
Sweetee

It was a windy Sunday afternoon in April 2003. I stood agitated at our apartment veranda with Arinze, Fejiro, Dare, Ogechi - my playmates, and my little sister, Abigail, in our small compound in Onitsha – the commercial powerhouse of West Africa in southeastern Nigeria where I grew up. We were playing “Suwe” at the play area inside the compound before the rain began to drizzle and ruined our fun.

The thunderous noise emerging from our flat that afternoon made me sick to my stomach. *Nna* Ogechi, Papa Emeka who is popularly known as *Onye isi* who resides in the next compound and my father converged in our parlour discussing the aftermath of the Nigerian Presidential election which had held the previous day.

“*The efu*, Nonsense.” Papa Emeka in his blaring voice shouted declaring that the election was rocked with electoral fraud and did not fulfil minimum standard for democratic elections.

My dad in a soothing voice defended, “*Jiri ya nwayo*, take it easy. We will surely get there and you know this is the first time in 15 years an election is being conducted by a civilian government.”

I always wish they’d take their political arguments somewhere else so I can watch “Tom and Jerry” which airs on NTA 2 Channel 5 every Sunday afternoon.

“Ola, don’t worry. The rain would soon stop so we can resume our play.” Ogechi said to me sympathetically.

“My Mummy said that when rain falls and the sun is shining, it means that an elephant is giving birth,” Arinze said. We all stared at him, fascinated.

“*Akuko*. That’s how you said you saw Bush Baby last week...” Fejiro announced in an amusing tone which made us laugh loudly.

I was four years old at that time, an adventurous boy full of life with plenty of energy to waste, jumping and flying around the whole compound like Tarzan - bare-chested, with my favourite oversized brown underwear.

As we argued “who mess the mess”, the drizzle stopped. We jumped excitedly to continue our play. “Maybe the elephant has finished giving birth. A boy or girl elephant? I pondered.

The sky was cloudless and vibrant as the late afternoon sun descended on the commercial city.

Let’s play “who is in the garden” my little sister suggested.

“Make a big circle like your mother’s cooking pot.” Ogechi stood in the centre.

Who is in the garden,

A little fine girl, can I come and see her

No, No, No...” we chorused with excitement.

I suddenly felt an irresistible urge to scratch the bottom part of my left buttocks. The feeling was sweet like an Indian movie. The more aggressively I scratched the sweetie, the greater ecstasy I felt. I stylishly continued the scratching so that no one would notice.

The evening came too quickly. It was now dusk, time to retire to our various home. But somehow we stayed back because the game “Who stole the meat from the cooking pot?” had reached cloud nine.

“Ola... Ola...” my mother yelled from the kitchen window. I froze and pretended not to have heard her summon. “Why must she always spoil my groove?” I said with a grudge continuing my game.

All of a sudden, my playmates stopped running, condolence written all over their faces. I looked back and saw my mother dashing towards me with “turning garri” on her right hand. “Mummy, please. I will not do it again.” I begged remorsefully from a safe distance.

Luckily, I ran swiftly pass her unharmed. As I was about heaving a sigh of relief, “gbas gbos” my mother’s slippers landed on my back with vigour. “*heeeey...*” I ran inside the house with a pandemic of tears.

“Oya, all of you go to your mother’s house.” I heard her instruct the others.

Arriving inside my room, I removed my underwear, scratched my sweetie but it was painful. I quickly regarded my buttocks in the mirror. My sweetie had transformed into a big boil. Scampering to the bathroom, I showed my mother the boil.

“Why did you scratch it? *ola edo m*” my mother quizzed with pity. “I will tell you a story,” she said as she began bathing me.

Many years ago, I lived as an only child with my parents in Umuka village in Okigwe. My father was a peasant cattle rearer. At the age of eighteen, I graduated from the Community Secondary School, Okigwe and promptly got accepted to study Economics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. My parents were so proud of my achievements. I became the pride of my community. My mother finally found her voice at the Women’s Council meeting. My parents doubled their efforts to meet up with the necessary expenses required for my University enrolment.

I remember it was on a particular Eke market day. My mother took ill, so I had to take the vegetables to the market myself. I sold all the vegetables in no record time but decided to wait for Ozioma, my friend, so we’d go back home together. A few minutes later, I observed a group of people hovering around a table in the market. Chanting and laughing with reckless abandon. Well, I decided to check out what the amusement was all about.

“Hey! ezigbo nwanyi, fine girl. Come and play a card game and make quick money.” A man beckoned on me as I arrived at the table. It was a three-card game. All you have to do is pick the “King card” after being shuffled by the handler. Pretty easy, I said to myself as I dropped three kobo for a bet. Without any hassle, I picked the king card and got double my money. I continued to play the game and won every market day. One faithful day, I told to myself. “Hey! why not play this game with something big and win big and save my parents the stress of selling their properties just to raise my school fees. But where will I get the money?”

It took me only two days to discover where my father conceals the money he had been saving for my tuition fee.

On the next market day, I took all of the seventy Naira savings and placed a bet. “I was going to inform my father after the win.” I was very confident. Astonishingly, I picked the wrong card. How? I couldn’t believe what had happened because something must have gone wrong. I wept bitterly as I walked home to inform my parents of my foolishness.

My parents were so disappointed in me. The gamblers were nowhere to be found. Two months later, my father died. My mother sent me off to Lagos to stay with my Aunt where I got enlisted as an apprentice in a fashion school. It was during my training I met your father, a dashing young Captain of the Nigerian Army from Ogun state.

You see my son, life will present you with lots of sweetee, you must be very cautious not to scratch them or else you will end up with blisters. “All that glitter is not gold.” As you grow to become a man, never make decisions while you are overly excited. Always analyse situations and make adequate consultations before deciding. If you must make a mistake, it must be a calculated error. Never you gamble with your goals. Stay focused, God will help you.

We joined the rest of the family at the dinner table. A mountain of pounded yam and Ofe Oha laid helplessly in front of my father. Two separate plates of Spaghetti jollof for me and my sister.

My father already impatient began to pray “Lord, we thank you for the provision of this food. Bless us and sanctify this food... Amen”

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