

Aisha knows her way around the world these days, she is not new to the anyhow-ness of how things happen.

On one of her birthdays, the apartment is full of dirty water that almost causes the furniture to float. The carpet smells. There are toddlers shrieking everywhere, it's their party now. There was no conversation about it, it was not one of the many things that needed to be agreed on but the toddlers should not be there. One of the aunties is yelling that they just need to take the sound system out. She's yelling that there is not much that can be done now.

"They don't need canopies, they just need music and food. Can you hear me?! I'm saying that they only need to be entertained, they don't care".

Aisha is outside the flooded apartment with her friends and the classmates that showed up. Her boot-cut jeans have now been rolled up to just under her knees. She is leaning against a car and twirling the ends of her box braids with her left hand while she gesticulates with the other one.

"No, like I'm totally fine. I know one of my stupid cousins left that tap open, but we've been telling my dad to fix the sink since forever but it's like whatever, yeah? Like I just wanted to have a fun time with my friends but we could still do something, you know?"

Mrs Aisha's mother comes out through the kitchen entrance and then goes on to clap her hands and point at whatever blew her out of there. She's still wearing heels. The silver belt that cinches her waist is

still on the yellow jumpsuit that made Aisha's eyes hurt earlier in the day when she walked into her mother's room to ask if her braids looked better as a full updo or a half ponytail. The yellow jumpsuit that made one of the neighbors do a double take and ask whose birthday it actually is while her mother giggled.

"It's our birthday o, it's our sweet sixteen. You know you have to remind these girls that they are not the only sisis in town"

It is clear now that Aisha's mother is yelling at the caterer as she continues to clap her hands and beat her chest while spitting words like 'unprofessional', 'intolerant' and 'asewo'. The caterer soon storms out with her apron draped over her shoulder and charger plates under her armpit. Aisha's mother prances as quickly as her heels allow her and stands in the caterer's way.

'Ehn ehn? If you like, go. But did we not pay deposit? What of my deposit?'

The caterer does not say anything, she inhales deeply and readjusts the charger plates under her armpit as she plants her feet in the ground. Aisha's mother begins to turn in circles and clap her hands again.

"What? You can't talk? You want to beat me abi? You want to beat me?????"

But it is clear how her clapping and little dance move her out of reach of the caterer who hisses as loudly as she can and walks away while her assistant who has been standing clear of the two warring women dashes quickly behind her.

Aisha's mother spits on the floor, tucks a loose strand of hair back into her headwrap and announces to Aisha, her friends and the other classmates who showed up that everything is under control.

"Come, girls. She's useless and we don't need her. Come, let's make small chops together. There are videos on youtube, it will be fun, we'll have a fun baking party".

Days hold on to themselves and press against each other like hungry lovers until it is hard to tell who is which but it is soon Ramadan, and Aisha watches her father randomly lay out a very persuasive argument to her mom at 6am, just after fajr, that they should move away from Ijebu-Ode to another state.

"That Seyi Makinde boy is trying for them in Oyo, my only. I know things can be better...no! Things will be better if we go there."

"Wo, they said that he is doing like he is the governor of only Ibadan, and not all of Oyo, my dearest. And they are already too much in that Ibadan, that's where all of Lagos people are running to now. If you don't like Ijebu-Ode again, we can go to Abeokuta, we even know more people there."

“That is where you are wrong, my joy. It is Abeokuta that is getting overcrowded, and I do not want to live close to that devilish woman that you call sister. I know she just lost her husband, may Allah rest his soul and forgive his sins, but you can comfort her over whatsapp. Grief does something terrible to people, and she already has shaitan in her.”

While they lean into each other and argue in the texture of velvet, Aisha counts off supplications on her tesbih.

