

For as long as I can remember, Motunrayo was my reason, my anchor, my person. You see in this life, not many people get the rare opportunity to experience what it's like to have truly loved, and to be loved in return - completely.

From my earliest memory of her she was always the loudest in every room. It's why when her voice grew quiet and she became silent, everything that was anything in me was silenced with her.

We met in Primary 2. That day, mummy came to pick me up later than normal. Motunrayo, whom I had never spoken to before made her father wait, and sat with me till my mother came. The thing is, Motunrayo always looked out for me and showed me what it means to love. Our parents used to joke about how she was my bodyguard and my husband would have to seek her permission for my hand before he even asked them. I don't know if they realised, but they were not wrong.

When we didn't get admission at the same university, Motunrayo made the 1 hour 30 minutes journey every Saturday for 4 years to see me at school. I remember the week she met Dotun. She had come to spend the entire weekend with me and she had been raving about him and how he was too good to be true from the moment she entered my room. I doubted this because my mind couldn't comprehend anyone that could be too good for my Motun. She never saw herself that way but she was a gift to me – a precious stone that by some manufacturer error is found with other non-precious stones. It always bothered me how she saw good in everyone but herself.

He was the calm to her storm, this Dotun. Where Motunrayo was an ever moving wind, he was still - the mist that makes up the morning dew. I wasn't sure how to feel because honestly I was not ready to share her with anyone else. I was also very skeptical about him, but not necessarily because of some sixth sense but simply as a result of the protectiveness that comes

with loving someone. I simply did not believe that there could ever be any one worthy of her. Not even me.

Motun was so excited for me to meet him that I found myself getting looking forward to the meeting. I had seen her happy before but not this way. This was a different kind of happy, the sure and safe kind, the kind of happy that doesn't waiver. Perhaps happy does not describe accurately. He seemed level headed but completely love struck all the same. He was so enthralled by her. Where Motunrayo was hasty, he was patient and calculative, always looking out for her. At some point, my stone cold heart of over-protection thawed completely and without my knowledge or permission. I found that I could trust him with my Motun. There was something about his unwavering loyalty to her.

He introduced her to his parents and entire family as the girl he was going to marry barely a month after they started dating. He made it a point of duty to surprise her with a gift every week because that was her love language. Motun had a self-imposed allergy to nuts – self-imposed because there was no proof but she swore that she itched each time she ate nuts and pointed to invisible red spots on her skin from hives. But whether real or imagined Dotun made it a point of duty to check the menu of any restaurant they went to in advance to confirm if they had anything with nuts so he could either change the restaurant or draw her attention to it – because whilst she claimed to be allergic, she never really paid attention to what went into her meal.

At some point I became worried for Dotun. I had seen a lot in my life but there was something ethereal about his devotion to her. Absolutely nothing she did could sway his love. Nothing. When they had their disagreements, it took a toll on both of them; sometimes physically. I was afraid that people would say she had bewitched him. I was afraid for him that he may lose himself in her, not like it was a bad thing, but I always believed that to love, one had to be safe still – at least in romantic love. Maybe that's why Motunrayo always said she couldn't wait to see me drop my guard. I never understood what she meant though, because I had already;

with her. The intensity of my love for Motunrayo showed me that true love can exist outside the confines of a romantic relationship. That perhaps, the bond shared in friendship was beyond the realm of what romantic love could hope to achieve.

I remember one week towards the end of a really tough semester, which also happened to be the week of their anniversary, Motunrayo took to me on a vacation to a resort in a small town in Jos. I had always wanted to go but it was so expensive and I could not afford it at the time. I remember asking her multiple times on that trip how she was able to afford it and she always found a way out of answering. It was not until the last day of the vacation when we were checking out of our hotel that I saw the name we were signed under - Dotun Adams. It was then she told me that the trip was all Dotun's idea and he had told her how he knew she was unhappy seeing me so stressed and he thought I deserved a break. Then she mentioned how I always wanted to go to the resort and he offered to pay for the trip - but made her promise not to let me know it was him because he was sure I would refuse. In turn, she made me promise not to tell him I knew.

That weekend something shifted in me towards Dotun. I finally accepted that this man was good for my friend and in moments where I caught myself being truly honest, I realised I considered him a gift to her. My Motun was safe with him.

A year after University, he proposed to her and they were married some 6 months down the line. It was November. It was a cloudy Saturday in November and we were worried it would rain. But not my Motun. She swore nothing would spoil her day and I think even mother nature agreed. The cloud didn't let up but the sky didn't release any rain either. Maybe the weather was trying to tell us something it would've been impossible to see at the time.

