

## THE PRESENT (AUGUST 2023)

My existence veered into an unanticipated trajectory when I turned eighteen, I observed the painstakingly constructed aspects of my life crumble before my very eyes. Oh, did I face the consequences of my actions and danced so good to the beat that I made for myself. I shut my eyes, hoping it will take me back to the beginning of the problems and I will quickly rectify it as though it was a paper mistake, and I can erase it. Molola, my darling niece- it is no news that I love her so much, this is because I see myself in Molola. Analogies to myself, Molola is excessively serene, and it perturbs the collective, you might have to move mountains before you elicit a response from her. Utterly indifferent, embraces autonomy, masters situations and sometimes exhibits precocity. Whenever her siblings, Morayo and Mofe complain about how much time I spend with her and not with them, I offer reminder of how much I love Molola and how she is my favorite. I know, bad aunty traits. What can I say? I have never been the type to not express what I feel because I do not want to make you feel bad, you can sulk, I really do not care about people's feelings. My elder brother (my only sibling) will invite me to his room, and his annoying wife will sit beside him as he enjoins me to promote peace among Molola and her siblings. Apparently, I refuse to do that because I do not hide the fact that Lola is my favorite; according to him, I am intensifying a rivalry. He will persist indefinitely about it while his wife nods affirmatively like an agama lizard. Her empty brain does nothing but repeat whatever her husband already said, as though his initial utterance fell on deaf ears. She is inconsequential as the first slice of bread in an African home, and is perpetually disregarded by all, but that is not our primary purpose here. August 18th, the day my Parents decided that "okay o, we need to bring a daughter to life". They've been endeavoring to expand their progeny after they had my brother. He was ten years old when they had me, and my Parents deemed duo as the quintessential count and did not need further offspring post me.

It is my birthday and Molola's, and she rebuffed each proposition from her parents for a lavish festivity. After all, big eighteen is not a child's play. I was at their house over the weekend and even after deciding to leave the house a day before our birthday so as not to pollute the atmosphere, Molola asserted that I wait. Thirty-six with no fruitful relationship to result to a marriage and birth Children, what is worth celebrating? Molola has a way of getting me to do things I do not want to; she knows my soft spot and the best faces to put on so I can comply. I had promised her a year before that I was going to get her a car for her 18th birthday, and I fulfilled my promises. While her mother makes snide remarks about how I am spoiling her, my brother tells her that If I do not spoil her, who will do it? Well, no truer words have been said. I dwell in comfort, capable of providing her an optimal existence as I am devoid of personal progeny. I am in the room, responding to work related issues, and the door opens. Lola is the only human permitted to enter my room without knocking, her siblings dare not. "Morayo is angry because when she turned eighteen you did not get her a car", she says as she shoves my laptop aside conveying a message that it is Sunday and my birthday, so I should not be swamped with work. "Leave her alone, she will get over it", I say, stretching my arms for Molola to fall into them. My brother and his Wife did a thing by bestowing upon their children a biennial interval. Morayo 20, Molola 18, Mofeoluwa 16. "Aunty T, you have never told me why you hate this day so much. I am unable to reveal, should your merriment be absent.", Lola breaks the silence. Molola transitioning into the eighteenth year of life and my life taking a strange turn at eighteen makes today the perfect day to tell her why I hate August 18th so much. "I will tell you why".

