

A DREAD IN THE SPINE

They saw visions. Now, they are being kidnapped.

A Thriller Novel

Akintayo Akinjide

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Contents

1. A Grand Reunion
2. The First
3. The Visionaries
4. Compromising
5. Error 404
6. Imprisoned in Knowledge
7. Disappeared
8. Meddlers
9. Baseline
10. Hoping
11. The Voyage
12. Grassed
13. The Good Old Path
14. The Regrets
15. Fireflies
16. Let Nosa Know
17. Pulling Chloe out of The Set
18. Maybes and Wonders

Read First

The story happened in Fortunecity, a private island in Nigeria. In The Year 2016.

The private Island is divided to Greencity, Brownvalley, Blacktown, and Suncity.

1 A Grand Reunion

Nosa checked the message that made his phone vibrate and hissed.

Nosa Obaigbenwen answer your phone. A lot is at stake. People are dying. Money is involved. Huge money. And you need to save the world. – Mr. Johnson Owojobi.

Nosa hissed again as he pocketed his phone and banged on the door. ‘Let me in’.

‘No. You’re a pastor’s son, Moriah yelled from within the house.

‘Let me in’, Nosa shouted as he stared at the handle of the door and repeatedly pulled the doorknob. On a normal day, he would have kicked it in, but he wouldn’t want to do anything reckless in her presence anymore.

‘No. You’re not coming in. Hop away and be a good boy before your father comes to pull your ear and drag you away’.

‘Moriah, open this door’, he said through clenched teeth. ‘Open this door...Open this door’.

‘Nosa, you’re not coming into my house. Haven’t I given you space enough? Don’t want you in my life’.

‘Never. I know you do. I know you just want to be like your all-righteous reverend father. You want to be a son like him. No. You shouldn’t be like your father. Your mighty-in-holiness father’.

‘You see? You...see? We are pastors' children for Pete’s sake and shouldn’t be seen together. Not the way you want’.

Nosa backed the door and slid down to the ground. There was no way he would leave her compound without seeing her. She was the reason he was still sane and still went to church regularly. For eight years, the only prayer on his lips and the only desire in his heart were to have her back. Thinking about her had invaded him and his marriage, and the intensity of his matrimonial rough bed.

‘Why did you leave the gate ajar if you were bent on not seeing me? You would have shut it the moment you saw me. You wanted me. We both know that’.

He hit the back of his head on the door repeatedly and waited for her response. His phone rang. He brought it out of his pocket, saw the name of the caller, and hissed: Mr. Johnson was calling his private line again. That could only mean one of two things: there was a mini-war somewhere in someone's life or something beyond the Police’s control was happening. He should pick up the call, but he wasn’t in the mood to listen to the words of anyone that wasn't Moriah.

If the police were that desperate, all they had to do was to call-back Shayla: his mistress, their most respected investigator, who was on probation for torturing a witness. The Fortuncity

Police Force was such that didn't allow mishandling of suspects. According to the Inspector General, Keisha Olajoku, the private island would be a role model to the Nigerian Police as a whole. So, Shayla had to be placed on probation for such act.

Seeing that Mr. Johnson's disturbance was getting to its height, Nosa changed the phone's audio profile to vibration.

'Moriah, you have to open this door. You are not your father. You're not a Bee. I know'.

'Nosa, an apple doesn't fall far from its tree. I want to be recognized as a Pastor's daughter. I started changing my lifestyle. I love my Bee's way now'.

'No, you don't. Open this door'.

He sat still, expecting her to open the door. She was assertive, but, he knew she would budge. She always did. Maybe never to others, but to him, she always did.

'Nosa. I'm the bad child here. We both know that. My own Bee calls me Jezebel. Can you imagine that? A father calling his own daughter Jezebel. Even your Bee called me a whore; that I came to destroy your life. He said... What was that he said...? Err... Yes... "How did you find me?"'

Nosa remembered the day his father called Moriah a whore, he felt like removing the old man's teeth and ramming them down his throat. Whenever they talked, his father still always rejoiced that he married Chloe and not Moriah. But, Moriah was his choice and she would forever be. She had lived in his heart ever since he knew her, and would remain in his heart till he gave up the ghost. In his heart, he had built a mansion for her. Every other lady that came into his life had lived in the quarters of this mansion, but would never be allowed to take a single peek at the interior of the mansion.

'I will put the man to death one day. One shot to the head, and one to the chest. To take him away. I'm not like my Bee of a father. You know me... Moriah... You...know...me'.

'Nosa, you have a wife, Chloe. She is good for you. She is even rich. Damn rich. She is good for you. I'm not the type of woman for you. I heard she is buying all the lands in the Fortuncity. That's a good woman for you. I never was. I never will be. Both of our parents saw it, and they made sure we weren't together. They knew I would ruin your life. I wouldn't want you to go to church regularly, and they were right'.

'I wouldn't want to go church before too. Who cares about the secret abode of hypocritical Christians?'

'You see? That's what I'm saying'.

'Don't tell me that crap. Our parents didn't run away. Did they? They weren't the ones that spent a lifetime to escape from me. The only time I saw you was when my children died'.

His phone rang again. Mr. Johnson was calling again. He returned the phone to his pocket.

'Nosa, my boyfriend would soon be here. Do you know I have a boyfriend? An actual boyfriend. Not virtual reality'.

'Let me see you and I'll leave'.

‘No. Don’t want to see you...’

‘You’ve seen me today’.

‘Didn’t you see the way I ran back inside the house when I saw you? It could only mean one thing - Don’t want to see your onerous, reckless face’.

He was angry at her right now. He got up, rested his head on the door, and banged the door repeatedly. ‘Mo...Ri...Ah... Open this door’.

He rested on it, and they were both thrown into an awkward silence. There was no way he would leave without seeing her, touching or even hugging her. Then, Mr. Johnson called again. Whatever the Police force was calling him for was definitely big. And he knew Mr. Johnson, he esteemed his money and his time over any agent. If Nosa didn’t pick up his calls, he would pass the job to someone else. However, there was no way Nosa would receive any call or even leave that place until she opened the door. What was money when one's mind wasn't in the business of making it?

For eight years, he had searched everywhere for her. But, since she was the most-wanted hacker in Fortunecity, it was easy for her to erase all of her information, and everything that pertained to her. He had spent a lot of money on searching for her and would have continued doing so if they didn’t find her. Her father, after two years, believed she was dead, but Nosa never gave up on her. He hired a lot of computer geeks, who kept doing his bid, to find her. But to no avail.

So, when one of them called him that morning that he got wind of her, Nosa left his breakfast in a hurry as if he was being chased by a police dog. When he got to her place, he knocked the door repeatedly, and then he hid behind walls. His informant had told him about the number of cameras focused on the street and the house. So, it was easy to start spotting the hideous gate, which he escaped like he did those crazy traps she used to set for their practices and games when they were still together years before; before he finally proposed to her and asked for her hand in marriage.

When she got to the gate, she was looking perplexed, but he remained in hiding, watching her and hoping she wouldn’t run away like the criminals he always chased before he quit being regarded as a policeman.

‘Wow...’ she said as she looked everywhere in the street. ‘Whoever you are, you are very good. How you did it that all my cameras didn’t even catch a shadow of you is intriguing. I know someone that was reckless but could still manage to escape all cameras. He was good at counter surveillance, and I would give him the credit for that any day. Yet, he can’t find me right now. So whoever you are, let me see your smelly face. At least, to know who could beat Nosa’s record’.

He waited a bit and watched her top hour-glass, almost red, body shift from side to side. She didn’t change a bit in her dressing. Her artificial long lashes blinked repeatedly, making him wish he could run to her and hug her like a baby, whose mother was returning from a long journey. Her hair was cut into a Galaxy style of low-cut, with the middle portion dyed gold, and a parting adorning the side of the hair. She wore a very short black skirt and an armless yellow

blouse that had the drawing of a tongue sticking out of a mouth. Those were enough to make her look sultry, but she loved to make it very glaring. Her lips were brushed with a little pink lipstick.

For some unfathomable reason, she just felt it would do her no good if the world knew her as a geek. She preferred to be termed a bimbo, sassy, or prostitute. But being seen as a geek, wearing glasses, or having a drooling look wasn't her thing.

After watching her for a while playing with her black choker with her hand that was adorned with a wing bracelet, Nosa swaggered out. Upon seeing him, she screamed and sprinted into the house. He pursued her, making sure he bolted the gate behind him. Since then, he had been trying to gain entrance into the house.

After a while of refusing to open the door for him, she opened the door and rushed to hug him. She giggled as she did so. He also smiled. Then, he planted a kiss on her lips.

'Nosy', she whispered as she kissed him as if the meteors from the skies were burning the earth, and they were having their last kiss. 'You are turning to a bad person. You're married. You shouldn't be kissing me. I don't want that for you. I want you to be good'.

'I thought we reserved being good for Chloe'.

Moriah swallowed hard and wanted to continue talking about how he was recklessly throwing the perfect world he had, but he placed a finger on her lips. Nosa wasn't ready to think of anything or anyone. At that time, he wanted to be a zombie or like a member of an agitated crowd- he wanted to be led by his desire. He lifted her, and carried her into the room, to the bed. She was definitely going to hold him bound there with her ravenous way of kissing. He was ready to give up the world for her.

However, the moment he climbed the bed after her, her phone rang from the other end of the room. She paused, panting hard. They stared into one another's eyes for a few seconds.

'I know that ringtone. I have to answer this call', she said as she rolled off his body. For the first time since they entered, he noticed that she had unbuttoned his red checked-shirt.

'Don't... It's like that bottle of urine'

'Yuck! When did you become Raphael?'

'I never became Raphael, we only changed roles. He became me'.

'Yes, he suddenly became the bad boy and you turned to a good daddy's boy because of Mr. King's daughter, which is good for you anyways'.

'Maybe you're right. But if you pick up that call you will be opening that bottle of urine', he said as he pulled her hand. It was soft and was worth holding till eternity.

'Have to go', she muttered and let her hands slip off his, and inhaled louder.

All of them in the clique could never forget the bottle of urine. When he first met Chloe during their secondary school days, they all loved her because she was the only daughter of a flamboyant and wealthy father, unlike their own fathers. Despite their own fathers' wealth, despite being the children of respected, popular and rich Pastors, they weren't given enough

pocket-money to their school. Nosa's father even made sure he gave him the same amount as that of the son of the poorest woman in his church. His father ensured Nosa was with him, when he jokingly asked the woman, who was too happy to reply such question, the amount she gave her son as feeding allowance.

At the advent of Chloe's immaculate arrival, she was generous and lavished them with the money her wealthy father gave them, which they all loved. However, when Nosa began to hang out more with her than with Raphael and Moriah, Raphael decided to teach him a big lesson.

He urinated in an opaque bottle, sealed the bottle with shoe gum, and hid it for two weeks. When he was sure he would get the effect he needed, he excitedly handed the bottle to Nosa, telling him to check out his newest experiment. Raphael wasn't known for conducting experiments. So when he received the wrapped bottle from him, Nosa was excited that his friend was finally becoming dedicated to something other than fantasizing about girls that he was too timid to talk to. More so, he would have never suspected that Raphael would be capable of doing such crazy things since Nosa was the one with the evil schemes. When he opened the bottle and was faced with the content of the bottle, he yelled in horror. The stench made him feel like vomiting his intestine, so he recklessly dumped the bottle on the floor. Everyone around ran away, including Chloe.

'That's for deserting your friends', Raphael shouted as he and Moriah ran away, giggling. Later that night, they all made out and laughed at people's reaction.

He smiled on the bed as he reminisced about the event of that day. However, as Moriah returned from making the call, he knew from her face that something was wrong. She picked her cloth and wore it.

'I told you, it's a bottle of urine.'

'Yes...My boyfriend is your opaque bottle of urine. He is coming'.

'Tell him I'm here with you', Nosa said as he began to button his shirt.

'To gain what? To what end? I don't do married men. I can't lose in two ways'.

'I can leave all that for you. I can leave Chloe, my bee, my blind, loyal mother, and my siblings. I will leave them all'.

'That's rash, reckless and... If you do that, my eight years of running away from you would be in vain or what are you talking about?'

'But I can. I just want to marry you. I didn't say I won't wait. I asked you to marry me, didn't I? But, you said no...'

'Yet, you won't leave me. You didn't follow your heart to Chloe. She was your choice. You need to be with her'.

'Are you mocking me? So, you seriously thought the best option was to run away?'

She straightened her cloth and turned away from him to watch her desktop computers beep continuously. There was no way he would understand what she loved about programming and all

the stuff that followed it. It was too boring. The only thing he loved about computer was the action and crime games, which she made him love.

She turned towards him as she grabbed her makeup bag. 'I did the right thing. It's time to go'.

'Don't give me that crap. You could have asked for...'

'I'm not getting younger. That's by the way, I'm going shopping for Christmas'.

His phone rang, and this time it was Chloe calling. Only a few people had that number and they knew it was his emergency number.

'Chloe...?' He said as he hurriedly picked the call.

'Mr. Johnson had been trying to find you?'

'Okay'.

Moriah mouthed that he shouldn't let her know that she was near him.

'I sense this would be another big explosive case. If you need any money just tell me'.

'Yes dear', he said as he disconnected the call. She never cared about the money he would rake into the family's account. She had the money to feed hundreds of generations from their family. The only thing she had always wanted for him was to have the name, the popularity as one of the best private investigator in town. She hoped to help him achieve his dream of starting a world known Private investigating company. But, as he told her, he loved all of his team working in the shadow, and not displayed like a signboard.

He dialed Mr. Johnson's number and listened to him ramble about how he had been trying to reach him all this while. Moriah was bent on her computer, and she pointed five fingers at him to indicate that he had five minutes left to leave her house. He nodded as he moved towards the door.

'We have a job for you. It's a big pay. Some organizations are coming together to pay big and I thought it had to be you. You will get what we need within a few days. I don't know how you do it but you just do', Mr. Johnson said the moment their phone got connected. Those were some of the reasons he loved Mr. Johnson - he was always hungry for the money, and always had a way of making the agents working for him feel they were the best in the world.

'I know. How much is your cut this time?'

'Ah ahn! You're too blunt. As if I live my life for the money'.

'As if your blood is not made of currency'.

'I don't. I live to save lives. If I live for the money, I would have been the kidnapper and the company to find them. But no. I work honestly and have the best sets of guys at my beck and call'.

'How much are we talking about here?'

'Thirty percent...'

‘Let me talk to the people myself’.

‘No... You talk to me. They think I’m the investigator. You talk to me. Thirty percent is not too much’.

‘That’s because they are all fools. Or I’ll send hackers to get the message off your phone, and probably leave a lot of viruses to tell you that you can’t be reaping off people all year while staying in your office, growing bigger than the world’s population’.

