

The background of the cover is a sepia-toned photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, there is a valley with a small town or village. The middle ground shows a river or stream winding through the valley. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains, some of which are shrouded in mist or fog. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Letters To **GOD**

Oluwasegun **Femi Fragile**

Dedication

I dedicate this *piece of art* to **GOD** for the inspiration



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One

Baba God,

My belief in you creates the certainty that you are doing fine, but I sincerely don't know if it is same with me since we last spoke. Yeah, I know I have been unfaithful in our relationship, but I also understand that you are a Merciful and Gracious Being. I decided to write this letter because it looks like my calls haven't been connecting lately; perhaps I have been calling via the wrong number. I just hope I get a quick reply this time. Before anything, I would like to say thank you for not killing me yet; thank you for preserving me. Thank you for my friends and family, and thank you in advance for what you will do after you read this letter.

I know several others will get to read this letter, but I am not bothered. I can imagine someone telling me, "You don't have the greatest problem in the world." That is true. I am not just the type of guy that enjoys difficulties, whether big or small. I just have one need: happiness and that requires a lot of things being in place. However, I would like to confess my sins before presenting my requests. Forgive me for I have sinned: I did promise to stop drinking, but my friends won't just help. I have been able to reduce my intake from 7 to 5 bottles of beer. I sincerely hope that can count for something, and make you come to my rescue. God, you created man in your own image, and I know you understand the part that explains sex as the sweetest exercise in all of creation. I am trying so hard to quit my daunting act of sleeping with different girls every week; compared to that, abstinence from alcohol seems to be very feasible.

Baba, I am counting on your Divine intervention. Don't just forgive me, help me. It has gotten so bad that I even wank to soft porn in the absence of anything in skirt, or anyone with ripe oranges upfront and onion booty; thanks to the half-naked ladies in musical videos claiming to be vixens. Awon omo wobe! Excuse my language; I am actually drunk right now.

Ehen, lest I forget, this week I made a huge profit for my company. I sold our products for a higher price; actually 50% higher than our selling price. I actually got a commission, but not on the 50%. I went complaining to Jide, but his "deeper life" doctrine won't let him tell things the way they are. "You cheated that customer, ahn-ahn! Making excessive profit is bad, Tayo. Be modest!" he preached to me. He even called me a 419er. God, is that a sin too? I actually kept 10% of the profit for myself. Didn't the Bible, your Word, say 'the gift of a man will make way for him?' Isn't that why I am a sales rep? If that is a sin too, Baba, try and understand, abeg. It is not easy to be a man. I must look fresh, ball hard, and all these babes don exit surulere bus top tey-tey. Na money for hand, back for ground.

Baba God, I am not happy at all, you promised to always have my back but the way things are going it looks like you have left me to my own adversity. I need your help as fast as possible. I don't mind if you send Jesus or angel Michael, just do something already. I am not just ready for this type of obligation, and it is making me sad. I am scared. I have sought advice from my mother and Charles, but their replies have left me even more confused.

My mum wants me to go to my boss and confess what I have done, how can I do that? That's like adding fuel to a furnace.

"Tayo just terminate everything and run away. Even your appointment, you will get a better job," Charles wrote in the concluding part of his mail to me.

I would have taken Charles's advice but I haven't found another job.

And how can I even agree to take the lives of the innocent? God, you could have just created me as a girl and save me from this inevitable shame brewing in the cloud above me. I would gladly switch places right now.

Mr. Idemili will definitely kill me when he finds out what I have done. God can you help calm him.

Just this one time and I will change. Abi, how do I tell him that I am the one responsible for the pregnancy of his two daughters? Yeah, don't blame me; You gave him a pair of identical twins.

Osasu and Osato have killed me with their smoking hot bodies. You should know na, Baba, you created them! I swear I didn't know I was screwing the both of them until last month. It was while I was "kpainshing" Osasu from behind with her waist bent towards mine that I realized she had a big birthmark Osato didn't have on her waistline. I would never have found out otherwise.

Why didn't I use condom? Oh dear God! Skin diving is the sweetest way. Actually I am used to the ultra slim durex condom; I just got carried away this time, actually two times for both ladies. And to think that they have the same sizes of assets, front, back, everything! I hope my erection isn't about to send me to detention. Big stout and yoghurt won't allow a man to fire and miss, no o, every shot must enter. I should consider switching to lager. No, I'll just quit drinking. With Your help.

The bad thing is, each one doesn't know I am involved with the other; I mean, I just call them Osas for short and they respond, so there has never been a clash of names or any other mix up. They both brought their pregnancy test results to me on Friday at different times. Charles thinks this is a war I shouldn't wait to witness, and my mother says it is a blessing in disguise. Blessing from who? It can't be You. The only thing I have asked for is a double promotion, not double trouble. I am going crazy already; I hope this doesn't claim my life.

God, this is my supplication. Please help me this time and I promise to serve you forever. What do you think is happening to me? Should I terminate or embrace? What if they end up having two sets of twins? The blessing of the Lord maketh rich and addeth no sorrow unto it. This can't be you; these are my father's enemies at work. Do not let me walk this path alone, please send help as soon as possible, my heart is about to explode from this emotional Haram.

I hope to hear from you soon, thank you Sir.

Awotayo Coker.

Twa

They didn't say anything to one another as they sat with their eyes glued to the TV to see yet another episode of 'Keeping up with the Kardashians' on E! They had been like that all day. Thus, dinner was boring as there was no chatter or side talk from the girls. It was an unfamiliar atmosphere, but their parents didn't think much of it enough to say anything. Perhaps it was a mere mood swing that would soon pass. Mr. Idemili kept chuckling as he read the Saturday Punch while his wife sipped on a cup of cold juice while grooming her fingernails. Osato stood up from the couch where she was lying down, walked up to her dad and gave him a kiss on the forehead, before addressing the whole family with a listless 'goodnight'. Osasu just sat transfixed as she kept a clueless gaze on the flat screen before her.

On getting to the room Osato pulled a stool from the left side of her bed, climbed on it and reached for the highest section of her wardrobe, where she collected a book with an inscription 'my thoughts'. She returned the stool and reached for a pen in the last drawer of her dresser. She turned the journal to a blank page and wrote:

Big Guy,

I'm here again to share my thoughts with you. I am actually not scared of telling dad about my pregnancy, after all, I'm 20 and I'll be a lawyer in two years. It is my life! It just sucks to know that I betrayed my twin sister. To think that she trusted me enough to tell me every detail of her sexual adventures with Tayo and I took advantage of it, darn it! I am just a bitch! I blame the silly guy who didn't realize I had a crush on him all this while and decided to hit on my sister. How would he have known? He can't even differentiate between both of us. Don't blame me; she always said she wasn't interested. How was I to know she had given in to his proposal? And to think that she wouldn't stop talking about how caring and attentive he is, I just couldn't hold myself back. Yet, this wasn't what I bargained for. He gave me so much to scream about and I didn't care if he had a condom on or not when he proposed another round. I still think I haven't gotten the best of him. Hmmm, if daddy agrees to this, I will marry him. What else can a girl wish for? He is handsome, caring, hardworking, and sexually proactive. It eez a zweet zomething. Meloveeey.

Jeeez! Mum, how is she going to react when she finds out about my pregnancy? I guess she will have to live with it. The problem I am faced with right now is how to tell Osasu and Tayo about my ungodly escapade, and most importantly how to get him to love me more. There is nothing to forgive, at least he enjoyed every position I commanded; especially when I made him stagnant and hit him on the reverse motion. Naughty me! I'm sure she doesn't give it to him that way; we both know she isn't adventurous.

Wow! I think I will just meet Tayo up for dinner tomorrow and unveil this secret. How do I tell the family? Hmmm, let's see...Probably at lunch after church tomorrow. No, I'll just send dad a text this night and we'll talk about it in the morning. Yes, that's it.

*Thanks big G, you know I love you right? And yeah, I'm gonna testify in church tomorrow about how you rescued me from that ghastly motor accident. Mehn, you are indeed a Superman. Thanks so much for sparing my life so that I can be with Tayo; I love you and I know you got me covered anytime. Gotta go to bed now, and yes, I won't forget to send the text message. Goodnight.
Osato.*

*Chai, see the way my heart is beating fast ehn. Osasu calm down, you're just pregnant, you didn't fucking kill a man, you only fucked one. After all he hasn't said he doesn't want the child. All he has ever talked about is how much he loves you. I will just tell dad before he goes to bed, that way I will stop bothering myself and he gets to talk to him at work on Monday. This Khardashians are just very lucky; rich and famous. Imagine how happy Kim is to have Kanye. Marriage isn't a bad thing after all. We are making money, and now we get to train our child. This is the best feeling ever. I am sure when dad finds out he will give him a deserving promotion or something. The wedding doesn't have to be crowded; it just has to be classy; probably on a yacht or in a plane. Mr. Idemili can afford it. Abi, why is he the marketing manager of Flobacom communications?
Osasu, chill. Ask yourself if you are ripe for marriage. Am I? Tayo is the only guy I have dated and we haven't even lasted a year. Well, it is love over experience. When we get to the bridge we will cross it. I think I should just tell papa when mum has gone to bed so I can avoid her theatrical displays. Osato is going to be my chief bridesmaid. God, please, let everything go as I have desired; I have confidence in you. Make I see wetin dey happen for HipTV before I yarn paleh this news. Yeepa! Femi Ogedengbe born twins, come name them Nollywood and Hollywood, funny dude. Come to think of it God, if you give me a set of twins, that's double blessing.*

Mrs. Idemili exited the living room. Osasu sat up and with a million-watt smile on her face, she called her father's attention.

"Hey dad, I have news for you."

Mr. Idemili folded the newspaper and adjusted his sitting position as if to say – I am listening – then he heard his phone beep.

"I have a message. Can you please get my phone?" he requested.

Osasu came back with his phone and handed it to him.

"What is it you want to tell me?" he asked as he swiped through the screen of his phone to check his message.

"Daddy, I'm pregnant." Osasu said in synchrony to Mr. Idemili text message from Osato.

He shook his head after a sigh and laughed, displacing the seriousness in her statement, "Another one of your silly pranks, I just love you girls. You got that sense of humour from me. Na me una take resemble. Goodnight darling."

He replied the text message while voicing the same thing to Osasu in syllables. He walked into his bedroom and left her standing clueless.

Three

The Idemili family gathered at the dining table for breakfast; the thing to do before going for the Sunday service which would commence by 10am. It was still 8 O'clock so they weren't in haste. The couple sat on the opposite ends of the table while the sisters sat beside each other adjacent their parents.

"Sweetheart, please pray for us", Mrs. Idemili requested her husband to bless their meal. The sisters grumbled. They knew they were in for a long prayer session. Mr. Idemili who had little or no time for his family on weekdays is committed to this philosophy of devoting enough time for prayers when the time is available. An act he often performs on weekends before breakfast.

