

# THERE'S NO END TO THIS LOVE STORY

I stared in the mirror with teary eyes for a long time in search of answers. "Does my skin really look like a leopard's " and "am I that ugly?", I asked. I knew I wasn't as pretty as many girls in my school but that doesn't make me less of a human, does it? I began to caress my face. First, the moles of different sizes. Then, the contusion of pale and ebony on each side of my face—my mother would say, they make me unique. But I tell her, "I don't feel special." The only reason you and dad think I'm special is because I'm your daughter". Whenever I gave that response, she pulled me to her side, patted my back, and said, "you are beautiful". But I wasn't one to be convinced easily.

I thought back to that unfaithful day Audu referred to my face as a leopard's skin. It was at the canteen where a lot of students were and they chuckled so hard you'd think Audu had cracked a joke. I looked them all in the eyes; each one of them— none of them thought differently of me. I noticed that Joe was there also. He was my long-admired crush. I watched as he laughed heartily too. My heart sank, I couldn't bear it. It hit me so badly that my eyes let out an ocean of tears. My food tray fell from my hands, and I ran out. I crawled back into my shell; the safest place I knew. I was hot with fury, I wanted to yank off my face—perhaps if I did that, I'd be beautiful like everyone else. Since that moment, Joe has avoided me more than ever before. Not only him, but the whole school save for Miss Chioma. My brilliance couldn't save me; in fact, I was tortured more for being brilliant and ugly. I was always reminded even by my teachers that I was ugly.

I gawked at my reflection in the mirror, trying so hard to reckon with all that Miss Chioma told me when she saw me sobbing that day Audu tore my heart into bits with his words. She said she knew some very kind man who loved all my imperfections and chose to die for me like he'll do a billion time again. I laughed when she told me.

"Nobody loves me. People run away from me when they behold my scars, and my heart bleeds each time I get home. I stare at myself in the mirror until I can't see myself anymore", I told her. It had been a daily tradition and my day was never complete without me basking in my misery. So how did this kind man come about? "It is all gibberish," I muttered to myself.

One night, while I was in my room approaching the aisles of sleep, I felt someone whisper to me. His voice was soft, silky-smooth, and soothing, it had an air of whispery breath. "I love you", he said with the ease and calmness of a dove. My ears tingle at hearing them like they'd been starved of these words for years.

I wasn't sure if I heard correctly, so I tapped my ears to be sure my pinnae weren't receiving waves from the television I had forgotten to turn off. Rays of light strode into my bedroom giving off fluctuating colors that reflected on the tiled floor. It was ten o'clock, and though the city seemed asleep, I could hear the newscaster broadcast the news of the hour enthusiastically. But I wasn't interested in listening to the news, I needed some rest. So I arose from my bed and

walked to the sitting room where I turned the television off. I tossed out those three words I had earlier heard and strode to my room to lie on my bed.

"It's my mind at it again", I thought. But the voice came again much softer than I heard before, it seemed. "I love you", he said. It was so real I could feel it. It was warm and so true, I watched in awe as the hair on my arms rose as they breathed in and out. I arose to move the drapes of my curtains, perhaps someone was playing a prank on me. I pulled them up and to the sides but I couldn't find a trace or shadow of anyone at the windows, so I dropped the drapes.

"Who could that be?", I thought aloud.

Then it occurred to me like one of those random thoughts that rings the most in one's head, that Miss Chioma had said that I'd hear him say those words to me himself someday soon. She was certain of it, she said I would tell her all about it when it happens. Was he the one?

"Who could it be", where did the whispering voice come from?" I pondered on the possible answers until I got to the shores of sleep.

The next morning, I called Miss Chioma. I told her I had missed her but that wasn't what I wanted to say.

"Tell me about that kind man," I blurted out. Miss Chioma's voice was an earthquake over the phone. I had never heard her voice that boldly crisp. She told me how this man loved me even before I came into being.

It enthralled me to know that this loving man doesn't care about my imperfections; he would choose me over and over again. I learned that this kind man is Jesus and that his love for me is unconditional. It was unbelievable; everything I had and was, all of it, I had had to work for. The very few smiles ever beamed at me were when I did something deserving; most of the time, they were sarcastic, flashing horror at my taints. But this, I didn't and couldn't have worked for.

I gave this man a try; got to know him, and it was the best decision I made. Every day with him has been paradise on Earth. Just the mere fact that he's with me and working with me, gets me pumped up each new day. He says I'm beautiful, wonderfully and perfectly made; when I look in the mirror now, all I see is Him. His love is too vast I can't comprehend, too large I can't estimate. He calls me his very own and even recorded in his words that nothing, not even death, can cut short this love story!

