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THE DREADFUL DAY

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Most people wondered about the kind of pain I felt when it happened. I have only one word for it; excruciating. I am aware of the stories of corruption and incompetence in the Nigerian police force but I swear, I never imagined that some of these people could be so cruel and barbaric until the awful day I decided to seek refuge in them.

I had been married to Ardo, my cousin for five years before it happened. Believe me since after leaving the station, remembering the Hausa proverb that says 'baki shi kan yanka wuya,' became like morning azkar to me. First two years into our marriage, normal. Nothing exciting or extra ordinary. By the beginning of the third year, our house turned into a theatre where almost every day Ardo and I staged our drama while the neighbours eargaly watched, listened and secretly judged us. Neighbours became accustomed to our morning routine of fights like the azan. In most cases my angry voice echoed in his ears as he left for work. He used to sell plywood in Kasuwan Katako while I stayed at home waiting for him to come back so I could splice fresh complaints with the wilted ones. On rare occasions, I chatted with him which resulted in whining and complaining and ultimately a reason to have a fight the next day. I sometimes visited the neighbours whenever I had an issue with Ardo. I poured all my predicaments to their enthusiastic ears. I thought I had sympathisers, now I know they only listened out of curiosity.

After so many pressures from his mother and sisters, Ardo decided to marry a teenager from our village named Lami. Three years and still nothing to show sai masifar banza as his mother use to complain. After his baiko with Lami, believe me anything that had to do with me was thrown in the bin by Ardo. His mother and sisters despised me. I always threaten to harm him, never allow him and Lami have peace in that house, kai! even kill him if he decided to go on with the wedding plans. I didn't care who heard me say all the hurtful words to him because at that point, madness, bitterness, resentment, jealousy and anything that can make a person loss his mind were bubbling furiously in my heart like the mysterious concoction you find in a witch's caldron.

Ardo kenan! If only you knew what was in your kindirimo, I know you would have allowed me drink it all instead of hiding it in room.

On his wedding day, he bought kindirimo and kept it in new bride's unfurnished room. To annoy me because he knew I love kindirimo? Oho! He had his bath, drank his kindirimo and was getting ready for the wedding fatiha when he collapsed and started shivering like someone possessed by jinnu. Foam was oozing out of his mouth. He never had epilepsy I thought. I began to panic as I noticed the way his stomach looked like a slaughtered ram blown up by yan fida before they cut it open. I ran out to alert the neighbours but before we came back, he was stiff, like an ugly gunki. Neighbours were just exclaiming innalillahi wa innailaihi rajiun, mu kaishi asibiti! A nemo mota maza! But amidst the frenzy, Ardo to me already looked like a fresh mushe. I now understand the message behind their sad faces when they kept nodding and staring at me from time to time as I cried instead of consoling me. They seemed to be asking why? How could I? Ardo was a good man.

The people that came for the wedding fatiha performed janaza instead. Neighbours stayed to console me or were it to get firsthand information about my predicament? Some of Ardo's relatives came and started threatening me. They said I killed him because I was jealous. They threatened to kill me too. I was so terrified and ran straight to the police station to report the incident.

When I told them about my in-laws' plan, the police men told me to calm down and go back home and that they would investigate the matter. I left. A Few hours after I returned home, I saw a police van parked in front of my house. Three police men including Sgt. Garba came out. Before they even knocked at my door, I rushed to open it for them because I was so curious and anxious. The moment they got to the door, one of them slapped me and all of a sudden, they started hitting and cursing me. They shoved me into the van and drove straight to the station.

