**A Review of *POIGNANT TALES* by Idaniloju Sotunsa**

BY Toyin Falola

Human beings are plagued with many challenges in various forms and magnitudes. Life will not always be rosy; it can be tough today and easy tomorrow, depressing today but joyful tomorrow. Some have food but cannot eat, while some can eat but have no food: that is life, *e no balance.* Until recently, people kept their problems to themselves, even after they might have surmounted those issues, to avoid stigma or misunderstanding from society. This has resulted in people remaining stuck and clueless in similar experiences with other persons who could have shared their story and how they got out of such situations, while some others who did not go through such challenges may be able to understand and help people. After all, experience, they say, is the best teacher. This is what *Poignant Tales* is set to achieve.

*Poignant Tales* touches on life’s challenges ranging from loss, grief, marriage, pregnancy and career. It recounts real-life stories of actual people who have been kept anonymous. Each individual in this book tells their story, the challenges life has thrown at them and how they navigated the course of their lives and emerged successful.

I must commend the author, Idaniloju Sotunsa, a first-year student of Mass Communication at Babcock University, for her brilliance and creativity in putting this work together, particularly in bringing to light certain issues which are mostly ignored, such as the part on “Trauma: Main Care Giver”. Her writing style in the form of a talk show is captivating and keeps the reader hooked till the end.

The book opens with a social menace in which several discussions have been advanced, but victims avoid talking about Rape. Many people never recover from it; the memories torment them even years after the incident. It leaves a scar that may never heal. As traumatizing as rape is, rape survivors are forced to keep silent about it; directly by the predators or their parents, indirectly by a society which will place a tag on the survivor. It is important to state that women can be rapists too. There are stories of female domestic staff who have sexually molested their boss’ son. In Nigeria, it is easier to believe that a dog was raped than to believe that a man was raped. Hence, it is extremely difficult for people to come out to share their experiences, and when they do, they choose to be faceless to avoid the stigma and backlash that may follow. It is highly commendable that a survivor would share her story, despite the unbearable way it happened. It helps other survivors relate to her story and gives them hope.

It takes divine help, perseverance, diligence and hard work for a child from a wretched home to become successful. The odds will, a lot of times, not be in his favour. No matter how strong-willed he is, Ms. Sotunsa has shown that he will need God to take him out of poverty. Poverty is a very terrible thing. There are a lot of children all over the world who want a better life for themselves and are struggling and working hard daily to break free from poverty. But there are days when it is just too tough, and thoughts of giving up weaken the soul. On days like these, thoughts of “if *Lagbaja*, the son of nobody, can make it, I will make it too” strengthen his resolve and push him to get through another day. This is what the story in Chapter Two offers. Do not give up; there is hope. It is possible to become something out of nothing. Hard work still pays.

Loss is an inevitable part of human life, but as inevitable as it is, we are never prepared for it. Loss of a spouse, a child, a parent or a loved one, the pain of one is not lesser than the other. It is still a loss. Navigating through life despite the vacuum that such loss leaves are devastating; many are left helpless and broken while well-meaning people give various advice. The common one is “to be strong for the children.” As well-meaning as that may sound, it is not what a grieving person needs now. After the condolence follows prying eyes, wanting to know the bereaved’s every movement, particularly if they are widowed. It is appalling to know that society does not always expect the widowed, especially a widow, to remarry. They are considered selfish and not thinking about their children or that they do not love their late spouse enough. They fail to realize that for some, companionship is what they need, while some others cannot easily bear the load originally meant for two now solely become theirs. In Chapter Three, a widower shares her challenges after she lost her husband, Chapters six, eight and twelve recount the loss of a wife, parent and child, respectively. These touching stories will make you realize how fickle life is and how you should love and treat people well while they are here.

Chapters Four and Seven share stories on teenage pregnancy and single parenting. These two issues are a huge blow and can be major life disruptors for women. Low self-esteem and shame can be a constant battle. For many women, their lives spiral downward; they lose a grip of their own lives and dreams to cater for a child brought into the world by two people, only for the other party to bail out suddenly. Many women do not get support from their friends and families, making it hard for them to sometimes get back on track. One mistake mars their lives forever. The stories in these chapters show how empathy, support, love, forgiveness and understanding can help people get their lives back. A child is not a disease; although it can be tough initially, it is not a death sentence or the end of your life and dreams. You can move on to be everything you dream of and more. The experiences of these women will guide you and assure you that your mistakes do not define you, but whatever you make out of that mistake is your choice. If you are not in these situations, you will learn from their mistakes and avoid repeating them.

As stated earlier, *this life no balance*. While some women are ridiculed for having a child out of wedlock, others are scorned for not having a child in their marriage. TTC (“Trying To Conceive”) women have a lot of ‘horror’ stories to tell about what they face in their homes, from their spouses, in-laws, neighbours, and even from their parents and families. Delayed pregnancy in marriage comes with taunts, mockery, snide comments, awful advice and suggestions, a lot of monetary expenses, tons of medical tests and checkups, emotional and psychological stress, hope, despair, prayers and tears. Society focuses on the woman and tags her as ‘barren’, forgetting that only God gives children and that it takes two to make a baby, and the man could be infertile. TTC women become desperate for solutions to their inability to conceive; some will go the extra mile just to have a child. Chapter Five tells the story of a woman who waited sixteen years after marriage before she conceived and gave birth to triplets! She shares how her in-laws constantly maltreated her and how this challenge took a toll on her and her home. Her story is inspiring; through it, one is assured that God makes everything beautiful in His time.

In different chapters, the book also touches on having a personal vision and the lack of it. Two individuals share their experiences and how they became successful despite having a personal vision or lacking one.

Domestic Violence, another silent killer, is not left unvisited in this book. Abuse does not have to be physical; emotional and verbal abuse can sometimes be worse than physical assault. Here, a woman narrates how she suffered abuse from her husband for years until she summoned the courage to leave. This story teaches women that enduring an abusive marriage is not the best. Fear of what people will say is not enough reason. Whether you leave to live or stay to die, people will talk and move on to the next gossip quickly. Marriage should be enjoyed, not endured.

In all, *Poignant Tales* is a must-read as a work of literature and a motivational tool. While a young teenager, the voices are mature, and the pieces of advice are solid. The book reveals the intricacies of life: life truly is not a bed of roses. From this book, you will learn about compassion, kindness and humanity. You will know about people's struggles and let empathy, not judgment, be your watchword. Through the pages of this book, you will learn, unlearn and relearn*.* This book will help you learn from people’s stories and avoid the mistakes they have made. *Poignant Tales* is a reminder to be grateful for the life you have. Idaniloju is a writer, a motivational author, and the princess of sermons.