‘Nosa Obaigbanwen... You don’t want to try rubbish with me. You don’t want to try it. I’m a typical Nigerian. I will show you the true meaning of life. What’s always wrong with you men, you don’t even trust us, your agents, again?’

‘Just say something’, Nosa said as he walked out of the house, and sighted Chloe’s bicycle parked in a corner. A lot of memories flooded back and brought a smile to his lips as he remembered how they all would race with their different bicycles. He had a feeling that in a short while he would make his way back to Chloe’s house, the bedroom, and probably her life.

‘Two million naira’.

‘Tell me the truth’.

‘Do you see me as a joker? I’m a businessman, I don’t joke with my time, my life with anything. I tell the truth’.

‘I know. And such lifestyle would kill you soon. Just tell me the truth’.

‘It’s two million’.

‘What the... You mean to say... What are we looking for?’

‘Have you been following the news?’

‘It’s depressing’.

‘That implies that you have been tracking the cases of the kidnapping of some people’.

‘Yes. Chloe had been feeling really sad for them’.

‘Yes. I feel their pain. I understand her own pain too. I’m sorry about those beautiful women being kidnapped. I cried too, you know. I cried. They should have brought this case to us soon. I cried that the world is not seeing what we at Eagle Eyes can do. That they are neglecting our help. It’s such people that neglect God almighty. But at least, they came back to their senses. That is where we come in. They called me. I was happy at last. We would be the hero. You, Nosa, would be their knight in shining armor’.

‘That’s what you always wanted. You are nothing but a...’

‘Your money bag... Be calm and let me finish my sentence. Don’t be rude to your source of wealth’.

‘Provide the details’.

'I'll send the details to your email. The name of the recent one is Victoria Akachi Amadi... She saw heaven too and has just been kidnapped. You need to be her prince in shining armor, and remember, whose company and name you are representing. They are paying us to find all the missing women. Bear our flag. Let them know Eagle Eyes Security is the best'.

Nosa hissed and disconnected the phone. Moriah hurried after him as he trudged away. Then he remembered the bike, turned and pointed at it. She turned towards the place he pointed to, turned to him, smiled, and covered her face. Then, she winked and burst into their favorite song- 'Four Years' by Nigerian musicians 'Stylplus'.

'Yeah! Seriously. Oh! I miss those days'.

'Me too'.

'How's Chloe by the way?'

'Chloe is there. Reverting to her corner'.

'Hiding in her *Chloeset*', Moriah said and nodded. 'What of her psychiatrist, she still sees him, right?'

'Not for long now'.

'Well, Mr. King is dead'.

'Even before his death'.

When he got to the gate, he turned to plant a kiss on her lips, but she withdrew. 'Don't come back to this house this week. You're married. I have a boyfriend and we are both doing fine'.

'No, we are not. We are two stupid lonely fools, who couldn't leave their deceptive life to enter the real ones. We are DiCaprio, we are living in our inception, in a dream...'

'At most, twice a month'

'Twice a week...'

She stared at him longingly. 'Twice a week and nothing more. Not even a friendly call. Must we even see?'

'Not necessarily. I will just have to call you daily'.

'Kay. I support two days. And as for Raphael, I haven't forgiven him'.

'Me too. I can't take the news off my mind. The next time I see him I'll let him know he has no right to see you'.

She shook her hands at his face as if she wanted to smash his face with the hands. 'I was invariably telling you not to let him know where I stay, that I'm back'.

Nosa nodded and winked as he hurried to where his IVM Fox- made by Innoson - a Nigerian, was parked. It was high time he went home. Just as he entered the car, someone shouted from the end of the street. 'Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand. Heaven and hell

are real. The end time is near. Get your copy of this vision about hell. You need to see how people are dealing with sins. Come to Jesus’.

‘Indeed’, Nosa murmured and started the car and hissed.

Moriah slumped on the door to her house when she returned to it and slid down to the rug, smacking her lips repeatedly. It took her a great effort not to jump over Nosa the first time she saw him that day. Every moment of the eight years of living away from him, she had had to restrain herself from typing his name into her giant computers because he had warned her right from the time that he never ever wanted her to be his guiding angel and that was her fault. With the level at which she tracked everything about him, he had to tell her to stop. Those days, she was always calling him whenever someone was following him for more than ten minutes. She had set her computer's algorithm to take minute-count of everyone around him, and she got a beep the moment anyone had spent more than ten minutes around him.

Seeing him alone made memories crowd her head as she remembered those days on the road, together in the university, the rituals, the little fights, and the fun they shared. She burst into tears and shook her head. If she hadn't been stupid, she wouldn't have lost him to Chloe.

As she was still deep in her thought, someone knocked again. She sighed and hissed as she flung the door open, moving all cylinders to the gate. Nosa was back again after she told him, her boyfriend was on the way. Although she had friend-zoned Dennis, she preferred to flaunt him as her boyfriend, any day, anytime. Luckily, he also kept at being called her boyfriend, with the hope of her agreeing to be his girlfriend, which was totally impossible.

As she marched towards the gate, she jiggled and chuckled. Then, she inhaled and made sure she stabilized herself and her emotions.

‘Nosa, why are you here again? The sight of you alone disgusts me’.

Just as she touched the door, her alarmed blared. Moriah was so surprised. The alarm didn't blare when Nosa was there the other time. That meant someone was coming with something harmful like a gun. She hurriedly pressed the monitor system on the gate, and Shayla's face popped on the screen. The dark shades she wore couldn't make Moriah decipher her expression at that time, but what else could she have wanted than to get some things that were beyond the government's system?

‘The authority has found me again’, Moriah murmured as she opened the gate, shifted to a side and gestured towards the compound. Shayla clicked her lower lips and entered, her stomach shooting out a bit like someone that had just finished eating three plates of food. She fidgeted, glanced about, and removed her shades as Moriah locked the door. Shayla was a slim lady with short dark hair, who walked as if she was skipping. She wore crazy jeans trousers, tennis boots, and a striped shirt that she rolled at the arms. She had around her neck a silver round cable chain, one that Moriah had always desired, but have never gotten the effrontery to buy.

‘What the hell was Nosa doing here?’

‘You know Nosa...’

‘I'm his mistress’.

‘Oh! The home wrecker’.

‘How dare you call...? He loved me first... But that’s not a concern for now... Was he here to find out about me?’

Moriah shifted back as she stared at her for a while before hissing. ‘What do you see yourself as? So, you think you’re the special one here that Nosa would run down here just to ask about you as if he is foolish? No. Don’t ever think of yourself as special. You’re just a bottle of urine’.

Shayla's hands danced on the handle of her bag. ‘Bottle of? I want to know if he has something on me...’

Moriah spun twice and felt like slapping Shayla, but knew there was no need to do that. ‘He came to see me. Just me. Not for any business... Before you became his mistress, I was his only love. Even till now, I’m his goddess. He worships me’.

Shayla batted her. ‘You this stupid bimbo... I will crush you... I will crush you... Who are you? I know Nosa, he doesn’t deal with...’ Shayla flipped her hands up and down with the fingers pointing to Moriah.

Moriah burst into laughter. ‘Do you want me to show you my wet rough bed or the parts of my body he pressed? Or if you so wish, I can let you go to him now to get a look at his lips. The lipstick stains would still be there, imprinted on his cloth. He loves everything about me. So if you don’t have anything to do here than to gloat about being a mistress, leave right now’.

Shayla’s hand dusted invisible dirt from her jeans as she stared at Moriah with starry eyes. She swallowed and panted repeatedly, and Moriah hoped she would leave before her silence turned to rage. After what seemed like ages, Shayla placed her hand into her bag and withdrew a pistol. Moriah shifted back and raised her hands.

‘Hey! I’m the good guy here. I told him to leave me for all its worth. He is just like a virus, the more I block him the more he finds his way back to me’.

‘You have to stop seeing him’, Shayla said as she strolled towards Moriah. ‘But that’s for that, I need information from you’.

Moriah dropped her hands, straightened and allowed herself to have a bit of confidence, despite the gun with Shayla, she moved closer. ‘Why the gun? You know the deal. Money on the left, your information on the right’.

‘I can get your money and would fund you any day any time and would still give you more’.

Moriah smiled brightly. ‘Now, you’re talking. Spit it out’.

‘I need information on your subject...’

Moriah frowned. ‘My subject? I don’t have any... No, I can’t give you anything on him’.

It was Shayla’s turn to have a creased face. She lowered her gun and raised it again. ‘Why? What’s stopping you? Are you now placing your feelings over money now? Hot, busty, geeky Moriah would put her emotion before money’.

'He made me promise not to ever track him'.

'Then, you're both mad. He wants to ruin something for us. For all of us'.

Moriah stared at her for a while as she watched the eyes of the silent Shayla. 'What do you mean by ruining something for us? Who and who are the us? Me and you? When did we become 5 and 6?'

'I think he is going after the missing women'.

'I don't have anything to do with that. We have a non-disclosure agreement. I have my lawyers on my speed dial'.

'Idiot. Some of the things we are using for our operations would be discovered if Nosa is involved. He is brute at this job. He is ruthless and reckless and would make sure he finds every little detail. We can't let him go on. I need something. I mean anything to just be on the safer side always'.

Moriah had made that promise and even her own freedom or life would never make her back down from it. She shook her head. Shayla got the message and brought the gun to Moriah's head.

'Give me something. I have goons around me, but you are the one with the microchips things. Ones I can use on him. I need those to succeed. Not some whatnot. I need to get Nosa's playbook'.

'Then, kill me'.

Shayla looked perplexed. Her eyes roamed on Moriah and she was sure Shayla could see the defiance in her. Nothing in the world would make her go back on her word, especially the one she made to Nosa. Shayla turned and shrugged. She bagged the gun and removed a knife. Moriah shifted back.

'You want to use a knife where your gun failed', Moriah shouted and dashed for the door of her room. Right now, Shayla was planning to hurt her, and the only thing she could do would be to escape from her. Indoor, she had the best advantage over anyone, no matter how powerful.

'If you don't give me what I need, I'll hurt his baby. I will kill his last baby and I will make him believe you did it. Your subject would detest you. You said he worships you. He would destroy your shrine and would scorch it to the ground', Shayla shouted as she raised the knife.

'You can do nothing. You are about to open a bottle of urine. Come on, don't want what would cost you, your life and that of the baby's, Moriah said as she edged towards the door. She was sure that Shayla wouldn't be stupid. Even if she was, she wasn't as reckless as Nosa and she would do the right thing, regardless of what she needed.

However, Shayla was true to her word; she brought the knife to her stomach and creased her face to show she was putting a lot of effort into making sure she was injured. Moriah thought she was joking, but edged forward. When Shayla winced, she knew it was true, after all.

'Stop all these... I will find a way. I will get something to help you monitor him'.

'Soonest?'

'Soonest'.

2 The First

Greenland of Fortunecity had begun to see the deaths and kidnappings of some of its occupants. The whole ordeal started with a simple, sorrowful, but simple news of a Christian being killed. Everyone assumed it was one of those religious bigotries that followed the northern Nigerians into the Island. However, when the death toll rose from a single Christian to six, the authorities began to look for patterns. Then, the killings got an additional phase to it: some of them were being kidnapped, and those kidnapped were Christians that saw visions of hell at one point or the other.

Nosa knew the police would find a solution to the problem, and had refused to heed Chloe's cry to search for them. The Fortunecity Police Force was a combination of people from different countries and tribes. If they put their heads together, they would surely get the missing people in time. Despite that, the number of those kidnapped increased sporadically. The funniest part of it was that the kidnapper had a totally different method from that of the killer's.

Yet, Nosa promised himself that he would never be involved until one of the authorities asked for his help. He was practicing to be a private investigator. Private investigators aren't heroes to the country; they are heroes to individuals. Still, he did his findings once in a while and didn't raise any dust. So, when Mr. Johnson poured his Eagle Eyes' problem on his laps, he was happy he had a folder for it already.

He celebrated as he drove home in a hurry. He had to finish the investigation in time so that he could have a lot of time with the one he loved. There was nothing that could make him sad that day.

However, the moment he entered the house, Nosa was drawn to Chloe's countenance. Of course, she was supposed to be grieving because of the loss she had encountered of recent, but she didn't get the opportunity to really grieve the first loss before another one landed on it. His fear, as he saw her, was that she had finally found the need to talk about her pain, and he wouldn't be around to listen to her. He went near and rubbed her chin.

'Chloe, is everything alright?'

'No', Chloe shook her head that had its long hair the way she loved it; neatly flowing like that of a queen - as she stared at the television. 'Everything is wrong. Terrible things are happening and would happen soon. The taste of the danger is becoming sourer by the second. Its stench is like that of a bottle of forgotten urine.'

'Chloe, everything will be fine'.

'You said that when our daughter...' 'She stopped talking and inhaled sharply. Her high cheekbone, which attracted him to her the first time they met, was now covered in a shadow of sorrow. 'You've been saying this since this menace began to form like dark clouds over Greencity, over Fortunecity, over Nigeria...'

‘Mr. Johnson called me for one of the cases. You know what that means’.

‘That nobody can beat you to finding them? But, you should have sniffed out this killer when it all started’.

‘You know all this hero thing is not my thing. It's Eagle Eyes' thing’.

‘I know you are not Mr. Johnson, but if you had gone, at least, all these might have been avoided’.

‘Do you know what that would have...?’ Nosa stopped as his voice began to rise. He stopped himself from getting worked up. His wife was still grieving over the loss of her father, their daughter, and son. Rather, she was supposed to be grieving over them, but she was always seen with books and biros, watching videos of those that had gone to hell. At night, when she was supposed to sleep, she would be found poring over the books about hell.

‘Immediately I saw the death of the second one, I smelt trouble and suspected that they would be picked off one after the other like guinea pigs. I told you. It is on you like a perfume’.

‘Okay. Chloe, I have to go’, Nosa muttered as he rose from her side. His anger was trying to come out of its tunnel, and he wouldn’t want to allow her to see that side of him, at least not that day. ‘I’ve got to go’.

‘Sniff out this missing one or ones, as many as you can find’.

‘Why are you so...?’

‘Engrossed with them? Instead of crying over my dead family members, I've decided to find something better to do than to cry over people that have turned to dust. I want to feel joy on my skin again’.

‘If it were better, I would have appreciated it’.

‘It’s better. I have something taking my mind off all these evil that the world is making me face’.

Nosa sighed, sat beside her, and patted her shoulder as he used his other hand to rub his own beard. Maybe her reaction and love for these things was her way of grieving for everyone she had lost. ‘I’m sorry. Maybe I should have found them’.

‘Maybe... Even if you didn’t find them, you would have made me happy... Can you smell the joy on me? It's beautiful from inside out. Why? You have finally listened to my plea. I don't know why you always brush my advice aside like a roving dirt’.

‘Things will be better. I will find these missing women’.

