Let's go and see."

When we got there, Papa was already shaking Mr Philips hand and called us as he noticed us

" This is my son Eli and Mrs. Tamunofiri's Son, Emmanuel"

"Good afternoon, Uncle" we both resonated

" Ah Ah! such strong looking young men, I hope you will show me the happening places here"

We all laughed and I thought he was at least friendly and funny, he's surely better than Prof.

"Let me introduce you to my daughter" Mr Philip added

"Ada! come out of the car and greet our neighbours, don't be rude Biko"

As we watched the car door open, I was intrigued, she was a bit taller than me, had the same fair complexion as her father and looked good with her braids. I unconsciously stared until she had gotten close. A

She sheepishly smiled revealing she had dimples on both sides of her face. I smiled back at her.

"Good afternoon, Sir, my name is Adaku".

"Sir?" I thought to myself.

The title made me feel uneducated, especially after I had called her dad "Uncle". I already started feeling a way around her.

"Good afternoon young lady, how are you?"

"I'm fine sir"

"This is Eli and his friend, Emmanuel"

I extended my hand for a handshake only to be ignored and waved at. I heard Emmanuel giggle behind me and I was pretty sure if not for both parents, he would burst out laughing, the one I usually told him sounded like a goat screaming.

I withdrew my hand; I tried to dislike her for how she made me feel.

25th September 2007, the day we all became seniors in secondary school. We were all in the same class but Ada and Emmanuel had gotten particularly close not long after we met. Undoubtedly because they discovered they shared a tragedy. Ada had lost her mother to a car accident when she was 3, Emmanuel had lost his father to armed robbers.

We all started hanging out after school, our parents unanimously deciding it was best to go from home. Emmanuel and I knew I had a crush on her, I often got jealous when I felt she got too close to Emmanuel. He even teased me one time by holding her hand and swaying it like

in the romantic movies, it made her laugh, but I could swear she turned to look at me like she felt guilty about it.

Still, she never really made it clear what I had with her, she mocked me when I started talking to other girls, especially Amara.

“Don’t tell me you like that her big nose” she said

“And what if I do?”

“On your wedding day when they say kiss the bride, her nose will poke your eye”

“Na Wa O, ok so would you rather it’s you I kiss” I teased.

At first, she smiled;

“Abeg don’t even try using those your nonsense lines on me before I break your head”

“This guy you’re trying to smooth talk a brick wall, e go bounce back” Emmanuel said

She playfully smacked him on the head as we all laughed.

I thought it was flattering she thought most girls weren’t my standard. Nevertheless, every time I tried asking her to go on a walk or to see a movie, she always asked Emmanuel to join us. Even when he tried faking an illness, she always found a way to bribe him with either paying for his ticket or getting him suya on our way back.

There is this thing about guys, we never really get over someone. Rather, we fill our hearts with other things eventually making them the last thing we think about. However, it was difficult moving past Ada, I saw her almost every day.

“So, you’re saying you can never date a friend?” I asked

“I’m not saying I can’t date my friend; I’m saying the relationship I have with you and Emmanuel is too precious to ruin”

“I thought they always say marry your friend abi best friend”

“Eh heh, and they also say men are scum but look at me having two men in my life”

“Don’t worry I’ll shock you, before you know you’re saying you love me”

“Why does that sound like a threat?”

“Even though I think you guys will make a great couple, I also don’t believe in forcing things” Emmanuel added.

“Why do you say that”? she asked

“The thing with forcing things is that, one party gets hurts. It could go either way, either the person forcing it figured it wasn’t for him and he wasted his time, or the person that was convinced sees that it shouldn’t have happened in the first place”

He looked at me for a moment and I hated that he didn’t tell me this in private.

Eventually, I started dating Amara before we finished school. Amara was one of the most popular girls in our set and I felt I had to make a loud statement before leaving. Ada still wasn’t a fan of her nose.

June 15th 2010, all three of us eventually graduated from school and planned to apply to Unilag.

August 12th 2010, the day Emmanuel told us he was leaving Nigeria on the campus field.

“Hey guys I know we planned to stick together and all but my mom believes that I have a better opportunity outside the country, we already have an admission starting late January” he said.

“What? How? Aren’t we all starting school this September?” Ada asked.

“Guy when did you even start this process?” I added

“The period we were about writing JAMB, my mum started process with my uncle in London”

We noticed the shimmer in his eyes, it distracted us from asking why he hid this from us. We assumed his mum didn’t want something supernatural derailing their plans hence the secrecy.

I caught him wiping tears off pretending the wind had introduced sand to his eyes. Ada got up to buy us drinks from the shop and her eyes were noticeably red when she got back. I cried when I laid in bed that night.

August 5th 2011, Ada started talking to Daniel. They met on our induction week, being both freshers studying International Relations.

Eventually, he asked her out when he took her on a lunch date. She came back happy and broke the news to us. I pretended to be ecstatic while Emmanuel was genuinely happy for her. Emmanuel had been staying with me off campus in Lagos because his mum thought leaving Port Harcourt to Lagos was a good experiment before he ventured out of the country.

Daniel was really good to her; I could tell from the way she smiled at her phone and how much she started going out to new places she always thought were too cliché. He occasionally wrote handwritten love letters to her even though he had a phone.

I was still with Amara at the time, she also got into Unilag with us and was more than thrilled to continue our romance. Although we both knew it was never serious, she only loved the attention I gave her. We would usually go on double dates because Amara and Daniel were course mates and knew each other from classes. Amara only wished I took the relationship more serious sometimes rather than gawk about my friendship with Ada.