"Let us join our hands as we pray." The family joined their hands in response to his command, and he went ahead to pray:

Heavenly father, we are gathered here today to thank you for this provision and more. We thank you for your love over this family as you have exercised in your security over us and your kindness to us. I thank you for my job. I worship you because of my beautiful wife and kids; thank you for rescuing Osato from that ghastly motor accident, accept our thanks in Jesus Name (the family responded with a big Amen). If we say we have no sins, the bible helps us to understand that we deceive ourselves. We ask that you extend your benevolence towards us and look upon us with mercy. Forgive our iniquities. We also beg that you forgive our wrong thoughts and any form of spontaneous sin in Jesus name (The family replied with a louder amen, Osato's voice rising above others). Father, we ask that you perfect everything concerning us and bless us abundantly. I commit my job into your hands. The pressure in the marketing department these days is much, please secure my position. We also pray that you maximize the profit from my wife's fabric business and make her brand a force to reckon with. Finally Lord, I pray for my daughters – he smiled and shook his head before continuing – all they have done since you blessed me with them is make me happy. I pray that you reward them with double of such joy and give me the strength to grant all their financial and parental needs. In Jesus name we have prayed (The girls responds with the loudest amen).

Mrs. Idemili stood up to serve her husband while she watched her girls attend to themselves; a breakfast of boiled egg, French fries and ketchup.

"What is it with the silence on the table these days?" Mr. Idemili questioned as he cast a friendly gaze at Osato and Osasu. But his wife cut in before any of the girls could answer,

"I think I enjoy the silence better. You people can always have your father-children conversation anywhere, but not on my table. In fact anyone who breaks the table rules henceforth will pay a heavy fine by not having the next meal."

Osasu laughed at her in mockery before retorting, "Mummy, stop threatening us o, we all know you can't starve your husband."

"Okay then, let him break my rule. In fact, I don't want to hear a word from anyone till after breakfast, break that rule and see me exercise my veto power as the wife of this house,"

"Oh, you this Benin woman, you want to starve your husband," Mr. Idemili replied before she could say further, and then she countered,

"You this Igbo man, you just broke the rule, no lunch for you." Osasu choked on her meal in silent laughter while Osato cut in innocently,

"Mummy, I am with you on this one,"

"Thank you daughter, but there is no lunch for you too, you just spoke,"

"Then there should be no lunch for anyone, you just spoke too mummy" Osato snapped.

A long silence ensued before Mr. Idemili broke out in laughter,

"Sweetness," he called his wife by her pet name, "you need to see the prank your daughters played on me last night."

She stared into his eyes and asked, "What did they do this time around?" The girls remained silent.

"They tried to scare me by telling they were pregnant in unison. Osato sent me a text the same time Osasu was telling it to me. Can you imagine?"

The girls gazed at each other's faces in shock.

His wife voiced her response amidst laughter, "you could have played along by asking them who was responsible."

The doorbell rang shrilly, and Mrs. Idemili, still in laughter, whispered, "Can any of the pregnant girls check who is at the door please?"

They both stood up in hurry to get the door in order to get away from the brewing awkwardness; Osato who was ahead on getting to the corridor got pulled back by Osasu with a swift question, "Are you seriously pregnant?"

"Yes I am" Osato replied, "Are you?"

"Positive!" Osasu said nervously, and anxiously asked "who is responsible for yours?"

"Who is at the door?" Their mother shouted from across the dining room. Osasu moved to open the door and there was Tayo standing beside a stranger who was neatly dressed in a black jacket and well-trimmed jeans, looking smart. He appeared like someone in his early fifties, with a tiny moustache, a round face and a light complexion.

"What are you doing here?" the girls shouted in unison, and then turned to each other with an intense scream, 'what!' ignoring the stranger with him. Tayo just stood there in silence and in awe of the girls.

Mr. Idemili hurried down the corridor to find Tayo standing with the stranger,

"What's it with the noise?" he asked the girls before acknowledging the presence of the men standing outside the door,

"Good morning gentlemen. Tayo please who is this gentleman, and why are you here on a Sunday morning?" He inquired cautiously and Tayo replied,

"Good morning sir, I was actually on my way to discuss an important issue with you. Then I met this man at the junction. He asked me for the compound of the Idemilis and I thought it would be kind to show him since I was headed in the same destination."

"Good morning. My name is George Elliot, and I am here to see Osahon Idemili." The stranger finally lost his silence.

Mr. Idemili ushered them in. He knew Tayo, and if the stranger knew his wife by her first name, maybe he was no stranger after all. The girls walked behind them, sweating their make-up off.

"Sweetness, someone is here for you," Mr. Idemili called on his wife who swiftly walked into the living room at the sound of his voice. George stood up the moment he saw her and calmly said,

"Good morning Osahon. Been ages, how are you?" Osahon, in quick realization of who the uninvited guest was, slumped. In quick reflex, Mr. Idemili held her up before she could hit her head on the floor. Screaming her name, "Osahon! Sweetness! Osahon!" An immediate chaos ensued.

"Mummy! Mummy!" The girls screamed continuously. One of them rushed to the fridge to get some water. A confused Tayo stood helplessly behind Mr. Idemili and the stranger was oddly calm. Mr. Idemili was quick to question his motive,

"Who are you and what do you want?"

In response the man reached into his pocket and produced a gun and answered, "My name is George Elliot."

Four

I understand that as a Christian it is wrong to father a child out of wedlock, but the deed has been done and abortion isn't an option. That will be putting too many lives at stake; I am particularly disappointed in him and I know you are too. Please make this disappointment a big blessing, let the girls have a safe delivery. I don't know what the church women council will say when they find out that my son will have a polygamous family, I will probably get suspended. I made the rule and I can't be an exception; I hope I find the courage to reveal it to them.

Mrs. Coker prayed in her thoughts while she waited for her turn to use the confession box. It had been six days since her last confession so she decided she wasn't going to start the new week without confessing her iniquities. Tayo had called her the previous week and updated her on his every move. Besides she had a nightmare that gave her the fright of her life, so after her confession, she went ahead to pray some more. She walked out of the church auditorium, trod a path that led to the church garden where a big Mother Mary statue was erected, While using her hand to make the holy sign of the cross, she knelt before Mary and made her supplications:

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord be with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Mother, I had a terrible nightmare and I am scared. Please, I need divine watch over my son. Since his father died, he has been my only source of joy and I cannot afford to lose him. The bible promises that we shall not bury our young ones; spare his life so that he can father my unborn grandchildren. I come against every plan of the devil to cut short his life, I rebuke every evil dream. My son shall not be killed by a gun. Amen. Bless his work, and let him find favour all the days of his life. I know that he has been careless in recent times, I plead that you cast a merciful look on him and help him arrange his puzzled life.

Jesus Christ, right now he has gone to see Mr. Idemili to discuss his misdeed with his daughters. I ask that you speak on his behalf so that his boss doesn't overreact. In Jesus name I pray through Mother Mary. Amen.

Damn it, he has the gun facing me. God if you save me from this one, I promise to serve you for the rest of my life. I will join a department in church and I will never fornicate again. Jesus, son of God, Holy Spirit... Why didn't I just wait till tomorrow to see him at the office? This is what maami's stubbornness has caused, and my spirit wasn't in support of this visit. I should have just ran away. God, touch this man's heart; let him just excuse me. I am not a party to whatever he came here for. Abi, let him just kuku kill me, that way I won't get to face Mr. Idemili. Yeh, if I die, who will take care of my mother? See my life outside; my penis has gotten me into trouble. Ah, he is staring at me, God please don't let him do something crazy. God abeg o. Yeeeee.

"Young man, what is your name?" George Elliot asked waving his gun at Tayo.

"Lobatan! Mogbe!" Tayo screamed in his thought before finally breaking his silence, "Tayo sir. Awotayo Coker."

"Awotayo Coker, I am so sorry to put you in this position. I can't guarantee that you will get out of this alive, but in the meantime I want you to be calm."

"Did he just say calm? How can I be calm with death staring at me in the face?"

George continued, "I didn't come here for you. If he cooperates" – he pointed his gun at Mr. Idemili – "no one will get hurt."

"Okay sir", Tayo replied

"I am not a Knight!" George retorted with a scream, as he cocked his gun, "Don't call me sir, I don't deserve the appellation. At least not yet."

He yelled on, spittle spraying from his lips. "But you know what? I will earn that respect when I am done with this fight, and I mean today" He concluded with his voice descending.

"You still haven't specified what you came here for," said Mr. Idemili with caution,

"Oh! I am not the one to tell you, nah, she will tell you," George countered, waving the gun at Mrs. Idemili,

"So, Osahon. Oh no, my bad. Mrs. Idemili, can you please tell your husband that he has something that belongs to me." Mrs. --Idemili just sat transfixed, without a reply, while her daughters wept on silently. Mr. Idemili kept a stare on his wife's face expecting an answer; after few moments of silence he asked her,

"Sweetness, what property of his am I holding? And what relationship do you have with this gentleman?" He apparently was being deliberate with his words.

Infuriated, George intruded,

"Mister, don't make me angry. Do not call me a gentleman. My name is George Elliot, and your Sweetness knows that."

"Mrs. Idemili, please say something," Tayo ventured, an act that further inflamed George's temper.

"Didn't I order you not to say a word?" He asked Tayo as he thumbed back the safety of his pistol, preparing it for danger, "didn't I?"

"I'm so sorry sir," Tayo pleaded, his voice vibrating,

George countered in elevated vexation, "Don't tell me sorry; you don't know yet what to be sorry for. Do not tell me sorry!"

He advanced towards Tayo as he spoke; breathing heavily with every step he took. Mr. Idemili realized George had turned his back on him; he knew that was his only chance if he was to disarm him. He jumped up, rushed towards him, and punched him on his neck. George reacted by throwing his elbow in defense of himself. Mr. Idemili reached for the gun in his hand as they struggled. The sisters panicked as they watched their father struggling with George, screaming "Daddy, Daddy, please." Evidently Mrs. Idemili was in shock, as she sat transfixed; Tayo knelt down there hoping that Mr. Idemili would win the battle.

George's finger flicked often, trying to locate the trigger. So Mr Idemili tried to twist his hand instead. That resulted in the gun being pointed in the direction of Tayo and the girls. So the scream got really loud. The fight continued for a moment and in no time a thunderous clap sound erupted. Both men immediately stopped fighting. Someone had been shot.

Five

The bang sound awoke Osahon from her shock. Both men had stopped fighting but they hadn't let go of each other's arms. The drop of the gun was accompanied by a gush of blood, the bullet had caught him. The moment Osahon realized who it was that had been shot she yelled, "Nooo!"

Tears rolled down her cheek as she shook her head in dismay, whispering, "Why?" Osato and Osasu who were still terribly frightened embraced each other with closed eyes, hoping that their father had not been shot. Tayo stood up from where he knelt and sluggishly sank into a nearby couch. Mr. Idemili staggered as he withdrew himself from George, he couldn't believe what was happening to him. He had a thousand thoughts running within him and questions he couldn't answer. He muttered words that formed a sentence like, "Is this how I will die?" George just stood there gallantly as he watched his blood flow on the living tiles. The bullet that lodged in his abdomen appeared to have caused massive internal injuries; death was inevitable. Then Mr. Idemili whispered again, "I am going to die. Whoever kills will be killed, right?"