On the road to Ibadan, what is too precious to go in the moving truck is crammed into the trunk and backseat of Aisha’s father’s land rover. Each time the car falls into a pothole or another vehicle whizzes fast by them, Aisha whimpers and her mother turns around to give her a disgusted look. She ignores this and instead, grips her ipod tightly while she looks out at everyone and everything else on the road. There’s a man seated by the window in a bus two lanes away from her father’s car with his hair packed in a ponytail. There was something about men with long, permed hair that always looked a little bit funny and she laughs softly to herself. She watches him read a book that he looks away from every quarter of a minute to stare into space and is curious if he is distracted or he is reading one of those intense books where you often have to come up for air. She knows what that is, as she leans back into the car as far as the boxes on the parcel shelf can let her, she thinks about how the drowned body quickly sinks after it dies, how quickly the heaviness understands what to do underwater. Sinking after water takes over the lungs and cuts off breathing takes less than a minute, but what eventually pushes

the body to the surface much later is still heaviness, just a different kind. She wonders if she's been sinking for a long time or she's just starting to float.

She is surprised by how taken aback she is, and the feet that immediately begin to run around in her head, then settle to stomp hard just behind her eyes when her father casually mentions, while they lazily sit around and watch TV on a Sunday evening, that they would all be attending a visa interview the following weekend.

“Visa interview? Where are we going?”

Aisha's mom leans out of the sofa she is sitting in with her legs in Aisha's father's laps to pick the tv remote control from the coffee table, while simultaneously dropping her eyes to Aisha's legs spread wide open on the floor where she is sat. Aisha instantly readjusts and closes her legs without giving much thought to it as she tries to process the information her father just unloaded on her.

“We are going to Canada. Are there needles on the chair that are stabbing you? Why are you sitting on the floor?”

“Canada? We are taking a trip? I didn't know we could afford an international trip”

“We are not taking a trip, Nana. We are moving to Canada. My dearest, are you still watching this match? My show is starting soon”

Aisha's father pats her mother's feet distractedly without looking away from his phone.

"You can watch whatever you want, my joy. These useless Liverpool boys are playing rubbish as usual, I know Yomi will cry to sleep again tonight'.

"I don't understand. We are moving to Canada? Like, that's where we'll be living permanently now? We are leaving Nigeria ?"

"Sounds to me like you do understand the idea of moving. Jo, Nana, don't injure me with questions and get me a glass of water instead. I don't think I've drank enough water today. Make sure it is room temperature o, I know you don't listen when I tell you not to drink cold water but make sure my water is room temperature".

Aisha sits still and watches her mother, and then both her parents for about 5 seconds before she stretches the legs that she had just tucked under her knees, wills her headache that is now heavy on her temple to stay in place, then gathers herself to stand up.

The huge dark patch on the wall that faces her as she walks into the kitchen still manages to startle her sometimes. It looked like someone had intended to burn the kitchen down, then changed their mind halfway.

It has been there for more than 2 years now. Aisha's father has made promises, for months, and now years, to get someone to come over and have the wall plastered and repainted. Aisha however knows that the scorched wall still exists because her dad loved having a story to tell whenever they had guests, with visual effects.

The routine was easy enough. The guest would be welcomed by whomever opened the front door, and led to the living room with polite exchanges and good natured greetings, conversation would flow easily enough until Aisha's father would ask the unsuspecting visitor to come along to the kitchen to get a glass of wine, or juice, or water. The natural thing to do in any normal household would be to ask a guest what they wanted to eat or drink, then either get it for them or ask someone to do so. It was unusual to ask a guest that wasn't family or an old friend into the kitchen, it's like inviting them into your bedroom. Which is why the guests being asked into the kitchen often followed Aisha's father curiously, wondering what they had done to deserve such intimacy.

When they walked into the kitchen and faced the wall head-on, and whoever it was softly or loudly gasped and turned to Aisha's dad with a face that had questions, he would go 'Ah, it's true o, you've not been here since it happened', a deep and dramatic sigh would usually follow.

"Ki lo sele? What kind of thing happened here?"

"It is gas explosion o. Gas wa lo blow. Wo, alhamdulillah, let's just be thanking God, everybody in this building could have died"

He would then launch into a story of how he and Aisha's mother had been out of town for a family occasion, and how Aisha had slept like the living dead upstairs in her room while the house they had just moved in almost burnt down.

"Thank God for good neighbors. These people, they barely knew us, we had just moved in. But they are good people, they broke down the front door and stopped the fire. Thank God for good neighbors"

There would of course be the requisite onomatopoeic sounds to accompany this storytelling.

