

UNCOMMON LOVE

Life for Samir Hassan was not a bed of roses. At 12 not only had he lost his mother, he was practically disliked in school and ostracised for no fault of his. A Muslim, though his father married his late mother a Christian, Samir was tagged terrorist and other obscene names owing to the recurring bombings in some parts of the country. At other times, his classmates would taunt him, pull his ear and run away.

Though these acts displeased him, they did not make him want to withdraw or change school. He was only in his second year in high school and he liked both his teachers and the school. His grades were excellent and his teachers used him as an example of a good and studious student always.

However, one day, as one of the teachers commended him for answering a question correctly, one of the students and the same boy who championed bullying (John by name) him shouted “bloodsucker” from his seat. The teacher got mad and not only punished John but also ensured that he reported him to the principal who suspended John for two weeks.

A few days later after the incident, as Samir was reading the Quran at a quiet corner in the school yard, a little girl of no more than 10 years approached him identifying herself as Cynthia, a sister to the John who was suspended. Surprised, Samir looked up and expecting a slap from the girl, rather saw a small hand stretched.

“Thanks for contributing to my brother’s suspension. I like it. John has been a thorn in my flesh and father says he will never come back to this school again.” Cynthia said.

Samir took the hand and rather apologised. He explained all that transpired between John and himself to her and quickly made friends with her. It was not long before both realised that they had a lot in common and this bonded them more. Both liked to read detective and thriller novels and watching detective movies. They also liked Math and English language though they did not find other subjects tasking to pass. In fact while Samir was among the first three students in his class, Cynthia was among the first ten in her class. While Samir aspired to be a doctor, saving the world, Cynthia’s ambition was to be a lawyer.

In the coming days, a friendship blossomed between 10 year old Cynthia in her first year and 12 year old Samir in his second year. They were seen everywhere together during break and after school. Though Samir was shy and an introvert, he found Cynthia who was more outgoing, a good and intelligent company. They even shared their snacks

together. Cynthia would cry all day if Samir would refuse to take some chunk out of her snack box when he is fasting. Samir on his part would only be too willing to share his snacks with Cynthia. As they shared snacks, Samir also explained very difficult topics to her. No gain saying that this went a long way to improve Cynthia's grades that both her teachers and parents noticed the improvement in her grades.

Outside school hours, they went to the movies; visited interesting places and in a short while, Cynthia became a household name in Samir's house. The father welcomed her and Samir's two elder brothers also welcomed and treated her like a younger sister. At times, Samir's brothers took them out to enjoy ice cream and chocolate.

When John got wind of the alliance between his sister and Samir, he was enraged. His fury exceeded limits when Cynthia came home one day with Samir to introduce him to their parents. He was boiling inside with rage. He left their apartment and waited for Samir down their street. He ambushed Samir, beat him up with a plank and left him for dead. It was the quick intervention of passers-by that saved Samir's life as they rushed him to hospital. On hearing the havoc his son had wrecked, John's father grounded his son.

This singular act of rage by John rather than break up the two families unified them even more. Cynthia's parents visited Samir often in hospital to nurse him back to health especially when she was in school. Even Samir's father and brothers were surprised to see the man and woman visit the hospital on a daily basis and even chat with Samir apart from delivering Cynthia's handwritten letter to him.

For Cynthia, the times were not just good. Her sadness was conspicuous in both classes and outside classes. Her parents had told her to focus on her studies while they help nurse Samir back to health. But she could not even concentrate in school. She was withdrawn, sad and always wore a long face. Even her teachers observed this with dismay. At home, she was a shadow of herself. Known to be the livewire of the family who made everywhere lively and fun, the house was quiet. She refused to eat and even when she did, she nibbled at it. She would eat a small chunk and dump the rest in the sink. She became restless. She had do something and very quick. She had to see Samir. At the end of school one day, she left straight for the hospital. Her heart skipped two beats when she set eyes on Samir after four days. She rushed to him and hugged him tightly; tears flowed freely out of her eyes. Samir who was fast asleep woke up and was overwhelmed with joy seeing Cynthia again. Though it hurt him but they hold each other tight for a very long time.

After that day, Samir's recovery rate improved tremendously. The doctors and nurses attested to this fact while both families confirmed it. So it was not long before Samir came back to school. Cynthia was excited. She and her friends organised a small get together to welcome him back to school. They became inseparable like Siamese twins in school and at home. Many envied their friendship including neighbours and adults. They would argue that the friendship would not stand the taste of time insisting that once both of them grew older, they would part ways naturally. However, six years down the line the love bonding them grew thicker.

A religious crisis that erupted in the state threw both families apart. Cynthia's family had to relocate to another state as Muslim fundamentalists threatened to exterminate Christians residing in their state. But both Samir and Cynthia kept in contact through e mail and mobile phone. Even Samir went the extra mile of travelling more than 383 kilometres to see Cynthia on several occasions especially during her birthday and her call to bar.

University life for Samir was to a large extent uneventful. Though he excelled in his studies, he missed Cynthia. No amount of calls and text messages could take that away. Angry at the reasons that separated him from his long time love, he dumped Islam and got baptised in the Catholic Church. He followed his faith spiritually, read his bible often and attended masses.

After his one year compulsory national service, he was employed and so was Cynthia after Law School. So when Samir asked for Cynthia's hand in marriage she accepted. Without both parents expressing any reservations, they accepted knowing that both Samir and Cynthia had known each other for long.

On their wedding day, tragedy struck. A short distance away, a group of young and mischievous boys including John, Cynthia's brother were planting an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that when detonated, would kill both the newly wedded couple and many other people. Unfortunately, the device detonated chopping off John's left arm (as he was coming back from easing himself) and killing the rest.

He was rushed to a nearby hospital. On close examination, it was found that he lost a large quantity of blood. He not only needed at least one pint of blood, he also needed a quick surgery and a large sum of money to be deposited before the surgery would be conducted.

Business for John's father took a nosedive immediately he relocated with his family. Though he did not have the money to deposit, he argued that if he had the money, he

would not make any deposit since John was out to ruin his live and the lives of both the newlyweds and their well wishers who had come to support them. Uncomfortable with the situation, Samir, took time out of his reception to donate blood to John (he is a universal donor o+) and left seventy thousand naira (N70, 000) for the doctors to commence the surgery while he rushed back to conclude his wedding reception.

When John regained consciousness and learnt that both the blood and money were donated by Samir, he shed tears uncontrollably.

On one of those days that Samir came in to visit him, with tears flowing freely down his eyes he thanked Samir for saving his life even when his father and sister abandoned him. Samir said:

“John, do not thank me. Thank God. If not because of you, I would not have met your sister, a special gift from God. Again, if not because of God, you might have been a dead man today. The only piece of advice I would give you is love your fellow man. You don’t give life, so why take it. I gave blood to you so that I can extend my love to you and also tell you in practical terms that I love you and will do you no harm. I pray you learn this. Love begins with me. I have extended it to you. If you love your brother and your brother loves another brother or sister, would there be crisis or war?”

Cynthia, on Samir’s persuasion facilitated dropping a case filed against John as he (John) had a change of heart and attitude.

Samir later sponsored John through his university and he became a mechanical engineer. John when he got a job in a construction company founded a Not for Profit organisation that preached love and helped orphans and widows.

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