

## The Joker

~~~ *Divine Adachukwu Onyekwena*

Time is a Joker. This moment you have it, the next you don't. Life belongs to you and at the same time, it doesn't. It's more like a tragi-comedy. One that makes you laugh through your tears because that's how conflicted your insides are.

We lost Mum five years ago in an accident. I was ten years old then. Old enough to know that there was an argument between my parents, wise enough to know that she drove out in anger and angry enough to blame my father for her death. Five years of resentment and no love lost on my side. Suffice it to say that my father tried. Oh, he did. You know what happens when you continually pick at a wound? It never heals. I didn't want this wound to heal because somehow this hate and angst was the tape that held the ripped pages of what was.

"I hate you, dad", I told him one morning. It felt good to say that and not even the silence that came with his stare as he paused momentarily from climbing up the stairs or his rapid blinking or his shaking hands or the way he nodded slowly was going to take away the sweet sensation of delight I felt. This felt like victory, triumph, a light-over-darkness moment. I wanted him to hurt because I was hurting.

Did it ever occur to me that he missed mum too? That he dreaded walking into his bedroom because mum's painting was still hung on that part of the window where she loved to sit and write? That he wanted to change all this? That he had yelled at God the nights I slept over at Mama's? Did I ever pause to wonder why he was looking pale? That maybe the guilt was ripping him apart too? Except this time, it wasn't just ripping his soul apart. It was ripping his life and body.

"I have cancer, Dubem. I just have six months to live". He said this looking at Mama who came over as was the usual on Sundays. He didn't look at me. In that moment, I felt like I got drenched after taking care to avoid the rain. Maybe this was how it felt to be blessed back with all your curses. As Mama wailed, I broke like chalk. I wanted to keep the past so much that I threw away a future I should have had, no matter how short it would have been.

"I love you, dad", I told him one morning. We still had a month. We could have had more. I know I'm to be blamed. I was trying so hard to get lost when I could have been found. Dad smiled at me weakly and I squeezed his hands tighter. If only I had slashed through the darkness to let a slice of forgiveness in. If only. If only. Time is a Joker. Life is a story. May we always remember to live like it's our last.

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