

The Discussion Continues

Emeka hung up the phone after talking to his mother. For just over three months, they had been pressuring him to come home in December but he had put them off for a long time since he did not know whether he would have some time off from work. He knew why they wanted him home, but he was not quite ready. He wanted to go after the new year when airfares from Canada were less expensive than in the xmas period. It was not as if he had not made an effort. He had called his younger sister during the summer to ask her about her friends and whether any of them was available and eligible for marriage. She just laughed at him. "In this woke world?" At 36 he had finally made peace with himself and decided he needed to settled down. His friends teased him endlessly because he was always at Mild Afro Lounge on Dundas Street where he was currently having dinner with Segun. He was either ordering *Ofada rice with ofada stew, tripe, beef and pomo* or he was ordering a dangerous combo of *knockout pouno, egusi with goat meat or assorted meat*, depending on his mood. After the call, he called the waitress and changed his order, knockout pouno it is today.

His friend Segun mused as he looked at the forlorn look on Emeka's face. "Ehn now, your mother is right, if you had a wife, you won't be donating all your income to Mild Afro Lounge, na only you dey Toronto?"

"Abeg, comot, you carry wife give me?"

"Listen, its for your own good, I only came here to hang out with you. Anyway, its because of you I called my wife and told her to put my gbegiri soup in the fridge. Knowing you, you will be back here tomorrow again after work."

"Okay, but I've already told you that after the New Year, I am going to naija and I hope I meet someone during my time at home"

"Why you no fit find wife for here marry...?"

"With their shakara and all that, abeg, plus my sister says they are all woke, whatever that means"

"Really, or you don't want them to chop your money, all the money you are spending here!!"

"Segun, See ehn, I have dated some of these girls and after one or two dates, they will start speaking ogologo grammer because their father sent them to school and when you go to their house, they won't even cook for you. Look at me now, I go school, na cook I no fit cook"

Emeka and Segun kept eating for a while. It was obvious that Emeka was frustrated as he remembered the teasing he gets each time. He was the only son and his parents were getting alarmed that he was approaching 40 and he had not settled down yet. In the past years, each

time his parents asked him if he was coming home in December, he used work as an excuse and explained how “these oyibo people don’t celebrate like we do in Nnewi and you know finding a wife is not a one day affair.”

Emeka had used this excuse in the last seven years and finally decided that he was ready to make that move after the new year. He was tired of looking here and apart from his friends’ teasing, the winter months were a great reminder why he really needed to settle down. He had booked a flight for February on Lufthansa to Lagos through Frankfurt.

The more he thought of it though, the more it bothered him, he did not want to hurry this marriage thing. He thought of the email he received from another friend discussing how some Naija men were killing their “imported” wives who coincidentally were nurses. It was mind numbing for him to read. He also remembered the last Umunna meeting he went to in the village and the story he heard there. Amadi’s wife Eunice, had just given birth to their second child and his mother-in-law was visiting them in London for the traditional Omugwo. The Omugwo visit had now turned into an “Operation Fire for Fire.” His mother-in-law was giving him hell. The woman no longer answered him when he greeted her in the morning. She stopped talking to him since that day they had an argument about why he had and would not buy a Jeep as Omugwo present for her daughter Eunice. Eunice was a nurse and her mother consistently accused him of squandering her daughter’s money. According to her, Amadi should have also shipped a Jeep to Nigeria for her, his mother-in-law. As far as Amadi was concerned, the woman was just greedy, after all, they already shipped her a Honda Accord- and he thought that was the end of it, now the woman now wants an SUV. Emeka could not believe his ears that day and all those stories scared him. Segun told him “Ah you never see something, my guy wey dey Calgary, his wife had him arrested, claiming he sexually assaulted her back in November!! and na September we dey! He had to leave the house he is paying the mortgage for while waiting for the next court date. The Judge basically said he could not go anywhere near her or near his house. Can you imagine..after all that hard work.

It cannot all be bad news Emeka thought. He decided he was going to take it one day at a time. He was not in the import-export business and saw no reason to import a wife and export a car in return, after all, what is the point of the bride price he will present to the girl’s family. He decided that until he gets to Nigeria in February, he will try not to think too much of this issue.

That Saturday afternoon, Emeka started getting ready for the party he was invited to by Ifeanyi, another friend from his weekend football team. According to Ifeanyi, his wife was inviting friends over to their house for a “thank God the kids are back to school” get together. Lol. Nigerians in Canada will get together for any reason, but what does he care, Lord knows, Ifeanyi’s wife can cook up a storm, and he has the empty bowls at home from previous parties to prove it.

An hour later, he was in the Toronto Suburbs of Kitchener where Ifeanyi lived peacefully with his wife, two kids and no mother-in-law wahala. It was a beautiful four bedroom duplex on a cul-de-sac. If this were Nigeria, Ifeanyi would have two police dogs and a maiguard at the gate.