‘If not all, just this newest missing one would be impressive’.

‘I'll find them’, Nosa said as he rose to leave. She nodded and rubbed his arm.

‘Don’t use that belt. It’s torn’.

‘How did you know the belt I’m using? Moreover, my clothes will cover it’.

She gave him a cold glare and mimicked him in a way that always fascinated him. 'Does that sound good to your ears?'

He sighed. 'Okay'.

'The other one is better. In fact, give me the belt now. I don't want you having ideas in your head about replacing it behind my back'.

'But...'

'No. You need to start representing this family and your company well. Such fashion taste is bad. It irks me. Also, wear that new black Jeans trousers. It's Christmas tomorrow, enjoy the festive mood'.

Nosa grudgingly removed the belt, gave it to her and strolled into the room, where he picked the bulky ridiculous belt she said she loved, and changed the trousers. He would do anything to make her happy until her grieving time was over. Wherever those ladies were, he wasn't ready to start a wild goose chase. He needed to search for them strategically. Like Moriah would advise, he needed to be careful.

'I need to be careful', he said as he picked the folder he came for.

Then, as he was about to leave the room, he sighted the things that might help his new case; the numerous books, CDs, and DVDs she bought to keep herself busy and knowledgeable about hell or to take her mind off her numerous losses laid on her side of the room. He couldn't understand why she became engrossed with those horrible, money-making books, but he packed them.

'Will you need these books in a few days?' he said as he came out with the load of books, CDs, and DVDs and dumped them on the table.

'Wow. This is really good. They would enlighten you. Take as many as you want...'

He boomed. 'These ones. They are nothing, but money-making instruments. I just need them to find the missing women'.

'There are a lot of things you should know. If not for my bad network provider, I would have sent something to you over WhatsApp. I will send it when the network comes back on'.

'I've told you to use Glo data bundle'.

'Typical Nigerian. Glo can't help me. Have you seen people's complaint about them?'

'That's a handful of their total users. We...'

She glanced at the clock. 'This is just 7:30 pm. Try to come back in time. But, in case you can't, hold some clothes and enough money to stay at a hotel. But you must come home tomorrow for Christmas'.

'Yes, mummy', he said, kissing her forehead.

'I'll take your IVM G20'.

'That's a seven-seater'.

'I'll be comfortable in it for this mission'.

'Alright! It's yours. It's ours'.

'Yes, mummy'.

'Be a good boy' she said and became fixated on the television. Her knees shook like a leaf in the wind as another breaking news displayed on the TV, detailing that another woman had been kidnapped, and the news pointed to the fact that she was also one of the ladies that saw the visions of hell.

Nosa bent over her, and held her leg in place, making sure he blocked her view of the television. He had tried many ways of talking her out of every other thing that could make her grieve. The real grief was supposed to be that of her family members that were dead. He needed her to do an actual, overbearing grieving over her family member's death. He had done his part, crying like a baby, when they lost their first child to a mild sickness. She did too, but not enough before Mr. Kings died of a heart attack.

Nosa stared into her dark eyes and said, 'we'll find them. I'll find them'.

She nodded. 'Be careful'.

As if tuned to Nosa's thought, someone knocked the door. Nosa wondered how he didn't hear the gate open. Who's there?

'It's me, Mummy Church'.

Chloe had a lot of servants that should have done all the works in the house, but she sent them away after her father's death. She grew up living with servants, and when her father died and wrote in his will that Chloe mustn't do any work directly, she sent all the servants away as payback. The only ones she still allowed were the cook, the gardeners, who came once a day to do their work, and they would leave again. Nosa agreed with her anger against her father, whom she claimed was still trying to control her in his death. He made sure her aunty was a thorn in her flesh.

Nosa hurried to the door the moment he heard Mummy Church's voice. Despite his dislike for her talkativeness, arrogance, slothfulness, he preferred her above all other persons to talk with and to Chloe. No matter how long the one-handed woman stayed with her, Chloe's mind would be taken off the codswallop that the media kept feeding the public.

For some reasons, unlike the way his instinct had helped him, he suspected that he would regret ever taking this case. This instinct had helped him solve a lot of mysteries. Shayla called it detective's instinct. Yet, like his father used to preach, like Paul, he would take up what he knew portended danger and hope to return in good shape or at least better than the last time. Unlike his father, he wasn't going to plant his detective church in Idumwurgha forest of Edo state, Nigeria. He would spread out his tentacles and would know what to do. He sent messages to his teams and activities began the moment he stepped out of the house.

'Nosa, hair is returning to your bald head. Do something about it. And your beard, its shape is... You're becoming bushy'.

'Yes, mummy' Nosa shouted as he marched off into the compound.

'Don't you dare let your feet smell my lawn', she shouted after him, making him jump back into the lane. She was a lover of her garden. He looked at the green carpet grass and knew why he didn't endure their marriage, why he really loved her. Her love for different beautiful things fascinated him and made him stay in love with her all those years.

The first thing he sighted immediately he stepped outside with loads of books, CDs, and DVDs was a tract on the windscreen of his car. He opened his car, dumped the items he was carrying and returned to pick the tract and skimmed it. Its heading read: Hell Is So Real!

He crumbled it into the shape of a ball and threw it into the bin. Smiling at himself, he said, 'this is a good omen. I'll throw this nonsense case like a paper'.

Chloe sat still in fear and could only wish the presence of her Pastor's wife, Mrs. Fowosere alias Mummy Church, would crush her fear of the unknown, of the numerous troubles that had wrapped themselves around her mind. She had jumped from a horrible dream some minutes before Nosa entered the house. Of late, she had been having a constant terrible dream. The recurring dream always featured her going to the lake of fire, being drawn by the evil force of the dreadful place because she gave birth to a child out of wedlock. Probably, that was the reason God made her lose the child.

When she first had the dream, she wasn't sure she had dreamt right. However, when the dream became constant, she was very sure she was it wasn't a figment of her imagination. Dismissing it would have been the top on her mind, but she had read about people that had revelations of hell through dreams. Maybe she was becoming part of those who saw hell. She needed to talk to someone.

That particular day, the dream went on to show the lights of twenty-four people in Greenland. Initially, she thought it was the number of genuine Christians in Fortunecity, but soon discovered that those were the numbers of those that had seen heaven in Greenland. She might have misunderstood it, but she saw the exact number of the missing women gathered in a corner. Three had gone out and the others were fizzling out. However, she saw three others at different locations and hoped those ones would be safe.

She wished one of them would do her good and tell her about heaven and the exact day God would return to the saint. She had meticulously followed their teachings. They were good but she needed one of them to tell her about heaven.

'These things we face per time as Christians', Mummy Church said as she rolled her good hand around the cup. Chloe wondered how she managed to work with one hand. She wasn't sure she as a person would be able to bear it.

'Indeed, the lack of knowledge plays a part, though'.

'How?'

'Not having full access to some knowledge is distraughting'.

Mummy Church nodded in agreement as she stared into space. 'I just felt led to visit you to... maybe, be here with you in this trying time'.

Chloe smiled warily. She wasn't concerned about her grief. It did her no good. Even and despite knowing about Nosa's mistress, Shayla, she preferred to move on with her life than to watch her life drain off her. There were many things she needed to know about heaven. The Bible made her know that only God knows when the kingdom of God would be upon them soon, but he never keeps anything from his saints. Yet, there she was, grasping for a knowledge that had eluded the world.

Suddenly, Mummy Church's phone rang. She struggled with her wallet, where the phone was. Chloe rose to help her get it, but she smiled broadly and shook her head. Chloe understood her and sat back. She would have been defiant, but she preferred to watch Mummy Church as she struggled with her wallet. It took her a while, but in a few seconds, Mummy Church had removed the phone and was already talking as she excused herself to go outside. Chloe watched her leave, hoping Mummy Church would succeed in taking her mind off whatever was happening.

She rose to tend to her flowers in a vase by the window side. Maybe doing that would take her mind off the horrendous turbulence bound for the earth. If what those women said about the soon coming of Christ was true, then she needed to brace herself as well as others.

'Why are you calling me?' Mummy Church said, whispering.

Chloe focused on the blade of the flowers and proceeded to remove the weeds sprouting in the vase. That was how the final day would be; yet, people can recruit others in preparation for that day.

'Stop calling me? I'm around people. I told you. Me and you... The police? No. When we know the right person to trust'.

That piqued Chloe's interest. She stood straight and perched after she had scurried to the door. Why was Mummy Church fusing herself with a case that would lead to the police? That portended that she was involved in something illegal, and it would do her no good to dip herself into anything that would stain her white linen as a Christian. Chloe had to be sure about what Mummy Church was doing before she even gave her any advice on how to remain in the path of God.

'What's wrong with you', Mummy church said and her voice showed a deep sense of frustration mixed with anger. 'Do you want to die or do you want those kidnappers to carry you too...? What's wrong with you? I will get back to you when... Stay where you are. No. Don't even try rubbish. Stay where you are'.

Mummy Church hissed. Chloe ran to her seat, sat and rose the moment the door opened. Mummy Church looked perplexed.

'Is everything alright?'

'That depends on which everything you mean?' Chloe said in a manner that would present her as dejected. 'I want to tend to my flower. It's been calling for mummy since but I don't have its time. I wanted it to have a taste of hunger as human beings do'.

Her cat meowed as it entered the sitting room. She turned it and perfectly mimicked its sound. 'Hey, Joel, come here. Have you greeted Mummy Church?' Chloe's cat stretched. She smiled at it. 'Lazy Joel'.

Mummy Church laughed wryly. 'You and giving non-humans names. Well, you are showing... fulfilling your purpose like God allowed Adam to do by naming animals in Genesis two verse twenty and twenty-one'.

Chloe smiled warily. 'That's cool, being called a child of Adam: it's comforting'.

'No. I don't mean it in a harmful way'

She shrugged. 'Of course, I know. It's just that I'm not a man and not a woman. So, I won't fall into his error of falling for a woman'.

Mummy laughed and went silent for a while. 'There...'

'What?' Chloe turned and looked at her inquisitively. 'Do you think I have the chance of falling to a man?'

'Oh! Woman'.

Chloe's stared at her and watched her eyes danced within its socket. 'I'm not gay. I'm straight and I'm not a lesbian'.

'Of Course. I wasn't thinking of that. You're a child of God. You have retained God in your heart so he won't give you up to the perdition of the world'.

Chloe sighed. 'Good...'

'But you are a woman and you can do worse than Adam... A whole lot.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean...'. She said and sat up well. 'Let's take Adam for example. He was doing fine in the Bible and obeyed God's commandment but things changed'.

'Yes. Satan polluted him'.

'No, he was given Eve'.

'Yes. His bottle of urine. To tend to...'

'Good but when he wanted to lose her or when he perceived that she had sinned. Instead of separating himself like Jesus in Hebrew one nine, he committed a sin because of her. That's why the Bible records that Adam sinned and not Eve. She was deceived into...but he deliberately sinned'.

'Oh! I still don't see where they intertwine. How is that my case?'

'You are... I don't know but I'm sensing that you're afraid of the future... Like Adam. I'm sensing you're still afraid of that sin you committed before you finally gave your life to Christ'.

Chloe felt her mouth go dry like Brooks in the dry season. 'Me? Afraid? I'm not afraid. Maybe you are thinking so because I'm preparing for heaven. The Bible says we should prepare.'

See, I'm not proud of it, but I committed a sin by fornicating with my boyfriend, who later became my husband, and I've seen the repercussion'.

'Of course. But not in a way that is harmful to our health and emotions. God has forgiven you'.

'For my mother too, I know. But there is always a reward'.

'Things clear off when you're in Christ. All sins are cleared'.

'But Mummy Church, my mother died through my hand. She was already a Christian at that time', Chloe said and heaved because she was finally able to talk about her mother, who died because she gave birth to her, an unwanted, born-out-of-wedlock child. 'That's her reward. There's always a reward'.

'That's also one of the things you've stopped tackling. You can see that you need to see a psychiatrist. You're not fine. I'm sorry if I sound rude'.

Chloe laughed. 'Mummy Church o. I'm fine'.

'See, Adam knew that Eve had fallen into error. But he was afraid of being alone. It was like a torture for him. You... Maybe you're afraid of not making heaven... Of-of... Erm.... Being left alone'.

'Shouldn't we all be prepared?'

'We should'.

Chloe grabbed her scissors and pruned the edges of her flowers. That would help her hide her shaking hands from Mummy Church, who made it her duty to frustrate her. There was no way she would have the same fear as Adam. She was definitely putting things in store for the archive of heaven and that wasn't fear; that was prudence. There were no other words to what she was doing than that. The Bible and Jesus said we should watch and pray. She was a watchman but not for the town; for herself.

Mummy Church rose. 'I need to leave. But your husband...Some other people too had been whispering to my husband that you need to cry, to grieve and I can't help but agree with them'.

'Mummy, God giveth and taketh away. I just want to prepare for the future'.

Mummy Church smiled as she edged towards her. Chloe looked at her and craved to have her tan skin. It made her look elegant in the long dark green gown she wore. The flowery pattern on the clothes called her attention and she loved to have a perfectly designed life like that of the cloth.

'This dress is beautiful'.

Mummy Church blushed. 'It's the work of our own Havilah Couture. You know her now?'

'Of course. That fair tall beautiful lady. So, she is a tailor? I never knew'.

'She is. I even saw her taking a picture of your dress last week. As in, that your dress was extremely beautiful'.

'Aww awn. I got it from our Hadassah'.

'Hadassah! The five-k store. My sister, I need to go'.

'Maybe... Or what do you think?'

'What's that?'

'Me? Nothing much. I was just thinking about how it would be good to follow you. Maybe it would help me'.

'Oh that would be good. But I have to attend to something important first. When I return from my... From the person I want to meet, then we can go out together'.

'Hope all is well?'

'Sure. All will always be well with Christians', she smiled as she neared the door, and adjusted her headgear.

'That means, I can follow you?'

Mummy Church bit her lower lips, stared at Chloe for some seconds and shrugged as she turned towards the door. 'You can come, but I hope it won't be stressful for you'.

'Stressful, you say? Remember my husband had been disturbing the whole world that I'm not myself. I think this is the perfect way I can do it and prove to him that I have come to the realization: God giveth and He taketh. Also, I should follow the advice of this other lady that speaks about relationships, *Bimbzspeak*. She said when our spouse is having issues with us and the issue coincides with what others are saying about us, then we are the one at fault. Or don't you think heeding to that is wise?'

'Of course. We should be able to break out of our shell'.

'Mummy, are you sure everything is alright?'

