

Saturday Night (A Short Story)

Jessica and Jude had been close friends from their first year in the University. They were in the Department of Civil Engineering. Jude was fond of securing a seat for her in the lecture hall especially during General Studies' (GS) courses aimed to introduce the students to the diverse fields of study outside the scope of their department or faculty. These GS courses were usually attended by hundreds of students from other departments, as a result many students were compelled to stand in and around the lecture hall to receive lectures. Jude, being an early riser, would come much earlier than the usual seven o'clock to get seats for himself and Jessica.

Jessica took after her mother, Ojembaenweilo, ... tall, dark, slim and pretty. She had dimple whenever she smiled. She had a ring neck and very bright eyes. She came from a home where food was eaten three times daily. Rod was never spared and etiquette was observed to the later.

Her father, Chief Okwuolisa Anagbogu, married a second wife who gave him four children, three boys and a girl. Jessica once asked the mother, why should daddy bring in another wife instead of adopting a son? Had he not been a strong crusader of adoption...stressing the need to provide support, regular healthcare, education, and loving home environment for the motherless? She replied. "Daddy's decision is final and the best". Nevertheless, they all lived happily without jealousy or squabbles as seen in most polygamous homes. All the children called Jessica's mother 'mummy' and their mother was referred to as Aunt Janet.

Aunt Janet was married into the family at the age of seventeen, she was still naive and timid, while Jessica was ten. Mummy advised her to take General Certificate of Education (GCE) so she could further her education. She combined going to school and bearing children. Mummy directed most of the chores at home and did the school run for the children with great joy. The children loved her. Aunt Janet was quite relieved and was able to study law.

Chief was very strict but provided almost all they needed at home. He was quick to anger, he stammered and never talked much. The irony of life is that he was the most dreaded in the house though he had never raised his fist on anyone, but mummy, who was soft spoken, slow to anger, very friendly to all and sundry, flogged like a headmaster. He bought a car for his second wife. He hardly smiled at anyone, but according to mummy, who mediated between him and the rest of the family members, "Daddy is a very kind man".

Ezinwanne, Jessica's little sister, once asked mummy, how kind is daddy when he can't ever give us a hug?" "Kindness has nothing to do with a hug, you go give daddy a hug when you see him come back, don't wait for him to do that."

The boys believed that daddy was nothing but a hard and mean man, nothing to smile at.

"I think he had smiled once, on my matriculation day", Jessica said.

You guys should study hard and enter the University so that daddy would smile.

"The second time!" the children echoed.

Mummy was a born teacher, teaching everywhere and every time. She was a product of St Monica's College, Ogbunike, a training college founded in 1892 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). It started as a Sunday school, then a modern school where newly married were

specifically trained to learn home management and how to overcome marital challenges. Later it was made a Teacher Training College, run with very strict schedules, prayer periods and disciplined lifestyles. She taught all the children to study diligently, respect their elders and learn how to say “please” and “thank you”. These, no doubt, had positive influence on them. She made them believe that daddy was the head of the family and his consent must be sought before any decision could be taken. She meticulously raised their children. She was a stickler for hygiene and cleanliness, she taught her children to be smart and well-mannered at all times. Her home respected seniority and hierarchy. The boys were fully involved in the kitchen, while girls were encouraged to do arduous assignments. Most responsibilities in the house were gender neutral. Sundays were truly kept holy, no work was done, as recorded in Exodus 20:8-11. Most of the house chores and most cooking for Sunday ended on Saturday. Every member of the family knew the tale of a man captured on the moon for hewing firewood on a Sunday. Sundays were very special, every child wore the best clothes and received money for weekly thanksgiving. It was a day the boys walked chest up, head high and both hands in their pockets. The girls modelled the best dresses that complemented their hats, handbags and shoes. It was a day every member of the family looked forward to.

Mummy governed her home with discipline and integrity. She was always a shoulder to lean on, listening ears and a counsellor in times of confusion and trouble, a willing provider and helper during lack and distress. Children felt completely safe with her and believed she had solution for every problem. She wiped away tears and provided welfare. She was a delight to her husband and the entire family. All the children knew without doubt that they were loved but had to be corrected when rules were flouted. Mummy was not only good in cooking but also skilled in making cakes, bread rolls, chin chin and other baked goods. She knitted baby’s socks and sweater to perfection and gave out to young mothers. Unlike daddy, Ojemba was always smiling and anxious to please. She was not fashion conscious and never followed the trends but she wore what fitted and enhanced her figure. She respected and honoured her husband despite his very strict nature as a Military Officer. She would ensure that her home was spotless and that the reception for her guests was without parallel.

Whenever she visited Jessica on campus, she prepared meals for her and the roommates. Jessica’s roommates loved her and looked forward to her visits. She taught them to love one another and above all to love God. She occasionally inspected their wardrobes and corners, insisting that a girl should be impeccably neat and organized. The roommates always got their room arranged and tidied up whenever they heard mummy would visit. Her love, teaching, and hospitality were not reserved for her children only. She emphasized on the efficacy of prayers and advised them to pray together.

