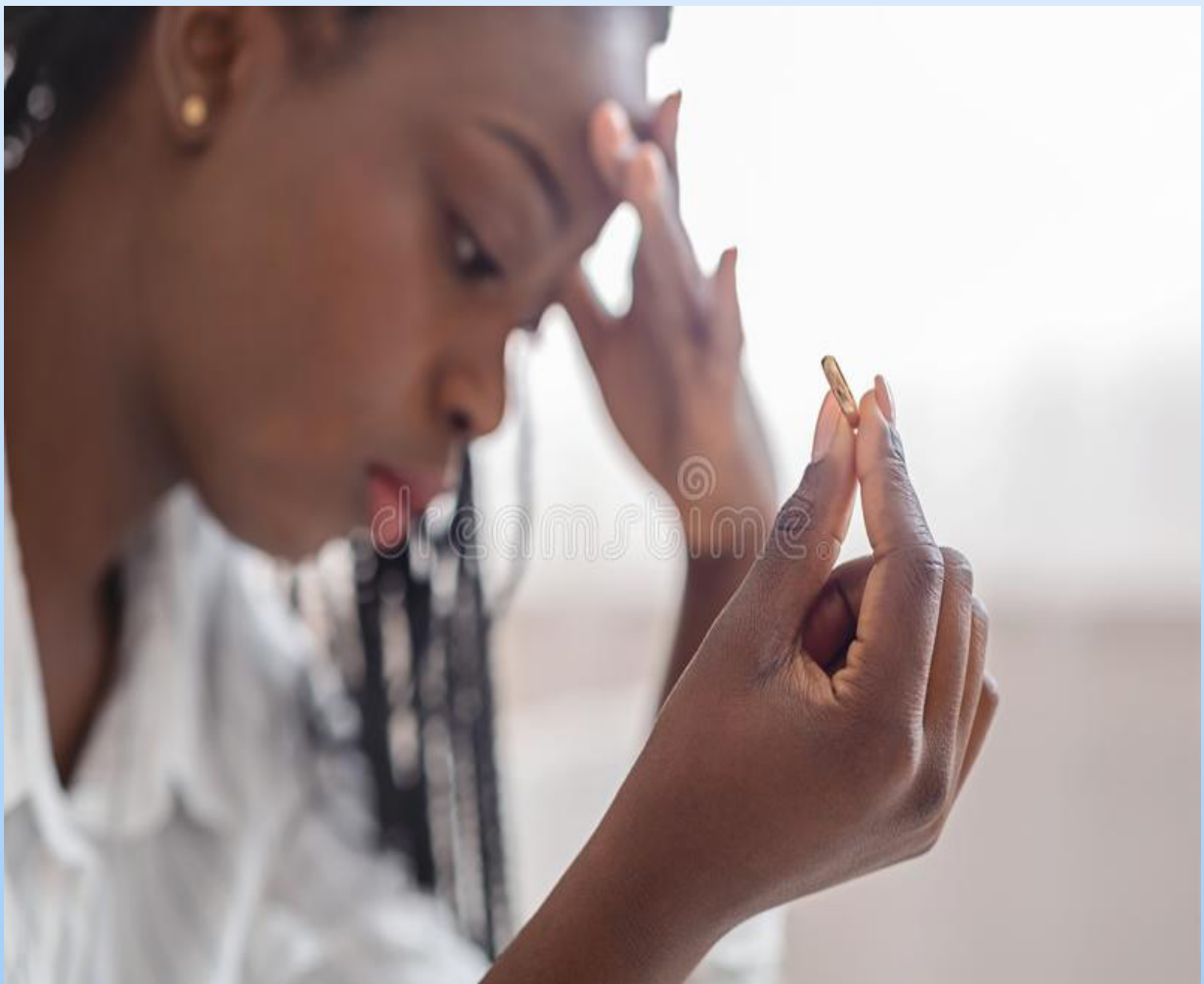


ALMOST A BRIDE



BY: EMEDIONG AKPAN

PROLOGUE

Samuel:

(Over the phone) Babe, what's going on? Where exactly are you? I just got off the phone with your sister and she says you're not home yet and you're not answering your phone either. What's going on? Are you in some kind of trouble? Just tell me where you are, I will come pick you up.