"You didn't kill him, you only defended yourself." Tayo quickly retorted.

George fell to the floor with his hand grasping the lower section of his stomach. He wanted to say something, but each attempt cost him a deep cough that ended in a splash of blood from his mouth. One moment the room was in chaos and what followed was an eerie silence with its occupants looking helpless and confused. They watched him die without anyone attempting to save his life. The girls ran to their father and hugged him, Tayo who had just been treated to a death fright stood there, watching the lifeless George. At this point, the transfixed Osahon confusingly broke into tears. Tayo finally found his voice,

"I think we need to inform the police," he said to Mr. Idemili. Mr. Idemili who was still being hugged by his daughters nodded in agreement to what Tayo proposed. The girls finally let him breathe and then Osato whispered, "God, thank you for sparing my father's life."

"I thought we had lost him, thank you God," said Osasu with a sigh in reference to her sister's statement.

Osahon let out a heavy sigh as she folded her hands and then blurted out,

"Don't thank Him yet girls. That's your father lying down in a pool of his own blood." At that point, she became the center of attention. The girls suddenly became clueless. What was she saying? Mr. Idemili walked closer to her and asked in an anxious manner, "What? What are you saying?" "I am saying George is the father of the girls, not you Emeka. Not you," she gently replied as she sobbed on.

Trembling as he walked over to the crying woman, Mr. Idemili questioned her.

"Are you saying that I, Emeka Idemili" – he beat his chest with his left hand as he spoke – "I am not the father of my daughters?"

He questioned her as he turned around to face Tayo. He halted for few moments and then started walking towards him. He stopped just when he got to where the gun had fallen. He bent to pick it up and screamed as he let a bullet into the air, "Will you start talking or do you need me to ask again?"

"I think I need to get out of this place sir. I think this is family business," Tayo said, in an attempt to excuse himself from the brewing home battle. Emeka replied with yet another scream, "no one leaves this house until I say so. Sit down!" Tayo complied without saying a word.

Osahon started her narration. Her expressions were somewhere between nonchalant and fearless.

"I have known George all my life. We were meant to get married but he wasn't ready; he didn't have a job and couldn't take care of me. I waited for him, hoping that his hustle would be fruitful. I guess he was just unlucky. I have never stopped loving him. And then I met you, you were everything George was except that you were already rich and he was merely surviving. I couldn't turn down your proposal so I agreed to marry you. Remember the doctor said you needed treatment because you suffered from low sperm count? You wouldn't listen; you simply stuck to your mother's herb. Don't blame me! I met George again and he saved me from barrenness, and then you became a father. Ever asked yourself why I begged you to relocate us to Lagos from Enugu? I was running from George, just to make you happy. I finally convinced you to get treated, and you did. But your elitism won't let you father your own child, two is just perfect, three is a crowd, is what you always said. I wanted a third child, your child! But you denied yourself that. I always prayed against this day, I guess God isn't wicked after all, he knows what prayer to answer. I am sorry girls, but your dad just killed your biological father."

The living room became a graveyard. Mr. Idemili sat down on the spot where he previously stood. Tayo prayed within for the umpteenth time, "God save me from this one and I promise to serve you for the rest of my life." Mr. Idemili tightened his grip around the gun as he stood up. He was about to say something when Osasu vomited all over the floor and her sister. The sight of the vomit nauseated Osato and that caused her to vomit too.

"We should call the police sir."

Tayo whispered aloud, an intentional means of disclosing why he was visiting. Everyone including him was still tense and so he got no response to his proposal. He continued anyway, "but before we call the police sir. Sir..."

"Speak up young man," Emeka's anger was momentarily rekindled.

"I am responsible sir." Tayo voiced nervously.

Emeka thundered quietly, "responsible for what?"

"Osasu and Osato, their pregnancy sir."

Silence gripped the room again, this time it lasted about 10 minutes. Finally Mr. Idemili stood up from where he sat laying the gun on the arm of the couch and said, "I forgive you."

With a sigh of relief Tayo expressed his gratitude, "thank you sir. God bless you."

"Not you!" Emeka retorted, "her." He nodded at Osahon.

The strange and sudden clemency left their mouth ajar.

Six

A year later

The look in John's eyes was scary. Osato quickly dialed Tayo's line again.

"God please do not let my child die," she muttered as she ran back to the couch where she laid him. She had called Tayo three times all unanswered. "Where the hell is he?" she wondered. She wasn't ready for this. Osasu wasn't in, she had gone to be with their Mum, who was in labour. She had dropped her twins – Mark and Brian at the crèche on her way out. John had fallen ill five days earlier and had been treated and declared healthy by the doctor, whatever was happening to him today was a mystery to Osato. The poor boy was having a fever, his eyeballs had rolled up to the whites, and pain was forcing tears out of his eyes. His twin meanwhile remained in the cot where they had been laid together few minutes ago before he cried out in pain.

She rushed outside and shouted at the gateman, "Musa! Open that gate!" She then rushed inside to pick John. Things got worse; both boys were now howling. "Oh God! I didn't bargain for this! Arrghh!" She swore out loudly this time. Few months ago she was desperate to become a mother. The Instagram pages of celebrities who had kids were her favourite destinations while on the internet. She would sigh and whisper to herself, "Oh my God, I want beautiful kids like these, they are so adorable."

What changed? Weren't the kids adorable?

She picked up her Blackberry and sent Tayo an instant message;

PING!!!

Meet me @ d fam hospital wen u get dis, John is sick.

She stuck the phone into her back pocket of her jeans, grabbed her car keys and headed for the hospital.

The past one year had been the most challenging season of his life; impregnating the girls, the birth of the boys and the life after that. It was a miracle that he has not lost his life in the home battle. It looked like his whole world was falling apart. However, he kept his promise to God; he started going to church. He even joined the protocol department, but it was difficult to discern who his commitment in church was for; God or himself? Since he moved into a new apartment with the girls, no day had gone by without him settling a quarrel. The ladies always argued about how either of them had stolen him from the other. The handsome Tayo had suddenly started aging; handling his wives and the kids, plus the pressure from work was eating him alive. What was meant to be a double portion of blessing had proved otherwise. He got promoted to the position of the marketing manager, but whatever dividend came with it wasn't enough to hold his home together. Things even got worse when the girls put to bed; their squabbles intensified with the two of them trying to assert their territorial authority.

Brother Tayo, as he was fondly called by his church members, now preferred to work late into the night. When he wasn't working, he would be in the church. He was always the first person to arrive at the church, and the last person to leave; a trait the pastor noticed, and decided to hand over the church keys to him.

He had dropped his phone on his desk while leaving for his lunch break. The jovial and very accommodating Tayo had abruptly become withdrawn. He went to a bar at the mall where he ordered two shots of tequila for the stress; he had resumed drinking.

God, am I still being punished for my sins? Aren't you a gracious God? Look at me; what is my life turning into? Ever since you saved me from the claws of death, all I have ever done was serve you. Is this what I deserve? Torture, pain, psychological unrest, and a life of confusion; how do I deserve all these? Yes, I got promoted, but your word says that the blessing of the Lord makes one rich and adds no sorrow to it, why am I an exception? David impregnated Bathsheba, he even killed Uriah her husband, yet he remained a man after your own heart. I only impregnated two girls, by mistake. I didn't know I was having sex with the both of them until later. I even went ahead to please you by taking both of them as wives; at least maami convinced me that it is better to be husband to my children's mother than to have a broken home. Was marrying them against your will?

"Why have you decided to make me a man after your wrath?" – He yelled out his last thought and noticed everyone staring at him. He downed what was left of his drink, paid the bartender, dashed out of the bar and made way for his office; lunchtime was over.

St. Anselm's Hospital

Emeka Idemili was still pacing down the female ward when he caught sight of Osato running down the children's ward with John on her shoulder.

Osahon had been in labour for hours and she was yet to put to bed, Osasu sat down on the waiting chair that was in the passage as she prayed silently for Osahon's safe delivery.

"Osasu," Emeka called.

Osasu stood up in response to his call, "Yes dad?"

"I think I just saw your sister running towards the children's ward with one of the twins. Can you please make sure everything is okay while I wait for the doctor?"

"Okay dad," she replied and left in search of her sister.

Few minutes later, Tayo arrived at the hospital in search of Osato. He was busy trying to locate the children's ward when he stumbled on Emeka who had a smile on his face. Osahon had finally popped out a baby boy.

"Oh! Thank God. Good afternoon sir, have you seen Osato? I just got a message from her saying John is ill again, so I rushed down immediately."

"Oh my God! I saw her rush past with one of the boys", he said with concern clouding his features, before catching sight of the twins.

"There they are," he pointed towards the girls who stood afar off. Both men approached the girls, with Tayo outpacing Emeka.

"How is he? How is my son?" Tayo asked as he approached them.

"Oh! He is your son now, shey? Where were you when I was calling your phone? Where were you?" Osato screeched.

"Calm down everybody," Emeka interrupted. "How is the boy?"

"He is being attended to, and the doctor said he will be fine," answered Osasu.

"How is mum?" Osasu asked Emeka.

"I have good news; your mother just gave me... I mean she just gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. I was on my way to tell you when I saw Tayo."

Everyone sighed with huge relief; the girls gave their papa a big hug while Tayo stretched forth his hand as he echoed "Congratulations sir."

"Thank you," Emeka responded and shook Tayo's hand vigorously.

They all waited for the doctor taking care of John. After waiting for few minutes the doctor came out and requested to talk to the child's father.

"I am his Father," Tayo answered, stepping forward, while everyone paid keen attention to what the doctor had to say.

"Your son suffered from pneumonia, probably as a result of being exposed to a cold environment. I did my best for him. But I am sorry, we lost him."

Tayo fell on his knees, "God why? Why me!" he broke into tears.

Mr. Idemili pulled him up in an attempt to comfort him; Osasu held Osato tight with murmurs of, "I am so sorry dear. I'm sorry." They were both weeping, and then Osato stiffened.

"Jesus Christ! Johnson, Johnson!"

"What is wrong with him? Where is my son?" Tayo retorted,

"I...I forgot him on the couch."

Seven

Tayo's car horn blared as he approached the gate. He had left the hospital alone in a rage, the moment he realized Osato had forgotten Johnson at home. What type of mother forgets her child in a duplex for hours? While he was driving down to the house, he almost knocked down a crossing pedestrian, but he couldn't get himself to apologize to the almost accident-victim; all he wanted to do was get home.

"God please have mercy, I can't afford to lose two sons in less than 24 hours; please God."

He prayed in his heart as he sped home.

He was finally in front of the gate and was honking the car horn, but Musa wasn't there to open. "Where is this idiot?" he yelled behind the wheel before making his way out of the car.