Mummy church stared at her for a moment and rubbed her forehead repeatedly and nodded as if she wasn't sure. Chloe had to take all the restraint in the world to show how happy she was. Now, there was an opportunity to help someone back to the way of Christ. Mummy Church was definitely trailing from something that wasn't of God, and she would be on her neck till she returned to God's way. She was happy with her present feeling. It felt like gold to her. So precious. So cool. She wouldn't let it slip off her hand to the ground, where it might be trampled upon or get the fate of every rusty instrument. Getting people back to the way of God was a medium of making herself happy. She wouldn't give it up for anything.

'I'll be back', Chloe said and ran into the room. A simple gown would do. That was why Hadassah and Konga Nigeria would forever top her mind when it came to gown. The times of things showed that if she wasn't fast about knowing what was happening, she might be one of those left behind on earth.

Within few minutes, they were in her car. Mummy Church had always insisted on driving herself, but her husband, the Pastor, would never agree to her desire. He said he could go to the length of getting her a driver, which she blatantly refused. So, she always transported herself through bikes and public transports or when the Pastor himself took her out.

'Are you sure you're alright?'

Mummy church nodded. Chloe smirked and drove off into the road. When she glanced at the rearview mirror, she saw the three acne that invaded her face. They were getting red and she was sure, one of them would give up in the fight against one another. Yet, she was sure she wouldn't be the one to give up on them. She would make sure she used everything available in making sure they disappeared and never reappeared on her face.

Then, she saw her nosy neighbor waving for her to stop, but she couldn't because their path might not clash. If it was someone like Chloe's Aunt, such woman would have evicted the estate.

They journey through the beautiful roads of Greencity was mesmerizing and felt as if she was going through the grandeur of heaven. Various horrific posters punctuated the different places they passed, and she would have longed for it to be removed if they weren't about hell. She glanced at Mummy Church several times as she tried hard not to fidget. Although she didn't love to put the poor woman in such position, she still needed to help her return to her position of peace.

Mummy Church placed a call to whomever she wanted to meet and told her to meet them at Greencity General Hospital. She wished it also was privatized, she would have gotten a share of it like she did most major companies in Fortunecity and Nigeria. When they got there, they waited a while.

'Hope the person isn't in need of money?' Chloe said as she tried desperately to reduce her intake of the smell of antiseptic, which she detested.

Mummy Church shook her head and tried to smile, but she could only do that while wheezing. She scanned everywhere to be sure the person was not hiding from them, but they saw no one. Mummy Church repeatedly placed a call to the person, but the person refused to pick up the call. Mummy Church rose from her seat and began to move from one place to another. After a little while, she moved outside, and Chloe followed her. Mummy Church looked from one end to another and kept replying Chloe in the negative as regarding fear of any problem. Chloe was sure she could smell trouble, and that Mummy Church might soon lash out at her angrily for being nosy. Maybe she should stop.

Then, someone tapped her. Chloe turned to face her nosy neighbor, who was cuddling her black chubby daughter in her hands. Her clothes were hanging off her shoulder, not because she was a fashionista but because her fashion sense was horrible.

'Mrs. Kings', she said, and Chloe hissed as she knew she would have to talk with the spittle in her mouth. The woman was one of the few people that still called her Mrs. Kings, which she detested as it reminded her of so many unbearable things. Chloe turned to her with a stiff smile and exchanged pleasantries with her.

'I was calling you. I saw your car and was waving at it'.

'Oh! I'm sorry. I thought you were calling someone else'.

Luckily for her, the woman was called by someone else. The nosy woman shouted her excitement and scurried off to meet a scrawny, short, fair woman. She didn't need another nudge to return home because her father-in-law called that he had gotten home. He called her earlier

that he would be coming to their house, not to rest, but because his friend had caused trouble for him. His friend, a Pastor, from Brown Valley, visited him in Edo, and told him that God gave him a duty to do something very important, and requested for a secretive place to do such a thing. Since they were both friends and respected men of God, he gave his friend a place that was deep in the forest. After some days, he visited his Pastor-friend and heard the sounds of wild animals in the said place. When he asked his friend about it, he said God asked him to do that.

Seeing this, he took it upon himself to report his friend to the friend's church and to get people working in a Fortunecity Zoo, to get the animals out of the place. Seeing that people were already gossiping about the issue, his other children, Nosa's younger ones, sent him to Greencity to rest for a few days, and to take his mind off the case.

'Mummy, I hope all is well. I have to leave to meet my father-in-law'.

Mummy Church nodded as if she was glued to the seat, and that she was trying not to cry. Chloe followed her unstable eyes with her own eyes but didn't see anything worth her time. Yet, that behavior was unlike that of Mummy Church, who would have wanted to know why her father-in-law was visiting, and might probably have requested that he came around to her own house. When she looked at Mummy Church's face, she was very sure she could hear her heave, but duty came first.

She rose and left with Mummy Church's goodbye trailing after her. Whatever she was hiding could cause her a great deal of trouble, but since Chloe didn't have the power to stop it again, she would pray for her. She would tell God to help Mummy Church not to fall into perdition and drag the sanctimonious name of the Fowosere in the mud.

She spat out the saliva, entered her car and drove out of the compound with a heavy heart, and hoped to warm a good food for her father-in-law. Luckily any food one wanted had already been prepared by her house help and had been stored in a freezer.

Then, she remembered that she wasn't aware of how Mummy Church would get to her house. Even if she suspected she was about to do something bad, she still had to play her part in making sure her own love for the woman didn't wane. She didn't want to assume she had the money necessary to get home without much trouble. So, she parked the car by the side of the road and jumped out of it with her purse bundled in her hand. She shouldn't be keeping her father-in-law waiting, but it wouldn't be ideal to also leave like that.

Chloe ran to the place they sat, wishing she could just get there and return to her car within seconds. However, the seat was empty, and Mummy Church wasn't anywhere near the bench. She was surprised.

'Ehn... Ehn...' Shouted her Nosy street neighbor, making Chloe towards her. The woman, whose wrapper was slipping and baby was crying, desperately tearing at her mother's cloth.

'You left like that', the woman said and tied her wrapper well. 'I saw that other Mummy you were together, and she said you have gone'.

'She went to the toilet?'

'Yes. That's even true. She had been gone for a while. She went with another woman. I hope all is well?'

'Thank you. Thank you very much', Chloe whispered as she scurried off. 'See me at home'.

'When?'

Chloe rushed off to the toilet, and would have shouted *Mummy Church* if the place wasn't smelling of antiseptic. She held her breathe and moved towards the toilet until she got near the toilet. By this time, she was already hoarding spittle in her mouth, and hoped to spit it out the moment she got the chance.

'Mummy, I have to go to them', a lady said.

'Where do you want to go?'

'I'm coming out of hiding'.

'Patience. The Bible says though the vision might tarry, it would yet...'

'Mummy Church, it's not that type of vision'.

'Are you calling the Bible a lie?'

'This one is the vision of heaven and God wants it'.

'What... What are you saying? Did God show you visions of heaven too?'

'He showed me hell... Heaven. Heaven. Hell. What does it matter?'

'Hope you're not hiding the truth?'

'Mummy, whatever the truth is, I want it out'.

'I'll make sure...'

They became silent for a while. Chloe suspected they were trying to check out if someone was there. So, she removed her shoes, picked them, and ran away silently at first, then wildly. Then, she ran into her nosy neighbor again, who almost fell.

'Mummy, when should I come?'

'This evening. But I would give you something bigger if you can go towards the toilet and turn'.

'Just that?'

Chloe always knew the woman's problem - money. The woman excitedly moved towards the toilet and turned.

Chloe rushed to her car. She just heard of someone that went to heaven. There was no way she would leave Mummy Church to such case alone. But for now, she needed somebody to watch her.

As soon as she entered the car, she dialed Segun's phone number and relayed her fear to him. And she instructed him on how she hoped he could save the woman by watching her. Segun was someone that ran into their house on one of those days he was being pursued by the Police. She allowed him hide in her compound till they were gone, and she talked some sense into his head,

and she made him know that she was ready to provide everything he would ever need, so far he would always do her bid. And he had been doing that.

She drove off to welcome her father-in-law.

3 The Visionaries

When Nosa left the houses of the missing women, the evening was already crawling over the sky; yet, he made sure he didn't get angry at any of the careless drivers that were either drunk or rushing somewhere, probably to their family. He ensured his own anger was locked in the treasure box because he was still in a good mood.

When he got to the house of Victoria Akachi Amadi, he knew it would be a dramatic evening because the compound was buzzing with people. There, he wished people were moving in his house the same way. At least, that would prevent his wife from staying aloof or refusing to accept the death of her loved ones. Unlike his former patterns of finding out missing people, he started his investigation from the first missing person to the last. In fact, he was already tired from the way they answered his numerous questions. The question and answer sessions were tiring.

There was no way he would understand their fanaticism; yet, he needed the understanding to get the reason behind the kidnapper's and the killer's motive for doing what they were doing. Luckily for him, none of them was forcing their belief on him, and he loved it that way. His hope, as he walked in the midst of mourning fanatics, was that he would only ask questions and leave to start the real search for the serial kidnapper and serial killer. Nevertheless, he wouldn't lose focus on the fact that he was employed to find the missing women and not the serial killer.

As he entered the compound of the missing lady, Mr. Johnson called him, and he felt like slapping him for disregarding their agreement: he wasn't supposed to call him for anything until he finished his present investigation. They had to make the agreement once, when Mr. Johnson was too quick to call the police to help Nosa when Nosa informed him that he was trapped. The police came in with their loud siren and made the criminals escape with the child Nosa was about to rescue. It took Nosa another three days to find the missing child.

'What do you want?'

'Nosa Obaigbenwen, you need to learn to revere the trough that provides grains for you.'

'That is if the trough is not an obstruction. What do you want?'

'I wanted to remind you of your job. Just as you don't trust agents, so also do we not trust you freelancers. You all want to be heroes, and to return with the spiky head of the dragon, and most times allow the princesses die in the process!'

Nosa gritted. 'Mr. Johnson, if you're not careful, I'll return to the house to sleep and wait by the radio to hear the town crier's announcement about how the princesses died in captivity!'

'The horse that refuses to go to war with its owner would remain in the stable without food. Be grateful Eagle Eyes Security is helping everyone. Me. You. Everyone!'

'I'll disconnect this call if you won't tell me something of importance!'

'It is only a fool that needs one to say all one has in mind'.

'Don't be rude to your money bag', Nosa said trying to mimic him. He wished he had the same ability as Chloe.

'I don't talk like that. Meanwhile, I'm only telling you to make sure you return with the ladies- dead or alive. That's all Eagle Eyes Security needs. Don't return with the head of the ladies or that of the criminal, and for God's sake. I don't need your head. I need you. In case you're in any horseshit call me, I'll be there to pull your face out of it'.

'Oh! All you're saying is that you're fearful for my life'.

'Me? Afraid? Impossible? I have the heart of iron. I feel nothing. All in all, never let what that thing is or whoever they are to swallow you'.

'Don't you ever call me during operations again', Nosa said, hissed and pocketed the phone as he walked into the compound. He was right: Mr. Johnson's call was another bottle of urine.

The reactions of the people in Victoria Amadi's house enlightened Nosa on what the Bible said about the world being near its tail end. Random people cried about how Sister Victoria had brought their salvation to them. In fact, a lot of people were commiserating with one another, testifying about how God used her to save them. He wished he could agree with them or be one of them. But despite his distaste for cultural religion, he's still had a sound knowledge of the Bible and knew all these things were ephemeral. Very soon their hunger would be for something else.

Thunder roared overhead. A slight breeze passed through the house, then the intensity increased for no reason. Someone yelled that God was ready to fight on behalf of Sister Victoria. Someone else shouted, 'glory to God'. And a lot of people began to chew the word in their mouths. The house wasn't really a comfortable one. The compound had no fence, and the little compound it was built on had a lot of vegetables planted around it. The banana leaves beside the house rumbled in accord with the cry of the people. From streets away, the sound of knockouts reverberated as if they were competing.

He meandered to the door of the house and asked the nearest person for the mother of the missing Victoria Amadi.

'Dead'.

'Oh! I'm sorry. What of her father?'

'Dead too. Haven't you been paying attention to her meetings or reading her books with all your mind?'

'Err... No'.

He had to hold himself from yelling at the lanky woman that he wasn't there to discuss books. If he needed to discuss books, he would go to a book club. He knew of many; like the Bookworm café Nigeria, Onkawe Book Club and even Rainbow Book Club. Like Chloe would say, he was only there to sniff out the killer, and not to hear someone's cry for him to become a fanatic.

'Hmm... Who are you?'

'I want... I'm an investigator and I need to find the missing women'.

'An investigator? What power do men have to find our own? The Lord is our refuge. He is our help and shield. We will lift up our eyes to the hills. From whence cometh our help? Our help cometh from the Lord who made the heavens and earth...'

Nosa held his breath with the hope that it would suppress the anger that was on the verge of controlling him. 'Madam...'

However, the woman kept rambling, and was getting on his nerve, which would soon make him unleash his already-spoilt-mood. He was supposed to be happy from meeting Moriah again, but these people were punching holes into his balloon of happiness.

'Mummy... The Lord would send help to his own with a human being. Strong, solid, touchable human beings. He won't come to investigate or find her himself. Now, where is a real human that I can talk to?'

The woman shook her head and pointed at the sky. 'Why do the heathen rage? With God, all things shall be possible and...'

'I'd... I know. Just show me someone'.

'Well as the Bible encourages, I will follow peace with all men, with you. But not before I show you that the God of Elijah is whom I will call'.

'Oh! This woman is making me become weak by the second', Nosa mumbled as he decided to go against courtesy and barge into the partially plastered house.

A woman came out and rushed past them. Nosa hurriedly turned to her. The woman wore a lace material sewed into blouse and wrapper. The neck was cut as if they were meant to wrap the woman's throat. He jogged after her while shouting, 'Excuse me, ma'.

'Do you know anyone I can talk to here? That woman sitting there is frustrating me'.

The woman in lace was in a hurry. So, she pointed to the house and rushed off.

Nosa shouted after her, 'What should I do inside?'

'Her younger sister is inside'.

Nosa sighed and turned towards the house.

'Jehovah Jireh, the Lord our banner, would find her for us. He would get her before you do'.

'As if I care who finds her first and it is Jehovah Nissi', Nosa mumbled as he entered the parlor. Despite the fact that people had visited him more than once to commiserate with him on the death of his children, he still felt it strange to see people gathered around a plump teenage girl, who would have been beautiful if she didn't tie her scarf around her head, covering her ears also. It made her look round like a jester, and awkward. An elderly woman rose and enjoined everyone present to begin to pray, stating that the devil was the one at work because he knew salvation was surging into the different parts of the world through Sister Victoria.