Ruth:

Sam please calm down ok? I'm so sorry, I... I... promise I'll be with you tomorrow. I don't think I can come back tonight, you just have to trust me, I'll be home first thing tomorrow morning. I'm so sorry honey, don't panic ok? I assure you everything will be fine, I promise.

Samuel (Agitated):

Ruth, what do you mean you can't come back tonight? Do you realize tomorrow is our wedding day? Or does this marriage mean nothing to you? C'mon what's all these? Where are you for goodness sakes?

Ruth:

Sam please, don't be like this, I understand how this makes you feel but please, you have to trust me, I'll fix this, I'll...

Samuel:

Ruth, I don't know what you're up to, but please don't do this, please.

Ruth:

No Sammy, I can't, I could never do you like that. Please forgive me, I beg you. I'll fix this, I promise...

My name is Ruth and I MISSED MY OWN WEDDING!!!

You'd probably be thinking "Who misses her own wedding for Goodness sakes?" Well, I've asked myself that question over and over again too, and the only logical answer I've been able to come up with is **ME**. Oh yes! I said it; I am the only person who could do something that frivolous. I call myself a risk taker, but I've finally been able to turn myself into a public disgrace.

I've always believed every girl's dream is to have a fairy tale, skyrocketed wedding, you know like the ones in Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, and the likes. Not only did I believe this was every girl's dream, I also thought every girl deserved to feel like a princess on her wedding day, myself inclusive. So, to think that I missed my own wedding, oh no! My tomfoolery must have climaxed.

How did this happen? Why did this happen? Where will I start from to fix this? Let me take you down the road to my sorry story, maybe you can help me figure this out.

You know my fiancé, Sam; he is one man I do not joke with. I have always wanted to marry someone who knows me inside and out, someone who understands me like a favourite novel, someone who would love me unconditionally, care for me, and treat me right without even thinking for ones if I am worth it; and so, when I said "YES!" to Samuel Bassey, I knew without a doubt that I had made the right decision. There and then, I vowed to myself to give this man all the right dose of loving and romance a good man could ever get.

Just so you know, I am a really lovey-dovey person, I love to display romantic gestures, but I never knew it would one day land me in a pot hole of trouble.

Virginity they say is the best gift a woman could give to her man on their wedding night. But what about those of us who might have already threw it right into the throat of Mr.

Wrong before Mr. Right decided to show up? What do we give then?

I wanted my wedding night to be special, I wanted Sam to feel a certain kind of joy that didn't only come from the fact that we've just been joined together in holy matrimony, I wanted it to be unexplainably surreal.

I'm not a virgin; Mr. Wrong had done me the regrettable honours. So, the beautiful gift of me being Sam's first was out of the question. Therefore, I began to sail the ocean of wild thoughts, "What romantic gesture do I perform on my wedding night to completely throw my Sam off guard and have him fall again helplessly into the bottomless pit of love for me?"

It was in my quest of getting pretty awesome ideas that I came across one Lucinda Osuji on Instagram two weeks to my big day.

Lucinda specializes on planning exotic meals for people who totally lack the creative capability to do it themselves, you could refer to her as a Chef Gourmet, she goes all out in preparing and serving the highest quality food with excellent service, she would make sure whatever meal of the day you want is prepared with precision and presented in an artful manner. I couldn't get enough of what I was seeing on her Instagram page, and so I had to hook up with her. Notice how I've taken my time to explain what business Lucinda is into? This just goes to show how very much interested I was in patronizing her.

My Sam is a foodie; he could break his back for good food literally, I couldn't think of a better way to treat my man with an exotic romantic dinner if not with Lucinda services. Hey! Don't go thinking I'm no good cook. Sometimes you've just got to sit back and watch someone else take proper care of you. Life is too short to put yourself under undue stress. P.S – it's my wedding night we're talking about here.

Whatever I had planned out with Lucinda was meant to be a surprise, and so, I couldn't tell Sam about it. Ok, fast forward to the week pregnant with my wedding day, it was super crazy; I had literally been running helter-skelter, working all the hours that God sent. You could say I worked my fingers to the bone just so I could have my dream wedding. It was totally exhausting. I didn't know one had to work that hard just to pull off a memorable wedding.