At this point his anger hit boiling point. He slammed the car door and jogged towards the pedestrian gate; Musa's cubicle was just beside it. He was either in deep sleep or was having his bath. Whichever it was, Tayo hoped knocking on the gate will send the awareness of his presence to Musa. He soon arrived at the gate to find a padlock on it,

"Ah, Mogbe! Where has this one gone to? Why does it have to be today? Why, God why?" he questioned with his voice trembling with echoes of tears. There was no getting in. The fence and gate were securely laced fence with barbed wire. Without much consideration he decided to break the padlock. He hit a button on the car remote that opened the trunk and collected a wheel spanner. He hurried back to the gate and swung at the lock with the spanner as he cursed Musa's name, breathing heavily.

Osato sat transfixed beside Osasu as they drove home. She knew better than to have followed Tayo; he was angry and her presence would only make him angrier. They had left the hospital when he did, but Osasu couldn't drive at a similar speed. As a result, they were several minutes behind him. Osato had just lost a child; she was supposed to be in the comforting arms of her husband, but she was condemning herself. How could she forget her son because his brother was dying? She soon broke the silence with tears,

"This is what desperation has led me too. I wasn't ripe for it; I wasn't ripe for this marriage. Now I have killed John and left Johnson to his own fate. Please God, kill me already! The wages of sin is death, abi?" she sobbed on.

"Hey" Osasu cut in carefully, "nothing is going to happen to Johnson. I am almost sure Tayo has him by now, and to think that Musa is in the house. I know he is in safe hands. And please, God isn't wicked, He forgives. Please stop talking about dying; all will be well."

She concluded by patting Osato on her shoulder with her right hand while she navigated the car with the other.

Musa used to be the gateman for the Idemilis. His humility and diligence earned him the love of every member of the Idemili family. Above all he was very funny, a character that made the girls persuade their father to let him live with them as their gateman after they put to bed. Musa has been with them for about 5 years; he has become a part of their family and has been entrusted with certain responsibilities. The girls were so fond of him while growing up. They taught him how to read and write, and always complemented his efforts with gifts whenever he showed improvement. Furthermore, he has good instincts. He always knew what to do and when to do them, but on this day he was nowhere to be found.

Tayo was sweating profusely; he let out a grunt as each hit landed on the lock. Their duplex was the last house in the close, so no one noticed what was going on with him. Tayo's shirt and tie were no longer on him, both lay wildly on the car bonnet. After seven minutes of intensive labour the padlock finally gave way. He rushed into the house in a search of Johnson.

"Johnson!" he yelled. Tayo combed all the rooms, including the kitchen and the store, hoping to hear the scream of a child, but it was all futile. Johnson was missing. He sank helplessly into a couch in the sitting room, breathing heavily as he whispered, "Johnson." He removed his phone from his pocket and had just dialed Musa's number when Osato walked in behind Osasu.

"Where is my son?" she asked as she gazed into Tayo's eyes for an answer. The only response she got was from Tayo's speakerphone,

"The number you have called is currently switched off."

She asked again, "Tayo please where is our son?"

"Don't you dare ask me such a question!"

He screamed at her.

"Easy dear, easy, don't shout at her. She just lost a son and that wasn't her fault. She was under intense pressure. So, please, do not shout at her! Calm down!" Osasu countered in defense of her sister.

"Okay. Alright, I am sorry. But I didn't forget the boy, and I can't find him either. I cannot find Musa too."

"Have you called his number?" Osasu retorted,

"I just did and it is switched off." Tayo declared.

Osasu walked up to her husband, knelt before him and wrapped her hands around his neck, "I understand that you are worried, I am too, and so is Osato. If Musa and Johnson are missing, then I'm sure they are together and safe. Let's exercise little patience, they will be back soon." She kissed his forehead and then walked over to her sister and held her close.

They had left the gate ajar earlier, and so he gained an easy entrance. He just walked straight for the duplex, opened the door and let himself in.

"Who are you?" Tayo asked giving him a ferocious look,

"Me I be Sule," the Hausa-Fulani man responded,

"Sule, did nobody teach you how to knock where you come from?" Tayo further asked. The man looked clueless for a minute before finally letting out a response,

"Musa I say make he give am for oga this liter." He threw the letter at Tayo and ran out of the compound.

Tayo opened the letter; a rumpled paper that smelled of onion and cigarette smoke and read it out spontaneously:

"Oga, I have taken my boy. The mother keep one and I keep one too. Ask the mother who is the boy's father. Don't find me, you will not see me. Goodbye. Musa."

Eight

Tayo tore the letter and burst into laughter as he dropped the pieces on the floor. He dipped his hands into his pocket and staggered towards the bar in the visitor's room to pour himself few shots of Jack Daniels. The girls remained seated. Osasu focused on the face of Osato with the hope that she'll get an explanation. Osato buried her face in her palms. The tears of John's demise had run dry. She was drowning in her own sweat; she had gone from sad to being ashamed. Tayo suddenly got tired of drinking from the cup; he grabbed the bottle of Jack and began to pour its contents into his mouth. Neither of the girls had ever seen him that way, but they didn't need to be told that his reticence meant anger. Thirty minutes passed and the whole house remained silent. Osato had her head bowed in shame while Osasu just sat speechless. "I have to go and get Mark and Brian from the crèche now. It's past four already," Osasu said to no one in particular. Perhaps she figured that was the best way to get herself out of the messy situation. An opportunity for Osato to explain whatever Musa's letter meant. One thing was certain; should now pay special attention to her kids. If anything negative happens to them, it would be totally disastrous on the family. As she made for the door,

Tayo slammed the bottle of whisky, which was now empty on the floor and screeched, "Osasu sit down before I let out my fury on you! I am trying to be calm, please do not push me. Sit back down before I make you do so," Tayo yelled on as he stood up from the bar stool and approached the girls.

"Osasu. Ask your sister where my son is. I deserve an explanation, don't I?" he laughed in mockery and continued.

"I mean, I need to know why Musa of all people. Ah! Musa has been sleeping with my supposed wife" – Tayo's hands began to tremble in synchrony with his voice – "God knows how many times that has happened under my nose and I didn't even suspect it."

"Tell me Osasu, do you know about this? Were you girls waiting for me to find out? Perhaps, you were covering your sister's iniquity. This is wickedness."

"Tayo calm down, I'm sure there's an explanation for this," Osasu said calmly.

"Do not tell me to calm down" Tayo retorted. "I deserve an explanation and I want it now before I do something!"

He screamed and startled both girls, especially Osato who was finding it very difficult to express herself. Each time she attempted to utter a word she shamefully ended up swallowing her saliva. Tayo took giant strides as he walked back to the bar to retrieve a handy piece of the broken bottle. "Will you start talking or do I have to use this?" he pointed the bottle at Osato.

"Tayo calm down" Osasu pleaded.

"Tell that to your miserable whore of a sister" – he waved the broken bottle at Osato's face – "have you been having sex with Musa?"

"I am sorry," Osato muttered.

"You are sorry? Sorry for what?" Tayo questioned as he slammed the bottle against the wall just above Osato's head.

"Okay!" Osato finally found her nervous voice,

"I did have sex with Musa, but it only happened twice. I am sure the boys are not his."

"Oh! I see, having sex with him severally would have given him a fair chance, abi?" Tayo countered.

Osasu, surprised by her sister's confession interrupted, "Osato, why would you do such? Why?"

"I was cold and horny and, a-and it just happened. I am sorry." Osato pleaded guiltily, tears coursing down her soft cheeks as she spoke.

"Oh! Cold and horny. What an excuse! I should have known better. I should have known that you are just a messy piece of tissue paper. Why did I expect better from a girl that slipped into my bed disguising as her twin sister. I should have known that you are a chameleon; a slimy, slippery, sloppy creature."

"Tayo that isn't fair," Osasu refuted.

"Oh, that isn't fair. Perchance Musa was also doing the same to you. Abi?" Tayo gave her a rhetorical look,

"Hell no!" Osasu thundered in self-defense.

"Then do not tell me that I am not being fair," Tayo shouted back at her with tears threatening to start pouring from his eyes.

"The first time she was cold and horny. That is miserably understandable but very questionable. What happened the second time? He fucked her so well the first time and she went back begging him for more?"

He faced Osato and yelled at her letting out a large chunk of saliva that caught her face, "wasn't that what happened?"

Osato fell on her knees and held Tayo's leg.

"Please forgive me, I love you." He kicked her off and slapped his face hard, probably to wake himself up from the nightmare.

"Osato, but why? Why? Why?" He made a fist with his left hand in an attempt to hit her, but he couldn't bring himself to.

Osasu moved two steps closer to him,

"Tayo, I am sure we can sort this out as a family. This isn't the time to get angry, let us channel this energy into bringing Johnson home before it is too late. I am sure Musa is still somewhere around. We might find someone who knows his whereabouts. Please, be patient." She took another step towards him, placing her directly on some pieces of the broken bottle.

"Osasu, please stop trying to patronize me." Tayo responded without any regard to her suggestion.

"I am not trying to patronize you dear; I am only giving the best solution. Let us find our child first."

"Okay, I pray we find him. I hope we find Johnson soon; else I am going to devour this daughter of a whore alive. That's how your mother bore you after all, creeping into another man's bed."

"Tayo, how dare you insult my mother?" Osato blasted Tayo as she stood up to him.

"Tayo that isn't fair" Osasu supported her sister. Osato raised her hand to shove Tayo aside. He reacted by slapping her hand away. Osato rushed several blows into his chest. Tayo got really angry and shoved her back to the couch where she had been sitting. As soon as her bum hit the couch she endeavored to stand up again. Osasu realized the scene could get ugly and so she moved to stop her sister.

"No, let the whore beat me," Tayo demanded and pushed Osasu out of the way in order to allow Osato enjoy her display of madness. Osasu lost her balance. Her sandal slipped on a shard of the shattered bottle and she fell, hard. She hit her head on the floor with a crack. She started bleeding.

Nine

Tayo drove with an intensity that denoted the emergency at hand. Initially it was a light smoke, and then suddenly the fire made manifest its presence; a burning home, from beauty to ashes. Tayo stepped on the accelerator pedal of his car as the speed rose to 100km/hr. He couldn't concentrate on the road as he turned his head to look at the bleeding Osasu at intervals.

"What have I done?" he murmured to himself as tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Baby, please stay with me. I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you, please." He begged.

He made a sharp drift to avoid the traffic that was ahead and swerved off the road. The car tyres bumped on the pedestrian road with Tayo blaring on the car horn to send across a nervy message to the pedestrians to get out of the way. He cared less about the law he was breaking, all he wanted to do was get Osasu to the hospital in time.

"God please, nothing must happen to my wife."

He checked on her through the rear-view mirror. He cared less about the twin whose laps cushioned her head. All that matter to him was his wife's life, not Osato's tears that he concluded in his mind were crocodile tears. All Osato ever wanted was to have him wholly to herself. At the expense of her sister's life, she appeared to be getting her desire.