'Good evening', Nosa said to the nearest person. The woman scanned him with her tired eyes and pointed to the end of the parlor. He was able to vaguely examine the room for a while; the room was barely designed. However, on the right side of the parlor was a huge wallpaper of Jesus Christ nailed to the cross, and a lot of inscription on different sizes of paper, pointing people to heaven and hell and a lot of mumbo jumbos that the Bible said had been forgiven men. Placed at the end of the room was a table that was draped with a beautiful blue linen wrapper. On it was placed a lot of books and CDs from the missing sister Victoria. It also had a big picture of the missing Victoria. She looked horrible, making him wonder why Christians' first instinct at salvation was to deface themselves and look next to ugly.

'I want to see...'

'As faithful followers, we are donating a reward for whoever finds Sister Victoria as well as the other missing ladies'.

He was astounded. 'Like for real? That's....'

'You can't do anything here before making your donation. It is a mandate for her followers'.

'But...'

He rolled his eyes the way Chloe would have done and headed for the end of the room. The woman's face looked drab like every woman in that house. None of them wore an earring. He wished he had listened to some of Victoria's messages before he got there, but he didn't have time for such frivolities. He had better problems to solve like how to handle his double romance life. He had to make sure his mistress, Shayla, won't destroy his marriage with her agitation and fear. She had been stubbornly demanding his attention of recent. She didn't demand any other thing than his presence and rejected every other thing he offered her. Truth be told, he had left her for a while now to comfort his wife. But how would he leave her especially this period when his wife and he had just lost their three-year-old son, the second child lost?

When he got to the book the woman directed him to write in, he felt like throwing up. The whole bunch of them promised ridiculous amounts to get Victoria and the missing Christian women back. Nosa glanced back as they kept singing hymns. He loved hymns- they were cool, serene and helped him think of God once in a while- but he hated these ones they sang. They were sad and reminded him of death. He hurriedly scanned the room. Everyone there had the same look of being poor, yet many of them promised extremely high amounts. He couldn't fathom such dedication, such reverence, such fanaticism. Whatever she had taught or whatever message anyone taught, the end time should point at God, not them. He grinned the moment he noticed the path he was threading. He reverted to his policy- no thought or talks about anyone that proclaimed they were a servant of God.

After pretending to write something, he went to the woman and asked for the parents of the missing lady.

'She doesn't have parents anymore. She lives alone with her younger sister'.

'Oh, I've forgotten'.

The woman, with her puffy eyes, looked at him quizzically. 'You should know all about her by now'.

'Like seriously? Why? Is she a goddess?'

'That's profane. You should have read her messages and watched her videos'.

He scratched his head and knew the truth should do better. 'I've not really watched her videos. I only heard of how people say God was using her'.

'How people say? No. It is how God is using Sister Victoria. We shouldn't talk while they are about to pray. But I see you're a lost soul and I need to quickly explain things to you'.

'Seriously? I need to see her family members'.

The woman brandished an unusually firm grin that showed she wouldn't allow him to do anything until he had heard the gospel according to Victoria.

'Okay, but let's be fast'.

She led the way to the back of the house and began to explicate the word of God. He was lost in her great account of heavens and was aloof until she got to talking about hell. She burst into tears. He shook his head to ward off his aloofness.

'Are you fine?'

'Yes. The feeling is overwhelming. I mean the horror she must have seen. Even the one I've seen... I mean the ones I've read about. You need to see when she began preaching about them. You need to see the horror. It's scary. I don't want to miss heaven'.

He was flabbergasted by the sudden change in her demeanor. 'Why do you think you will miss heaven?'

The woman looked at him as if he was a dog that had wandered off from home. He swallowed hard and refused to flinch because doing so would make him stare at the ground. If you were raised by a cruel Pastor as a father, you would know that life could make you a wimp. And he had promised to stop being a wimp.

'You need to really listen to her messages and read as many as you can of her books'.

'So do you know how she got missing?'

'I don't have full details. I just knew her sister said she wasn't answering calls and didn't return home afterward'.

'So, you don't know of anything at all that can help me know where she is?'

'Look for her? Are you with the police?'

'No'.

'A journalist?'

'No'.

'Then, what are you... Who are you?'

'Why not let's shift our focus from who I am to how I want to help'.

The woman, short and plump, gave him that her firm look again, but this time he wouldn't succumb. She looked up into his eyes and he stared back at her.

'I just want to know who I am dealing with'.

He shook his head. 'I'm a P.I.'

'P.I? What's that?'

'Seriously? In this generation? You are seriously kidding me about not knowing what P.I means. Well, it means private investigator'.

'Oh! Who hired you?'

'This is seriously not where we should focus on at this time', he said and glanced at the house and watched the darkness that wrapped itself around the light that emitted from the bulb in front of the house. Thunder roared again.

'Yes... I know a lot about her and I have my own problem too'.

'We can find a solution to your problem someday, any other day, but today we need to look for her'.

'I need protection first. I need a guarantee of your privacy'.

At this point, he felt like squeezing the information out of the woman. She was delaying him and was dragging the event like a typical serial movie. This one should be done like an Instagram clip or a regular skit. At least, those ones could be moved forward to see the result. But she was a reality and must be attended to as such.

'Yes. Seriously, I need to leave to read the files about others and maybe their books. But first, I need to talk to Victoria's sister. Since you're not ready to tell me anything tangible, I have to leave now...'

'Are you promising me your secrecy?'

'I swear...'

'Don't swear by heavens or earth or your head they all belong to God'.

'Whatever! Seriously... Say whatever you want to say. I'm getting tired'.

'I know things that could help matters, but I'm afraid to say it. What if God strikes me dead or the devil, yes the devil, destroys me? Oh God! Help me. Take this cup away. Roll this stone away from me'.

What did she think she was? Was she Jesus Christ? Even Jesus Christ carried his cross across the country despite being weak. Yet, there she was lamenting about nothing. Nosa stood straight and glared at her for some seconds. The way Christians took the reality of God with levity still baffled him. Of course, he had backslidden, but his brain and knowledge were still as fresh as the new TV series he was watching. The people of Greencity were talking about seeing visions as if they were watching *Jenifa's Diary* or *Lagos Housewives*. He wasn't there to listen to the figment of someone's imagination. 'Madam, you're delaying me. Were you set up there to delay me?'

'No. Please, I'm not lying. I speak the truth and the Holy Spirit is my witness'.

'As if I can see him here. He is also my witness. But in the court, we need something tangible. Please, tell me something fresh. You can't play the regular script for me'.

The woman folded her fist as if she was hanging from a tiny rope and must stay there like Christiana in the movie, *Divergent*, who was hanged from the chasms by Eric because she said she was tired of fighting against a dauntless recruit.

'My life would be in danger. Do you see how puffy my eyes are?'

He checked her eyes but couldn't see it well because of the darkness. But he had seen it earlier. The eyes, big and red, were filled with lack of sleep and tiredness. Remembering that, he calmed himself a bit. He rolled his tongue within his mouth as he stared at her. Although the darkness had descended, he still felt the sincerity in her voice.

'What do you need me to do? I'm sworn to secrecy. But if you need me to assign a police to you, I have friends in the force. They would really be of help'.

The woman backed away. 'I don't need them. They are devious. My spirit says you're to be trusted but I don't like your reaction to things. You are...'

'I know...That's me. That's my policy. I don't like to judge. It poisons my heart. But I don't take rubbish'.

The woman nodded. 'But can you help?'

'After I hear what you really know that is making you afraid. Did someone know you saw them or what?'

The woman pointed to a bench, which Nosa hadn't noticed was there all along, and they sat. She sat straight and gaped off into the dark night, while Nosa looked around impatiently. This woman should say what she knew and they should be done. She was delaying him, but his stupid instinct insisted that he must stay with her to listen. He felt she was too traumatized to explain what happened, and he was ready to listen to her if only she could tell him what he needed, and not for her to start behaving as if she was sent from the pit of hell to stop him from finding those girls. Well, even if she was an angel, he would pull through and find the missing ladies.

Yet, he sat still. He would have to pull the information out of her, one pebble after the other. Although he was tired, he felt he shouldn't be tired. *Jack Bauer* would never sleep until he got to the end of whatever problem he was trying to solve.

'I was a prostitute', the woman said and didn't look at him. He was startled and his eyes roamed over her body as he quickly profiled her to compare her with a typical prostitute. Despite the darkness, he could still see the frame of her body. He also tried to recollect how she looked when he first saw her. She was fat, short, and looked too drab to be referred to as a prostitute.

'Reduce the lie, and how does that help matters?'

'Well, it's not a lie. You would be surprised, I know. You needed to see me those days', she said and gave a curt laughter. 'At those Junctions, even the holiest men of God couldn't hold their object of destruction in their pants. So, when I got wind of the fact that Vicky, a prostitute with

whom I and others spent years feeding men's lust, had suddenly begun to lead people to Christ, I was curious and attended one of her meetings. My plan was to see how she was pretending, and how she managed to fool Christians. Alas! After listening to her testimonies I got so scared of what I was doing that I gave it up immediately and became a Christian'.

Nosa brought out his phone to check the time. The light from the house wasn't powerful enough to help him check his wristwatch. At least, with this woman, he could buy time so that those inside the house would have left before he returned to talk to Victoria's sister. This fat woman was delaying the information that was crucial to him; she was giving him crumbs when he needed the loaves.

'After about two months of being saved, I wanted her to know I was also saved, but I couldn't get to her'.

'Why?'

'Protocols'.

'No, I mean why did you need her validation?'

She shook in her position as if to turn to stare at him. 'I never needed her validation. God was my validation. But it was wise, and was a thing of joy to share my testimony that I got saved through her'.

'Oh-oh. So, the protocols prevented you from seeing her?'

He nodded in the realization of what she must have gone through. It was typical for great men to be surrounded by protocols, who saw men as bomb and would do everything to ensure that no one even got a whiff of their perfume or get the chance to explode in excitement in front of them.

'So, one day, I was able to run into her in a restroom. It was an exciting moment for both of us. She has really changed. She no longer had her tarty looks; instead, she had this unusual, unique but ominous gait'.

There, she caught Nosa's curiosity in two ways. But he had to pick the one at the top. Her previous rambling wasn't doing much. 'Unusual in what way?'

'I can't explain it. But there was a feeling that she was enjoying herself. And that was unusual for even a Christian'.

'I don't get you. Are Christians not supposed to have this type of joy?'

She shook her head and frowned. 'It was strange, queer. I don't know, but whatever it was I couldn't help being curious. So, when I told her I was leaving the restroom, she nodded and said she still wanted to freshen up. I... won't lie. It wasn't easy allowing such opportunity pass by. It was like meeting a celebrity. I wanted to run into her again. So, I stood back at the door. That was when I heard her making calls to someone or maybe receiving calls'.

'Calls?'

'Yes...She was telling the person something like she was tired or something'.

'Tired?'

'Yes. Why are you repeating my words?'

'Seriously, is that what you're focused on? Did you get the person's name?'

'Yes, that's my focus. Your repetition is distracting me. She didn't mention any name. Ah! Yes, she mentioned. But I'm not sure it was the person she was talking to. She mentioned a name. Or was it my imagination? No, I remember that she mentioned a name because she said if it was that person she was dealing with, she wouldn't have much trouble like the one she was having at the moment. His name is...' She said and stared at him for a while.

He held his breath and was all set to catch the name. But the name wasn't coming forth. Her head kept moving in different directions as if she was trying to untangle her head from a web.

'Yes? What's it? Talk. This might be it. The...' He said and scratched his head as he ransacked it for the right word.

'I don't know. The time... It's been long. I can't fully remember the details. Especially now that I have my own problems and I should still talk about my safety. You're selfish. You're so focused on the people you're finding. Don't you know that if I also go with them, it would be one more added person?'

'Madam...'

'Joana. Call me Joana.'

'Madam Joana.'

'Just Joana. Don't add any prefix.'

'Yes. Mad... Joana. Okay. Joana. Let's take it one after the other.'

'I'll... Am I not? Ehn... Look at me? I haven't slept for two days now because I was afraid of Jesus taking my body into the spirit.'

'You should be excited that the Lord has counted you worthy, but that is not our discussion.'

'Don't you get? I'm afraid. I'm afraid of many things. I'm afraid of what I'll see. You need to see demons. You will go crazy at the sight of one.'

He stared at her and wondered if she was crazy already. 'It's nothing'.

Joana withdrew her head and the way she looked transfixed, he could bet that she was giving him one of the million evil looks women possessed. 'This is serious. I'm afraid of missing heaven. What if I miss heaven? What if I spread the message and still do not make heaven? What if I say the message in a wrong way?'

'Calm down. You will make heaven', he said, placing his hands on her meaty arm.

She flung his hand away and scrambled out of the bench to face him like Captain America. 'Don't you dare tell me to stay calm. I'm the one that knows what will happen. I was the one who saw the vision. It was horrible. It made me fear God and made me fear the devil. I can't tell people what is coming because of my fear. I'm afraid'.

'I need you to tell me about this lady. Erm. Victoria Akachi, and the name of this person she mentioned during the call that transpired night or day or whatever. If I don't get his or her name, how will I ever save you from whoever it is?'

'I can't tell you about her or about others until I'm assured of my security!'

'What do you mean by others...Are you saying you know where others are...?'

'No, but I know how they got missing!'

'The police too know about them. I have spoken with their people!'

She shook her head and turned away. The night that seemed to have remained calm suddenly started picking momentum. The breeze suddenly began to make trees yell as they swayed them from side to side. He rose and led the way towards the building. Nosa was very sure he would get the opportunity he wanted with missing girl's sister.

'Police didn't know about them. They all know what everyone told them. What they didn't know is that someone else is at play here!'

'How do you know all this?'

'I know...Something happened to my friend, and I was so sure she didn't see a real vision, but I couldn't prove it. She ended up dead. I know things. Only that my memory is scrambling. My fear is taking a toll on me. I'm sorry. I had a terrible accident once, so my memory tends to struggle. And I seem to forget things. I really need to remember these details!'

'Yes... You'll need it to stay sane and safe', Nosa said and felt himself boiling with anger, which he would unleash like the molten magma in *Pompeii*. Whatever she knew was supposed to come out quick. Why was she stalling and making a hill out of such simple matter? She needed to give him concrete details. 'What's your friend's name?'

'She is dead!'

'Yet, I need her name to know how to trail her death!'

'She is dead. You need the name of the living!'

'Stop hoarding information. Your friend's name, you're hoarding. The information is crucial!'

'Don't you understand? Someone called my friend that night and she was shouting at the person that she was tired!'

His interest was piqued again. 'So what was she saying? What were they saying?'

'She was also saying she was tired!'

'That's like Victoria. Since your friend was found dead, what assurance do you have that Victoria isn't a criminal?'

'Sister Victoria? That's impossible. I guess the person she was talking about was another person!'

'Does that mean you've remembered the name?'

'I don't know... I don't remember. I told you the one I can remember', she said and slumped on the ground. 'I need to remember his name. I know you need the name, but I also need it, and I want to remember. Oh God! Help my memory. I must remember this name in Jesus name'.