Do you know what was even more exhausting? The fact that I had lost touch with Lucinda just two days before my big day. I mean, what she had to offer was suppose to be the highlight of the day for both Sam and I, how on earth was she out of reach at that point in time?

The surprising thing was, I had contacted her four days before, and she assured me that everything was going to go as planned, and that I had nothing to worry about. I trusted her and took her words for it. However, because I was too anxious of everything, I had to call in again and reconfirm that all was set for my big surprise; I mean, how could I not? I just met this person on Instagram, it's not like we've ever done business together in the past.

My wedding was meant to hold on a Saturday, I had tried to make the reconfirmation call on Thursday night, and for some reason I was unable to get through to Lucinda, plus she wasn't replying to any of my text messages both off and on social media. I felt it was quite unlikely for a professional business person to act in this way, knowing she has clients to carter to. I however did not want to think too much about it as I kept trying to reach her in the hopes that I'd get a response eventually.

I could hardly sleep that Thursday night, thoughts of not being able to get in contact

with Lucinda had tormented me all through the night, so much so I didn't even realize the night was gradually giving birth to a new dawn, a Friday that changed everything.

I sat up on my bed, legs crossed like a yoga mistress about to perform. With interlocked fingers, I leaned forward and perfectly rested my elbows on both my thighs, while my chin comfortably caressed my knuckles. Worry had indeed taken over my soul.

I kept stealing glances at the ugly wall clock that hung just across my bed. Each time I looked at it, it looked fiercely right back at me, while the minute and hour kept swinging by excitedly, probably singing my doom as they ticked-tucked non-stop. I could hear human chatter coming from across the street; and the birds, they got me every time, welcoming the daybreak with songs befitting of angels, songs that rang with the joy of a new dawn. This was supposed to be a beautiful day, this was supposed to be my last day as a spinster, and I was supposed to enjoy every bit of it. But Lucinda played me dirty, she didn't return any of my calls, neither did she reply to any of my messages. I had paid her to do one job; though not in full, but I had paid a huge amount of money and boy did I feel like killing someone.

You wouldn't understand, but this heavenly dinner for Sam was a big deal for me; I had been day dreaming of it ever since I spoke with Lucinda about it. Of course being a typical business person, she had filled my head with all the exciting things and magical moments she'd planned for Sam and I. How could I be blamed for being hooked by her bait?

Taking a final look at the wall clock and one last glance at my cell phone, in the hopes that Lucinda had dropped a message, I shook my head in disbelief, got out of bed and headed right for the bathroom. At this point, I knew I had to take a decision, no matter

how rational or irrational, I did not care; I just had to do something.

After an unceremonious time in the shower, I was dying to get the day's plan in motion. I had so much on my mind, more negative than positive, no thanks to Lucinda. The hideous looking wall clock in my bedroom didn't have my best interest at heart at all. It kept racing and racing and couldn't even take a chill pill for me, well, even though technically, time waits for no man but DAMN!!! I'd never seen time move at such breakneck speed.

I put my clothes on with such celerity you'd think I was in some competition. I didn't care much about my messy hair (thankfully I was going to wear a wig for my wedding) and my makeup less face (I'm still so darn pretty without a makeup on), I just wanted to go find Lucinda, I had to find her.

I didn't want to believe it was all a scam because there was so much at stake. Her Instagram page seemed so legit to me, there were posts where people gave their testimonies about her excellent services, several positive comments here and there, and to top it, every time I had a conversation with her, she was always so professional. So, don't blame me when I say I couldn't bring myself to thinking or believing she actually played me a con game.

Thank God for "Google my business", I gained access to her physical business address, and I was going to track her down. But there was a slight problem; she was operating from a different state. I was in Calabar, Cross River State, and she Owerri, Imo State.

Need I tell you my decision? Call me crazy, but I was ready to take that risk. It was either Sam's big surprise was going to happen, or that lady was going to refund my hard earned money. Even though I had never visited Imo, I'd at least been to some other states in Eastern Nigeria, and it didn't take forever to get there. So, whatever! I could

quickly dash in and dash out before anyone even notices I'd left town. The worst that could happen is I'd come back somewhat late; cook up a really fanciful lie for Sam and my nosy relatives. No one would dare question me because I'm the bride. At least so I thought. I couldn't allow some fake lady on Instagram dupe me of thousands I could have saved up for my future kids.