"In the end, ka sa ma dupe. We did not even tell people like that, it is only because you followed me into this kitchen that you know. I didn't even want to talk about it."

She picks a glass cup from the tray set placed face down on the shelf just above the water dispenser before she crouches before it and presses down on the tap.

She is still very confused about her parents' announcement and she can now feel the headache pressing and pushing her eyes till they felt heavy to keep open. Aisha's parents teased and trolled each other a lot but not her. So, if they say that they are all appearing at a Canadian consulate for an interview soon, then it is only a matter of time before it happens.



“Nana Aisha! Did you somehow leave this house and go to the water corporation for a glass of water? Because it cannot be the dispenser that you are getting this water from that is taking this much time”

“Ah Mummy, I am coming”

“Ehn?!”

“I said I’m sorry ma, I’m bringing it to you right now”

When she bends over to drop the glass of water on the coffee table, she feels her mother’s eyes hot on her exposed chest with disapproval. She stands up straight and adjusts the neckline of her blouse, she already has too much to think of and is not in the mood for a lecture of being conscious of how her body could unravel itself.

“ So, when are we leaving? Are we also going to Alberta? Shebi that’s where Mummy Alhaja is? ”

“ You’ll know when it is time to leave, we will go and do the visa interview first. And when did you hear your father or I mention Mummy Alhaja? I better not hear you repeat any of this to anyone outside this house, close your mouth”

“So, Mummy Alhaja does not know we are coming?”

“Nana Aisha -”

Her father who had remained mostly mute since he dropped the news raises his hand and cuts Aisha’s mother off.

“Enough. Stop stressing your mother, Aisha. Our relocation is private business, only we three here are privy to it and we are the only ones that need to know. I understand if you are excited but take it easy with the one million questions”

“I am not excited. I’m just really confused”

Aisha’s mother’s face holds something that is the hybrid of a scowl and a mouth full of food as she turns her face towards the tv.

“Why are you acting like a child? Most people your age would be happy about this, Aisha. You’ll get to live and go to University abroad, why aren’t you happy?”

Aisha had not realized that she still had her father’s attention. When she looks up from the ground she had been staring at and meets his face staring at her, she falters briefly.

“I know schools are on strike now, but my third year is almost over. Am I supposed to start over? We just moved here from Ijebu not that long ago. Why are we leaving again so soon, out of the country at that”

“Well, life is full of changes”

Aisha's mom had stopped watching Tv and was now darting her eyes back and forth between Aisha and her father.

“Besides, you are getting a little brother soon, and the minute I got the job offer, I knew it was Allah's divine timing.”

Aisha's mother chuckles and pulls at his beard playfully.

“It's too early to know if it is a boy or a girl, I keep telling you, this man”

“Mom, you are having a baby?”

Barely a month after she resumed her first year at Unibadan, Aisha started to keep condoms in her bag. The first time she was at the doctor's office to take the STD screening required for post-admission medicals, she had said yes and stretched her hands when the nurse outside asked if she wanted any of the free condoms in the bowl on her desk. She could tell from the nurse's face that her acceptance to take the condoms was a surprise, and the mix of concern and judgment on the elderly woman's face made her stomach knot in a way that was similar to when she cooked a whole pack of spaghetti and finished it all in one night.

Soon, she began to collect other things; emergency contraceptive pills, half smoked joints, colored pills in a clear unlabelled container, and the pamphlet she kept after an underground pro-abortion feminist group did their rounds at her hostel. She stopped when she had to leave school because of the academic staff's strike that stopped classes while the lecturers embarked on a back and forth with the federal government on the increment of their salaries and allowances. But her stash was safe and stuffed at the bottom of her wardrobe with her old shoes.

When she goes to the pharmacy later to get painkillers for her headache, she loudly asks the cashier at the counter for a pack of cigarettes when he asks if she wants anything else.

“Hodges and Benson, please”

As she holds her polythene bag and walks past the whispering queue and scornful eyes, she smiles to herself and pushes her chest up like a proper woman of the world.