The day I finally made my father proud was the day I lied to him. I had never seen him so proud of me. I had always done my best to make him say those words, but I was never as smart as my siblings. I had always done my best and worked as hard as I could. Living in a Nigerian home was more difficult than I imagined, and everything was always made into a competition. Not by the siblings, no. My parents were always comparing and indirectly pitting us against each other. From a very young age, I always heard "Why can't you be more like your sister? She is smart and gets straight A's. She does not cause trouble or act like a boy. She is well behaved and very obedient." They could never understand why I did not want to be like her. Do not get me wrong, I love my sister to death, but my parents made her so malleable in their hands. I never wanted people to walk all over me. My parents made their first mistake with me by teaching me to stand up for myself. I never let them bully me into doing anything. Nigerians have this thing where an adult can never be wrong and if they are, they will never admit it. They can never lie also. So, if you say they are lying against you, even if they are, you would be classified as rude. I was not book smart, but I was street smart. I got things in a different way from my sister. My brain was unique, at least to me. It did not take me very long to realize that other people did not think the way I did, and I was classified as weird for being different.

Growing up, I learnt to keep exactly what I was feeling to myself because they always had more important things they were talking about and thinking about. The day my sister scared me to death, I was told I was overreacting. That I was just being a drama queen. So I became one. If that would make them at least notice me, so be it. I had an amazing primary education. I was loved by all. Then I went to boarding school and my life changed. My spirit was broken, I was no longer a happy child. I became a child that just wanted to survive. My will to live declined every day. My family did not notice though. Any time I asked my dad to change my school, he refused. He told me, "That is how life is. School is not easy and you go through hardships." I was livid, I was screaming on the inside, "It is not a hardship, I want to die. I want to die. Why can't you see that? Why

can't you see what that school is doing to me? I thought you loved me and cared about me?" I could never say that out loud though. You may be asking why did I not just tell them what was going on with me. Well, I had mentioned them being mean to me in school before, I mean I had almost died and they still did not see a reason to move me from the school. I was put on oxygen and my brother was told I had a two percent chance of surviving. Well I did.

I could not get those that caused it in trouble though. If I had snitched, I would have been in more trouble when I got to the hostel. So I kept quiet. Something changed in me that day. I stopped acting normal. I was mocked by my mates, tormented by those around me. Every resumption day was like Armageddon for me. I would be fine on the drive, but as soon as I saw those walls, I immediately fell sick. I tried to hide it from my family, but it was not like they noticed. They just thought I was being Torie. I was dying inside. Falling apart but I laughed when needed, trying not to clue anyone in. I kept a diary, but it was full of my fears. I did my best to make them like me, it always backfired, proving my point that I could never do anything right. That I was aways bound to fail. In all this darkness, there was a sliver of hope, that I would get out of the funk I was in and become better, that it would get better. I tried taking my life so many times, but the thought of my family always stopped me. I asked myself these questions though, "Would they notice I was gone? Would they be sad? Would they wish there was something they could have done differently? Would they avenge me? Or would they just move on like nothing happened?" no matter the answer my mind conjured, I gave them the benefit of doubt.

In my fourth year of secondary school, I was harassed sexually by someone I trusted with my life. Someone that I thought of like a brother. It was the last day of that term, and I was in his class watching a movie on the teacher's laptop. We were a lot of students crowded around the laptop watching the movie and my 'friend' was behind me. Would I have imagined he could violate me? Never in a million years. I was his friend, basically his sister. We took care of each other. But that day, while the movie was going on, I felt him grab my ass. I thought it was a mistake and I ignored it. Then he did it again, and I

knew. I removed his hand. He kept grabbing my ass and when I kept removing his hand, he grabbed my hand and put it on his dick. I was 14. I had not had a sexual encounter with anyone, and I was very much innocent. I had not even had my first kiss yet and I was being violated by someone I trusted. I felt like crying but I could not make any noise. I hated making a scene because I had learned they would not take my side. He was the popular one and I was the freak, the weirdo and the outcast. He could say I pushed myself on him and they would believe him. So, I kept quiet, dying even more on the inside. When he placed my hand on his dick, I pulled my hand back immediately. He was stronger than me though, and he took my hand forcefully and placed it back while grabbing my ass harder. Then he pulled me back to him and rubbed his crotch on my ass. I tried not to cry. I focused harder on the movie, knowing I was helpless. I whispered to him to stop, my voice cracking, but he ignored me. Once the movie was over, I got up and ran out of the classroom. When my parents came to take me home, I stayed silent. I wanted to tell someone, I needed to tell someone, but would they believe me. I told my sister and two of her friends, and they gave me advice and they told me it was not my fault, and I should not feel guilty. They were right, I was full of guilt, I thought I had led him to think he could do that to me, but it was not my fault. He was just sick.