While trying to sneak out the house that Friday morning, I bumped into my immediate elder sister Rachael, and my cousin Deborah, gossiping about every nothing as usual. I casually informed them I wanted to quickly visit the manicurist down the road to get my nails done. Thankfully they just waved me away and didn't engage me in a "Q and A" interview session (Phew!). Yeah I know I lied, nobody really wants to hear that the bride-to-be is taking a road trip to some faraway place she's never been to, just to see some lady whose actual existence she's not sure of.

While I sat on that very uncomfortable public transport vehicle on my way to the Eastern Heartland, I for the first time did not know if I was doing the right thing. However, the candle was already lit, and so there was no stopping now.

I sent a text message to Sam, telling him not to worry if I didn't pick up his calls for the greater part of the day, because I would be spending sometime in the holy room with God. I know that was a bit too much, but that was the only way I could get him to not bombard my cell with calls out of worry.

The trip to the Owerri felt like the longest trip I'd ever been on. I had my phone on silent mode the whole time. I knew people were going to try to reach me, but I didn't want to hear the phone ring, it would've distracted me from focusing on the mission ahead. I didn't want to turn it off either because I didn't want them thinking I'm dead or I'd ditched Sam and ran off with some other man.

Few hours into the journey, I began to notice large pillows of clouds forming, and blotting out the old gold colour of the sun. The once beautiful cock-tail blue sky was beginning to darken into gravel-grey.

“Wait a second; it’s not about to rain is it?” I asked myself.

I was obviously not ready for that kind of journey. What if it kept raining as at the time we arrive our destination? What would I do? I didn’t even travel with an umbrella.

My countenance immediately dropped like the urine of a scared little child; I didn’t want the rain to put me on a halt when I got to Owerri. I didn’t know about the other passengers on the bus, but for me, time was essential. I needed to do what I had to do and return immediately, so as to walk down the aisle with the love of my life the following day. I could only pray and hope the sudden change was just a façade.

The change in weather condition wasn’t a guise as I hoped, because few seconds after the sky was completely covered, the showers began to pour. Luckily, it wasn’t as heavy as I thought it would be. It was just some mizzle rain, suspiring through the air and weaving with the wind. The soft drizzle was short-lived as the sun slowly came out again, casting slanted beams of light across the glass windows of the vehicle. As suddenly as the clouds had gathered, they dispersed as though they had never met. Heaving a sigh of relief, my heart leaped for joy and my hope of finding Lucinda was rekindled.

After about 4 hours on one bumpy road to the other, we finally arrived our Bus Station in Owerri at about 1: 35 p.m. It felt like a good arrival time, taking into cognizance the time the bus left Calabar. Although it wasn’t the best time for a bride to be out of town, I was determined to make the most of the little daylight time I had left. I wanted to be out of this city and back home before nightfall, in order for my absence to not create any form

of suspicion.

Immediately, I ordered an Uber to come pick me up from the bus station to the location I had found on Lucinda's "Google my business" page.

It was another long and bumpy ride to that destination. After about an hour 30 minutes of flickering moments on the horrible highways and byways, we got to a certain area of picturesque ambience, environment so contemporary, this vicinity at least had the first good road I'd seen since I got to Owerri. In truth, it was just beautiful.

The Uber driver pulled over by a jaw dropping two storey building complex. I was completely blown away by the magnificence and aestheticism of this building. What actually struck me the most was the gigantic billboard that welcomed everyone that cared to visit or even look that direction. The billboard boldly read in one of the most stylish calligraphy I'd ever seen – **"FRESHIE FLY CUISINE – SAY HELLO TO LUCINDA"**.

"Well, well, well, so she is real after all" I thought to myself.

I gave the Uber driver his fare and alighted. I was so excited, yet really pissed at the same time.

I briskly walked towards the entrance door where I was warmly received by a petit looking young man who wore an attire that screamed "I'm the security guard here and my name is Ikenna". Hell yeah! Bro had a name tag.

