

AYO MI

By

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INT. APARTMENT-MORNING

Iya Dorathy is lying on the bed with her eyes closed. She looks like hell.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

My world is spinning in the wrong direction. Everything around me feels strange. I began having nightmares after he was taken away. Nightmares about people jumping out of ambulances, wearing face masks and white coveralls. The part of the dream that scares me the most is the siren.

We hear a very loud siren blare. The sound makes her wake up with a jolt. She pants and sweats.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

How did we go from normal life to hell in less than a month? Until a month ago this was our home. Our place of love, support and peace. Now, it is a place of...

We hear loud angry voices from outside the house.

ANGRY VOICE

Why you dey go near that house? Abi you won die? Na house of death be that.

Her eyes are glittering with tears and she does not reach to stifle it.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

(voice low and sad)

This is now a place of pain and sorrow and hunger.

She throws her legs out of the bed to the floor, sitting at the edge of the bed.

A little voice calls out to her from another room.

BABY VOICE

Mummy, we are tired of this game of hide and seek. We want to come out.

We hear the tiny footsteps approaching and she says immediately.

(CONTINUED)

IYA DORATHY

Have you counted to ten thousand yet?

BABY VOICE

No.

We hear the whimper of her two little children.

IYA DORATHY

(tearful but with a forced cheer)

The rule is count to ten thousand and come out and catch mummy. The winner gets a huge bowl of ice-cream. You will like that, won't you?

BABY VOICE

Yes, mummy.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

Dorathy is 7 and her brother is 4. They will never be able to count to ten thousand but keeping them far away from me is for their own good. I do not like the way I am feeling.

She dials the NCDC line but gets no response.

She stifles her tears.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

(so much sadness in her voice)

Ayo mi... this was not our plan for 2020. 2020 was supposed to be the year- our 8th wedding anniversary, vision 20:20.

IYA DORATHY

Even my neighbour who used to shout  
(voice louder)

I cannot wait for 4:20:4:20, does not seem to be waiting anymore.

Cackles and cries and the cackle soon give way to a cough. It's a dry painful cough. She goes to the table and pours warm water into a cup. She squeezes lemon into the water before drinking. On the table is a picture frame with a picture of her and her husband smiling. She drinks.

(CONTINUED)

IYA DORATHY'S VO

When I met Ayo, I had gone to his shop to fix my father's broken chair. He is a furniture maker.

(sad chuckle)

He was a good man. It was so easy to speak to him. We spoke the same language and I did not mean our dialect. He could not give me the world but he gave me all he had and our two lovely kids. Now the laughter is gone. Our joy is gone. My support system is gone. Ayodeji is gone.

IYA DORATHY

I am not sure I really know where I am.

She blinks and rubs her eyes but nothing changes.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

It started with just symptoms of pneumonia and trouble breathing. We dismissed it because to our knowledge we had not had any contact with anyone who just returned to the Country. Even at the shop, he was careful with customers. But he got worse. After he got tested for covid-19, we watched from our imposed quarantine as he was rushed away with sirens blaring.

She starts to cough again. It hurts her chest.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

What is this burning I feel in my chest?

She immediately panics and calls out in a loud voice.

IYA DORATHY

(earnestly)

Dorathy, you and your brother should breathe in and out.

She breathes in and out as she talks.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D

Let's go- in, out, in, out, in, out. Are you breathing?

(CONTINUED)

BABY VOICE

Yes, mummy.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D

Now hold your breath and count to ten.

She holds her breathe and counts but she is unable to get past 5. She lets out a very painful breath. Her chest hurts.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

They said we tested negative but I am scared. I do not feel alright.

She reaches for her phone and dials the NCDC emergency number but she is unable to reach it. She dials again and the low battery warning makes her sigh.

We hear noises outside the house like stones been thrown at her door. We hear the noise of a louver break. She jerks frightfully on every impact.

ANGRY VOICE

Corona house. Virus family. Witch oh. Una never die? Make una die oh.

She drops on the floor weeping.

Her hands soon begin to tremble so much the cup drops from her hand and hits the floor, the water splashes. She cries.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

Nobody prepared us for the other very dark side of having the virus. The fear. The resentment. The shaming. The stigma. The hunger. While my husband was rushed out of here in sirens, our neighbours tore our reputation apart. Almost immediately the rumours and the fury began to swirl.

We hear another stone hit the door.

ANGRY VOICE

Ogun go kill una.

Unable to control herself she retorts angrily.

IYA DORATHY

Na your mama Ogun go kill.

She cries.

(CONTINUED)

We hear the tiny soft patter of her children approaching and she snaps, this time loud and angry.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
(eyes blazing)  
I said stay back. Are you deaf?

BABY VOICE  
We are hungry.

IYA DORATHY  
(softer)  
It's not yet time for breakfast,  
baby. You know we have to fast and  
pray for Nigeria so God can heal  
Nigeria.

We see on the clock that it is almost 12 noon.

BABY VOICE  
(weakly)  
But we are hungry.

