

### **Tears of Blood (A Short Story)**

Nervously, Ngozi ran into a room breathing heavily while looking for a place to hide. The sounds of her footsteps were different from the steady predatory steps of her attacker. She ran until she got to a dead end and stopped to scan the environment for where to hide but panicked when the sound of the footsteps was getting nearer and louder. Luckily, she saw an opening and squeezed herself into it while still breathing heavily. She covered her mouth to avoid screaming when she saw a dark figure coming directly towards her as if drawn by her perfume. She was his prey while he was her predator. Ngozi tightly closed her eyes, waited for some time, nothing happened and then she slowly opened her eyes and saw her attacker on the ground.

The man pulled her up and warned, “beware of people you thought you knew and then shouted run before it is too late.” She was struggling to run until she woke up from her sleep. She was sweating profusely and also breathing heavily with the speedy rise and fall of her chest.

So this is a dream, she thought, but it looked real to her. Looking around, she discovered that Emeka was no longer on their bed. She shrugged her shoulder, there was a frown on her forehead and she thought he was answering one of his secret calls, she thought. She is worried about his recent behaviour because sometimes he seems nervous and sometimes lost in thought. It looks as if something is eating him up, which he never wanted to discuss. He often blocks her off lately as if the love they shared before had faded. His attitude shows that he is trying to fulfil all righteousness of being a married man. That initial spark is no longer there, it seems to her as if it is a marriage of convenience. Ngozi has been doing her best to give their relationship a chance but it seems that all her efforts are crumbling down like a house built with straw. She had slightly recovered from the dream and was in deep thought when she heard the sound of the door opening. She quickly came back from her flight mode and pretended to be asleep.

Emeka said, “Darling, I’m off”. He blew a kiss into the air and quietly left the room thinking that she was still asleep.

Ngozi got up dressed quickly, took her phone, at least she will use it to listen to music when coming back and quietly followed him outside. She did not know what made her take that radical decision to follow him. It was just as if an unknown force was pulling her to she followed him.

It was in the early hours of the morning, the atmosphere was still dark when she came outside their compound but she could still see the silhouette of Emeka at a distance. She followed him but kept a little distance from him so that he would not notice her presence.

As he walked, he kept looking behind his shoulders as if looking for an invisible foe. His speed was astounding, she was finding it difficult trailing him unnoticed. He kept on walking with that surprising speed until he entered his brother's compound. Ngozi thought, why is Emeka going into this compound? She knew that John, her brother in - law travelled and would be back in a fortnight. She tiptoed behind her husband, who looked back and sideways timidly from time to time.

These made her sense that there must be something wrong which Emeka refused to tell her.

The morning air was calm and soothing to the skin after a hot night. She thought for a second to go back to their house and forget about the doubt she had, but her legs refused to obey her. She kept on moving stealthily behind him.

“Why then is he going into his house at this time of the day?” Murred Ngozi. She quietly followed him until he disappeared into the house. It is a well-furnished duplex, the light in the living is still on, the gate open without the security man which is unusual.

When her husband got to the door, he knocked lightly and whispered something, she was not within earshot to hear what he said. The door opened slightly, he squeezed himself into the room. She silently moved closer to the window and peeped inside. What she saw nearly made her collapse. Instantly, she felt dizzy and staggered back but managed to control herself. Emeka and Jane were in a hot embrace while kissing, touching as if they could not get enough of each other. Later, Emeka managed to pull away. Jane did not let him go, they started another round of eating each other while forgetting about all the problems they would face and all the hearts they would break with this simple foolish act of lust.

Emeka whispered between kisses, “Jane, I felt that somebody was following me, when I looked behind, nobody was there.”

“This has been happening for many years and nobody knew about it,” Jane said, raising her voice. “How can they know now? she hissed not even willing to listen to his explanations. Ngozi was listening to their ecstatic moaning and her head wanted to blow up.

I love you,

I love you more, replied Emeka.

Ngozi shivered and blinked as if not trusting her eyes.

Emmy, “I have been drugging her so that she will not have more children except for the first one that took me unawares”.

She continued, “I could not bear to see her have your children”.

“Look at the lovely children we had, aren’t they beautiful?”

Emeka was busy fumbling with her clothes, he muttered in a strained voice, “they are”.

It is high time we sent her packing with one accusation or the other like the one we tried before but never succeeded.

Ngozi was leaning on the wall listening to all their conversations until she started hearing moans and movements. Within a space of time, they were completely naked. She wanted to move away from there but could not. Her legs were as if laden with mud. She watched them shamelessly making out on the couch in the living room until they were satiated.

At the end of their lovemaking, Angela was clinging to Emeka as if he is her life. Angela was hysterical. She whispered; let us elope with the boys. Ngozi heard it clearly but was confused, “which boys.

“Honey,” Emeka said, “there is no way that they can stay away from their supposed father for so long and the consequences are too dare”. “We have discussed this severally and decided to have patience. I don’t know why you want us to go through all this again and again”. Her face instantly looked pale. She retorted, “of the sacrifices I made for you, you are still behaving like a woman. For how long are we waiting? If it means killing them, we can do that and nobody will know because the secret will be with us”. His eyes widen, “Jane, how can you be so heartless? He had even started regretting all his activities and what he got himself into when he noticed how vicious Jane was.

Jane raised her voice and warned Emeka, "I'm tired of this pretence because it is suffocating". She continued again, "For these six years, I have been drugging Ngozi which made her miscarry up to five pregnancies. Do you want all my efforts to be in vain?"

Emeka looked horrified at her confession and a desperate woman but managed to control himself. He begged her to calm down that he was working on how best to handle the situation.

