

Hi, my name is Ayomide Bamiduro and I'll be playing the role of Deyemi Okanlawon as Kola Ademola in "Blood Sisters, the Movie" scene 12.

I guess that's what an actual audition would sound like since I've never been in one.

I know what you're thinking, *"I must be prepping for my first audition"*.

Well, you're wrong. Why don't we lay a little foundation to this whole audition thing?

Let's start by taking a trip back to when I was 8 years old.

All the way back? Yes, you'll find out why.

You know how kids of these days are treated like kings and queens? I wish that was me. I recently saw a video of a mother packing food into her kid's lunch box - garnished jollof rice, boiled egg, fried chicken, pieces of sliced apple, a small pack of juice. Again, I wish that was me! Who knew what a lunch box was when I was a kid, let alone one with different segments to accommodate different food items? In my eight-year-old world, I was sucking Mama Ifenna's rice and ofeakwu from a white nylon; the taste has not left my taste bud.

No, Mama Ifenna was not my mother. She was the woman who sold food at our primary school. You do not want to know the anticipation that led up to the lunch bell, or the rush to get ahead of the long queue at Mama Ifenna's food stand.

I did not like my mother's food so much as a kid. I thought it didn't taste as good as Mama Ifenna's food. I recall once, I asked her why her food did not taste like Mama Ifenna's. I got the blackmail scolding that made me believe I was an ungrateful child when it was just my innocent mind asking ridiculously unnecessary questions. Plus, I was starved of dinner that night. I learned the hard way to savor the taste of my mother's food, sweet or not.

Anyways, back to our story.

8-year-old me was walking home from school, which was some 10 kilometers. I was used to it anyway. Make no mistake, I was starving. Yes, Mama Ifenna came through, but what is 10-naira food in the days for a poor child after another stretch of four hours from lunchtime? And don't forget the usual two or mostly three students with the regular habit of stretching their hands to any classmate with something to eat. But I had hope of meeting food at home, right? Perhaps that fueled

my journey home. The hole at the sole of my sandals that gave my feet direct contact with the hard floor did not matter, the distance did not matter, the next triple 500 meters after school trip to the rich people's street to fetch water from their borehole did not matter, not even the sweat getting absorbed by my school uniform which I was not going to wash mattered. What mattered was the beans at home. I was so sure it was beans. I knew my mother's menu. There wasn't much on it so I could tell what was on it every day.

I galloped like a unicorn with every step drawing me closer to my safe haven. I had a very monotonous and predictable lifestyle down to what I ate. Things were supposed to go only one way - I would get home panting, greet my mother who would be packaging whatever items she would resell, or cutting vegetables for the next day's soup. Then she would say, *"Remove your clothes and wash all the plates in the kitchen before you take your food."* There was no conversation that led to keeping up with my education and finding out how I was doing at school. At the time, the only relationship my mother had with my education was my school fees and the praise or comparison talk I got after I presented my end-of-term result. But I was okay with it. I mean, no kid wanted to discuss failed class works, uncompleted assignments, bully experiences, and served punishments, not with our kind of mothers.

Anyway, I entered the compound, sorry, I walked towards the house. It wasn't fenced so there was no entering the compound. That was when I began to hear voices. They were faint but as always, a sheep knows the shepherd's voice. I picked my mother's voice from afar. As I came closer to the house, the voices became clearer. My mother was having a conversation with someone, a man. I guess I should mention at this point that my father was late. You might have also figured since I've not mentioned him up to this point. It was just me and my mother.

The man's voice was loud yet deep. It sounded familiar but I did not recognize it at first. I was more interested in the things I heard him say.

Marry my mother ke?

He wanted to marry my mother!

I clearly heard my mother say, *"We have to keep our relationship a secret"*.

What?

Come on, I was eight, I knew what the word meant. I was still the best class performer in Words and Meaning.

I wanted to barge in but I didn't. My mother might have been strict, but she taught me principles that included not barging in on adult conversations.

Oh well, the good child in me stayed outside.

Two minutes of eavesdropping on my mother's conversation and I felt my mother had failed my father. It was five years after his death and there she was, already loving up on another man. What did I know about a woman's need for a man? Or the role of a father in a child's life, because as far as I was concerned, my mother's lover or anyone would never take my father's place.

We're close to the audition part.

I later barged in because what in the world? An only son of a late man who has received the sermon on the mount about how he's the man of the house and must carry on from where his father stopped, would understand my defiling my mother's principle and barging in on their adult conversation. In that instant, the room that held serious conversations that could have led to beautiful or worse endings fell silent like a graveyard.

This man, I knew him, oh, I did. The same man who came to the children's church every Sunday to quiz us after Sunday School. Oh, I hated his questions, every single one of them. Who asks children to quote an entire Bible text? What then is the memory verse meant for?

