

THE REALITIES OF DISABILITY: BRIANS STORY

I quietly walked down the stairs, my demeanor betrayed me as everyone could tell something was up, I didn't want to share so for everyone who looked at me quizzically while I worked, I managed to flash a smile. I was already approaching the exit door when Uchenna who had been in the library which was just by the left side of the hallway about 2 meters from the exit door. I hastened my steps. "Hold on Brian what's going on he screamed as he chased after me" at least someone still calls my name with a little dignity' I thought as I took the left turn and headed towards the playground. Sensing that something was wrong since I completely ignored him, Uchenna followed me behind as he couldn't catch up with my pace. When I arrived in the playground I made towards the double swing and sat on one of them. I barely let the first tear drop down when Uchenna finally caught up with me. He took a seat on the second swing right beside me. For moments he said nothing. He just watched me sob and pretend not to cry with one hands covering the side of my face. When I was done fake crying I finally turned to look at him and he flashed me a smile. 'So tell me, what actually happened" I didn't budge so he persisted 'well if you're not going to tell me then I may as well go back inside and announce to the whole school that I caught you. a man crying like a baby" he changed his voice and squeezed his face to reflect that of a baby who was crying for an adults attention. I suddenly realized why I was his only friend, it was because he had a bad sense of humor and not everyone could tolerate it as much as I did. I smiled at the thought then began "I can't do this any longer, why does my life have to be like this" I stuttered while pronouncing almost every word. He sighed "just calm down and tell me what happened this time" "when I came to class this morning I noticed that Ebuka had taken my usual front seat space, I knew I was late and so was justified to have lost the seat to him this time, I pleaded with him to let me sit there and when he refused I backed out. There was only one seat left which was the last one at the back apparently left for late comers so I sat there". Uchenna made to interject but I signaled him with my hands to let me finish because I knew all he was going to say was why I had not insisted on sitting there because of my condition, so I continued "long story cut short I couldn't see anything that was written on the board both from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd lesson. Even with my glasses it was impossible due to the distance of my back seat from the board. After the class I asked Ikenna for his notes so I could copy because i didn't write anything. He handed it over to me but then Ebuka suddenly grabbed the book from behind and began teasing me, "this albino boy because you no get eye see road you no copy note when teacher dey teach ba" I tried to ignore the comment and asked him for the notes back but he wasn't ready to return

it. Ikenna intervened and tried to collect the note but Ebuka was reluctant, he suddenly started raining curses at both Ikenna and I but particularly at me, telling me that I will be blind forever and that I didn't belong here, I ought for be amongst my type. Soon a few other students who already disliked me for reasons I didn't know joined him in teasing me, one of them brought out a blue napkin and asked me what color it was. When I didn't reply, he remarked that I couldn't determine the color since I was born blind anyway". At this point hot tears began to drop from my eyes as I told the story so I could barely speak. Uchenna saw this and made to get a towel from his pocket to give me but realizing he didn't have any told me to clean my tears with my uniform and take a deep breath. He got up from the swing where he was sitting and came to mine, stood in front of me then held placed his hands on my shoulder. "Why was I born this way, is it my fault that I am an albino, is it my fault that I can't see clearly under the sun, why don't they understand that it's completely natural, why do they keep thinking I am disabled, why do people take double stares at me when they first see me". I lamented.

"Because you are special and you don't have to give a damn about their hate Brian" Uchenna replied. Uchenna's sister was suffering from autism spectrum disorder. He once fought off a crowd who tried to bully her because due to her inability to communicate properly and her frail body occasioned by autism, she apparently couldn't defend herself so He knew better how disabled people were treated in our community though the educated and lenient members of the community decided to rename us "special", it didn't change a thing about our realities because we were more disabled than special in their eyes. We were more of a burden to them than the special beings their media tried to portray us as. They never treated us specially. Maybe the best word to describe how we were treated should be "mockery" or if they are being polite, then "indifference" An irony you may call it, yet it was our reality as disabled people.

What they didn't know was that most of the time, their actions towards us affected our psychology, our mental health, our dreams, our goals and our potential. Or maybe they knew because one time.... Never mind let's leave that story for another day. Back to the story, so Uchenna gave me a short yet powerful pep talk on that day which I'd share with you another time. The important thing is that it was that day I decided to become a lawyer.