Jessica, being a product of good parentage had limit in all she did. She had one major thing bothering her. She loved Jude so much. She neither wanted to lose Jude nor disobey her mother. To her greatest surprise, Jude’s religious rooted background and spiritual thoughts did not seem to forbid his carnal desires. Mummy, on the other hand, had been drumming into her ears to avoid a carnal union before marriage. She saw it as a grievous sin against the body, which is the temple of God, and the punishment is death. She maintained that a girl should zip up and wait till she gets married.

“On no account should you allow any man, at this stage of life, to touch you.

Any man who truly loves you should wait and get married to you. If he is your husband, he will surely wait for you.

Virginity is pride, purity and dignity!

It is the most valuable gift for your husband, so preserve it and guard it jealously!

Just as our people say that the dead will be weary of sleeping: you will be tired of sex when you get married. Relax my dear, don't be in a hurry! Face your studies for now. Don't drag the reputation of this great family to the mud. There are so many consequences of pre-marital sex: unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, HIV/AIDS, loss of dignity and family support, I can go on and on. You know your father, *Ichie Ochiagha* of Obeagu Community, *onye* army, a no-nonsense man, he will skin you alive....*Lee kwa m, biko*. I am begging you, don't disgrace me, *biko kwa*. May God forbid!

Is it impossible to have a relationship that is unsexual? What should I do...? God!" She often queried herself. Her ever-growing empathy for Jude made the situation worse for her.

Jude was not the most handsome guy on campus. Among all the guys that made advances to her in their first year, Jude could be said to be the worst. Oscar was very handsome and had a Toyota Carina. JKB was a Minister's son, from Rivers State. All others had a lot to boast of. Jude was armed with nothing except his bible and a pen. He skipped meals and had little or nothing to wear. He could achieve so much from so little. He made very good grades in most of his courses. Jude could tell what hardship meant. He was the second child of his parents and his mother died when he was two. His father, Onyekazuolu Obikwelu, worked as a sexton in their village church, St Peter's Church, Ngodo. He had no experience or story to tell about a mother. His father managed to feed them with his meager income. Feeding three times a day was like a fairy tale and could only be imagined. He gave them instructions and had no time to chat with them. Jude did menial jobs to augment his school fees. He trekked three kilometers to his secondary school, in a neighbouring community. He combined his domestic schedules with that of schooling, attending catechism and choir. He was very intelligent, though he did not have a comfortable background. The day he opened up his domestic related affairs, Jessica cried the whole day, imagining how a life without mother could be. She promised to love him all her life and be a mother to him.

Jude was a highly disciplined young man and seriously committed to any course he believed in. He was not an extrovert, but could relate well with anybody from whatever stratum of society. He had a very good command of English and wrote powerfully and poetically. This attribute got Jessica attracted to him. Jessica had never experienced hardship. She was a latent volcano, a trait inherited from her father. She was always shouting at people and raining abusive words at any slightest provocation. One day she got a note:

Jessica dear,

Learn to get control over your emotions.

Anger is a miniature madness.

Be careful, what you say when you are angry.

Aggressive and hurtful words said in the fits of anger cannot be unsaid. They can leave emotional scars that may be difficult to erase even with the sincerest apology.

Be a bit careful....

Remember: 'A fool gives full vent to his anger

but a wise man keeps himself under control’’,
Proverbs 29:11. Remember also that nobody is perfect,
you and I inclusive.

Love,

Jude.

Further discussions and analysis of this metamorphosed into a strong relationship. Jessica at times referred to him jokingly as her psychiatrist. He was able to defuse her hostile instincts through his persistent loving and gentle advice. She really learnt quite a lot from Jude’s experience and ideology. It was a wonderful privilege to be associated with Jude. She didn’t quite understand much about life. To say that she was a spoilt child may not be an understatement. She was the only child of the parents for almost eleven years, pampered and spoon-fed. Jude’s background opened her eyes to quite a lot. He laid his problems at the Lord’s feet and got on with his life. In fact, he was a channel of blessing to her, and she had come to love him passionately.

The end of degree examination in University of Bokoro was usually celebrated like a feast. Students jubilated and paraded themselves as graduates even before the results were out. Jessica’s examination ended on Thursday. She decided to stay like most final year students and wait for results to be out. This was a period of jamboree. Jude walked her to her hostel and promised to check back later in the evening.

Around half past seven in the evening, a girl came to room 308 and asked of Jessy, that she had a visitor at the porter’s lodge. Jessica new it could not be anyone else other than Jude; the roommates smiled and asked her to come back with goodies. She dressed in a purple pair of trousers and lilac spaghetti sleeved top. She went downstairs to meet him. Jude gave her a hug and they strolled out.

They went to New Arts Theatre to watch a show organized by the Theatre Arts Department. Jude paid for their tickets, they moved in quietly and sat down. The show was almost about to start. The light was already off and the curtain was drawn. The theatre was big with a sitting capacity of five hundred. ‘This Land Must Sacrifice’ was a very interesting and touchy drama. Half way into the show, Jude noticed Jessy was sobbing. He pulled her closely and held her whispering into her ears, “it is not real, it’s just a drama”. The show ended late. He took her back to her hall and they promised to see the next day.