As he parked on the street, he could smell fried plantain. It was a good thing that once Ifeanyi had alerted him of the party invitation four days earlier, he had taken a good break from Mild Afro Lounge and to be sure, he did not have any serious meals since then. He basically ate indomie noodles for dinner the night before and right now, he was ready to massacre any plate in front of him. Here, there was no gate, you just walked up to the house and knocked on the door of 75 Dalewood Drive.

He walked into the house and was led by Ifeanyi straight to the buffet table.

“Ah ah, Ifeanyi, your wife try oh...wetin no dey here...See now..jollof rice, fried rice, plantain and gizzard, nkwobi, peppersoup, pounded yam and egusi with okporoko, salad, scotch egg...abeg, your wife get extra bowls for her kitchen?”

“Don’t worry, forget bowl now, my wife will take care of you when you are leaving, when I say make you marry, you think say na joke I dey joke!”

“Ifeanyi, if I chop all this finish and die, na heaven straight!!” They both laughed.

Emeka packed two plates of food - one traditional and one western. One plate had pounded yam with egusi and okporoko with a little bowl of nkwobi escorting the pounded yam. The other plate had jollof rice, with fried rice sitting by the side, fried chicken with plantain and gizzard, with salad and scotch egg to aid digestion. This is the only type of Operation Fire for Fire that Emeka liked. He placed the plates in front of him and started the battle.

The man sitting next to him was polishing off the mound of pounded yam and Egusi when a young lady came with a replenishing bowl of egusi soup and placed it before the man. Emeka greeted the man with a nod of his head and a wave of his hand, knowing fully well, that when an Igbo man is in the midst of battle with pounded yam or garri or any swallowables for that matter, then is not the right time to indulge in extended greetings, lest he thinks you are trying to interrupt his meal or borrow money from him, neither of which is good. As the man’s pounded yam dwindled, the young lady came back with a bowl of peppersoup.

Emeka looked at her and looked at the man. Who is this lady with a good sense of timing. She knows when it is time to bring additional soup, she times the peppersoup well plus she has a great smile. Emeka had to ask and just as the man finished the last of his peppersoup and followed it down with a cup of Guinness Stout, he asked;

“Mazi, is that your daughter?” *Please say yes, Please say yes Please say yes, Emeka’s mind kept repeating.*

“Yes, that’s my first daughter, Nneoma, my Ada. She is a graduate and that’s her mother sitting next to Ifeanyi’s wife over there” Mazi was not foolish. The igbos say that what an elder sees sitting, even a young man cannot see standing, and here was an elder with a full stomach! He had seen how Emeka was eyeing his daughter while he was wolfing down his own pounded

yam. The poor boy had almost put the pounded yam in his nose because he was distracted. He intentionally kept whispering to his daughter to bring something else just to watch Emeka's reaction each time she brought him something.

"Ehn eh, that's good, she is such a responsible lady,"

"Yes, yes, yes...she is. Nneoma finished university since, and even has a masters in finance from University of Toronto, and works for TD Bank. Young man, what do you do?"

Emeka was an Information Technology specialist at a big IT firm in Canada. It was a field he got into after moving to Canada almost a decade ago after studying Microbiology at Uniport. He owned his own house in Brampton, a four bedroom three-level home that his father said was not a home yet because it was devoid of a family's presence. After Emeka downloaded his life history and academic and job qualifications to the old man, he was not surprised to hear him say "Wait let me call her"

Mazi called Nneoma and introduced her to Emeka. They both said hello to each other before she walked back to join her other friends who were also there for the party. Emeka gave himself 15 minutes before he excused himself and went looking for her. He cornered her by the staircase and they sat down and talked for a while. They had a lot of common interests - they liked to read a lot and watch a lot of Nigerian movies. As they talked, they both realized that they were at the movie premiere of the book adaptation of "I do not come to you by chance" shown at the Toronto Film Festival and they had both read the book before, so they discussed their experience reading the book and then watching the movie. The more they talked, the more Emeka kept thinking to himself, she is intelligent, well spoken, her mom looks beautiful and not a day over 25, so Nneoma has good genes as well. As his mom told him, "show me a girl's mother and I will show you what she will look like at 60" He always doubted that, but in this case, he hoped it was true.

Emeka was beginning to wonder if this was too good to be true. The good thing if this works is - he won't have a crazy mother-in-law who is trying to come to Canada to make his life hell. He had gone to greet Nneoma's mother and she seemed nice. She was a Professor at the University of Waterloo and didn't seem like one who dwelt on shenanigans. Check! He also felt he had struck a bond with Mazi. Some much grey hair, so much wisdom, the things you learn and gain at the feet of elders. Sitting with elders was becoming a lost experience given the busy live we live abroad. He started to thank God in his heart - look at me, I was about to travel to Nigeria to find a wife that would have been like leaving Canada to go and look for Democracy in Cameroon.

At the end of the evening, as she left with her parents, he gave her a hug and his card with a plan to set up a date. As he drove home that night, he was already singing along with Davido's "Jowo" playing on his car bluetooth speaker and prayed that he could get a refund on his February plane ticket to Nigeria.

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