Osato held her sister's hands as she watched her struggle for her life; Osasu's eyes were slightly opened, but the bleeding from her head had soaked Osato's white jeans and made them red.

She couldn't utter a word; she just lay there helplessly with tears flooding her face. Osato realized what was happening and she couldn't hide her own emotions, she wept on in prayers.

"God please don't let my sister die. God I'm sorry. Please."

She then looked at dying Osasu pitifully, knowing that she was the primary cause of what was happening. Was it fate or misfortune? She begged,

"Osasu, please I am sorry. Just hang in there; we will be in the hospital in no time. Just stay alive for me, for Mark and Brian, for mum and dad, for us. Please," the word 'please' echoing in the car with mucus running from her nose. The first being she bonded with was dying and they were 15 minutes away from the nearest hospital. She lifted her gaze from Osasu, cast a horrific look on Tayo and screeched,

"Can't you drive faster? She's in pains! She's dying!"

"Don't you dare shout at me Osato." Tayo turned around to emphasize every statement he was about to say, paying very little attention to the road.

"If anything happens to my wife, I will hold you responsible for it."

"So I am not your wife now?"

"You are not my wife, I didn't marry a whore!"

"Okay, okay! Just drive," Osato gave up on the argument.

Tayo faced the road to see where he was navigating and realized he was driving straight into a canal, he swerved to the right to avoid the foreseen pit and then his right side mirror hit a heavy object that he couldn't place due to his hastiness. The side mirror was knocked off, and he heard shouts of "wait, wait. Don't go," by some of the people on the street.

He just ignored them and drove off, his side mirror wasn't as important as Osasu.

Tayo looked through the rear mirror again and asked Osato if Osasu was still breathing. Osato replied grudgingly with "yes, but move faster."

"Hang in there baby, we are almost at the hospital." Tayo said as he pumped the car brake to reduce his speed as he made a sharp turn to arrive at the street of their proposed destination. On their arrival, he wasn't patient enough to turn off the ignition. He just halted the car by slamming the brake and pulling the hand brake. He rushed into the emergency ward to get the nurses who brought a stretcher to get Osasu from the car. Three minutes into the examination of Osasu by a doctor; the doctor concluded that she had to be operated on urgently.

"She has lost so much blood. As it stands, the level of damage is unclear, but I can tell you that her brain has been badly affected. From my observation I can tell that her sense organs are not responding; perhaps as a result of the shock. She needs a surgery and she needs it now."

"Doctor, do all you can," Tayo implored the doctor who was already heading for the theatre.

"Please save my sister," Osato said in tears as if to mean doctors are gods; they only try, once death is inevitable, there's nothing they can do. Abi?" The couple waited.

He carried her into the emergency ward screaming, "Doctor!" A nurse came rushing down towards him,

"What happened to her?"

"We been dey street, naim one mumu driver clear am commot for road," a man in his late thirties replied, breathing heavily with every word he said.

"Oya put her on that bed," the nurse who seemed nicer than the average Nigerian nurse pointed to a bed in the corner of the room.

"I will give your sister first aid treatment, but she will have to wait to see the doctor for further observations."

"Nurse, abeg na, she nor be my sister, na street we help am, she dey die. Treat am now now na."

The man countered, obviously unwilling to cough up funds for a perfect stranger.

"The doctors are attending to a patient that needs surgery. There's no one here to attend to her now. I can see she is still breathing, she will be fine."

"Okay nurse. But make I clear you, boys dey outside hospital gate dey para. If this babe die, if she kpeme, naim be say yawa don gas."

"She no go die," the nurse assured him diplomatically, but he wasn't satisfied. "If that babe die, the hospital no go rest. Make God just dash me that bastard driver, make I wound am. Ehn, dem wan kee us finish abi. We no get car but we for this street, we dey wound anything. Na me ,Sly, talk am", he boomed, thumping on his chest for emphasis.

He exited the emergency ward and walked towards his fellow good Samaritans, while the nurse went ahead to clean the victim's wounds; from her assessment she would pull through. The pain she was suffering was inevitable.

Sly waited with his goons outside as they anticipated the doctor's report. When he told them she hadn't been attended to they almost created a fuss but he was quick to calm their nerves, "Make una never mad. If anything do am, na me Sly go mad pass." He was the most feared tout on the street. He had been in many fights and slept in the jail severally. One of his legs was shorter than the other; a memento from a fight years back. But that hadn't stopped him from getting into street fights or issues with the law. He was the voice of his street.

After about 15 minutes of waiting, one of his boys brought something to his attention.

"Sly see double daring!" He approached him, squatting and staggering as he demonstrated his amazement.

"Kekere, wetin happen na?" Sly questioned.

"Na the car be that."Kekere pointed at Tayo's car. Tayo had hit the lady but in his haste.

"Yee-paripa!" Sly jumped up twice, like a boxer whose arrival had just been announced.

"Kekere, as he be say na you notice am eh. If the owner of that car comot, tear am knife for belle make you bounce."

"Okay egbon" Kekere acknowledged Sly's command.

"Boys, we mission don complete for here, make we dey clear." Sly ordered the rest of his pack and they left the hospital premises with Kekere lurking behind.

Tayo and Osato who hadn't said a word to each other both jumped up the moment they saw the doctor coming out of the operation theatre. As he approached them, impatient Tayo asked from a distance,

"Doctor how is my wife?"

"Mr....."

"Coker, Mr. Coker," Tayo finished up for the doctor who was trying so hard to remember his name.

"Mr. Coker, your wife is okay. The surgery was successful; we were able to stabilize her. She is alive. But there has been major damage to her brain. We have to be patient enough for her to respond to treatment."

"Okay, I don't get. Respond to treatment? I thought you said the surgery was a success."Tayo asked confusedly,

"Yes, it was. But she is presently unconscious. I mean she's in a vegetable state. Chances are 10% that she will come around soon, but like I said, we can't be so sure. She might get lucky. We will keep doing our best, but you need to be patient."

Osato cuts in before Tayo could say a word, "Doctor, can I see my sister?" She spoke in tears.

"You don't need to cry, she will be alright. You can't see her now, she needs rest." The doctor concluded and excused himself from their presence. The couple looked at each other with hatred, in tears and anger. Tayo left the building and Osato followed him.

Kekere noticed someone approaching the car. He hid between the neatly trimmed flowers of the hospital environment as he crawled towards the car. The moment he had a close view and saw that the person wasn't paying attention, he brought out his short knife and rushed up to Tayo's car.

Ten

"Kekere, Kekere!" he heard someone scream his name as he made his move to attack Tayo who was finding it difficult to open his car door as a result of his confused state. Kekere paused at the sound of his name and quickly made a sharp turn as he hid the knife he was holding so as not to draw unnecessary attention to himself.

"Na when person wan busy dem go dey call person anyhow?" he murmured as he turned slowly, to catch a glimpse of the person shouting his name.

"Na Rabi sha. Chai," he bit his lips hard. "Wetin this bobo dey find? Na so he come call me when I dey fuck last night. Na me go kill am." He forced his way between the flowers not caring about the hard work the horticulturist had done and destroying some of the flowers in the process.

"Ehn en, Rabi wetin happen," he questioned.

Rabi who didn't realize Kekere had arrived behind him was startled at the jingle of his voice. After Sly, Kekere was the most dreaded tout in that hood. He was always tasked with dirty responsibilities, if he isn't making the kill or leading the fight squad, then he is in jail; his favorite holiday spot. He was friends with the policemen who patrolled the street, having been picked up numerous times.

Rabi answered Kekere, panting as he spoke, "Baba Sly say make I update you say make you abort the mission."

"For why na?" Kekere retorted.

"As I dey reason you so ehn, black scout don hear the matter and dem go soon land here." Black scout, was street lingo for policemen. The name was based on their mocking opinion that the police force was simply a bunch of Boy Scouts in a different uniform. As far as they are concerned, policemen only camp on roads; making roadblocks with wood and tyres while receiving bribe.

"Shuo, shey na local or special?" Kekere asked Rabi.

"Na them Rambo o," Rabi responded. "Kekere, you no dey hear the sound of the instrumental?" He continued. Instrumental was street word for siren. Kekere nodded his head to affirm the urgency of the situation and they both jogged out of the hospital premises. They were never scared of the local police, but Rambo, which was their code for SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) – they don't dare!

Tayo slammed the car door after him as he waited for Osato. She walked sluggishly towards the car. Too much had happened in a day and so she wasn't sure if going home with Tayo was the right thing to do. What if he wasn't going home? After all, Johnson was still missing.

"Are you going to get into this car while we go out and look for my son or would you rather have me drag you into it?" Tayo yelled at her, not minding the attention he was calling to himself from puzzled passersby.

Osato couldn't delay any further. Tayo had been totally unpredictable today, and she should rightly be blamed for that. It was wise to avoid another drama, and so she hastened. Tayo pushed the ignition the moment Osato was seated in the car. He put the vehicle in reverse motion and navigated his way out of where he had parked.

"Tayo!" he heard someone scream his name from afar. He kept his leg on the brake and looked through the rear mirror to see who was calling. It was Mr. Idemili. He was now walking faster so as to catch up with them. The sudden chaos had beclouded the joy of the day; no one except Mr. Idemili cared about Osahon who had put to bed earlier. The series of events that unfolded had formatted such a beautiful memory from their brains.

"Is Johnson alright?" asked Emeka who had now arrived beside Tayo's car. Neither of them answered him, and so he asked again "Is my grandson alright?"

"I think she is in the right position to answer those questions sir." Tayo blurted out as he gave Osato a disgusting look.

"Daddy, Johnson is missing," declared Osato.

"Missing? How? I mean, you said you left him in the house. What do you mean by he is missing? Is this a joke or something?" Emeka asked confusedly.

"Dad, Musa took him away," Osato muttered,

"Took who away? Why? Where? Wh.."

Tayo cuts in rudely. "Your daughter, I mean Osato, have been sleeping with Musa."

"What?" Emeka exclaimed,

"Yes. So, Musa thinks he is the father of my kids, your grandchildren."

"Osato, what is this irritating allegation that is being laid against you?" Emeka gave Osato a questioning look.

She rubbed her hand on her lap as she attempted to answer, "Dad...dy."

"Wait a minute. Why are your jeans soaked in blood or am I mistaken? Where is Osasu?"

"Daddy, Osasu is in coma,"

"What do you mean? Where is she?"

"She is in the ICU sir," Tayo replied him diplomatically.

Emeka opened his mouth in surprise, he couldn't comprehend what was wrong; John died, Johnson is missing, and now Osasu is in the ICU.

"What is wrong with her?" he asked.

The couple looked at themselves in disappointment and with remorse as they answered in synchrony,

“She slipped and hit her head.” The first thing they had agreed on since the misfortune started. What could they have said?

Emeka shook his head in disbelief and then spontaneously yelled at the both of them, “will both of you get out of that car and take me to my daughter now!”