They met in Queen Amina’s Inn over some drinks and pastries. “Can I ask you a question?”” Jude asked.

Yes, go ahead.

Do you really love me?

Yes, I do.

He held her hands and kissed her. She bent her face.

I love you more, my darling. Now look at me into my eyes, but she could not.

Well, can you spend the rest of your life with me?

Yes, I will. She said shyly.

He pulled her up from the seat and hugged her.

Can we spend the night in my room, tonight? Please!

Don't keep quiet, say yes. I love you and heaven knows I do.
My mother,
'Shhh' Jude hushed; leave your mother out of this. I will marry you, in fact you are my wife. By the way is your mother a magician? How will she know, who will tell her? I have waited for a long time. Haven't I tried? Now give me your hand, he placed it on his chest. Listen to my heart beat. Why can't you bail me out? Are you so wicked? For the sake of the love we share for each other. Please.
Okay, but
Shhh! Placing his finger on her lips. Give me an unconditional love, 'but' is not accepted. Tonight, I am....
Alright, but not tonight, I am not prepared.
Prepared for what?
For the experiment...
There is nothing to prepare, the apparatus will be provided for you.
What apparatus?
Should I show you?
No! Mad boy! ... Why don't we leave it tomorrow, Saturday? **Saturday night?** Oh my God, I will wait, thank you my dear.
Can I now move for adjournment?
So soon?
It's already past ten.
No problem, let's go.

Friday, the seventeenth day of July, became the longest night in the year 1990. Jessy could not sleep. She was so much worried, what have I done to myself? Why didn't I leave the day I finished my examination? I should have known that my stay would result to this. I don't want to lose him; he had tried... five solid years! What will I tell my mother? How can I convince her that I've been in tact all these years? Poor woman, I have betrayed her. God have mercy on me. What if I leave first thing tomorrow morning and tell him that my parents sent someone to fetch me? He will believe me, but after this what next? The experiment must be done some day. What's the point, since he has proposed, but, well, God have mercy on me.... I shouldn't have given in... I am finished.... She knelt down and opened her Ancient and Modern and cried onto God: Onto thee, Oh Lord, I surrender all.... Be thou my guardian and my guide... I am tempted to sin, the emotions are very strong, I am confused and my flesh is very weak, but Thou are mighty, let not my slippery footsteps slide, Oh Lord.... Please, hold me with thy powerful hands... lest I fall. Is there anything too hard for you? You can still turn things around for good, King of Kings. Please save my soul from wrong....

Jude was busy cleaning his room in an off-campus hostel. He inherited the self-contained room from a course mate who had travelled overseas. He sprayed insecticide to kill both friendly and harmful insects. He scrubbed under the bed, the bathroom, and everywhere. First thing in the morning, he washed all the beddings. The room had never received such an attention. Jessy ate rice while Jude settled for *okro* soup and *garri*, at the Ibiam refectory before going home. Your room is so fine and smells fresh.
Oh thanks, please feel free, this is our room.
Jessy was fidgeting but was covering up.

You like to take your bath?

Yes, please!

Jessy came out of the bathroom, tying a pink towel round her chest. The towel was small and her smooth laps were all exposed. Jude rushed towards her like a small boy whose mother had returned from the market. As he held her and tried to untie the towel, Jessy whispered, "Please put out the light". The working implements could be noticed from the see-through flowing caftan.

As he rushed towards the door for the switch, they heard a knock on the door.

Juu, it's me.

Who is that?

Monica, open the door.

By past nine?

Who is that? Jessy asked.

The knock persisted. He was a bit jittery, and had no option but to open the door. Monica was one of Jude's friends schooling at the College of Education, Bokoro. She is quite pretty and elegant but poorly costumed. She moved straight to the ward robe to drop her bag.

Jessica lost control. Jude why? So, you brought me here to humiliate me?

Mother was right... very correct! She insisted I should zip up and face my studies. She maintained I should not trust any man, "only your husband should be offered that privilege, to avoid regret, to avoid disgrace, to avoid humiliation", she would always say. So, you have been cheating on me all these years, fiddling with a bush meat?

Who is a bush meat? Snatcher! Shouted Monica.

Jessica dressed up, took her bag and left. Jude followed immediately running after her on a bike.

In front of Hall Eight, Jessica heaved a sigh of great relief: God moves in a mysterious way! This **Saturday Night**, a night of deliverance, I promise to surrender all aspects of my life to the will of Almighty God, who has used Monica, a girl I don't know, to save me from sin and heartbreak. May His name be highly exalted. She didn't even look back at Jude as he was pleading, please, let me explain, it is not what you think. I love you so much, I can't...

He went back to the room. Everywhere was deserted. Where is this

witch? Monica! Where is this devil sent beast? My God, I can't believe this...

Saturday Night, a night of sorrow. Oh! My angel, my promised land...no, no....

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