

Metallic Yellow Ferraris

"Stop picking at it!" my sister, Ese, says. "You'll get a really ugly scar."

I ignore her and continue to worry the wound that sits just under my jaw. I look at the purplish skin surrounding it in the mirror above the dresser. The almost two-inch-long gash that is beginning to itch as it heals fascinates me, and contrary to my sister's fears, I think the scar it will leave behind will be beautiful; the most beautiful one I wear.

"I'm just so happy you finally made it here," Ese says, giving my shoulder a squeeze. "I'm proud of you." She says and starts to tear up again.

I smile at her reflection in the mirror and lay a hand on hers.

Thank you, I mouth to her and she smiles.

"Get some sleep." She says. "You've had a tough couple of days."

That is true. I am thousands of miles away from home, farther than I've ever been before, and I am drained, both emotionally and physically. I caress my wound one more time as I get up from the dresser. It will add to my eclectic repertoire of scars. I got it a week ago, but I've been collecting scars for the last thirteen years. This scar I know I will wear like a badge. This one I know will make my head stand high.

My very first scar was a trilogy of 9.25-carat diamond stones. They sit in all their queenly glory atop a band of white gold on whose inside is inscribed mine and Káyòdé's initials. *Always and forever.* That scar I got the day we got engaged - the very first time he hit me. That time was a mistake; he reassured me of that. He had been going through a really tough time at work and had been very stressed out. I didn't have to go and ruin the engagement moment by running off to call my sister whom he dislikes very much with the news. That day he broke something in me even though I didn't realize it then, and that beautiful rock-scar sits smack on the very centre of my ego.

Àrínolá Fernandez is the scar disfiguring my self-esteem. We'd been married two years when I found out he'd been cheating with her. When I confronted him, he'd sneered and thrown it in my face that I was so lucky he'd married plain, ordinary me when he could have had any girl he wanted. He'd pointed out that it wasn't anyone's fault but mine that Àrínolá was more sophisticated than I was and looked at least a decade younger even though we were best friends and had grown up together in ìkoyí.

My mother is the scar that used to be hope. Truly, there is no real despair without hope. When he broke my wrist following the confrontation about Àrínolá, I moved back home to Mother in righteous

indignation, hoping to get a sympathetic ear in my corner. Why would he cheat and then still knock me around? Mother had cut me short in my rant and had told me to wipe my tears and stop my whining.

"Life is no bed of roses," she'd said. "and marriage is no exception. You have to be strong because men will be men. Questioning his authority is not the way to go. The true strength of a woman is in her ability to keep her marriage despite all these things. What will people say if they hear that the daughter of Chief Osemwemke left her husband's house? Do you know how much I've had to put up with and all I took from your father, all just so you and your sisters could have a good life?"

One of the biggest scars I wear is thirty-five hundred pounds of metallic yellow perfection. A majestic beast at just 47 inches high, with a twin-turbo engine packing over 600 horsepower, reaching 100mph in 6 seconds, one of Ferrari's most exquisite creations. This was for the Baby we lost because he'd lost a great deal of money when the value of the Naira plummeted against the Dollar. That had been a very difficult time for him, and he had been a little frustrated. He really hadn't meant to hurt me or our child, he would never even think of it! I was his entire universe and our unborn child had been the very best thing that had happened to him. He had tried to prove that to me when he presented me with the keys to the car while I was still in the hospital. That car has its coveted position, snug under my breast, where my heart used to be; it died along with our child that night.

A few weeks after I lost the baby, I left Káyòdé for the first time. Or tried to. He'd found me after all of 11 hours and he'd reiterated what my mother told me: *a woman's place is with her husband*. He told me the beating that came afterwards was totally my fault and that one was all on me; why did I go and provoke him that way right after he'd bought me such an expensive gift? How ungrateful could I be?

As I snuggle under the covers in the guest room of my sister's London Townhouse, I tuck my hands under my chin, not minding that my wound is still very sore. I know my face still looks stunning despite the discoloured skin and the bruising. In all our time together, Káyòdé never left a mark on me, not to talk of scars. Yes, I've broken a few ribs, my wrist, my collar bone and my ankle, but nothing that left a permanent mark on the surface. He was always very careful about that, no matter how angry he was. He was a man who loved beautiful things and his wife could be no different. Heaven forbid that I didn't look perfect along with his cars and designer suits and houses and his 140 ft. yacht.

A little smile relaxes my lips from their characteristic hard line, and I heave a contented sigh. Two weeks ago, I left him again, right after I'd seen the lines on the stick. I'd known it was no longer just about me and that had given me the courage to get up and leave. Of course, he found me, just like he'd warned me. But this time around, I fought back. I let him know I was done being afraid of him. I told him he might as well kill me because I would keep leaving until I was well rid of him. He'd lost it then. I'm not

sure if it was rage at my audacity to talk back at him, or if it was surprise that I could actually stand up to him, but something snapped in him and he attacked me right there in the lobby of the hotel I'd been holed up in. That was the first time he would hit me in public, the first time he would do it without a care. The terrifying thought of losing my Baby again turned me into a crazed woman and I fought him. I scratched and bit and kicked and screamed and scratched some more. Until two policemen were pulling him off me. I didn't care that the crowd around us was gawping. I didn't care that he was still spitting threats and curses at me as the policemen took him away. I didn't care that my face was puffy and bleeding and that my eyes were swelling shut. All I cared about was the little life growing inside of me.

When I was discharged from the hospital, I declined the policeman's offer of a ride home. I declined his offer to call my mother on his mobile. I took what little belongings I had with me and got in a cab to the airport. I bought a ticket, got on a plane and didn't look back.

Of all my scars, this is the only one I will wear visibly, and I will wear it proudly because it is the one I got fighting back. It is the one I got getting my life back. It is the one that will make all the others fade away.