Clueless, Tayo opened the car door grudgingly and stepped outside. Osato sat back in the car. It was getting dark already, but she didn’t want to be seen with blood stains all over her body.

As Emeka and Tayo got set to make their way for the ICU, they were accosted by two men who were dressed in Red polo tops with SARS written on them. Both men hung AK47 rifles on their shoulders. One of them, a bald man with a Herbert Macaulay mustache was quick to introduce himself.

“I am Inspector Farouk Alade, chief Scorpion of Lagos State SARS. Which one of you is Mr. Emeka Idemili?” He directed the question at both men.

“I am,” Emeka responded, and then asked Farouk “how can I help you?”

Farouk smiled mischievously and faced Tayo, “then you must be Awotayo Coker.”

“Yes, I am Awotayo Coker,” Tayo gutted out.

Inspector Farouk turned and whistled as he beckoned to three other officers from the Toyota Hilux van they came in with.

Emeka was swift to ask, “What is going on here inspector?”

“Both of you are under arrest for conspiracy and murder of George Elliot. Anything you say or do can or will be used against you in the court of law.”

Farouk turned to his officers and concluded, “Cuff their hands, they are highly dangerous.”

Eleven

The SARS department of the police refused Emeka and Tayo bail on the grounds that their freedom was dangerous to the public. Furthermore, Inspector Farouk had argued that both men may jump bail if given the chance. It's been seven days of interrogation, but both men didn't get broken. They had been advised by their lawyer not to say anything to the police so as not to be further indicted.

"All you have to keep hammering on is that you are innocent," Barrister Yejide said to them.

Barrister Patrick Yejide was Emeka's friend and legal adviser. He was a S.A.N. He has a remarkable record of winning such controversial cases, and has many protégés living up to that reputation too. However, he also had a loud reputation. If he must be in court the money must be good, else he will send one of his junior lawyers to represent him. In Emeka's case, their friendship more than his bill was the reason why he didn't find it difficult agreeing to represent him in court.

"You have been charged to court for conspiracy and murder; a two-count charge. The first sitting will be on Monday. You need to be prepared. I will do my best to defend you, but first I will see to it that the Judge grants you bail. I have spoken to Farouk and he has given me permission to spend some additional minutes with you. I will ask you some of the questions the prosecutor is likely to put to you. I need you to give me a very straight forward and simple answer."

Both men nodded to affirm their understanding of his request. They were looking pale and rumpled; they had only eaten three times in seven days, and had been denied the privilege of seeing their families. The condition of the cell in which they were detained was particularly terrible; there were faeces all around and molds had started growing in it. It smelled of urine and decayed shit, and had caused them to fall sick.

"Before you continue sir, can I ask a question?" Tayo managed to ask as he let out a deep cough.

"Yes, go on" Barrister Yejide replied him.

"How am I involved in all these? I didn't shoot George. I didn't conspire with him" – he pointed at Emeka – "I was only there visiting. Why won't they let me go?" He burst into tears as he spoke.

Patrick who seem rather unfazed by Tayo's level of ignorance decided to comfort him by adding a smile,

"That is a very intelligent question Tayo. Now, if you will answer these questions, maybe you can answer that question yourself," Patrick added.

"Okay sir" Tayo sobbed on.

"Mr. Awotayo Coker, do you know the deceased, Mr. George Eliiot?"

"Yes sir, I mean no sir... I mean I met him earlier that day, I didn't know him before then," Tayo replied nervously and with amplified tears. Patrick became infuriated by his cowardice and yelled at him,

"Do you want to spend the rest of your life in prison? Why can't you just answer the question and stop crying like a doll. Let me make this clear to you, when you answer yes and then no, you will be complicating things and incriminating yourself. A simple yes or no accompanied by a straight forward explanation will do. And for your own good, only explain when the prosecutor demands for an explanation. Is that clear?"

"Okay sir," Tayo replied as he squeezed his eyelids to get out his last drop of tears. Emeka just sat down calmly, wearing a smile as he caressed the handcuff that connected him to his son-in-law. Patrick continued, "Tayo, if you are still wondering why you are in this mess, you arrived at Emeka's house with George; you took him to the venue of his death." A defeated Tayo could only slam the table with his free hand. "Now to you Emeka, did you abduct George's wife and children?"

"No."

"Are you the biological father of the girls?"

"No."

"So how do you explain the fact that the said girls lived with you from birth till they got married?"

"I thought they were mine," Emeka retorted.

"Thought they were yours? As at the time of their birth, were you aware of your sexual infertility?"

Emeka slammed his hands on the table, causing Tayo pain in the process as he pulled the cuffs.

"Miracles happen every now and then. I thought I got a miracle."

Patrick queried Emeka spontaneously, "Ahn-ahn, Emeka, you should know better. When you are in court, don't bring God into this else the prosecutor will peg you to a corner on the grounds of blasphemy. Now, let's forge ahead. Is there a doctor's report to prove your infertility?"

"No."

"If that is the case, you should deny the awareness of your infertility," Patrick ordered.

Patrick was set to ask Tayo new set of questions when an officer walked in to remind him that he had 5 minutes left,

"What is your name officer?" he questioned him,

"Corporal Victor sir"

"Corporal, I asked for your name. I didn't ask for your rank. Anyway, tell Farouk I need more time with them. Tell him I said I will see him when I am done here."

"But..." the corporal countered,

"But, but what? Have you no respect for the law, don't you know who I am?"

The threatened policeman walked away without uttering a word, but made several grumbles as he did. Patrick turned to face his clients and continued.

Seven days had passed; it was the day for the christening of Osahon's son, but the father of the baby wasn't available. A pastor was invited to conduct a short service; his presence increased attendance to a total of 5 people which included Osato, Osahon, Mark, and Brian. After a brief session of prayer, the pastor announced the child's names as written down by his mother.

"This boy shall be called, "Chukwuemeka George Idemili. I anoint you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

They all chorused "Amen."

The moment the pastor exited the house, Osato confronted her mother,

"Why did you name him after George? You know daddy won't like that."

"We both agreed to give him the name in memory of the poor man; your father's memory. If Emeka was here right now, he would do the same." – Osahon paused and let out air through her mouth –

"Osato, always remember, George is your biological Father and he died fighting for you."

"But mum..." Osato tried to query Osahon,

"No buts, we have to go to the hospital to be with Osasu. Barrister Yejide has also arranged for us to finally see your father and Tayo today. We should get going already."

Barrister Yejide's phone beeped and he checked to see who it was that had sent him a text message.

"Oh! Your wives are outside. I was able to convince Farouk to let them see you. I also instructed them to bring you some cloths to change with, food, and some anti-biotic. I will meet with Farouk while they are with you to find out more about this case from their own investigation. We have a working relationship."

He stood up at the sight of the ladies. The three ladies burst into tears. Mrs. Coker had linked up with them at the hospital. She was so desperate to see her son.

"I am going to leave you now. You only have 10 minutes, make every conversation snappy," Barrister Yejide echoed as he walked away.

"My child and grandchildren; how are they doing?" Emeka asked, holding the hands of Osato and Osahon as he spoke.

Farouk and Patrick strolled to a quiet part of the Police Headquarters as they dialogued. When they had arrived at a very serene area and with the assurance that no one was paying attention to them, they stopped and continued their conversation.

"Pat, I am only going to tell you this once, and that is because of the relationship we have. I don't know who the person is. I only got a tip, and I decided to look into it," said Farouk.

"FRK, that isn't good enough. This case has been closed for over 9 months now. It was an issue of self-defense. All I want to know is how you got to know about it. You said someone called you up with the information. Who did? I can't just fold my hands and watch my friend go to jail for an offence he didn't commit. Who is the rat here?"

"You lawyers just enjoy making policemen look foolish. You just said it was in self-defense, yet you are insisting that he didn't do it. Anyway, I will tell you what I know. Three weeks ago a lady called to tell me that her brother was killed by Emeka and Tayo. I checked with the D.P.O of Ipaja Police Station where the case was originally opened and I decided to look into it, the case was closed on the grounds of self-defense and no evidence. I do not know who the lady is, but she kept pushing me to investigate. I didn't take her serious until her evidence found its way to my desk."

"What evidence?" Patrick asked surprisingly,

"A gun. I handed it over to the forensics to lift the fingerprints on it and it matched with the one we got from Emeka when he got here."

Apparently, there was another fingerprint, but Emeka's own was on the trigger. If you can find the strange lady, maybe you can help your client." Farouk concluded and briskly walked away from Patrick.

After few minutes of the sour family reunion. Tayo finally found his voice,
"How is Osasu?"

The ladies burst into tears without an answer. Tayo became inquisitive and pressed for an answer, "How is she? How is my wife?"

Mrs. Coker hugged him over the table that separated them and still in tears she answered,
"Osasu died this morning."

Twelve

It's been three months of pain, distress, and confusion. Over 90 days and the storm hadn't ceased to batter the ship of the Cokers and Idemilis.

Since Osasu's burial, Osato and Osahon had been at loggerheads with each other, one blaming the other for the hard luck that has brought chaos to the family. Osato cared less about George, as far as she was concerned, he was never her father. During their last arguments she thundered at Osahon,

"Mummy, please don't put this on me. George was never my father. The father I know is that sweet man lying in jail because you brought your misfortune to him in your quest to embrace his fortune. Or didn't you leave George because of money? It is not in your place to label me a black sheep, if you must do, then please note that it runs in the gene."

Osato's reaction was against her mother's accusation that she caused Osasu's death by creeping into Tayo's bed. Osahon wasn't swift to reply her daughter; she couldn't believe Osato would respond to her with such strong words. She simply sat down there on the dining table, sighing and hissing, and when she realized that she might be losing her respect as a mother if she didn't say anything, she gazed into Osato's eyes and said with a smile,

"I see you have now grown wings. I do not blame you. You should know that the gold I dug some years back is the basis of the wealth you enjoyed before now, and I don't regret being a gold digger. But since you seem to think we are alike, I'd like to inform you that Johnson is still missing and I am not the one sleeping with a gateman." She left for her room afterwards. Since then, mother and daughter haven't said a word to each other

Tayo stopped seeing Osato since he learnt of Osasu's death. To him Osato was a murderer, fornicator, liar, and an ill-mannered wife. He couldn't wait for his trial to be over. He would divorce her and institute legal action against her so that she could be tried for conspiracy and kidnap in the court of law. Johnson was still missing. However, Tayo has also refused to see his mother who he believed pushed him into this mess. There were days when he muttered to himself in tears,

"Had I known, I wouldn't have listened to maami. I would have absconded like I wanted to." He made Christ his best friend for the second time but his prayer point didn't change.

"Dear God, please save me from this mess and I will serve you forever."

Mrs. Coker who wouldn't quit cursing her luck and blaming herself for her son's suffering also prayed in like version, persuading Mother Mary to talk to her Son and save Tayo. Three months of court sittings and the fog only thickened. She was beginning to lose hope; her health had deteriorated as a result of high blood pressure. Her hopes are gradually being transferred to her grandchildren – Mark and Brian; she had been tasked with the responsibility of taking care of them since Osasu's demise.

