

Sundays

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Every Sunday, I woke not by choice, but to the reverberations of Yoruba praise music rattling through my bedroom walls and to the firm knocks from my brother, who had been tasked with making sure I was fully up. The harsh awakening was only the first irritation of the morning, soon followed by the uncomfortable sheen of sweat on my skin after my mother had, without fail, added yet another blanket over me while I slept, despite my constant reminders that I ran hot at night.

I'd quickly ready myself for the morning and slip into one of the itchy, brightly colored Nigerian dresses supposedly tailored by "professionals." I'd zip my sister up, and then she'd zip me, and I would hold my breath, praying her sharp nails wouldn't nip my back this time. By 8:45, we'd be out the door for church—a service that was always *meant* to end at 11, yet somehow we never left before 1.

But what defined the day, and made every inconvenience worth it, was the meal waiting on the kitchen island at 8:00 a.m.

Sundays were for the hefty dishes smothered in spices so strong they made me sneeze if I leaned too close. They were for eggs fried in oily, red stew and scooped from a ceramic bowl; for a large plate stacked with small, cylindrical cuts of boiled yam; for a long platter holding two fish, seasoned with Maggi and buried under more stew; and for the bowl holding two or three boiled eggs, untouched by everyone except my father and brother. And always, set in front of the picky eater's spot—my younger sister—sat the inevitable plastic bowl of dry Cheerios, out of place among the white ceramics on the table.

Sundays were for the frantic attempts of my siblings and me to serve ourselves before the third slop of red stew on the table sent my mother into full control mode. They were for my father's proclamation of "only water with your breakfast," even as he quietly defied his own rule and guzzled three tall glasses of juice. They were for the laughter and groans as we navigated the crowded table, elbows bumping, reaching over steaming bowls, and the subtle negotiations over who got the last piece of yam. Sundays were for claiming our portions, tasting everything at once, and somehow, despite the chaos, feeling like the table itself was what made the morning sacred.

And when the last bite was eaten and the plates and bowls piled in the sink, all my morning irritations felt trivial—because Sundays were for the morning meals.