## WHAT BIRTHED THE PRESENT (AUGUST 2005)

"Omotilewa", my Parents and their choice of names, where would I come from if not home? As a child, I did not impose strain on my Parents, they required minimal exertion to instill trepidation in me, I harbored an insatiable thirst for wisdom, driven by benevolent curiosity and possessed extensive knowledge, surpassing what was typical for my age. I was cognizant that every deed carried repercussions and was aware that my parents, with their old age and failing health, had limited time to stay with my brother and I, hence, I matured.. I did not linger for directives, I performed well in school, picked my friends rightly and lived a decent life. I have always been a one-man army, very rigid and cannot be influenced into doing what I did not want to. I did not conform to a certain rule to guide my life, I knew what I wanted to be, and I worked actively towards it. When I took my entrance examination for secondary school, I performed so well that I was given a scholarship to cover school expenses from my JSS1-SS3. My Parents were so proud of me, they were relieved of some financial burden. I was a yardstick to measure the success of a child my age. To some, there was something off about me, a child cannot be so perfect without having something terrible she was doing and hiding from her People at home. Sorry to prove you wrong, I was as pure as a dove. I was not going to do wild things; I was not a fan. My heavenly race was easy, boys made it easier as they were always scared to approach me. Omotilewa danger, I always had a straight look, you cannot mess with me. Yes, a focused Queen! My Mother died after a brief illness when I was in SS1, months of mourning and life went on. If you are living life to please anyone, the world will not waste time in forgetting you when you go. I finished Secondary school at the age of fifteen in year 2002 with an impeccable record, well behaved with good grades. I was admitted into the University of Lagos in 2003 at age 16.

The night before I went to the University, My Father and Brother called me to the living room for normal ted talks for a child that is about to be away from home- do not join bad gang, know the child of whom you are, remember where you are coming from, be focused, know why you have gone there and all those talks. My brother spoke alongside, like someone singing the chorus after a Lead singer sings the solo part, also adding that I have been a good girl and I surely would not do anything to let them down. One peculiarity of embodying a maiden such as myself is the fact that everybody looks up to you and some bad belles are patiently waiting for you to disappoint so they can rejoice at your downfall. I nodded as they both took turns to speak knowing fully well that I have coconut head and what I would do is in my mind. My father was emotional when he brought up my mother and how she had anticipated the moment. I am not an emotional person, I believe being vulnerable makes you weak and easy to ride on. My dearth of compassion used to perturb my mother, days she'd arrive come home and declare the death of individuals I observe daily, near her store and I'd observe her as she weeps without restraint. Everybody will go, it was Mama Bisi's time, it was Baba Agbede's time and Mother's time as well. May their souls rest in peace or not because we do not know what life after death is like, until it is our turn. Till then, live in the moment. I ensured to pack all my things properly without forgetting any useful thing. A firm believer of planning, I delineated my desired existence in the University. I wanted freedom, not to be wild but to be in total control of my life. An admirer of liberty, yet exhibits defiance when confined, that is Omotilewa.

I encountered no issues maneuvering through university existence, as a child that understood how life worked at a tender age, there is nothing thrown at me that I cannot handle. I exercised discretion in choosing my companions; unreachable, subtly understated and decent girls like me. I got close to two girls, Tomike and Folawe. You must be wondering if they only must be Yoruba- I am not going to lie, I am tribalistic. What do you expect, I grew up with old fashioned Parents that only recognizes Igbo and Hausa tribe. Igbos are bad people while the Hausas will not hesitate to kill you. My Parent's ideology rubbed off me, I dare not bring someone that is not Yoruba to the house as my Friend. A triad companionship unveiled torment, thank God I possessed sufficient intellect to remain impartial in conflicts. Traditionally, I faced no difficulties with scholarly pursuits, excellent grades as usual and I was on a first class. I said earlier that I am a big fan of planning, I have mapped out from small, how I wanted to celebrate my eighteen years birthday. I would do things that are considered legal- go clubbing, learn how to drive, start my business and have a boyfriend. My birthday was getting closer, and I spoke to Tomike and Folawe about my plans and they were excited that Tilewa was coming out of her box. All my life,

I had restricted myself to doing certain things because I wanted to grow at my own pace. Those things are what you will begin to do at the right age and get tired of doing them, there is a time for everything. I decided that I will party so hard on my birthday and begin to do more adult activities