I looked sternly at this man, I wanted so badly to laugh out loud but I had to contend myself, besides, I had something more serious to think about. But damn!!! That guard wasn't a dwarf, but he looked strangely small and very hilarious with his little blue shirt and black pant trousers.

He was so nice and warm, and didn't look fierce at all. As a matter of fact, there was

nothing “guardsman” about him. He seemed so innocent and feeble that robbers could easily throw him in the trash if they ever visited Lucinda’s domain. But hey! What do I know? I didn’t hire him.

After sizing up the poor little man and making my unwarranted inner mind conclusions about him, I proceeded into the main building. Guys, I couldn’t believe my eyes; the interior of this building was even more explicit and breathtaking. Oh my goodness! I’m so tempted to describe every single detail of the interior design right now but well, that’s not the main aim of this story, is it? Let’s move on people.

Obviously, with such magnificent taste in style, came great staffing. Therefore, it was pretty easy to locate who to talk to. I walked over to the lady at the front desk, and she immediately threw me a heavy grin; it almost looked feign, but who cares. We exchanged pleasantries, and I didn’t waste any time at all.

“Hi, my name is Ruth Etoh. I’m here to see Lucinda Osuji” I said bluntly.

“Oh! Do you have an appointment?” she asked.

“No I don’t, but I believe she’ll see me. We’ve been talking on the phone”.

She looked at me in disbelief after I said this. I didn’t understand why, so I looked blankly into her eyes expecting her to say something like,

“...ok please have a sit over there and I’d let her know you’re here”.

But no, she didn’t say anything like that, she just looked away, started doing God knows what on the desktop in front of her. I felt insulted, her Boss owed me an explanation and a service, and so I needed to see her. I wasn’t ready for any receptionist drama, and I was clearly running out of time.

“Young lady, I’d really appreciate if you showed me the way to your Boss’ office. I do not have much time” I said.

"Oh! I'm so sorry ma'am; I've just found your name on our clientele list. I'd inform Mrs. Osuji's secretary you're here" she responded.

"Look, I don't think you get it. I do not want to see the secretary; I want to see your Boss, Lucinda. I didn't come this far to see the secretary, so please, could you kindly make this easy for me? I'm running out of time." I retorted; feeling very irritable at this point.

"Madam, I'm sorry, it's just standard procedure".

I gave up. Lady was just trying to do her job, so it would've been plain stupid to continue an argument that was clearly going against me. Obviously she didn't understand my plight, and how desperately I needed to be out of there.

"Fine, can I see the secretary now? I came from a very far place, and I intend to return today" I said feeling defeated.

"Have a sit ma'am; you'll see the secretary soon". She said with a soft smile.

I quietly walked towards the reception room and sat there without muttering any words. There were other people waiting as well, and so, I didn't want to cause any dramatic scene; I know myself too well when I'm feeling very impatient.

I just sat there quietly, but didn't even try to hide the displeasure written all over my face. I already had 10 missed calls in the last 25 minutes, five from my best friend Angie, two from my sister, two from my mom and one from Sam. I could only imagine how many more calls I would miss if I didn't leave there sooner. I was so scared of picking up any phone calls. I couldn't risk anyone finding out that I had lied.

I sat in the waiting area for a little over 30 minutes and I didn't see any sign of a secretary. None of the other visitors seemed to be jiggery or complaining. They all sat there like they had nothing else to do other than relax at Freshie Fly Cuisine. Trust me, my patience level was already running thin.

As I sat there pondering on my next course of action as time wasn't on my side, I noticed something that made my heart start to palpitate,

"No no no please no, this shouldn't happen, this can't happen, not right now" I muttered.

The weather condition had changed drastically yet again, the sky was tar-black and the large Nimbostratus clouds were unstoppably and mercilessly eating up the Cumulus' that were just some moments ago wining and dining in the sky like they owned the day.

Suddenly, I heard tapping on the windows, and then it became a pitter-patter. I saw people run for cover outside and umbrellas were opened as the clouds spat out their beads of water. It was indeed happening; it had started to rain again, and I knew instantly my next course of action.

I didn't need anyone to tell me I had to get out of that city as quickly as possible. Just then, reality struck,

"Why did I even make this trip in the first place? Was this really worth it?"