IYA DORATHY  
(broken)  
You know what? Pick up a book and  
read. By the time you are done with  
the book, food will be ready. Is  
that okay?

BABY VOICE  
Yes, mummy.

She opens her purse and sees less than 2000 naira there. She checks around the room for food but finds very little. She is heartbroken.

IYA DORATHY'S VO  
I lost my husband and I am unable  
to grieve completely for him because  
the hunger my Children are feeling  
hurt me more the burning I feel in  
my chest. They told us not to leave  
our home. Self isolation means I am  
unable to work. Self isolation  
means I was unable to see my  
husband before he died. Self  
isolation means we couldn't claim  
his corpse. We were both informal  
workers. He made furniture and I  
make school uniforms. We lived on  
our daily earnings. We have nothing  
to protect us if we are unable to  
work.

(CONTINUED)

We hear the sound of a truck pull by. It is a relief truck.

VOICE  
(shouts)  
Food.

VOICE 2  
(shouts)  
Government Palliative.

We hear the sound of people cheering and running.

Iya Dorathy jumps on her feet as hope suddenly springs up in her.

IYA DORATHY  
Relief supplies. Thank you, Jesus.

She hurries to the door. Just as her hand reaches for the door knob, she coughs. She freezes.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
Oh no. The last time I stepped out  
for relief materials, my neighbours  
almost lynched me. But my children  
need to eat.  
(gasps)  
Dorathy!

IYA DORATHY  
(urgently)  
Dorathy, carry a bowl. The big one.  
The relief truck is here. Hurry.  
Go, go.

We hear tiny hurried movements, a bowl scraping the ground and a door opening and closing.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
Hurry. Hurry.

She moves to the window for a better view. She restlessly moves up, down, right, left- eyes popping in anxious desperation.

We hear loud, angry and desperate scuffle caused by the rush for food.. The more she watches the more anxious and desperate she becomes.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
(fervently)  
No, no, no. Don't push my child.  
Dorathy go forward. Move, go  
forward, no.

(CONTINUED)

(frantic)  
Stretch the bowl. Don't push my  
child. Dorathy, food is finished  
there. Move to the bread line.  
Fast! Run! Take bread. Yes!  
(deflates)  
Only one?  
(frantic, desperate)  
Don't take her bread. She has just  
one and you have three. I am  
begging you. Don't take her bread.  
(manically)  
Agbaya! Devil. You have no shame.  
Dem dey follow small pikin drag  
bread?

She throws her body on the floor in frustration.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
Oh God, oh God.

IYA DORATHY'S VO  
That would have been our dinner.  
For the first time in three weeks  
they would have had two meals  
instead of the 0-1-0 they are now  
so used to.

We hear the door open. Iya Dorathy not wanting her child to  
see her that way wills calm upon herself.

BABY VOICE  
(tearful)  
Papa Kayode took the bread from me.  
I am sorry, Mummy.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
(voice heavy with grief)  
You did well, Baby. It wasn't your  
fault. Go wash your hands.

She sings tearfully.

IYA DORATHY CONT'D  
Turn on the faucet, wet your hands.  
Apply enough soap to cover all hand  
surface. Rub your palms together.  
Wash the back of your hands between  
your fingers, under your nails, now  
rinse off lather with water.

(CONTINUED)



BABY VOICE

Water is not running.

IYA DORATHY

But I heard Landlord pump water  
this morning.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

(sigh)

Oh yeah. They blocked water from  
flowing into my flat because we  
could not contribute money to buy  
fuel for the pumping of water. Wash  
your hands, wash your hands- where  
is the light to pump water? Where  
is the water to wash hands?

(sigh)

I am tired. I am scared. I am faced  
with the horrible choice of going  
out to look for food for my  
children and I or stay at home and  
risk dying of starvation. Ayo mi,  
you should not have left me. I wish  
you stopped going to the shop when  
the Government announced the  
lockdown.

IYA DORATHY

(cries)

I am not blaming you. I am sorry. I  
am sorry that I am unable to mourn  
you properly. I am sorry I could  
not give you the burial you  
deserve. You deserve better.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

The painful part of this is that  
the reality of my husband's death  
is no more than a statistics on the  
news, a number on TV.

NEWSCASTER VOICE

Total confirmed cases inches close  
to the 1000 mark with 108 new cases  
reported by the close of day April  
23. Discharged tally stands at 197  
with deaths at 31.

She checks her purse for money again as if hoping to see  
miraculous money in there. She shuts the purse in  
frustration.

(CONTINUED)

IYA DORATHY'S VO

I received the children's school fees yesterday. We got a generous 40% discount for e-classes.

IYA DORATHY

How do I explain to the school that this virtual learning is a very big inconvenience for me? Where do I get money from to buy data? There is no electricity for the virtual learning. What is our other option for survival?

She coughs again, this time longer and harder.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

What is this pain I feel in my chest? I don't know if it's from grief or if I am showing symptoms or if it's just hunger.

She dials the NCDC line again and gets the same response as before. She cries.

IYA DORATHY'S VO

I don't want to die. I am all my children have. I don't want to die.