December 15th 2011, the day of the end of year party. Emmanuel was leaving next month and we decided to throw a little house party, one last ride. Ada pleaded we let Daniel crash in our living room after the party and I reluctantly agreed.

5:30pm Ada and Daniel had come to the flat with a bottle of rosé and I ushered them to the kitchen where they could introduce themselves to the other few guests. We invited 10 people which included both of them. I overheard Daniel talking about how the past few months have been and he couldn't wait to spend the rest of his life this happy, I noticed her blush.

Daniel tried to kiss her a few times but I knew Ada was not the kind and she was sober enough to still care.

I needed to get fresh air. The house had been crowded with over 15 extra unwanted guests as the word spread out that it was a party.

I stepped out of the house and was gone for 40 minutes and returned to meet Emmanuel and Ada talking in the parlour.

“Where were you”. Amara asked

“I just needed some air”

“I was worried, you left me alone”

“I'm sorry love, let me get you a drink”

“Sometimes I feel like you don’t care about me”

“It’s not like that you know, it’s complicated”

“I guess I need someone who feels I’m worth uncomplicating things with”

“Yeah, sorry I dragged you along like this, feel free to stay around and enjoy yourself”

“Thanks. I’ll try”

“Let me still get your drink”

I returned a few minutes later to find her downing two shots of tequila and was happy to receive another from me. She started flirting with a few guys there and I left her.

I asked Emmanuel to go with Ada to get some pringles and water while I watched the house. Daniel was visibly tipsy but stable so I told Ada not to worry about him. As they left, I saw Amara go to him, I felt I should have stopped her but I also felt Daniel could handle himself. He laughed off whatever she said and walked over to me in the living room.

“Nice party my guy”

“Thanks bro”

“Are you still with Amara”

“Nah, we ended things”

“That explains why she was asking me to kiss her”

“Sorry about that”

“it’s fine, I can’t think of doing something like that”

“Yeah, that’s true”

“Even though it’s really hard”

“What do you mean?”

“I know you’re Ada’s best friend, but, as a guy let me explain”

He went on to say with Ada they had never even kissed before, she was abstinent and was waiting till marriage. I flashed back when we all vowed to do the same one Sunday after church; although Emmanuel and I occasionally kissed our partners we never let it go further. Daniel explained that he wasn't a virgin when he met Ada but he was doing right by her. I understood his situation and urged him to have fun at the party, I cheered his drink and left to go to the kitchen.

However, the next 30 minutes felt like a movie, Daniel had gotten way tipsier than when I left him. I watched as he danced in the living room and as Amara moved towards him grinding on him.

In hindsight, I could have stopped it earlier especially after she kissed him on his cheek and pointed to the bedroom. I watched as Amara led Daniel into our bedroom. I was too stunned to move and after 5 minutes of hoping it was a dream, I stepped out of the house to catch my breath.

Ada had come back with Emmanuel and met me outside. She asked for Daniel and I mentioned he must have disappeared somewhere in the house. I didn't follow them into the house.

As she searched for him in the kitchen and walked over to open the bedroom door. However, before she could open the door, Amara stepped out buttoning her shirt and pulling down her skirt and brushing past her. Ada looked inside and found Daniel shirtless and passed out on the bed, the stench of the room answered the question.

She quietly closed the door and ran out crying only stopping when she saw me.

"Her are you ok?"

"I think Daniel and Amara..."

The tears rolled down as we sat on the side of my flat. I held her till she stopped crying and walked her to her taxi.

The next morning was filled with a mix of emotion, mostly rage and confusing. Daniel woke up to a breakup text. He did not understand how he got himself that drunk and how he hurt Ada. He rushed back to campus but she had made up her mind.

The following days were spent with me trying to console her as I started taking her to eat and the breakup made her finally notice me. I eventually had the courage to ask her out few months after.

“You guys better take it easy with the drinks, I don’t want to hear stories that touch like that end of year party”

“Common babe, I’m always on my best behaviour” I said

“Yeah, and I’m here make sure he is as well” Emmanuel said

“I trust you will. I need to test this baby monitor we got to know the range” She kissed my cheeks before heading to the living room.

“Funny how that was the night that she started considering dating me”

“Really? Oh yeah! After the issue with Daniel”

Prior to our anniversary, Daniel reached out to Ada on Facebook asking for forgiveness to which she responded she had and moved on.

“She told me he tried killing himself a few times because he couldn’t understand how he could do something like that”

“Omo that’s serious, but it’s his fault for not controlling himself”

“I’ll be honest with you, I feel guilty”

“Why?”

I confessed to Emmanuel that when I stepped out to get some air, I had gone to get some ecstasy from a local dealer to numb the thought of Ada. When Daniel came to talk to me, I couldn’t stand him talking about her so I slipped two pills into his drink so he would at least just enjoy the music and have fun and leave me alone.

“You drugged him!?”

“I didn’t know what would happen next”

“Bro”

“Yeah, I know, I don’t know how I’ll tell her”

“No bro.....”

I looked up to see him pointing at the baby monitor turned on and blinking on the kitchen table. I run up to the bedroom to find her in tears not wanting to speak to me. She had heard

everything. She stated that our relationship we have was built on manipulation and distrust and she wasn't sure what other seed I planted just to be with her.

I left the house after the anniversary party and got a smaller apartment. Emmanuel stayed a month in Nigeria trying to help us out before flying back. She hasn't picked my call or texted me yet but I'm still praying she forgives me.