Amidst the tribulation a friendship was born. Emeka and Tayo got closer; perhaps because they didn't have a choice. All their deeds were in unison; they sleep in the cell together, appear in court together, and find solace in each other. However, the older man demonstrated more mental strength. He remained the man of few words he had always been, while Tayo wouldn't stop being a crying toddler. Their first appearance in court was very short as the case was up for mention, but the judge refused Barrister Yejide's plea for the suspects to be granted bail. During the second sitting, the prosecutor couldn't back up his evidence with a laboratory report of the fingerprints which the judge demanded for, and the police report wasn't acceptable since they couldn't produce the witness that sent in the evidence. At the third sitting the judge became furious at the lack of a witness to corroborate the police report and evidence. The prosecutor pleaded for an adjournment and promised to bring his witnesses to court during the next sitting.

Barrister Yejide assured his clients that he would get them out of jail. He made them understand that he had launched an investigation into finding out who the witnesses were but everything seemed to be a dead end. Yet he refused to relent in his efforts. He had contacted the post house that delivered the evidence to the police station but their record didn't reveal much as there were no CCTV cameras. Inspector Farouk has been helpful, but his best wasn't enough. More so, he had to be much more discreet about things. The fourth sitting was around the corner, and there was just little hope in the hopelessness.

Fourth Sitting

Emeka and Tayo stood in the dock as they watched the prosecutor step forward, adjusting his gown as he approached the judge. He had quietly watched Barrister Yejide defend his clients, but he didn't say a word; no objections. He let him argue his case as he patiently awaited his time.

When Patrick was done, the prosecutor made his first move.

"My lord, I will like to invite my first witness in front of this court," he demanded.

The judge replied, "Go ahead."

"Mr. Musa, please step forward," Musa stepped forward to the amazement of Idemilis, especially Osato whose mouth was left ajar. He entered into the witness box where he was asked to declare his name and relationship to the suspects after he had sworn by the Holy Qur'an to say the truth and nothing but the truth. The prosecutor started his examination.

"Do you know the deceased?" he showed Musa a picture of George Elliot.

"Yes"

"Where do you know him from?"

"When I used to work with big oga, he followed small oga to the house one Sunday."

"Was it the same day he died?" the prosecutor asked emphatically, hitting his index finger on George's picture in the process.

"Yes sir," Musa declared.

"Musa, can you please tell this court what you witnessed that Sunday? Please specify small or big oga by using their names. Thank you."

Musa bowed down his head, locked his fingers, and then went ahead to express himself better in pidgin.

"I been dey gate when oga Tayo come with the man. He say he wan see oga; I don see oga Tayo before but I never see the man before. I ask the man for hin name, he say hin name na George, say hin na oga Tayo friend. I open gate make them enter. He never reach 10 minis wey then enter I start to dey hear plenty noise. I go window go see wetin dey happen, nah hin I see say oga Tayo friend carry pistu. Small time I see big oga and oga Tayo dey fight the man. Small time big oga collect the gun from the man hand come shoot am for belle."

Emotional Tayo burst out in tears as he couldn't believe his ears. Emeka just stood there with a smile on his face and folded arms. He was too calm for someone on trial.

"You saw Emeka and Tayo struggle with George?" the prosecutor questioned,

"Yes sir"

"You also saw Emeka shoot George?"

"Yes"

"Objection my Lord," Barrister Yejide cuts in. "My colleague is trying to blackmail my clients by asking his witness one sided and leading questions."

"Objection overruled" the judge ordered and then faced the prosecutor, "continue with your witness."

"That will be all for now my lord," the prosecutor answered.

"The counsel for the accused may now have this witness for a cross examination," the judge continued in reference to Barrister Yejide after he had raised an eyebrow to the prosecutor's leading question to Musa.

Barrister Yejide stepped forward,

"Musa, you said you saw George with the gun at first. Am I correct?"

"Yes," Musa replied.

"What was he doing with it?"

"He hold am"

"Of course, it is obvious he was holding it. What was he doing with it? Tell this court, was he playing with it. Did he or did he not have my clients under duress?" Barrister Yeide asked with the tone of his voice hitting a higher pitch. Musa responded with a long silence, and then Barrister Yejide addressed the court,

"My lord, the deceased brought in the gun and created a hostage situation. My clients only acted in self-defense."

"By killing an innocent man?" the prosecutor interrupted directing his question to the judge

"maybe my colleague should tell this court that one of the accused, Mr. Emeka, stole what belonged to the deceased? As a matter of fact his client stole George's children; a crime punishable under Nigerian Child law."

"My client did not steal any child. He is a man of reputable character" Patrick retorted, "the children in question are his, my Lord. I am done with this witness for now."

"My lord" the prosecutor called out, "I will like to call another witness. But before then I will like to present before this court these evidences to corroborate my next witness' information."

"Go ahead" the judge ordered.

The prosecutor then went ahead to present the gun that killed the deceased and a laboratory report that affirmed the fingerprints on it matched Emeka's own.

"Tag these exhibits A and B respectively," the judge said to the paralegal that took down the evidences.

"You may now call on your witness," he concluded.

The prosecutor took a deep breath, gave Osahon a heavy gaze and said, "I would like to call on the wife of one of the accused."

Thirteen

A long silence ensued in the court; everyone was shocked to see the prosecutor invite the wife of one of the accused men into the witness box. Tayo's mouth was left ajar while Emeka simply adjusted his glasses and leaned on the dock. He didn't seem to be surprised like his dock mate. Osato who was seated beside Osahon almost pulled her back as she stepped forward; she wore a puzzled look that questioned what her mother was up to. The registrar handed Osahon a bible and she went ahead to swear by it, repeating every word the registrar uttered, declaring to tell nothing but the truth. Barrister Yejide simply adjusted his wig in a way that denoted that he was expecting the worst. He wasn't prepared for the attack the prosecutor had just launched. And whatever it resulted into, he couldn't anticipate how to deal with it.

"Can you please tell the court your name and your relationship with these accused men," the prosecutor questioned as he began his examination of Osahon.

"I am Osahon Idemili, I am wife and mother-in-law to both accused men respectively," she answered pointing a finger at Emeka and then Tayo.

"Do you know the deceased?"

"Yes, I do"

"What exactly is your relationship with him?"

"He is the father of my daughters," Osahon said without blinking. She gave Emeka a lethal gaze that could only mean one thing – betrayal.

"Can you please recall and share with this court your own account of what transpired the day George visited," the prosecutor continued, laying emphases on the words 'account' and 'transpired' as he spoke.

Then silence took charge of the courtroom again, this time one could almost hear a pin drop. Osahon locked her fingers into each other and went mute for about 5 seconds, and then suddenly; as if there was a sudden unlock of her memory, she looked up at Emeka with tears in her eyes and pointed at him as she found her voice,

"He killed him!"

"Killed who? The prosecutor question,

"He killed George, Emeka killed George!" she declared, with grief in her voice. Osato stood up and screamed at her, "liar!" and then the courtroom erupted into noisy debate and argument before the registrar slammed his hand on the desk before him and yelled 'ORDER!'

"The prosecutor may continue with his examination of this witness", the judge declared. The prosecutor acknowledged the judge and continued. He turned to weeping Osahon and asked her to recount the event that occurred on the ill-fated day in details. She wiped her tears with a handkerchief she had stuck in her wrapper and then began to narrate:

"It was on a Sunday morning. We had just finished taking breakfast when the doorbell rang. I asked the girls to check who the visitor was and to my surprise it was George and Tayo. I wasn't expecting to see George, but I knew he had come for his daughters. He asked to talk to his daughters but Emeka refused, claiming his financial right over girls and talking about how he had spent a lot raising them and wasn't ready to grant George's proposal.

This soon angered George; he brought out a gun and threatened to shoot someone. After all, all he requested was a chance to talk to the girls and let them know who their biological father is. Osahon coughed. While he was still being furious and wasn't concentrating, Emeka pounced on him from behind and disarmed him. They both rushed for the gun, but Emeka was fastest to recover it. George raised his hands to surrender but Emeka disregarded the act and shot him twice."

The prosecutor adjusted his gown and continued, "Can you please tell this court who the biological father of the girls is?"

"They are George's girls,"

"In other words, Emeka killed an innocent man after carting away his children"

"Objection my Lord" Barrister Yejide intruded, "the state counsel is trying to blackmail my client with his questions. This witness brought the girls to my client and not the other way round."

"Objection overruled" the judge ordered, "the prosecutor may continue with this witness, but with straightforward questions."

"Yes my Lord" the prosecutor answered and then continued with Osahon,

"What was Mr. Tayo's role in the murder of Mr. George?"

"I can only remember him being scared and lurking in a corner. He didn't play any part in it. He was just unfortunate to have escorted the deceased to the place of his death."

"Are you saying that he didn't take part in his murder?"

"Yes."

"And there was no conspiracy of any such?"

"I do not know of any"

"So, he (Emeka) acted alone?"

"Yes."

"That will be all for now my Lord," the prosecutor concluded and headed to his seat." The judge jotted down few notes in his journal and then asked Barrister Yejide to cross examine Osahon. The first statement he made was to logically accuse Osahon of lies and betrayal.

"I put it to this court that this witness is an enemy within."

"Mrs. Idemili. If all you just recounted to this court is true, then I put it to you that you have been a part of this conspiracy all along,"

"No!" Osahon retorted,

"No, it isn't true? Or no I wasn't part of the conspiracy?"

"I wasn't part of the conspiracy."

"So, why did it take you over 13 months before coming out with this account?"

"It didn't take me 13 months. I was the one who sent the evidence to the police via the mailing company. At first I didn't want to come out because I was scared of losing my husband to the law. But then, a man died in the process and the law must take its cause."

Barrister Yejide took a deep breath and then pleaded the judge to grant Tayo bail on the grounds that Osahon's testimony vindicated him of any crime, and that he will always be present in court until judgment is given.

The judge granted Tayo bail and ordered that a DNA test be carried out to clarify the uncertainty about Emeka being the biological father of the twins. How come no one thought about that all the while? He adjourned the hearing till the next month and the court rose afterwards.

They parked outside the court premise, waiting for the session to be over. They seem to be in haste and so they didn't bother to turn off the ignition. They simply sat there with eyes that were redder than the colour red as they sipped on whiskey and puffed out smoke from the cigarettes they had in their hands. The first male who had a bottle of whiskey said to the other in a voice that denoted bottled up anger, "by the time this is over. We would have avenged our friend." "Yes." The other male responded.