'Was it about being kidnapped?'

She stared into space for sometimes and shook her head. 'No'.

'Then, what?'

'I don't know... But it was like the person was threatening her'.

'That's seriously good', he said as his phone rang. He brought his phone to silence it when he saw Shayla was on the line. 'Try to remember what she said or the name while I receive this call'.

'Come outside before I barge in', Shayla shouted from the other line.

'What!'

'Come out of your house. I'm outside'.

Her heavy boots crunched the leaves and echoed in the dark. The journey down the empty estate in the cold night was hectic but was really worth it. Time was of essence in this their work, and project, and she couldn't let anything stop her from getting what she wanted.

She sauntered into the stuffy, smelly room to see things herself after she had collected a mask from the member of the Gragus gang without the house. They've informed her that the different methods weren't working, and she couldn't take the bad news anymore. According to their reports, these people were doing the exact opposite of what she needed. Even if her people needed all the money in the world, she would find it for them. The project was very essential.

The kidnapped women cried out from the place they were chained to. She sucked in her breathe and wished they could get what they needed early. So that these women would have no reasons to suffer anymore. She touched the mask on her face. Her rule for everyone working with her on that project was that they must always put on their mask. The last person to mistakenly remove his mask was instantly killed because if the women saw him, they might later track them through him. However, if the person was shot, the women would forever be traumatized by the blood splashed on the ground than to even remember the shape of his head.

Despite how loud their wails and prayers were; they couldn't be as loud as the person within the research room. The doctor stood over the crying woman and recorded what she was shouting. Another man held a gun to her head and her eyes kept darting to the masked Gragus member, and the unconvinced eyes of the doctor.

She stared at the process from the observation room, but the woman on the table kept shouting. The doctor shook his head, and nodded at the man holding the gun, he placed his gun in its holster and pinned the woman down. The doctor injected her and she yelled again, and shook vigorously for some seconds and suddenly went into oblivion for another minute, then, she began to ramble.

As she stood in the observation room, she was happy that she got this new idea when one of those working with her felt their old method was proving abortive. Although it was yet to get her what she wanted, it proved to be useful in filtering the grain from the beans.

She pressed a button, and the doctor looked up and shook his head. They weren't progressing. She pressed the button twice. The doctor nodded and glanced at the gunman. He understood the doctor, who walked towards her. She turned just as the gunman placed the gun on the temple of the rambling woman.

Just as she moved out of the house into the empty, deserted, dirty estate, she heard the echoes of the leaves her heavy boots crunched, and a loud bang from the research room. Dejected, she strutted home.

4 Compromising

After Nosa left her in a haste and she was about to join those praying within the house, she received a call that would have cracked her up on a normal day or might have incited her joy. The number belonged to one of her former customers, who worked as a customer care agent with Glo Fortunecity. The last time they met, they fought- that was the day before she gave her life to Christ. He would assume she would still be in the business of prostitution.

'Joany, how far?'

'Raphael, how are you?'

'Sorry, I want to speak with Joana'.

'I'm the one, of course'.

'Why are you going all formal with me?'

She smiled warily. 'Don't mind me. Things have changed'.

'I guessed so because there is serious trouble'.

She shook her head. Raphael would never change. He always took his desire for pleasure as a problem she could help him to solve. 'Raphael, I'm now a serious believing Christian. I'm not into that business again'.

'Forget that side. Am I not a Christian too? At least I go to our church every Sunday. They know me when I carry the bell and begin to sing. Most times, I go into trance. I fall and stain my white prayer gown. But, I still do what I do'.

'Raphael. You need Jesus. Celestial Church of Christ will not help'.

'Ah see this girl-she. If I'm not a Christian, then how will I now have visions? It was one of the visions that made me do *Igbele*. You know what *Igbele* means?'

'Yes... That one that your pastors would tell you to stay in the church because something bad wants to happen, and they want you to avoid it by staying in the church. I know *Igbele*'.

'Yes. My own was even two months. But, that's not the reason I'm calling you'.

'What are you talking about?'

'There is a serious trouble. A big bottle of urine has been opened. Some very influential person asked our office to run a match of your voice'.

'My voice. Why me? How do you know it was me?'

'I don't know why you, but I know that you were talking to a man. I wouldn't have known it was you, but because I heard you say you were once a prostitute and you mentioned your name'.

'I don't get...Who brought the voice match?'

'I don't know. But the person had the power to pull strings. Our boss selected a very few people. As in, how will they ask us to start running a trace on your voice from all our call files? In fact, you were talking about going to heaven or seeing visions.'

Joana stared into oblivion. Nosa had just deceived her.

'Why will they want your voice?'

'I don't know. I don't know...'

'Be careful.'

'Have they discovered it was me?'

'No. Not yet. I've told my friend Thompson to delete every of your file from our database.'

'Is that not a sin? I don't want you to sin for me.'

'Idiot. If it's true you're seeing heaven. Then, the person is looking for you.'

'How will you know?'

'How won't I know? People have been disappearing. I mean...Do you listen to the news? You better go and glue your ear to the news. They are kidnapping people. Joany, please, hide your head.'

'I don't know where to hide.'

'I know. But for now, be safe. I'll see how I can help.'

'Raphael, thanks.'

'No worries. No worries, babe. It will be fine. You're surer than Bet9ja.'

Joana wondered what would happen now that she trusted Nosa. Surely, Nosa couldn't be the one. He knew who she was. Maybe, something was wrong. He must have recorded their meetings and someone would have heard it all. She dialed his phone number.

'Hello.'

'Nosa, please help. There's trouble.'

'What happened?'

'I...I', she searched her head and tried to figure out what so important she wanted to tell him. At that time, she hated ever being involved in the accident that made her have the memory issue. 'I've forgotten it. Oh! It's dangerous. I've forgotten'.

'Don't worry. You have no fear. You still have till tomorrow.'

'I hope. I will write it down. I always remember again'

'That's good.'

'Can you text me the address of your house'.

'I'll do'.

'Immediately you drop the call, before you forget'.

She nodded. She sent the message with trembling hands. Regardless of the fact that she was in the public, she went down on her knees to pray. She was sure wouldn't be able to sleep that night. She needed something to hold on to. What if she slept and saw another vision? Although the angel told her she needed a lot of rest, for now, she still had that nagging feeling that she might be carried away. The feeling haunted her like her late grandmother's forever-nagging voice.

Nosa sped off to the house and drove into bends without fear that he might encounter little children or animals or even other cars. Shayla was about to make his light of happiness burn out quickly.

One of three things was sure to happen if he continued barking at Shayla over the phone that she shouldn't enter his compound- Chloe might hear Shayla's voice or Shayla truly barged in as she threatened or he got so angry that he would finally break his record of never beating a woman.

As much as he cherished the love she had for him and understood what she felt at that moment, he wouldn't allow her to defile the serenity of his compound, especially with her sassiness. Chloe was still grieving, but none of the death of her loved ones would be as hurting as discovering that he had been deceiving her all these while, that their marriage had been in the virtual reality like that of the film, 'Under the dome'.

'Just wait', he mumbled as he stepped on the accelerator. The wind and the darkness had truly cleared the path for him, however, if Moriah was seated in the same car as he, she would have lamented about his recklessness. Although he was prepared for any sudden appearance of another car or somebody, he couldn't reduce his speed out of fear of hitting someone or bashing another car.

He couldn't fathom how it happened, but their calls got disconnected, and the phone brought up the TV series he was seeing on his way to the places he was making his investigations before she called, but he wasn't in the mood to watch it right there. He stopped it and poured all his concentration on the roads that looked as if one was entering a cult, and the trees on the side of the road were hooded figure, who kept swaying from side to side as they hummed a mantra.

Shayla called again, he picked up the call and put her on speaker phone.

'I swear I'm counting to five. If you don't come outside, I'll barge into this shabby thing you call a house. I'll be rough and talk and scream and win you away today'.

All he needed to meet up with her was for her to keep ranting. He had the best formulae for that.

'You know I'm not lying. You mean the world to me. But my wife is grieving over the loss of our child'.

'That implies that you are ready to lose another child because I'll keep shouting till my baby pops out to the hard ground'.

'Shaylee, don't you dare do any stupid thing. I'm not far from home. Trust me'.

I don't trust you. I don't give a heck. Not a single bit of it. I'll scream till the street bare their ugly, rotten, brown and black teeth to see you leave this house'.

'I'm near the house. I will block you at the house soon. I'm at the fullest speed'.

'You liar, you tyrant, you madman. You are in the house. I can see your car. One'.

'Hold on a bit'.

'No. You are a deceiver, pretender and you said you'll always choose me over her. Two'.

'I'm in the estate. Please just stall your attack'.

'No. I'm knocking on this door, and I'll not wait for a second after my fifth call. Three'.

'Baby, hold on, my car will be there soon. You're more trustworthy than any bulletproof'.

She laughed. 'You're a making mockery of me. I guess you and your wife would be laughing at me right now or do you think I don't know you people laugh behind my back? I won't allow you do that to me today. Four'.

'Please, I went with my wife's other car. If you scan the end of the street you will see me speeding up to meet you'.

'And this is the end. Tell the rest to your friends and the likes of them that laugh at me to no end. Five'.

'Please don't ruin a good evening with your thirst for my blood. I'm here'.

She went to the gate and banged just as he parked by her side. 'I'm here'.

'You devil. You weren't at my level, but I adored you like heaven. Now you want...' She raised her hands as she shouted and turned then rushed at him.

'Shhh', he whispered as she tried to make him see that she was really angry. She struck at him with her fists, but he didn't resist her; instead, he took both hands and drew her nearer.

'I'm sorry. I've offended you'.

She cried and crashed into his chest. 'You left me and deserted me and refused to see me. Have I offended you? What's my offense in loving you?'

'Nothing'.

'I love you'.

'I know... So you came this night to see me?'

'Yes. I couldn't live without you any longer. I was tired of being in this state without you by my side. You're all I have.'

'I know you like I know every part of my gun'.

She giggled, stared into his eyes and buried her head into his chest. It was his love for crimes that made her love him at first.

'Let's leave here'.

'Let me meet my wife. I'll stay with you tonight but I have to be back tomorrow'.

'Why?'

'We have a big case...to solve. Mr. Johnson called me in'.

She nodded. 'But you're not leaving early'.

'At least ten'.

'I know you. You would hurry'.

'My appointment is by ten. If I tried to do that before ten, shoot me'.

'You're pulling my leg'.

'I'm not joking'.

She nodded as he entered the house. He was joking, but if it would make him have a happy family, he would let her have that hope. She was that part he never saw in his wife, who was never interested in the criminal aspect of his life. She only wanted him to be a celebrated P.I. He and Chloe were good together. But things had stopped being rosy after she lost her father. Regardless of his love for Moriah, he still had a little connection with Chloe, and he had always banked on that until she lost her father. That day, she prayed for three days unending, but Mr. Kings didn't even bat an eyelid. Since that time, he had lost Chloe to her inner grief, to her Chloeset. Those days were so lonely for him that he had to resort to visiting a club, where he met a first timer, Shayla. Despite the disturbing fear of his father coming all the way from Edo state to Fortunecity to find him with someone else, he went ahead with the relationship.

Just as he was entering the house, Joana called, saying she had information for him, but she couldn't remember. That statement in itself was infuriating. Why would she call if she had nothing to give him? He felt like yelling and telling her how stupid she was. In fact, a thought briefly came to his mind as he put the phone into his pocket. With the way she was suddenly warming up to him, maybe she was beginning to like him. He rubbed his face and brought his hand to his bald head. All he could tell her was to send him her house address, that he would visit her the next day. Her paranoia was becoming extraordinary. At Victoria's place, she kept crying that she was in trouble- from God and Devil. How was that his concern? Everybody that wants to be a Christian must be ready for trouble from any of the two of them.

When he entered the room, Chloe didn't even flinch as if she noticed his presence.

'Chloe'.

She turned and smiled at him. 'Shhh!'

He stopped on his track and did a few seconds prayer to God. Why was she acting in a weird way? Chloe mustn't be mad at this period. The world would blame him for being nonchalant with his wife.

'Papa is inside'.

Nosa was now 50% sure. His fear becoming reality. 'Which Papa?'

'Papa now. Your father is...'

'He's here? Oh, God! Another bottle of urine'.

'Don't bring that here. That's reckless as Moriah would say'.

'What... What is he doing here?'

'He is here to rest and for the Christmas'.

'Why? Is that why he came down here? Couldn't he have stayed in his Idumwurgha forest?'

Chloe looked up at him and sighed exasperatedly. 'No. Nosa, they are looking for him. Some sect...erm, Cults. They blame him for something odd his Pastor friend did. They want...'

'God punish all of them. Now, they've brought a burden to me. They don't know how much I love to put my bee out of his miseries. One bullet to the heart, another to the brain. So quickly'.

Chloe groaned to show him that he was either being rude or was shouting. 'But I don't just understand you. Why are you...? Why have you not stopped being angry at your father? And lower your voice... My cat and Papa are sleeping'.

'I'm not angry at him', Nosa said between closed teeth. 'I hate him like Satan hates God'.

Chloe shrugged. 'Maybe you're the Satan'.

Nosa brushed the air away. 'Hope he is still sleeping?'

Chloe nodded. 'Meanwhile, my WhatsApp has expired and...'

'Yes. Good. Tell him I'm not coming home till tomorrow. Probably in the night'.

'That's a lie'.

'It's not a lie. I'm leaving truly. I have to get to a place near the riverbank as early as possible'.

'If it's not because of your father, that's good'.

'What? Me? Him? Impossible. By the way, did you hear someone knock the door?'

'The door...No'.

'Erm... I mean the gate'.

'No. Did you see anyone?'

He shook his head. 'Meanwhile, I came inside, I saw you all morose again. You should talk to someone'.

'I'm talking now. See me, talking to you. I'm fine and okay. Talking. See me. Happy. Talking'.

He shook his head. 'This is not talking. After you lost your father, you didn't recover for months. Then, we lost our babies. It was disastrous. You should let out your anger at God or something grievous. You cry or grieve or do something. Just do something'.

'But we talk. We talked about the weather'.

'That's the problem. You don't cry about it. You zone out'.

'But, I'm perfectly alright. See me. Instead of zoning out as you assert, I watch T.V, bury myself in something ideal and unconventional for a grieving woman. I know you don't see them as good, but I'm alright'.

'No... You're not alright'.

'I'm perfectly alright like a fresh flower', she said as she sat straight, rose, spun and sat again. 'I'm fine. I tend to my things. My father's companies are running fine. I get information regularly from my managers. In fact, I would have started work, if not for the contract of my overbearing father. See, do you see me having any speech defect? No. I'm fine dear'.