She called me to tell me she was three months pregnant and demanded I moved in with them a month to her due date. We went last minute shopping for baby things as she was due the

next week and wanted to make sure we got everything settled, and that everything was perfect for the baby's arrival.



Motunrayo, your sharp cry sent an alarm through me. I almost ran into the delivery room but I had to fight to control myself. Dotun came out to tell us - your parents and myself - the decision he had to make. I didn't understand why they couldn't just wake you up to ask you. I told him what the obvious decision should be, he told me you had said earlier you wanted to put her before yourself. I told him that you usually talk irrationally. I told him I was sure he was not thinking of listening to you. A nurse rushed out to call his attention.

Her piercing cry sent a flood of emotions through me. I wasn't sure what it meant. Why wasn't I hearing your cry too? Then I remembered it was only her cry we were supposed to hear. I let a shaky breathe.

I was apprehensive.

Dotun came out carrying her in his arms but something was wrong. It was how his shoulders slouched, the same way it did that week before your wedding when you had a really bad cold and could barely talk. He was always very good at exaggerating and your dramatic nature had somehow rubbed off on him. I remember telling him as we were all in your parents' living room, and you were laid on the couch still cracking jokes even when the doctor had asked you not to strain your voice, to not let you be the death of him. But now I know I spoke too early. I would later realise that that was advice that was meant for me.

It was your mum's scream that caught my attention first. She was holding onto his shirt with tears running down her eyes. The nurse had to take the baby from him and held her protectively from us as if we were the enemy.

It was another cloudy Saturday when I was getting ready. My hands shook when it was my turn to shovel my piece of dirt. I stood there staring at where you laid, hours after everyone else had left. I could not believe that the center of my world, now laid 6 feet beneath where I stood. On the tombstone, they wrote Wife, Daughter, Mother – but they had missed something. Soulmate.

It was 6 months before I found the will to speak to Dotun, to just ask him why? Why he took you from me. He said you told him you would've never forgiven him if he did otherwise and that you said you would choose her a million times before yourself. He said you asked him to make me her god-mother. I dropped the phone silently, all the while wondering if I crossed your mind and if you realised how I might never be able to forgive you. Or him. Or her.

He named her Adufe (a daughter that is deeply loved by her parents), your middle name, although he didn't have to seeing as she was already a spitting image of you. It would've been hard to attempt to see her and not see you. Impossible even.

I got another call that there was an accident, they did everything they could. He had gone to be with you.

She came to live with me. I told your parents I would die a thousand times before she moved in with anyone else. You were my soulmate after all. I do not know how they agreed to let their grand daughter live with me but they did. Maybe it was because you were an only child so there were no siblings to fight with. Or maybe they too saw how much I needed it to be so.

It was my first time in your house since you left. I still can't say the word. Your parents said they had decided to sell the house and put the profits in a trust for her. I went to see if there was anything I could find, anything that would be a reminder of you both, anything she would find useful when she was old enough, from photo albums, to your favourite scarf, to framed pictures of you and Dotun. It was then I found Dotun's journal. I didn't know when I had

started reading it and was absent mindedly flipping through the pages. It was my name that caught my attention. Why was I in his journal? I started reading. I did not know I was screaming till I felt the pain in my throat. He made me believe it was him that decided your fate so I wouldn't find out that you had already lost too much blood and had taken the decision from us. He was afraid I would hate her for taking you away from me. I wish I could but the unexplainable bond I already had with her would not let me. It felt like she was a part of me too, like a connection to you. Maybe it's because you named her after me.

It was her fifth birthday. I was wrapping the gift I got her when my eyes caught the bracelet you made me. It was my last birthday before you left. It's her favourite colour too. Motun it's hard to see her and not see you.

It wasn't till her sixteenth that I found the strength to tell her everything about you, everything about Dotun, everything about the magic that we were.

I gasped when I saw her in your wedding dress, now hers. She is you Motunrayo. Oh God I wished you and Dotun could see her – a perfect blend of father and mother. I felt like an impostor walking down the aisle with her on one side and your parents on the other but she would not have it any other way.

Do you remember when your parents wanted to change your secondary school from ours because your family was moving farther away, and how you insisted with all the might of an 11-year-old that we must remain in the same school? Eventually your parents agreed that you could stay with my family during the week and go back home on the weekends. That's exactly how she is Motun - strong-willed and firm in her beliefs. Just like you.

Sometimes I sit and wonder if it was all in my head, if everything is simply a figment of my active imagination, if somehow these experiences were from a former life. But then I

remember the pure magic that we were and how Adufe would forever be living, breathing
proof.

~ Story by Doubara Wingitari Vianana