Mrs. Coker ran after the judge had risen, to hug her son who reluctantly reciprocated the gesture. Osato just stood afar off initially, unsure of how to react to the whole episode. Emeka who was now laughing to everyone's disbelief was escorted to the prisoner's van. Osato ran after Musa and tore his shirt in an attempt to lock his neck with it, "Where is my son?" she shouted. Mrs. Coker was quick to soon join her, screaming at a policeman to arrest him for kidnapping her grandson. Musa who was now the center of attention quickly called on his friend who stood afar off, "Sule, bring Johnson." Everyone including Tayo turned around to face Sule who was walking towards them with Johnson. The two women left Musa and ran towards Sule to retrieve Johnson. Musa stood up and cautiously said to Tayo, "Oga mi, I am so sorry. I go for DNA, but I am not the father." Tayo, who was yet to recover from his shock at his sudden freedom from the jaws of jail, just stood there, not uttering a word. Suddenly, crack! crack! crack! The bangs were a bit louder than the regular fireworks. Then a man rushed into a car that was gradually picking up motion. In few seconds, the car was out of sight. Osahon had been shot in her shoulder, stomach, and thigh; she was fast losing blood..

Fourteen

Osahon was rushed to the nearest hospital. Spontaneously, Osato hopped into the ambulance. Few minutes ago, they were at loggerheads with each other. Hate burned in Osato's eyes while Osahon testified against her husband. But that changed the moment the bullets pierced her body, splashing her blood all over the floor of the courthouse. Hate turned to despair, Osato took another look into her mother's eyes and her fears heightened. She feared for her. Osahon was bleeding excessively and there was nothing she could do.

"Mummy please don't die on me." Osato wailed in tears. "I don't want to lose you too." She sobbed on, "I am sure we can sort this out as a family. Please don't die, mummy please don't die."

Osahon's attempt to say something only produced a mix of blood and saliva. She was helpless.

"Please go faster" Osato yelled at the man driving the ambulance; the ambulance itself was just a bus that had a stretcher and a first aid box in it.

Osato held her mother's hands and patted her hair with the other. Osahon managed to muster some words.

"I am so sorry I did this to our family. Please forgive me."

"Mummy I forgive you" Osato quickly responded amidst sobs.

"I can see your sister reaching out to me. I can see Osasu calling me."

"Mummy no, Osasu isn't here. Please don't die on me." Osato persuaded her mother like a child in dire need of something. They finally arrived at the hospital. She didn't make it there alive. Her body was wheeled to the mortuary.

Farouk and his men chased after the evil perpetrators in their van but their effort was futile. The men parked their car and ran into the market square that was closest to the court. They shot into the air, unsettled the crowd and escaped. Farouk couldn't hide his disappointment. He knew he was going to answer some tough questions from the commissioner of police. A woman was shot under his watch and he failed to arrest the predators. He ordered his boys to retreat to their station where they continued their investigation and urged anyone with any vital information to come forward. The news of Osahon's demise was communicated to him by Barrister Yejide. Both men discussed the situation that night over a bottle of Old Cask rum.

"Your client is ill-lucked. I wonder if he will make it out of this alive. As it stands now, he is also a suspect in his wife's murder. Except a miracle occurs, he will definitely hang for this." Farouk gulped another tot of the rum as he explained the situation from his point of view.

With the composure of a professional, Barrister Yejide smiled and responded, "it isn't over until it's over. From the way I see things, this could be a game changer."

"Game changer ke?" Farouk retorted.

"Yes. I don't have a plan yet, but I don't intend to give up on my friend."

They continued their conversation till the bottle was empty.

Emeka was transported back to his cell. He wouldn't stop laughing hysterically all through the ride. His strange behavior left the transporting officers clueless and they just let him be.

On their way they branched at the hospital to collect his blood sample for the DNA test. When the news of his wife's death finally got to him the laughter ceased. His expression was emotionless. He didn't cry or beat himself up about it. He would lurk quietly in a dark corner of his cell all night.

Osato grieved for her family. She had lost her sister and mother. Her father, whom she presumed was innocent was rotting in jail, and her husband wouldn't even see her. Tayo moved into his mother's apartment with Johnson, Mark and Brian, thereby leaving Osato to her world of deep regret and loneliness. There are days when she'd summon up courage to visit Emeka. Other days she just smoke and drank; a habit birthed by frustration. The only company she had was her baby brother Emeka, Osahon's son, whom she was left to nurse.

After several days of lying in the mortuary, Osahon's corpse was buried in a private cemetery with a procession which was arranged by Mrs. Coker, with Tayo and Osato in attendance. The couple struggled to talk to each other as the former only managed to express his condolences. Osato wailed like a child as she watched her mother being lowered into the ground. Mrs. Coker couldn't hold back her sympathy. She walked over to her son and engaged him in a mother-son conversation.

"Tayo, I understand your grievance towards Osato. I cannot claim to know how you feel. I am a woman, we make mistakes. I am a mother, and that's why I am telling you this. Go back to your wife. Forgive her. More than you, she has lost so much. You need each other now than ever before." Tears poured from Tayo's eyes as his mother counseled him. He looked at Osato and whispered,

"Mama she hurt me. It is because of her that I killed my wife. Osasu wouldn't have died if all these never happened. Mama no! This is hard for me too." He wept on. His mother drew him closer and hugged him.

"The calabash has broken. The water it holds has been spilled. Son, pick up the pieces and remould. Make it more beautiful than before and fetch clean water. Don't do this for anyone, not even for me. Do it for yourself and for the kids."

She kissed his cheek. She went to Osato and said to her, "your husband is waiting for you." Osato walked up to Tayo and knelt down.

"I am sorry." She apologized

By the next court sitting, the DNA result was available and admissible as evidence. Emeka wasn't the father to Osato and her sister. The prosecutor hinged his case on this fact, stating that Emeka was responsible for George's death and was the prime suspect in Osahon's murder. Farouk paid utmost attention while waiting for Barrister Yejide's game changer. It was the first time since becoming a S.A.N that he was being given a run for his money. Farouk felt there was possibly no further ways to prove that Emeka was innocent with Osahon dead and the perpetrators at large.

Barrister Yejide finally stepped forward,

"My Lord, I'd like to introduce a new witness." He adjusted his gown when the judge ruled in his favour.

"Go ahead. This court will admit your witness."

"Can Mr. John Elliot please step forward?" he announced. The court murmured as a tall and light complexioned man approached the witness box. It was obvious that he was a relation of the deceased George Elliot. After swearing an oath Barrister Yejide began his examination of the witness.

"Can you please introduce yourself to this court?"

"My name is John Elliot." He answered with precision.

"What is your relationship with George Elliot?"

"I am his younger brother and doctor."

The Barrister adjusted his wig and continued.

"Please tell us about your brother's health condition while he was alive."

"He suffered from depression which was caused by his diagnosis of prostate cancer." He answered astutely, but one could sense the grief he held back as he answered. He presented George's medical file and credentials to the court and it was admitted as evidence. The examination continued.

"Before the unfortunate incident that claimed his life, how long did he have to live?"

"Two months. Chemotherapy didn't help much."

Barrister Yejide made a dramatic turn to face the court and he got their attention. They eagerly awaited his next question or line of action. Farouk paid intense attention and Emeka was rather confused. He couldn't fathom what his friend was up to.

"I am sorry for your loss John. On a final note can you please tell this court in few words about what transpired between George and yourself the last time you saw him?" A glint of a smile played on Yejide's face, this was apparently the game change trigger.

The doctor took a long drag of breath and proceeded.

"The last time I saw him he was angry. He told me about his intention to get back his girls before he died. I advised him against it. I didn't think it was wise for him to just show up after twenty years of having another man perform his duty. He stormed out of my house. Three weeks ago I was called to come and identify his corpse." He rounded off with mild tears.

Then the counter attack.

"Your honour, I put it to this court that the deceased George Elliot was a time bomb waiting to explode. He was a dying man who was desperate to claim a responsibility he walked away from.

He was a vengeful man who took my client in a hostage situation." He faced the court,

"Why should such an innocent man have a loaded gun if he meant no harm? He isn't so innocent after all. He knew he was dying, so he came prepared to die if that was what it would cost him to claim the girls who only recognize my client as their father. My client was only protecting his family. What he did was in self-defense."

He approached the judge with another file.

"This is the case file from Ipaja police station where the incidence was reported to by my client. The officers who arrived at the scene reported that the state of the sitting room showed a struggle between two men.

The pictures of the scattered sofa are all inside this file.”

He handed the file over to the judge who admitted it as evidence before continuing.

“Therein are the statements everyone who was present that day, including late Mrs. Idemili and Musa. They all recounted that it was in self-defense. What changed? My client’s wife became bitter because of the revelation of his intention to file for divorce after she put to bed and plotted this to get back at him.”

There was a round of exclamations in the courtroom before it was restored to order by the registrar.

“As we speak there is an ongoing investigation to unveil who sold the evidence to her. The gun was logged in as evidence, how did she come across it? Please note My Lord that one of the prosecutor’s witnesses, Musa lied under oath. His initial statement contradicts his testimony in this court; a crime punishable under the law. I’d also like to state that the accused wife’s testimony emphasized on him as the culprit, contrary to Musa’s words that Tayo and Emeka are the masterminds of the incidence. Why the contradictions? Everything about this case points to conspiracy. My Lord, my client is being framed. He is an easy going man without any history of violence. He is not guilty. I adopt my final written address, which sums up to my client being discharged and acquitted of this charges.”

The court adjourned judgment for a fortnight. The courtroom erupted with noise after the judge took his leave. Osato ran to her father and told him everything would be fine.

Epilogue

Barrister Yejide sat comfortably on the couch, his friend sitting across him.

"How do you feel now?" he asked him after drinking from the glass of cold water the house help served him.

"The price of freedom comes at a cost. I am glad it didn't mean spending the rest of my life in jail." Emeka replied after letting out a deep cough.

"The doctor said I will get better. I hope mine won't be one of the situations where people contracted terminal illness due long time of incarceration. I must admit, I honestly don't understand this cough." He coughed again; this time he drank a little water out of his cup to ease the pain.

Barrister Yejide showed some concern, "Pele."

"Thank you my friend." Emeka drank another glass of water. "So, I invited you here for two reasons."

"Okay..." Yejide nodded as he temporarily looked away from the cup he was refilling with juice.

"I want to adjust my will. Life has tweaked even me so this adjustment is almost inevitable."

"Okay. I agree that there should be an adjustment to the will. Just tell me what you want and I'll come up with a draft before the end of the week. What's the other thing?" Yejide asked.

Emeka let out another cough and proceeded.

"Have you spoken to Farouk recently? Has any progress been made as regards the men who murdered Osahon?"

"No" Yejide responded sharply. "You are an amazing personality, you know. You are seated in that chair a free man today because she is dead. That woman was ready to send you to the gallows."

"Hmmm" Emeka sighed, "women, so unpredictable."

About Me

Oluwasegun Femi Fragile is a graduate of Philosophy from the Ekiti State University. He writes foods (recipes) and cook books. He loves to be referred to as the Cooking Pen or Fragile as popularly called. He is a content developer and creative director. He blogs at www.femifragile.com where he features original and creative pieces consistently. He is an avid reader and a passionate art lover.



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