'What of Irene? Your friend from Columbia. Can I get her number? I will inform Raphael also. When last did you talk with any of them?'

'Irene, a day before she died - yesterday. My friend is dead. Raphael, we still talked this week', she shrugged.

'Oh my God! Oh my God!' Nosa said and dragged her nearer. 'I'm so sorry. Why didn't you tell me?'

'Because I've erased the dead from my mind. I don't want to keep grieving for anybody. God knows where they are - heaven or hell'.

'I'm sorry'.

'Don't be. You didn't kill them. I, really, am fine'.

'I need to go for more investigation. I'll be back, tomorrow morning'.

She nodded and faced the TV.

'Let me pick some clothes inside the house'.

'And please, find these kidnappers. They are reasons to grieve on their own. They make us lose contact with the ones with the true visions of heaven'.

'I will', he said and kissed her forehead. She stiffened. His wife was grieving and he was following his mistress to her place- there must be something he could do to avoid all these. Not that he really loved Shayla, but he was obliged to follow her because of his unborn child.

'Give me your phone. As I was saying the other time, my WhatsApp has expired', she said as he stood. He handed over his phone to her, his mind still fixed on the bad news she just shared.

How come she didn't talk about Irene's death yesterday? He should find a way to help her regain her humanity and start responding like any normal human being.

After he had picked some clothes, he returned to the parlor for his phone. She returned it and said, 'you had a message. I'm sorry I mistakenly opened it. It's a message about one address'.

It's nothing', he said and kissed her forehead. She was worth to him than rubies, than their two dead children.

'I'll call Raphael to come tomorrow if it will make you happy'.

'It will...'

'Okay... And don't you dare climb my grass.'

'Yes, mummy'.

'Your bald...'

'Yes, mummy'.

He smiled and went out to meet an agitated Shayla. She skipped to meet him and had to stop herself from hugging him as if she was afraid he would never return. 'I was beginning to fear'.

Out of nowhere, came a woman, whom Chloe had always complained of her nosiness.

'Good evening sir', she said as she rocked her crying baby. 'I want to see Mummy Kings'.

Nosa sighed. 'She is not around'.

'But she said I should come to meet her this evening...'

'Woman, are you deaf?' Shayla shouted and pulled Nosa towards his IVM G20.

Chloe sat still, watching the news, stroking Joel's fur. She had the dream again. This time, she saw her children in hell. It was more horrible than the past ones. Most of those days, all she saw were the blazing fire, the big maggots, and the huge rats. However, this one was definitely horrifying and she wished she could get acid to wash it away from her mind because she also saw Irene. Despite all, she didn't see her father. Mr. Kings couldn't have made it to heaven, he was her father but didn't deserve heaven. He was a horrible man. He shouldn't have fallen in love with Chloe's mother, and she wouldn't have given birth to her out of wedlock.

Maybe the devil was playing with her mind. He must probably be somewhere else in hell along with her mother- they both deserved going to hell.

She was supposed to be out there searching for information herself but her father-in-law was around, she couldn't dabble into such, leaving him to himself without proper preparation. He wouldn't be deterrent to her desire to find what Mummy church was hiding, but she had nothing to fear because she had placed Segun on it.

The house was boring. So, she rose and tended to her flowers with Joel rubbing itself against her body. She had trimmed the edges of the leaves when Mummy Church came around. For some reason, a sort of rot was beginning to grow on the leaves and she had been trying to avoid such. As she fondled the blade of the flowers, she imagined how heaven could be. She had read about it in books by some authors. She would really love for people in Nigeria, especially in Fortuncity, especially one of those missing ladies to testify of it. Only God could really give a true picture of how heaven would look like, and one could only understand better if one was from the same tribe or the same area as the one who had the message.

She was very sure one of them would return from heaven one day to tell them about heaven. However, before that time, she would sit down to watch things unfold, and pray to God of heaven that he would send down a rain of righteous visionaries. She opened her jotter and went through it again. There were so many messages that she wished she could play a part in making these things work. If she could really help in building an army of God, it would really make her excited. However, the Bible stated that they should write the vision. How would she write the vision when the only thing she could see was the rotten evil of hell?

She picked up her phone and dialed Raphael's number. If she spoke with him, Nosa would be pleased and he wouldn't disturb her about not talking, not crying any longer.

'Stupid boy', she said as soon as Raphael called her name over the phone. 'Won't you come to mummy?'

He groaned as if he was busy, but she already knew his reply.

'I'll be there'.

They talked, abused one another in a mild way, and fixed the next day for a meeting. Then, Segun sent a message. 'I really need to shift post. Shayla needs me'.

She gritted, bit her lower lips, and stared into nothing. The only option was for her to go herself. She picked her phone and called him. 'Why are you doing this? You know I need you more than Shayla. She had just left with my husband'.

A regular wife should be angry at her husband for having an external affair, but if it would make him happy, she had no issue with it.

'But I need my life than even the money I'm getting'.

'I can help you get away from the authority's trouble if you want'.

'I don't want. Katrina is still with them. She doesn't know what I do for a living. And Shayla is banking on that'.

'Send me your location through WhatsApp'.

'I'm at...'

'Over WhatsApp. Remember the story of the man hanging from a rope'.

'I need to...'

'If he didn't wait longer, he wouldn't have gotten help'.

He sighed. 'I'll hang on. But please relieve me in time'.

'Before another bird flies over wherever you're, I'll be there'.

She fondled the rotten flower and knew there was no other option than to do the things that would help matters: she sliced the rotten leaf off its stem. She entered the guest room her father-in-law slept in, and gently tapped him.

'Papa, please wake', she said as she tapped him.

The tired old man wriggled in his sleep and turned to listen to her. He tiredly opened his eyes and took a few seconds to come to the realization that Chloe was the one in front of him.

'My daughter, hope all is well?'

'I'm sorry for waking you, but I think my Pastor's wife needs my help, and I don't know...'

'If someone is in need, you need to head there'.

'Thank you, Papa, but how we will... In case you need food, I've prepared food for you...'

'I'll wait'.

Chloe gritted. What if Mummy Church decided to do something else?

'Then, you can try the juice I and Joel did'.

'Joel? Who is...? Oh! Are you leaving us alone together?'

Chloe laughed and understood what he meant by that. Her father-in-law wasn't fond of her cat, and Joel too always had a reason to be disgusted by his presence. Chloe had always tried to make the two of them closer, but it was always a futile effort. Unfortunately, their enmity always had a heightened sense whenever Nosa was around since Joel would muzzle up to Nosa, who might choose that time to be away from his father or argue with him.

Upon driving outside, she knew what the rotten flower symbolized. The nosy woman was meandering around her gate. The funniest part of it all was that she always wondered why her husband wouldn't take care of her. She would cut her off.

Excitedly, the woman hopped towards her and flagged her down. Chloe hissed and stopped the car.

'Mummy kings, I saw your husband with a woman. She was hugging him'.

Chloe snapped at her. 'Woman, what do you want? The money?'

The woman, unashamed, nodded repeatedly. Chloe hissed, grabbed her bag, and unzipped it and fetched her wallet. The woman edged forward. Angry and hoping to never see her again, Chloe removed wads of one thousand notes and pointed it at her.

'Thief', a man shouted from afar. Chloe looked up and saw a fierce man rushing to meet her. The nosy woman looked at the man with fear and backed from Chloe. The man marched to meet Chloe.

'Please, what is she doing?'

'I'm just greeting her', the woman said and pulled her crying daughter nearer.

'I was just...!' Chloe said as she stretched the money out.

'Please ma, don't ever give her money'.

'I wasn't begging for money. She just wanted to give me'.

'Don't give her, ma. I traveled...'

'Paulina's father, let's resolve this at home'.

'Don't give this woman any money ever in your life. I traveled and sent her money. But when I returned I got information that she had been going around, looking poor and begging for money. You're in for a hard time, Paulina's mother'.

Chloe drove off into the darkness of the day. Segun sent the address to an old church in a land she had recently acquired. The journey to the address of the old deserted church Segun felt like hours. She hoped he would stay there till she arrived. At that moment, she felt bad for expending her energy on poke-nosing and behaving like a weed in the affairs of her Pastor's wife, but if it would do good to her and the world, Chloe wouldn't back down. Her desire for Fortuncity was to see it come to term with God's way.

Immediately she got to the place they were, Segun pointed them out to her and complained as he drove away. She didn't know why he was still freelancing with Shayla when she could keep paying him for just monitoring her company. However, she had learnt that human desires were greater than their hunger for money.

After he drove off, she sat there and watched Mummy Church having a heated discussion with a lanky woman, who looked as if she had been bereft of food for months. From the way they kept glancing from one place to another from the dim light in the place, she could guess the woman was afraid. The problem was that she wasn't even sure if the woman really saw heaven or hell.

Mr. Kings, her father, had a belief that one must aim for whatever one wanted, and not seat behind wheels to expect it drop in her laps.

She drove towards them and came out of her car as her mind scanned for the best reason for her sudden appearance. Chloe always ensured that any land she bought was lightened up with a lot of street lights. Immediately, she got into the ray of the street lights, Mummy Church was the first to see her. She became pale and swallowed hard. She kicked the lanky woman, who caught the cue and saw Chloe.

'Mrs. Obaigbenwen... I don't understand, what are you doing here?'

Chloe looked surprised as her mind raced with the best reply to Mummy Church. 'Mummy, I should ask you the same'.

'We...!' Mummy Church said and stuttered.

At that moment, Chloe felt like a cat, which had just cornered a rat. She stood straight and hoped her stance would send the fear of God into Mummy Church. If that woman was truly a visionary, she should really get off the hiding spree, and pass the message to the world. The

world needed to know what God had in plan for the world. Although many of the messages were almost the same, they still needed to tell people how and what God wanted the rapture to happen. And also what they needed to prepare for in heaven.

'We're scouting for land', the lanky woman said and glanced shyly at Mummy Church, who nodded as if it was a lesser sin and can be easily forgiven.

'Yes', Mummy Church said and nodded repeatedly. 'We are scouting for land'.

'Well, the land is sold out or would soon be'.

'How do you know that?' Mummy Church

'This land would soon be mine', Chloe said as she pretended to stare at the land that was being overgrown with grasses. She had just paid some people to cut the grass some weeks ago, but she was surprised at the way the grass had grown so big especially in the harmattan period. Although the whole area was dark, she still saw the shape of their height.

The woman fidgeted and glanced at Mummy Church, who looked rattled also.

'But I thought you just bought three of recent'.

'Yes, I told you why already'.

Mummy Church nodded.

'So, the land wasn't in your father's name?' Mummy Church asked.

Why will she ask such question? 'I told you already. I bought it in my name, not his name'.

'By the way, why did you people come here in the night? There are vigilantes here'.

'This is the only time she can get the chance to come'.

'This is serious', the lady said and shook with fear.

'Let me talk to her', Mummy Church said and used her good hand to drag the frightened lanky woman away. The lady kept glancing at a building at the edge of the land. The house belonged to the guard she paid to watch over the place. She did that for her other lands, but this particular one had been reported to be a haven for a lot of evil. So, she paid him to make sure nothing of such happened there.

Chloe pretended to walk towards the house. She didn't need to see the man because he wasn't expecting her. But if it was to keep up with her desire. She heard the woman argue with Mummy Church in low tones for a while. Despite desiring to listen to their conversation, she knew she just had to keep walking.

'Leave me', the lady shouted. 'I will meet her. I will tell her. This is the perfect place'.

She turned as it was expected of her, seeing she was near them. Mummy Church tried to pull the woman by the hand, but she evaded her and hurried towards Chloe.

'Sister Obi... Agnes... I'm Agnes'.

Chloe walked towards her with caution as it was expected of her. She had to keep pretending to be unaware of her plight. 'Yes? Sister Agnes, I hope nothing is making your peace rot away'.

'There is. I'm dying or might die soon'.

'I said it', Chloe said and glanced at Mummy Church, who held up her half arm in despair. 'I said I was perceiving something evil'.

'It's not evil. We're not doing anything illegal'.

'Like trying to steal something from my land?'

'Steal? Of course not. It wasn't anything illegal'.

'Then, what were you two doing?'

'Sister Agnes, we can still solve this. You are not ready', Mummy Church said and glared at Chloe as if she was suspecting her of something ominous.

'Mummy Church, let us solve this together. A problem is like a sour soup; one doesn't get sympathy from others until they've also tasted it. Let's taste this problem together. Expose this bottle of urine'.

'I'm ready, Mummy', Agnes said and turned to Chloe. 'I need a place to hide'.

'Hide? Are the police looking for you?'

'Police would have been better. I saw visions', she said, whispering.

Chloe looked at her in a queer way, pretending to disbelieve her. She chuckled and turned to Mummy Church. 'Are you people trying to joke with me on a cold December night?'

'Joke? In this daring period. Please o. I saw a vision of heaven and hell'.

'Seriously?' Chloe said as she tried to imitate Nosa's way of showing he was surprised. 'Heaven or hell?'

'What does it matter? All that matters is that I don't want to die?'

'Nobody will kill...'

'The kidnapper', Mummy Church chipped in.

'The kidnapper', Chloe said in fake realization.

'Yes, the kidnapper', Agnes affirmed.

'Wow. The Kidnapper. How do you intend to hide?'

Agnes glanced at Mummy Church, and at the bush. 'I really need a place to relay the message to the world'

'See this woman, what message? You need to tell the police', Chloe said surprised.

'Just kill me now. I told Mummy Church but she said no. Who do I listen to?'

'She can't', Mummy Church said and glanced at the bushes that were being blown by the cold air.

'Why? They would help her'.

'No. They won't. I told one of them, and the next thing I know was that she was calling me that someone was trying to break into her house'.

'I told her it was coincidental'.

'Coincidental my foot'.

'That's strange. What will happen now?'

'I want to relay the message from this place. They won't be able to track us down here. It would really help me, and I can hide here'.

Chloe glanced from Agnes' pleading eyes to the frightened gait of Mummy Church.

'You will be here, but I will monitor your progress'.

Agnes jumped happily, while Mummy Church could only give a weak smile. She was definitely having an ulterior motive. Chloe too had her own ulterior motive. Immediately she got back to the public, she would tell the police. Agnes couldn't hide forever. She needed the strong hands of the authority, and with her money, she would ensure she got it. All she needed to know at that time was whether it was heaven or hell the woman saw.

5 Error 404

Joana, depressed after the session of prayer, and encounter with Nosa, trudged home. She felt she needed to preach the gospel before she got to her room. However, she had to change her mind when she remembered a previous ordeal.

Her house was referred to as Fish estate. Although her house wasn't located in an estate, the houses in the compound looked like an estate. The compound was very large. There were four flats, beautifully painted and properly maintained, within it. Also, it had a story-building with thirteen rooms. She inherited the house from her grandmother, who sold fish when she was alive.