Angela cried, "If killing is necessary, we can do that".

Ngozi covered her mouth to stifle a scream. They heard a sound, Emeka rushed out to check but she had already moved to another spot. When he closed the door again, Ngozi quietly left the compound like a working corpse. She has heard enough.

She mustered enough strength and started moving back to her compound.

Tears were running down her face uncontrollably. There was no sound from her, she felt betrayed and vulnerable.

Ngozi was shocked; her heart was beating as if the whole village were pounding inside her. She opened her mouth to shout but what came out was a muffled sound. She could not move but got stuck. Her brain was not functioning. She never knew that something was happening between Emeka, her husband and her best friend, Jane who is also married to Emeka's brother.

Years back, she had had a slight doubt about their relationship but had dismissed it as not having a free mind and being overly suspicious.

There was a striking resemblance between Emeka and his elder brother's children since he is John's sibling, people thought it was alright.

Ngozi thought, is this why he had always visited the village at least thrice a month while giving her the impression that his parents are getting old and needs to be visited often. Most of the time, he goes to work from the village. The real reason is to be with his children and lover.

She felt devastated," man is not supposed to be trusted", Jane muttered.

"My eyes have seen my tears, my tears of blood," she cried bitterly.

Her tears were so heavy that they felt like blood flowing from an open wound.

When Ngozi left the compound, it was not too dark anymore; she walked home aimlessly. She broke down completely. She thought about how this could be possible. She thought she was a fool in their eyes. Tears were streaming down her face as if they would never stop. She could not control the tears; it was as if it was coming on its own accord. The tears were like her blood flowing endlessly. She was so broken-hearted that she was shedding tears of blood. She entered their house and sat down tiredly. She pretended as if she had just woken up. She was drained by what she heard and saw. She never knew that Emeka and Ngozi had been having an extramarital affair. Then, why did he marry me in the first place? Why did they want to break me like this? What sin did I commit?

Why break me? Why make me shed tears of blood? Why me? Why me? She cried bitterly

She tried to control her tears but could not. Her face was very dull when her mother-in-law saw and was surprised.

Ngozi, my daughter, what is the problem? Her mother-in-law asked her.

She could not say anything except cry.

She whispered, "Mum, I had a nightmare, it is okay now."

She thought that she would discuss with her mother first before disclosing anything. She never trusted anybody again and decided not to say anything until she was safely out of this horrible house full of lies where she dedicated part of her life. She has been using the money she earned as a medical doctor and her inheritance from her maternal grandmother in running care of their home. She never asked Emeka for upkeep money for running domestic expenses. Later, her mother-in-law left after giving her some pieces of advice. She told her that if she had any issue she could count on her.

"Hei!" She cried, "This world is full of mystery. How can my trusted friend and my husband betray my trust for so long? God, it is too painful."

She hissed, "I cannot bear this. Lord, give me the strength to hold on. So, this may be the interpretation of the dream which she did not take it seriously though she was afraid then."

Emeka rushed in and said, "Sweetheart, what is the problem? Mama called me". She never looked at him nor uttered a word.

She cried as her heart was about to explode. She moaned, "This is too much for me".

"I can't bear this."

So, betrayal is this painful, she muttered. She fell asleep on the couch and was there till late evening when she woke up and saw that some members of their family were looking enquiringly at her. She stared at them blankly. She looked from this face to the other until she got to where her husband was sitting. She stared at him for some time, hissed and looked away. Emeka could not understand the hatred with which Ngozi looked at him. He felt his secret was still safe with him. Ngozi thought, why didn't she notice anything all these years?

Ngozi was in the final year of her secondary school when she met Emeka. Emeka was introduced to her by her cousin Daniel. They became friends then until towards the end of her university education when they started developing feelings for each other. They started dating. Emeka proposed, she accepted because she was deeply in love with him not knowing that it was one-sided love.

Her parents warned her especially her mother who said that she was not getting good vibes from Emeka but she insisted.

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She managed carefully to stay up to six months while getting herself ready to fly abroad before leaving his house. Emeka came back one day and saw that Ngozi had left with their only son. He felt devastated and was perplexed on what to do until his father-in-law; Prof. Okeke invited him and his family to settle their marital problem. When they came, Emeka got the greatest shock of his life when the tape was played.

On that fateful day, Ngozi thought of taking their pictures but brushed it off for fear of being caught but got the video and recorded their conversation.

Prof Okeke cleared his throat and said, "I feel that there is nothing much to say. My daughter has suffered in your hands while looking at Emeka disgustingly. I gave you five Million Naira to help boost your business so you could take proper care of your wife but you failed."

Emeka muttered, "I-I-I-I am sorry". He looked down shamefully. He blamed himself for his stupidity and falling for that whore, Jane. Due to his foolishness, he had lost a rare gem, God freely

gave him. He hissed regretfully. He wanted to beg Ngozi but did not know where to start because he had destroyed the bond that held them together with his hands.

They returned the bride prize immediately through the middle man while they took Ngozi and her son to Enugu to prepare for their travel to London for her new appointment.

Prof. Okeke continued, "My attorney, will meet you later for the divorce proceedings and for the refund of the money I lent you based on our agreement." Emeka's mother cried bitterly.

She lamented, "My daughter, did I offend you?" Please forgive us. You will get the happiness that eluded you in your marriage with my son. You are a good child, my daughter."

Before leaving, Ngozi embraced her mother-in-law and said soothingly, "Mama I love you. I will always keep in touch." She left without a backward glance. Emeka watched Ngozi's back moving away from them with tears blinding his eyes. He kept on looking, hissed and shook his head dejectedly until his mother touched him and said, "let's go".

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