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Not a great breakfast

THERE'S never a good time to be given bad news, but nine o'clock in the morning, when you're hungrily shovelling a large spoonful of Sugar Puffs and warm milk into your mouth, is definitely one of the worst times.

"Doyin, we're going to have a party to celebrate our arrival in England," Mum said. "It's been a few weeks now and we have a lot to give thanks for."

Uh-oh. That did not sound good.

Mum and Dad love parties, but I knew what was coming.

I'd already put the cereal in my mouth, though, so, "Mmmm, whhuuummm dufff dooosshhhaaa," was the only response I could manage.

"Oh good. I know how much you like a party," Mum said. "I've invited all your cousins, aunties and uncles, and our family friends as well." She smiled. "We can all get dressed up."

This was what I was afraid of.

"No! No, we can't," I said, in a spray of Sugar Puffs. "People don't wear sokoto and agbada here."

Mum frowned. "Ade, it's a party. Our party. We need to look good. Anyway, I've already picked your outfit."

I groaned inwardly as I imagined myself in the traditional Nigerian dress: a pair of loose-fitting trousers and an oversized but

ornate-looking shirt. They come in all sorts of patterns but my mum isn't interested in bland, boring styles. She has what you could call a very *interesting* dress sense, though another way of describing it might be an outrageous, completely over the top, what on earth is she thinking, dress sense. She always chooses the brightest and loudest colours for me to wear. But I could tell from her expression this was important to her.

“Okay, fine.” I sighed. “Maybe I’ll just stay inside. When is this party?” I was sure I could come up with an excuse to get out of it somehow.

“It’s tomorrow,” Mum said brightly.

Tomorrow! This was bad news. I wasn't at school yet, because we'd arrived from Nigeria during the summer holidays, so I didn't have any friends to get me out of it, and I couldn't even pretend to have urgent homework or something.

“Well, I guess it’s just family anyway,” I said.

Mum waved a hand. “Well, yes, family and also those young boys we saw playing football on our street last week.”

The spoon slipped from my fingers. It clattered to the floor. This was a disaster.

“Mum! Why did you do that? We don’t even know them!”

“Doyin.” Mum was chuckling. I could tell that she thought I was over-reacting. “It’s important for you to make new friends. You love playing football and so do they. Everything’s going to be fine.”

“It’s not going to be fine!” I shouted, my cheeks getting hot and my eyes suddenly stinging with tears. “They’re going to think I’m weird and laugh at me.”

Before Mum could say anything else, I got down from the table, thudded up to my room and slammed the door shut.

I threw myself onto my bed and buried my face in my pillow. Mum just didn't get it.

Ever since we'd arrived in London, I'd decided that the best thing I could do was to keep as quiet as possible and not draw any attention to myself. If no one can see you or hear you, then they can't be nasty to you. I'd decided I'd just stay in my room with my action figures and X-Men comics all summer. And if I did have to leave the house I'd wear a hat and make sure my caliper was covered up.

You see, I am quite small for an almost ten-year-old, I suppose, but that's not the only different thing about me. I wear a metal support on my left leg, because I had polio when I was a baby so it makes me walk with a bit of a limp.

Anyway, in Nigeria it hadn't seemed to matter too much, but when we arrived in England a few weeks ago I realised how

different we looked from all the other families.

My plan had been working well so far, but parties are big and noisy and full of people, which was exactly the sort of thing that would draw attention to our family.

And Nigerian parties are the biggest and the noisiest of them all.

I heard footsteps on the stairs and quickly dived under the covers so no one could see me crying.

“Hmm, I wonder where Doyin could be?” Mum said as the door clicked open.

I lay as still as I could.

“Oh well,” Mum went on, “I’ll just have to sit on the end of the bed. Sit RIGHT HERE and wait till he comes back.”

What? I didn’t fancy getting squished beneath Mum’s bottom so I swiftly crawled up through the blankets and emerged into the daylight.

“Oh, there you are, Doyin.” Mum sat down next to me and gave me a hug.

I hugged her back, snivelling and feeling a little embarrassed. My tears had taken me by surprise.

Mum gently kissed my forehead and said softly, “Don’t cry, Doyin. Why do you think those boys would laugh at you?”

Because my caliper makes me look like C3PO from Star Wars but with chewing gum stuck to the bottom of my left foot, I thought.

I didn’t say that, though. I didn’t want to upset her.

“Maybe because of my caliper?”

Mum shook her head. “When they see how talented, intelligent and handsome you are they will love you, not laugh at you.”

She pinched my cheeks and stared down at me with her big bright eyes. Mum has a

way of making you feel better with one look,
but I still didn't believe her.

This party was going to be a disaster.