But his being at my mother's house asking for her hand in marriage explained a lot of things - He never asked me to remain standing every time I failed his Sunday school questions, and I mostly failed. When he gave biscuits to the ones who got their responses correctly, he gave me. Thinking about it now, I wonder how those kids would have felt.

I greeted my mother and him. My mother taught me some manners, remember? I expected the usual *"Remove your clothes and wash all the plates in the kitchen before you take your food."* but my mother said something else.

"I have an audition," she said.

She has what now?

I didn't understand. Big words and creative classes were not a thing in the type of school I went to.

Then she explained. And it made sense, or no sense at all.

First, I didn't think my face told that I listened to their conversation and understood it. If anything, my face screamed hunger. I was still a kid and emotions had nothing on my appetite. You can understand, right?

Why then did she explain that she and the Sunday school quiz master were practicing for an audition?

Secondly, my mother was a trader who sold anything she could make a profit from. I even hawked for her sometimes after school. But acting? The same career she condemned because of the history of broken marriages and the mature content they portrayed. This is a woman who made sure the only screen time I had was Thursday Super Story.

Helloooooo, who is kidding who?

But of course, I believed her. Don't forget I was 8. That sounded like an escape from poverty, an escape from monotonous meals. Finally, I would get a new school uniform and sandals. That was not even the best part, my mother would become popular, she might even feature in Super Story, and I would ultimately become the most sought-after student at school.

But all these dreams did not come to pass. I never saw the Sunday School quiz master again, not even in church; a break from those Sunday School questions was relieving too. And when I asked my mother about her acting career, she reminded me of how acting was for children of the devil.

Fast forward to today, I'm a 42-year-old man with a wife and two kids. I try to be responsible for my family, but I find out that being responsible takes a lot of discipline and uprightness, though circumstances can take one in different directions. And like my mother, sadly, I always have an audition.

Like when I borrowed money from a friend to offset rent and school fees and told my wife I had gotten three months' advance payment from the office which would

be deducted from my salary gradually over the space of six months. What a nice boss I must have. But that's my wife; she can handle my occasional discrepancies. But what about my innocent kids who look up to me as a seen God?

Every week, there's a stop at the hospital. I tell my kids the doctor is a friend of the family and we're just visiting. Is that so? Every week? That friendship must really have spanned many years, and I must owe the doctor some unpayable debt to be at his clinic every week.

When we miss church, I tell my kids that our pastor is sick and can't conduct a service. Come on, why then do we have ministers and people serving in different church departments?

When I return late from work, I tell my kids I was caught up in traffic. We don't live in Lagos.

And when I argue with my wife in the presence of my kids, something I'm not proud of, I tell them we're practicing for a church drama or replaying a scene we saw in a movie. Our kids do it all the time - they act out their best movie scenes, so there couldn't have been any better similitude.

Sadly, when our fight gets bad and my wife and I give silent treatment to each other, again, not proud of it, I tell my kids that we are both having a retreat and only communicate with God at that time. Not that I'm a pastor but the God I grew up to know is neither rigid nor selfish, and the retreat I was taught in church does not include little or no communication with my spouse.

As I grew older and became responsible for my kids, I began to understand everything my mother did or said, why the Sunday School quiz master never came back. It all made sense to me - It was all in a bid to protect me from hurt and misunderstanding. She had to put me above her needs and feelings. But in doing that, she influenced me greatly.

It all made me realize something. The people we depend on will greatly influence who we become. My mother did, and I might not know it, but my children are watching me, and though they might not understand anything I do or say now, they will later, and unfortunately, I'm not so sure I'm anything I want to see in my children.

I do not want my kids to grow up and find out that some of the things I said that made sense to them were lies. I do not want my kids to grow up and do the same with their kids. If it's a trend, then it must stop somewhere; even social media trends do not last a lifetime. And most importantly, I do not want my kids to look at me any differently when it all begins to make sense.

You know how it's said that children are great imitators? So, I thought to myself, "Why not give them something good to imitate?"

Sometimes, I wish my mother had come open to me, even if she didn't have to marry Sunday School quiz master. "*An audition*" really? That was out of the blue, even for her.

Well, I've decided to do better with my kids.

To do right by them, I won't stop at having an audition. I'll become an actor and play very good scenes they will be proud of.

I'm just kidding. I'll just be the father they will be proud to imitate, so help me God.

One thing still didn't make sense - How did my mother know I listened on their conversation?

By the way, it wasn't beans. It was some delicious rice and stew with big pieces of beef, the best my mother ever made throughout our monotonous lives. Something that could only come about by the visit of the Sunday School quiz master. They might have made a good couple if I'm being honest.