I felt so disoriented. I got up, and started down towards the front desk to give that receptionist a piece of my mind. I didn't want her to get away with making me achieve nothing after almost an hour of waiting. The moment she saw me, I guess she knew exactly what she had coming.

"Ma'am I am terribly sorry you had to wait that long, I...I... was informed the secretary was dealing with a little bit of situation and..."

She tried to explain, but I wasn't having it.

"Wow! Are you for real? Are we still talking about the secretary here? What the hell happened to LUCINDA the woman in charge? Did she go extinct? Look here Miss Receptionist, you clearly..."

I was just about to vent my spleen on this lady when I heard a voice behind me.

"Chioma, what's going on?" the voice asked.

I turned around and noticed a round headed young man approaching the reception with his face dented with concern. His robust figure and cranky little moustache made it quite hard to tell exactly what age group he belonged; but I guessed he wasn't anything older than 30.

"Was he Lucinda's secretary?" I thought.

He had better not be, because if he were, he'd be so damned because I was about to spew fire.

"Umm... Sir, I was just telling the lady you were a...a bit engaged and..."

Voila! Confirming that the fat guy was the secretary, I waited no second in listening to the receptionist's annoying stutter, as I turned full body to face the donut looking young man that now stood right in front of me. My adrenaline was high up there, as I lashed out at him without mercy.

"Oh wow! Mr. Secretary, it's about time. You stroll in here, feeling like the busiest person on earth, forgetting that there are people over here that have more important things to do with their time order than wander round in the "kitchen" doing God knows what? Oh! I hear you prepare exotic dishes, hmmm really? Exotic dishes that might as well taste like the slum gutters..."

Oh trust me; I said a lot, I might have needed filter for my mouth. Don't blame me, I was

just so mad. More pissed at myself than them in all honesty. If I had been smarter and got an opportunity to go back in time, I would never have made this trip in the first place.

Just so you know, the showers from heaven were still not ready to quit. I looked out the windows and not a lot of vehicles could be seen routing anymore. I could only hope that ordering an Uber to the Bus station would not be another challenge, because with weather like that, I had every reason to doubt if any driver would want to accept a ride.

I remember arriving at the Lucinda's Freshie Fly Cuisine at exactly 2:30p.m. I remember this vividly because duh!!! TIME WAS OF THE ESSENCE. I had planned not to spend more than 30 to 45 minutes there, but guess what? At 4:25p.m. , there I was, still standing in the same building with a confused secretary and a courageously petrified receptionist, and the best part; I hadn't achieved anything since I got there. I soon realized that I wasn't doing myself any favours by standing there and reigning abuses on them.

"You know what, I'm done. Go tell Lucinda I do not need her catastrophic services any longer and also, I need my money back if not, I'd come back here, have this place shut down, and we would have to meet in court. I'll make sure of that".

That was an empty threat by the way, but Lord was I pained. Just when I was about walking out the door not minding the rain, this fat guy blotted out the most devastating news I'd heard all day.

"She's in a coma".

Wait what! I wasn't sure I heard him right.

"What did you say?" I turned around and asked the secretary who had unapologetically spilled an unbelievable truth.

"It's a long story but Mrs. Osuji had a terrible shock, and fell into a coma 2 days ago" he

stated.

Oh! My God, What did I just hear? I immediately turned my gaze to the receptionist. I felt a very deep hate and anger towards her at that point.

Why did she not say something earlier? If she had, I probably would not have been standing there at the moment. I didn't even care about the fact that Lucinda was in a coma, or if she was going to die. I really didn't even care about the long story the secretary was talking about. All I could think of at that very moment was the wasted time and the wasted resources taking that trip had caused me.

I felt bitter, oh! I felt so bitter. I had lots of things to say to them, I had lots of questions I wanted to ask. But I figured it was all pointless. Everything was already a lost cause. I just gave a heavy sigh, had one final look at the secretary and the receptionist, shook my head in disappointment, turned around and headed right for the exit door.

The weather was so terrible I could hardly hear anything else other than heavy rain drops lashing down on the rooftops. I stood outside the building feeling so frustrated. The angry rain had started to trespass into my little place of shade and my ego would not let me go into Lucinda's Cuisine for cover.