At the station, Sgt. Garba said no need for thorough interrogation as he was sure I was the culprit. They only wanted me to tell them what I gave him to eat that killed him. When they got tired of my denials, they stripped me almost naked and beat me again while I kept screaming for mercy even though I did not murder Ardo. It seemed like Sgt. Garba has been waiting for the moment to teach a disrespectful wife a lesson, the way he does to his two wives. He was beating me with a diabolical gusto. He shouted on a constable to bring the powdered pepper on his table. Few seconds later, my already bloodied face was burning like fire and I was temporary blind. I heard someone telling them to take me outside because nobody had the time to wash my blood stain on the wall and floor. One of the men shouted on me to get up and follow them outside. But how could I walk when every bone in my body had been crushed by their shoes and sticks, when my eyes were glued by that hot powder

and when I was just reduced to a pulp? Perhaps they noticed that and so opted for plan B instead of leaving me alone. Sgt. Garba's big hand grabbed my hair and dragged me on the rough floor.

Outside, I was dragged for minutes on the ground. I thought they were happy with the way the pebbles left cuts and bruises on my skin and how the hostile sun made my body glittered with bloody sweat. When they had enough, they took me to a shelter made of zinc behind the station and like an animal, I was tethered. At that point I said to myself, what can be worse than that? I felt something hot melting my stomach. I opened my red eyes wide open. The agony I was going through at that moment was far worse than the hottest pepper in the world. With blurred vision, I was able to see what appeared to be local ironing stone full to the brim with glowing charcoal. Sgt. Garba pressed against my skin. A police woman stood by the door. She looked disturbed and confused. When he was about to press it again, the woman intervened. She pleaded with Sgt. Garba to let me go. They did. Reluctantly. I was put in a dark and quite room with only the presence of the pains on my body to keep me company. I thought I was going to follow Ardo. I overheard Sgt. Garba telling them that he believed my in-laws that I murdered my husband out of jealousy and because I did not want to be suspected, I pretended to be innocent and tried to blackmail my in-laws. He told them how I always threaten to harm Ardo whenever we had a misunderstanding. He was my neighbour you know, and Maimuna his first wife, was one of the women I use to tell my problems. I heard the woman pleading with him to at least take me to hospital. I closed my eyes and waited for that special visit from Azra'il.

Like a dream I heard the voice of my uncle Bappah Chindo after what looked like eternity arguing with Sgt. Garba. Later I realised that he wanted to bail me but Garba will not have that. They wanted him to pay because they thought he was dankauye. When my uncle protested about my condition, Sgt. Garba told him to leave the station immediately before he changed his mind and lock both of us up. It was three weeks after the incident that I came to know about how my brother in law; Mamman who was a friend to Sgt. Garba, convinced (with a little something of course) the police that I was guilty of killing my husband. He was covering his own tracks as he was so nervous that he might be suspected for killing his brother because everybody knew they were constantly fighting. He went to the station just an hour after I first left. After the police woman helped me put my clothes on, she watched me helplessly with the help of Bappah Chindo as I dragged myself out of the station like a battered dog.

By the time we managed to come out of the station, I was shivering and dizzy. The wound on my stomach was unignorable. I managed to sit under the shade of a tree as I watched Bappah Chindo waving frantically at every keke Napep that passed by. When one Keke stopped, Bappah Chindo begged the man to take us to the hospital. He agreed only when my uncle agreed to pay him the high amount he demanded. As I tried to stand on my feet, I slumped down and everything went blank.

It was strange for me when after opening my eyes, I found myself on a hospital bed with both hands with drips. There was a thick layer bandage round my stomach. I made an effort to look sideways when I noticed someone's presence. My elder sister quickly jumped from her seat when she saw I was fully awake.

'I did not kill him,' the first words that came out of my mouth.

'Sshh, we know you are not the one. Please don't say a word about it here,' replied Saude casting her eyes on other patients.

I spent almost a month strapped on the hospital bed before I was discharged. It was on the hospital bed that I learned everything that happened through my sister. Bappah Chindo appealed to Ardo's father to take everything that happened as kaddara. Unnecessary publicity should not be drawn to the family. On the day the police left with me to the station, Maimuna decided to pour out the left over kindirimo and behold! The carcass of a big gecko was found at the bottom of the calabash. Instinctively everybody knew Ardo died from poison.

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