

### **Scars That Break Us (A Short Story)**

Scars are the second horrible thing that can happen to anyone, the first is usually the beating. The severe kicks, slaps, punches and scratches that leave one a defeated spirit with the defences all gone.

It wasn't always this brutal. I had my family, I had friends, I went to school, I laughed so hard till tears ran down my cheeks, there were happy moments and days of high sounding prayers but it came to an abrupt end the day Dad died.

Mum promised we would never leave her to go stay with someone else, we believed her. I believed her. When the peanuts she got from everyday hawking wasn't enough to keep the bread crusty; anger, anxiety and depression started to set in and Mum forgot all her promises. I was the first to leave.

I went very far from home, away to stay with a woman who was supposed to be my aunt and for the first one week, it was bliss. The day her husband slapped me for giving their son Capri-Sonne instead of Viju Milk opened the imaginary door for others to follow. It graduated from slaps to blows, to punches - heavier ones, then to flogging with anything in sight- extreme flogging till my skin bled most times.

It turned me into a liar, a big fat liar to cover up for the pummeled face and purple eyes, for the swollen hand and limping gait. I remembered telling my teacher one time that I had hit my face at the door handle at home and it caused the swollen eyes. She knew I was lying because I was way taller than the door handle but she said nothing.

My own depression absorber were my books, I read out my brain and ate the school tests and exams like yams. Maybe, just maybe she would be proud of me and reduce her brutal treatments but that was so far from it.

Hers was pure hate; obvious decaying hatred for me no matter what I did or didn't do. The other day, she pushed me out of the car for wearing a blouse with a big tear at the armpit, the same blouse she refused to give me money to mend. I had to trek the long distance to Church that morning for she didn't want people to see me with her. That day was mother's Sunday and she had to appear as a pure soul worthy of praise and resemblance to the Ever Virgin Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. A girl in tattered clothes coming down from her car with her kids beautifully dressed would ruin her day.

Then it was the hunger strikes, on those days I would be banned from the Kitchen, other rooms were my atmosphere of play and chores but not the kitchen that housed the food. It would go on till she deems it fit to feed me, most times spanning into days.

I stopped schooling after Primary Five cos I was too good for her liking. She wondered how I excelled even though other children in my class stayed back for the extra lessons and had tons of tutorials at home. I'd rush home immediately after dismissal to meet up with work before dusk yet I bagged the first position at the end of each term. And because I did better than her children, I

started staying at home while her kids went to school. According to her, they need the education more than I do.

I stood before the woman from the state agency for Child Welfare and I explained how it all happened. The day she turned into a dark monster. She asked me to wash her George wrapper for the monthly women's meeting around 7 pm and spread it outside so it would dry before dawn. I did as I was instructed but the gods ruled against her favour that night, it rained heavily.

She woke me up with a slap and asked me to go outside and get her wrappers. I dashed out in the rain but it was no use, it was soaking wet and would never dry before 8 am for her meeting. It annoyed her so much that she locked me outside for making her wrappers wet. I nearly died of cold but it won't matter to her, I don't matter to anyone.

I laid at the entrance of the house coiled like a snake, shivering and allowing the rain to drown my tears and pain. I was soaked to the skin like her wrappers but I had no choice or anywhere to go. She finally let me in and refused to give me food. I didn't let it bother me. I have a way of stealing her money and filling my stomach with kpo kpo garri or akara and bread or even indomie and eggs when she leaves the house. I'd always find the money no matter where she hid them, I was that good at stealing.

Today, she didn't leave the house, she brought out another wrapper and was going to iron them for the meeting. She called me into her room minutes later and shut the door. I knew she was still angry cos of her wrappers but I never expected what she did next. She tore my clothes and in a flash, the iron on the floor was on the left lobe of my buttocks.

The sound of the scalding iron on my raw skin sent me to feynoi and beyond and I screamed in pure agony. She lifted the iron from my body and I could see a thin layer of my skin on it. She held me to a spot with her big hands and since I was so thin, it was so easy for her to hold me and stop me from escaping. The iron came down again on my right breast and I went haywire with screams.

How can someone be so cruel to this level? With a pressing iron. She squeezed her mouth in anger and held me still all the while muttering to herself.

"You're so useless and stupid, you think you can make my wrappers wet and make me pay that stupid fine at the meeting abi? You think you will go scot-free right? Useless girl!" she cursed. My pleas and shouts came out at the same time and I'm sure we both couldn't differentiate my "I'm sorry" and my screams from pain. I slipped my hand from her grip and made for the door but she moved fast and the iron came down again on my arm before I could run out. I fell on the floor but I stood up immediately and fled for my life.

I didn't mind that I was naked, I didn't mind that people were watching me, I didn't mind that I was still saying "I'm sorry" I also didn't mind that she won't let me into the house for running away like that from my punishment. I wanted to remain alive and so all those things didn't matter to me.

She was arrested and she claimed it was the devil's handwork. For Pete's sake, leave the poor innocent devil out of this. If there was a devil in all of this, the devil must be human, fat, ogre looking, fair green and it would be her, the woman I call aunt.

The Child welfare chairman told me to be strong, to be strong enough to say everything and that they would handle it. I was strong enough to strip naked for them to take pictures of the burn on my right arm, my left breast and on my buttocks. If only they know, I've stopped being weak a long time ago, I would be strong enough to set the house on fire with her inside of it, I would be strong enough to add sniper to her food and watch her groan before dying.

Today is Sunday and I'm in church, the preacher said God would heal us of all our emotional pain I laughed for he won't understand this one. The pain may heal but the scars remain forever. It would take just one look and I'll remember everything again. They are the scars that break us.

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My heart goes out to those abused in people's homes, soon those who pierce you to tremors would be the ones pierced. I know, I've been there and I understand but more importantly, God knows.

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