After several unsuccessful attempts to get an Uber, I decided to hop into the only public taxi I was lucky to see. Thankfully, it was just me in the vehicle, and so I asked the taxi guy to take me to the Bus station where I could join a Bus to Calabar.

The price he called out as his fare was ridiculous, but what choice did I have?

The ride to the bus station was crazy, the roads were worse than I had met them while coming. The rain kept getting heavier and heavier. Some vehicles had been held down

by flood on certain parts of the road; the angry thunderstorm rumbled and boomed as lightening flashed across the sky threatening to tear it up.

I was so scared something terrible was going to happen. I even began to wonder why the driver had stopped to pick me up in the first place. Probably he was just a greedy fellow that saw an opportunity to make money out of frustrated and stranded people like myself, or maybe he was just another Good Samaritan. The temptation to ask the driver to pull over until the rain subsided a bit was weighing heavily on me, but I didn't, because time was not on my side.

Finally, we got to the Bus Station that looked quite deserted on the outside. It was just some minutes after 5 o'clock but it looked like 7p.m. The dark clouds had totally swallowed up the sky, thanks to the unrepentant rain.

I gave the taxi driver his fare and ran immediately for cover towards the station's passenger waiting arena. In there, I met a lot of people. Some people had faces decorated with frustration just like mine, while some people were busy chatting and laughing happily.

I caught a glimpse of a man I thought could help me. He had a worker's I.D card hung around his neck, and so I went to speak to him. I needed to find out what time the next bus was leaving to my state, and where I could get a ticket. But what this man said to me almost made me pee in my pant.

"Madam the last bus for the day was supposed to leave at 4:00p.m. but for the rain. It doesn't exactly seem like we would be making any more trips to Calarbar again today, because the weather is too dreadful and it's a really dangerous route to travel when it rains and especially at night".

He clearly stated.

For a moment there I thought I was dreaming, I just stared blankly at the man not knowing what to say or do. In my mind, I was doomed; I was done for; in fact, I was finished.

“Madam are you alright?” the man concerned man asked.

I still didn’t know what to say or how to answer that question. Tears were already rolling down my cheek; I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. In fact, when Jesus told his disciples there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell, I’m sure he had me in mind as I was already experiencing mine here on earth.

I narrated my predicament to the man and I think he felt sorry for me. However, he feeling sorry for me did not change the fact that there was going to be no bus going to the Calarbar that evening.

The young man took time to explain to me how terrible the roads were and how he wouldn’t even let his worst enemy travel that route in a weather like that especially at that time of the day. He pointed to a small building really close to the Bus Station and told me it was a guest house and that I could spend the night there. But advised that I return to the station very early the following day because the first bus to Calarbar was going to leave at exactly 5:00a.m.

“5:00a.m? Oh! Finally there was a glimpse of hope” I thought to myself.

5:00a.m. wasn’t such a bad time to leave, although if I had my way I would have left earlier. If the first bus would leave at 5:00a.m as the man had said, then we’d probably arrive my hometown around 8:00a.m or there about. But not later than 9:00a.m.; buying me few minutes to prepare for my wedding at 10:00a.m. I thanked the kind man as I continued doing the math in my head.

As I sat in the passenger's arena waiting for the rain to tranquil, I decided to bring out my cell phone which I had intentionally left in the deepest part of my handbag in order not to be distracted by it. I wasn't surprised that I had over 30 missed calls recorded on my log and about 10 text messages; after all, my wedding was the following day and I was nowhere to be found. Just as I was about checking out those who had called, another call came in and it was Sam. This was when we had the conversation you read above.

In all honesty, after that short conversation with Sam, I felt like I had betrayed him and the love we shared. It's true it was because of him I had made the trip in the first place, but thinking about it now, maybe I would have thought of another surprise that wouldn't have required me to leave town.

At exactly 5:15 a.m. our bus was already en route to Cross-River State. The rain which had not abated totally was making a lovely, lilting sound while chinking off the glass windows and whispering soft murmurs in the air like white noise.

Although I wasn't happy about the weather condition, I was just glad I was on my way home. It wasn't the most amazing journey anyway, the large potholes and water logs made it so difficult to enjoy a smooth ride. I could never travel by road if I were pregnant, let alone travel to the Imo State. The bumpy ride alone would be enough to kill the baby.

