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### The Men Who Mothered Eve

I was d-i-s-t-r-a-u-g-h-t! Adam's rib, his rib, just a rib? Ozioma, it was when we were small children. Uncle . . . Which one? Tobechukwu, Mummy's junior brother. We simply referred to him as "Uncle" rather than "Uncle Tobechukwu" . . . I think it was because he was our favorite uncle.

Anyway, Uncle with his renewed Christian zeal . . . Hmm? He had recently become a "born again" Christian—Hey, my dear! Let me tell you, dat man, he lived up to his name: "Tobechukwu" means to "Praise God." Day and night, he deh praise God, he deh p-r-a-i-s-e God! A golden heavenly throne, certainly awaits him.

So, before we attended missionary school, it was Uncle who initially informed your mother and I of the King James biblical version of human creation. He told us that Adam and Eve were the first human beings on Earth and that a God used Adam's rib to create Eve. Did you know that? . . . Yes-oo, they say that the God of Abraham used Adam's rib to create Eve.

My incredulous response was, "Adam's rib! What (the hell) happened to Eve's Mummy?" Barring a slap in the mouth for using saucy, profane (adult) language, I thought "the hell," b-u-t did not allow those words to actually escape my lips. Ozioma, your Aunty was no fool!

"Eve was created from Adam's rib," Uncle re-stated very matter-of-factly with immense pride and condescension.

"But, what (the hell) happened to Eve's Mummy?" I queried skeptically. Once again, "the hell" remained a wordless thought.

Ozioma, your mother and I were at an age that granted life solid colorful certainties that have since become a spectrum of more textured pastels. When we became young women, do you know what Professor Chinua once told us? He said "Age tends to give a woman some things with the right hand while it takes away other things with the left." There was some truth in his statement; however, I stood up and argued that "Age is really a barometer. Age is used to specify a predetermined and limited range of women's possibilities, rather than actually being the giver or taker of female things." I believe I received an "A" in Professor Chinua's class. He strongly encouraged critical debates.

As I was saying, when I was a small child I knew exactly where babies came from and if asked, I declared "Their mother's stomach, of course!" At the time, Ozioma, the fine details, particularly a man's role in the process, had yet to become relevant. They're "never" relevant?! Aah! O-z-i-o-m-a, no mek Azikiwe hear you! . . .

So, during my childhood social observations, I carefully noted that after a long-long

time had passed—do you remember how long nine months was when you were a child? An eternity indeed!—I could not help but notice that a woman's formerly taut and engrossed stomach shrank once she had a baby (or two) suckling her breasts, cradled in her arms, sleeping on her back. Do you know on how many occasions our hands witnessed while our eyes caressed and our young backs carried this wonderful phenomenon? P-l-e-n-t-y!

Did I mention that I was not actually convinced by Uncle's professed "I am born again" proclamations? Do you know why? I was perplexed by Christian religious teachings. For example, the fact that you cannot die twice; I wondered how then could you be born more than once? Also, if you could be reborn, why did it happen so quickly? Aaahh! When Uncle did born again, my dear, di man don mek f-a-s-t-a-h dan fried plantain! Ozioma, if such a thing is possible, why would you be so BIG and look exactly the same? If you were reborn, would you not want at the very least, a prettier face? What baffled me the most my dear, was the fact that Uncle's pastor birthed him. I wanted to know when did men begin to give birth?

According to my social observations, men with large stomachs n-e-v-a-h bore babies, even if their stomach shrank—am I lying?

What did Uncle say? Ooh, he became perturbed by my apparent skepticism. Pointing to his ribcage, he shouted "Adam's rib, Eve was created from Adam's rib—his rib!" While resisting the urge to rescue, what looked to me like a lodged worm in the middle of Uncle's forehead that frantically sought freedom whenever he became animated, I stood bewildered. I whispered to myself, "Uncle thinks I'm hard of hearing." I also began to wonder why adults became repetitious when a child misunderstands or disbelieves what she has been told. Ozioma, tell me, does repetition equate to greater clarity, understanding, or acceptance? Like the undoing of intricate canerows, it slowly occurred to me that maybe "Uncle" did not understand what I was asking him. Clearly, he failed to realize that this apparently well-known information about Eve's birth, contradicted my observational knowledge. Therefore, I decided to reframe my question.

"A-d-a-m's r-i-b," each letter rolled off my tongue as if I was adding new words to my English vocabulary. "Was Eve's Mummy sick?"

"Nooo!"

I ignored Uncle's irritation and reasoned that if Eve's Mummy was not sick, she must have gone away, but not to somewhere close by like her farm or the market. Then I asked, "Did Eve's Mummy go abroad?"

Ozioma, was this not a perfectly logical question? My dear, di man's eyes bulged like breasts ready to give baby first suck! After all, don't we come from that part of the world, those places branded as the "Third World," where limited choices encourage mothers to leave their children, to go abroad for a few days/weeks/months/years, and increasingly, forever? Our mothers (reluctantly) leave their children behind, yes, sometimes without proper supervision, however they do so in order to take care of their children. This is a rarely acknowledged "necessary cost" of globalization: collateral damage.

In pursuit of "betterment," mothers lose their children and (some) children lose their childhood. The umbilical cord unravels becoming a noose of (cheap) commodities entombed in barrels. Etched in my mind (and colon) are the memories of genetically-modified foods, such as cornflakes—we loved it with Nestlé's condensed milk! Corned beef, macaroni, parboiled rice, and Ovaltine or Milo. It probably is made from Ivorian cocoa and the sweat of so-called child labourers. Do you know that one of our playmates almost became one of those enslaved children? That is a story for another time.