## **BIRTHDAY (AUGUST 18, 2005)**

"Oh my God, she is my favorite already. Congratulations to you and your Wife", I say with so much joy to my brother who had called me to wish me a happy birthday and announce the birth of another niece, after they had MORAYO their first child. I received another call from my father, and it was accompanied by, you know, those prayers- You will marry a good husband, you will give birth, you will not carry another person's curse and so on. I receive more phone calls from well-wishers. Tomike and Fola storm in with a beautiful cake with "18" inscription. "They were brimming with anticipation for the club activity." "If anyone had told me that Tilewa would suggest a club outing, I would not believe it", Tomike says. "Abi o, Tilewa the good girl", Fola responds. Unsure of what to feel towards them, I give them a "na you sabi" look. This is the thing with good girls, everybody wants to always see you in a certain way and if you act contrary to that, then you have joined a bad gang. Today might be the only time I will ever set foot in a club and that is okay because one ought to venture beyond the realm of familiarity. It shall forever remain an enigma, how people leave the comfort of their rooms to be exposed to loud music and sweaty bodies. All of these shall be within my grasp this evening. I scan the clothes in my wardrobe, nothing is club worthy. My friends try to help me put one and two together, but the outfits look tacky. I check the money with me as I have a small conversation with the voices in my head- Is getting new revealing clothes that I might never get to wear again, a good idea? Well, I only get to be eighteen once, picking clothes over food will not hurt. What is garri that I cannot eat? I picked up my purse as my friends and I headed for a boutique to shop for clothes. My brother had asked earlier about my plans for the day, "I don't know, the girls and I might go see a movie later", knowing fully well that my actual plan is not in any way related to seeing a movie. Little did I know that I would become a source of movie later.

I am not disappointed, the club is what I expected it to be- Strong alcohol, loud music, sweaty bodies moving to the music and people trying to hook up. We found a table a little far from the speaker, perfect. Fola signals for the barman to get us drinks. I was reluctant to drink initially, but after persuasion from my friends, I started to drink. A boy about 6 foot tall comes to our table and I move aside to pave way for him to talk to either Tomike or Folawe, yet, he steadfastly remains at my side. My friends are busy with guys they met at the club. Timi's height and scent drew me to him, he passes another glass of drink to me, and we start the "get to know each other" process. I remain somewhat oblivious to the happenings in my vicinity and I endeavor to scour the room for my Friends, but I do not see them. I turned towards Timi who was already staring at me as though he was searching for an answer to a question. "Come with me, pretty?" Unconscious of the unfolding events, I tread in his wake.

I strive to recollect the night's escapades at the club and my subsequent arrival at my campus dwelling. That morning, unidentified sources plastered indecent images of me across the university, Timi must be behind this. I'd been in tears the entire day, my friends rallying around me in comfort. My father had been calling nonstop berating me and reiterating his disappointment. I felt a piece of me crumble, all our efforts to locate Timi was unsuccessful. Everything I worked so hard to establish collapsed; I turned into the school's hot topic. Perhaps if I'd shown unruly behavior earlier, this would be easier, it was quite the surprise coming from me.

Overwhelmed by disgrace, I collected my belongings from school and sought refuge at my brother's house.

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The thought of facing anyone at school was too overwhelming, so I couldn't return. As a means of self-preservation, I made the difficult decision to sever ties with my friends. My brother's friend suggested that I change my environment and school in the North. Having the resilience to begin anew, I successfully completed my university journey from the start. Molola is crying as I round off my story. "You do not deserve this, he should not go unpunished", she says. Although, I am aware that it should not be the end of the world, I have been unable to get over it and I had promised myself to never let a man into my life. Timilehin, when I set my eyes on you, you will pay dearly for your crime. I tell Molola that she gets to be eighteen once. She should go out and have fun while learning from my mistake.

I make a telephonic reservation for her at an exclusive lounge to arrange a little birthday soiree for Molola and her friends, she perpetually expresses her gratitude towards me.

Subsequently that day, Lola is out with her friends and my brother's wife comes in to thank me for talking Molola out of her sulky mood. I scout for fun activities suitable for a millennial like me, maybe the birthday is worth celebrating after all. I swiftly move to answer the incoming call on my mobile device.

"Molola?", I respond.

A prolonged quietude precedes her muted response.

"Aunty T, there is a Timi here".