Halfway through the journey, we could see a heavy traffic building up in front of us, we all started wondering what was causing such a heavy traffic. I was particularly concerned because I had to be in my hometown before 10:00a.m. for my wedding ceremony.

As we drove into the traffic, it became clear to us that we were about to deal with a

flood situation. It appeared the rain had done a pretty serious damage on the road.

As our bus driver went further, obviously following the queued up vehicles without exactly having any clue of how bad the flooded area in front of us was, we started seeing people jumping from their vehicles unto a road swallowed up in water probably filled with debris, contaminated oil, gasoline or even raw sewage.

That water must have been about 6 inches deep. Now I was really scared. Why were people getting off their cars? What was really going on?

There was panic amongst the passengers on the bus, there was panic everywhere. You could see motorists try to make unsuccessful reverses that worsened the traffic situation, and we were all in a state of turmoil. Just as we were trying to figure out what was really going on, one of the people who had come down from a vehicle appeared by the driver's window and hurled out in dismay:

"Chairman, you gas find anoda way carry your passengers commot for here o. That water wey you see so, you no go fit cross am o, na die be dat. Mek u find way reverse abeg".

He said as he struggled off the fragmented road.

We all heard what the man had said, and as far as that road was concerned, we all knew it would be impossible to reverse while on a queue.

This was officially the worst day of my life. I sat there with tears in my eyes; I couldn't even be a strong woman at that point. I was broken; I could feel my heart beat so fast it seemed to want to would jump out of my chest.

I reached out for my phone as it wouldn't stop vibrating. Angie was calling, mom was calling, my sisters were calling, and oh my God Sam was calling.

It was already 8:30a.m, the rain had subsided. I couldn't believe this was happening to me.

"Who did I offend?" I thought to myself.

As I sat there pondering on how I was going to miss my own wedding, my attention was drawn to the teenage kid that sat beside me on the bus; boy was having the best time of his life, taking countless selfies and making a weird video of how he was about crossing Atlantic ocean.

Oh! Dear God, I was going to slap that Smartphone off his hand, but let's not even go there.

I was so consumed in negative thoughts and self pity that I didn't realize the driver had left the vehicle. I didn't exactly know what he had gone out for or how long he had been gone, but immediately he got back, he asked all of us to get down from the vehicle. Confusion erupted everywhere...

"Driver wetin dey happen?" shouted one of the passengers who sat two seats in front of me.

"Why are you asking us to come down kwanu?" a woman who sat behind me questioned.

I didn't know what to say or do; I just sat there as I allowed the tears flow freely from my eyes. I was tired, I was fed up, and depression was setting in. I just listened as confused passengers kept bombarded the driver with questions.

We all eventually got down, but only then did we realized that apparently the motorist had figured out a way to make a U-turn and take an alternative route that would lead me

home.

However, to be able to make this U-turn, they had to maneuver their way through a certain flooded part of the road as only there lay an avenue for a turn. This was going to be a dangerous process for vehicles, especially small cars and heavily loaded ones, hence our reason for coming down from the bus.

I watched with a bleeding heart in my palm as our bus driver tried to make the deadly u-turn. It was one of the hardest things I'd ever had to look at.

The bus kept tilting and swaying this way and that way as though it was combating with the waters. I prayed earnestly to God that our driver made it out in one piece as other motorist had done.

Slow and steady he kept moving, trying to navigate and maneuver. I could see the waters cringe their teeth and ready to attack if the driver made any wrong move.

Alas, I swallowed a lump of saliva as our driver made it through and unto higher ground ones again. Excited and anxious passengers hopped into the vehicle and immediately started engaging in small talk about the incident we all had just encountered.

As we started a fresh journey towards Calarbar following a different route, all my hopes of being a beautiful bride in a lovely little ball gown, walking down the aisle to meet my prince charming on the alter was shattered.

I didn't even bother to check what time it was; I already knew I wouldn't make it. I looked to see some of the faces on the bus with me, I realized everyone but me had "relieve" written all over their faces.

There and then, I realized it was only God that could prepare me for the reality I would have to face ones we finally arrive my home town.

THE END