I had always known girls were meaner to me than guys. I grew up with boys, I was more myself than with girls. The next term after I was abused, I realized girls were evil. Pure evil. I confided in the girls in my dormitory about what had happened. I told them I had called him when I got home and asked him why he had done it. He told me he was tempted, that it was the devil. I was tired of people blaming the devil for them being sick in the head. He told me he thought I wanted it, I told him I was removing his hand and struggling, that what part of that told him I wanted that. When I told the girls, they laughed at me. They mocked me and they made a song mocking me and what had happened to me. They spread the song, and I was mocked for one of the most humiliating moments of my life. I never spoke about it to them again. They just made the darkness take more of my heart. When we went to class the next day, I was talking to my friend

when the 'friend' came to me and acted like nothing happened. He tried to hug me, and I moved away. I told him to never touch me again. I was talking normally to avoid drawing attention to myself. He asked why, and I told him I did not want him near me. I told him we were no longer friends. He said he thought I was past it and I scoffed and left the classroom. I avoided going to that class if he was there. Others that did not know what happened, asked me why we were not talking. I would have told them the truth, but I could remember the song. I still remember it nine years later. So, I lied.

The rest of my secondary life went like that, I was bullied every day, and I could not talk to anyone. I was utterly alone in my pain. No one noticed and why would they, no one cared enough to actually look through the façade I had put up. I had very few friends that I could confide in though. I never told them the true extent of my pain, they would not understand, and I did not want to scare them. I did not want the darkness to consume them, like it consumed me. My last year in secondary school was better than the rest. I just had months to go. I made more friends. Some people apologized for what they did to me. Did I forgive them? I think I did. I still feel anger to most of them though. I am not fully healed. I do not think I can be fully healed. I accepted myself and I left the darkness. I stepped into the light, and I was happy, or at least the kind of happy I could be while still in that environment. Fast forward to the night of my graduation, the boys snuck into the girls hostel. They came to have fun with their girlfriends or sneaky links. I knew no one was coming for me, but I was still nervous. What if they tried to touch me in my sleep? I only had shorts and a tank top to sleep in, but I covered myself with a wrapper. I woke up and saw two boys in my dorm. I said hi to them and they left. I decided to get the gossip of what was going on. I walked out of my dorm and went round to see who was doing who. I got the last dorm, and it was like a brothel. Wild things happening everywhere around me. Then I saw him. He had apologized to me earlier that year and I finally forgave him. He was standing in the middle of the dormitory, and he took off his shirt. A close friend of mine stood beside him and announced, "He is horny and needs a girl to help him out." It was the cringiest scene, and no girl answered. A girl did come up

to me to tell me that he was hot. I said I knew but I was not going to do anything with him. I moved to a bunk, and I was talking with someone when I felt him behind me. He told my friend to excuse us, which she did. He turned to me and said, "Torie, I am really horny, and I want you. Will you help me out? Will you kiss me?" I smiled at him and replied, "No, I do not think I will. Goodbye." I left that dormitory and went back to my dorm. My friend was awake now and I started telling her everything I saw and all that happened. I noticed her eyes go wide just before I felt someone grab me, turn me around, and kiss me. In that second that they kissed me, they grabbed my breast. I reacted almost immediately. I pulled away and slapped him. It was him again. Why did he always have to steal my first experiences? Why did he think he needed to force himself on me? Why could he not take no for an answer? I ran out of my dorm and went to the one dorm that I knew there were no guys. I slept there till the next morning. When I woke up, I was told that they had arrested all the guys and the first to be arrested was him. I laughed and thanked God for having my back.

After secondary school, I went to university, and I blossomed. I learnt to be okay with people not liking me, I actually stopped caring. I had ups and downs in relationships. I finally had a proper first kiss and I fell in love. I learnt to push aside the worst six years of my life and I finally told my family all that happened. We bonded and we became closer. Even though I knew my parents loved me in their own special way, I still felt like I disappointed them every day. I did not get great grades like my siblings, and I struggled in school. I finished university with a second class lower and I could see the disappointment in my father's eyes that I did not get a second class upper like my siblings or even a first class. When I told him I wanted to be a writer, I saw the doubt in his eyes in my ability to succeed. I said nothing and pushed on. I finally got a job as a ghostwriter, I was underpaid but I was making money. He started getting interested in what I was doing. Then I decided to apply for a contract to write a book of my own. I made the mistake of showing him the contract. One day I was passing by, and he asked me about it and if I got it, in front of his friends. I wanted to say not yet but I could hear the pride

in his voice, and I had faith that I would get it, so I said yes. He was happy and proud of me for once. Then I found out I had not gotten the contract. I was sad, maybe God knew why I did not get it but what would I tell my father? How could I tell him that the first time he was proud of me was based on a lie?