The ordeal rang in her mind as she climbed the stairs. She remembered the day because that was the first time she had a share of heavenly visitation. It was the fourth of January. That day, Joana headed for the room of the two ladies in her house. They were known to dress awkwardly, and might end up in hell and also take a lot of people along with them. So, she made a duty to preach to them. That day also, the night had covered the house. More so, fear still tugged her heart, and the coldness of the month made her shiver from within.

When she got to the door, she whispered their names and wanted to knock when she heard the strangest of thing. Someone was moaning in the room. She would have probably overlooked the moaning if she hadn't done it before. One of the ungodly ladies was with a man in the room. She hissed and walked towards her room, but decided to break the defiling of her compound by making sure she preached the gospel.

So, she returned fearfully. She wasn't sure she was doing the right thing. She was yet to see where Jesus did that type of thing in the bible. Logically, she was trespassing but she couldn't let them go to hell. Suddenly, she heard something vibrating. Her mind went immediately to Victoria, her prostitute-friend, who later gave her life to Christ and made her a Christian. Victoria used vibrator a lot. The moaning from within the room was definitely moaning from someone using such. She decided it was time to stop the ungodliness in her house. She knocked harder. The door opened with her first push. And lying on top of each other weren't a man and a woman or a woman with a vibrator, but a woman on a woman, sweating profusely. Joana screamed.

The two of them jumped off the bed. The two ladies, Claudia and Tracey, were rattled. Even Joana was too perplexed. She ran out, pulled the door and shouted again. Even if the world didn't come around to listen to her cry, they would see the result of her anger. She was angry on God's behalf. There was no way she would allow such thing as this to go undiscussed or unresolved. Her home had turned to pseudo-Sodom and Gomorrah.

'Ah! My house that should be referred to as a place of worship had become the habitation of the vilest of things. God forbid', she screamed outside the room. 'Come out you fools'.

From within the house, Claudia was shouting repeatedly, while Tracey called after her as if she was pleading with her. But Claudia was the stubborn one. She had always wanted the

innocent Tracey to be the only one in the house. She should have followed what she felt at that moment.

'You people would pack your load and your sodomization out of this sacred house', she yelled and bounced about like a big balloon ball. She was so sure that the Lord purposely sent her to their room because he wanted her to discover the secret that lurked in that their room. Tracey was an unusually dark, tall lady. She had a knack for plaiting her hair, and that made her face shine in a very pretty way. Her face alone was what many in Joana's former line of business referred the face of the perfect beauty. Men died for her type of body because she was full in the right places. Even if she wanted to fornicate she shouldn't have dabbled with the addictive lesbianism.

'Shut your foul mouth, you this rubbish can', Claudia shouted as she rushed out. She came out as if she was prepared to make Joana as slim and short as she with enough beatings. Even if she wouldn't be involved in any physical fight with them, she would express her mind to them, and ensure that they leave her house with immediate alacrity. She would ensure that they run like men whose wives suddenly appear in a hotel to confront them for their adulterous way of life.

'I won't curse you, I won't pray for you but my mouth wouldn't stop talking. You people are nuisances'.

By this time, her neighbor's daughters, who might have come out of their room because of her noise began to try their best to be around them probably to make a jest of her. They didn't really like her, and she too didn't like them. The only people she loved from their fatherless family was their mother and elder sister, Gladys, who were serious Christians, and were worth emulating.

Yet, she couldn't focus on them as she and Claudia kept ranting at one another. In the next few minutes, Mummy Gladys was out and was trying to pull her away.

'Madam Joana, blessed are the peacemakers'.

'That's your job. Mine is to purge this house of the filthiness that's creeping into it'.

Luckily, Gladys was in the house. Most people in the house, even her, always craved the type of blessings and behavior.

'You two. In my house? That is Sodom... You are sodomites'.

Gladys' mother tried to tear the two of them apart. Tracey pulled Claudia, but she brushed her aside as if she had taken a drug that expanded her muscles, urging her to fight.

'What does this woman think she is? A sanctimonious... Is she Jesus? Even Jesus was a good person. I will show you pepper and fire. And to be clear, I am the fire and the pepper. Do you think we don't know your history? We've heard how you were once a prostitute'.

Joana felt hurt as she saw Gladys sympathizing with the ladies. She had seen hell and knew that people like them would surely end up in the lake of fire, and she didn't want Gladys to be a part of them. She, therefore, wielded the last weapon in her armory.

Joana jumped and shouted, 'thank you. But now I'm saved. See the two of them, Lesbians. And I know who taught who. You this short tiny devil. The Lord forbids you'.

Gladys gave a Tracey a cold glare that made her Joana's heart dance within her. Now, she would have a reason to make the ladies come to the realization of seeing it. Gladys returned to their room, probably disgusted.

Joana, still infuriated, allowed Gladys' mother drag her away. She had to stop fighting when she was very sure she had gotten to Gladys. With the way Gladys now felt about them, one of them would begin to have a changed mind and would probably change for the better.

As she inserted her keys into the new lock, she was very sure the fight was having its effect in their life. She entered the kitchen to get her food.

For hours, after she finished washing the empty plate, she watched the numerous videos of those that had gone to hell. Yet, she was restless. Her eyes were heavy from a desire to sleep, but she took a bottle of sleeping pills and popped one. She had prayed along with the various videos of the testimonies of those ladies that went to heaven, but she wasn't satisfied. She would do whatever it took to make heaven. She had given all her money to the church and had stopped wearing hair attachment, rubber attachment, wool attachment; none of her clothes showed any part of her body. The only visible part of her clothes were her head and hands, then her feet.

As she kept watching the videos, someone gave an interpretation that ignited the information Nosa wanted from her. She jumped with ecstasy and aimed for a paper and a pen.

'Hallelujah! I got the name', she shouted. 'Oh, I got the name'.

She wrote it down and slumped back into her seat. If she called Nosa that moment, it might be a wrong time as the midnight had just passed. She would wait until the next day.

'I got it', she shouted again as she concentrated on the video.

As soon as the midnight passed the thirtieth minutes, someone began to fiddle with the door. She was startled. That was surprising. She tiptoed nearer to the door and strained her ear to be sure she was hearing well. The person was definitely trying to break in. She should raise alarm, but her body could do only one thing that was programmed in it: what she had prepared for a day like that.

Gradually, she increased the volume of the loud television until she was sure one of the tenants would lament about how she had started her display of craziness, but she wasn't concerned. There was no way she would allow backbiting that was prevalent with harlots, and regular unchristian-like women affect her or stop her from saving her life.

She rushed into the kitchen and unlocked it. Luckily, she always greased her door. So, it would definitely not make any unnecessary noise. The back of her kitchen led to a bush, which she knew like the back of her hand. Her grandmother had planted a lot of crops there and always dragged her along. She hid there and was very sure nothing would bring her out till the intruder left.

Although she didn't expect her fear to be true, she couldn't risk her life. The intruder might truly not be after her for her dreams. The intruder might only be a thief but might end up killing her. She couldn't allow herself to play to that risk. Heaven helped those who helped themselves. When she was sure she was safe in the bush, she dialed Nosa's number.

Nosa laid beside his three-month-pregnant mistress, widely awake as he wondered why women could be so irritating, irrational, and irresponsible.

'Nosa. Baby...Did you hear what I said?' Shayla said and cuddled him.

'I heard, and seriously I think that's off the mark. You're losing your mind off the target set for you'.

'Wow. That's pure. Isn't it? Am I just another puppet? Or, yes, I'm your mistress, whom you can stress on the bed, but can forget at any moment'.

'Seriously, what're you saying?'

'I'm saying it was high time you made me your wife like you promised the other time'.

'But this isn't our present mission. You're to remain, my mistress, as you called it. We promised it won't go far. The plan was that it wouldn't go this far?'

'Wow! Pure truth from a foul mouth. Can you hear the rubbish that is being spilled from your mouth right now?'

'Seriously. We didn't make plans on it getting this ridiculously far. Have you seen *Breaking Bad*?'

'How's that my concern?'

'If you've seen it. You would understand that you are behaving like one of the characters, you...'

'I don't want to understand anything'.

'I remember the day we discussed this. We had two bowls of pepper soup, how many bottles of beers? I'm trying to help you seriously remember that particular day...'

'Nosa, you know me. I'll make you sink, you'll rot in the deep and no one will take a look at you, not for any reason'.

She was right. He needed to be gentle with her. Despite being on probation, she still had a lot of influence. Or she could decide to make Chloe aware of the whole situation.

'Whatever it will be, just calm your nerve. I'll find the right solution for you. We will...'

His phone rang and rattled on the table he placed it. It was Joana.

'Joana, I told you to stay calm. Some police officers are coming there', he growled into the phone.

'That's not why I'm calling. They are here already'.

'Then, why?'

'The name I told you I wrote on a piece of paper',

'Yes'.

'Someone took it'.

Nosa sat up. 'How?'

'I don't know'.

'Did they take any other thing?'

'No. They took only the name'.

'That's strange. Why will the person be after the name and nothing else'.

'Am I God? Only God could have known. But he won't even tell me at the moment. He is still angry with me for not telling the world about the visions. I'll...'

'Joana. Joana, do you remember it at this time?'

'No. I wish. I wish. Oh God! Why am I forgetful?'

Nosa felt like slapping her, telling her to keep quiet and think of the possible names. He inhaled and looked about in the room that was blue because of the blue bulb in Shayla's room.

'Calm down. Sleep and wake tomorrow, you'll remember'.

He wished he could go to her place, but he couldn't. He was on a boat with Shayla. There was no way she could allow him to go, not that night, not until the day was bright. She was the only one that could prevent him from working. And now, she was doing that.

6 Imprisoned in Knowledge

After the police left, Joana was still in shock when she received a call from Raphael. At first she tried to pick the call but the battery went off. She was surprised. She charged it the other time. Checking it, she discovered that she was using the worse one. As if she was on fire, she removed it and inserted the better one. Then, she called Raphael's phone again.

'Joany, your life is in danger'.

'Yes. Someone just broke into my house'.

'Someone broke into your house? Are they mad? Who are these people monitoring your life? As in... The one here is also monitoring your life. After what happened, I tapped to my boss' phone call and had been monitoring his calls'.

Joana, who laid on the sofa and had promised herself a good sleep, sat up. 'So?'

'I don't understand what they mean, but someone wants you dead or so. They are searching everywhere for you'.

Joana fingers danced on the sofa, and was sure she would soon cry out in frustration.

'What do you mean? I know the devil has started working or is it God?'

'What are you saying?'

'God wants me to tell the world about my encounter but I haven't done so'.

'But God will not do bad things for us like that'.

'But he is God, he is the ruler of the Universe and would get his demands, if he so pleases'.

There was a short pause from Raphael. 'That's what I hate about all these S.U. You make others hate God. But will God send someone to kill you?'

'Yes.'

'You didn't make me say what I want to say. I don't even know if the person is even trying to kidnap you like the others'.

'Oh God', she shouted.

'Trouble!' Raphael also shouted. 'Bottle of urine'.

'I know. I'm in serious trouble'.

'No...No. It's not you. Do you have television there? Switch it on. Hear the news. Listen to what they say... to what they are saying'.

'Where?' Joana scrambled out of the sofa and ran for the remote control. Then, she hurriedly began to change the TV stations.

'Ah! Idiot! Go to FcTv'.

She hurriedly turned the station to Fortunecity TV and heard the news. So far, the twenty-four people who saw the vision about hell had gone missing.

'Ah! I'm dead. Raphael, I have to tell the world tomorrow. God will be angry at me'.

'You're mad. You want to die, right? You will just die. Someone is kidnapping people and you want to talk. No. Go out and paste it on yourself from tonight that "people, I want to be kidnapped'.

She watched the news blankly. There was no way Raphael could convince her otherwise. 'See, Raphael, I must share my testimony o. And I must let people come back to God'.

'You're deceiving yourself. Okay...If you will do it, let me hide you'.

Would she want Raphael to hide her? He was a sinner. But what bad would it do if a sinner began to help her, a believer? The bible said if you find favor in God's eyes even the heathen would scramble to help you. All she needed was a place to write from and publish. Then, maybe she can do videos too.

'Okay'.

'In other words, you have to move immediately'.

'No. I've not taken anything'.

'Ah! Joany, who made you as foolish this? Don't you understand, people are after you? They want you dead or to kidnap you. They would smash your body, and crunch it'.

'I understand'.

'Where's your place?'

'Johnson Avenue. Sophia Close. The last house'.

'Not far. Not far. This is 9:27. Meet me at Samuel Junction in 40 minutes. If I don't see you there then, I'll call the police'.

'Okay'.

'Thank you'.

'Thank me when you're safe'.

Raphael had always doted on her when she was still a prostitute. He never allowed any other person service him. Most of the time they spent together met him showering her with love. He would continually request for her hand in marriage; a request she graciously refused. He promised to do anything for her, even become one of her puppets, but she adamantly refused.

Those days, he was more of a Christian than she. So, she believed he would try to make her a church-goer because he believed in the spirit of discernment, which he wrongly called the spirit of the prophets. She packed her clothes and left home; yet, sad that the word of God would make her leave home.

Nosa had woken immediately he felt Shayla removing the handcuffs. She said she wanted to try something else on him that night. She called it sex with handcuff or whatever. But she was naughty and calculative. She knew he might have reasons to run away again before the morning came, and God was his witness, if the cuffs weren't there, he would have used the fly boat to the land to meet Joana.

He rose from the bed, packed the load of CDs on the visions and stealthily entered the sitting room with his laptop. Then, he entered the kitchen, took and opened a drink and returned to the sitting room.

There, he watched the videos, skipped all the frivolous introductions, and began to note names of Pastors. The most consistent names were the general overseers of two big churches in Green City, Bringer of Life Ministry and In Christ's Might Church'.

Tomorrow, he would visit them. And his whole investigation would begin or should he say continue there. He should comfort Chloe, and wish her a merry Christmas. He picked his phone and chatted up Chloe on WhatsApp. The message was sent, but not delivered, that suggested one thing. Chloe's phone was off. Chloe rarely switched off her phone. She loved to be abreast of news and new information.

'Maybe she hasn't updated the WhatsApp still', he mumbled as he inserted one of the CDs to watch. Then, he returned to his seat, where he was vigorously jotting down information. He would have loved to ask people questions, but the problem was becoming rampant. It was high time he became the knight in shining armor for these ladies. They might really be killed off, and he wouldn't want their death to be pinned on his heart for long.

'Baby, what are you doing?' Shayla's voice reverberated behind him. He jumped slightly and smiled. She was good at catching him unaware.

'You see', she said and laughed. 'I'm your boss, I will always make you fall'.

He chuckled. 'I was dozing off'.

He was known for never being caught off guard. The only person that had ever caught him off guard was Shayla.

'Over and over again', she said as she bounced towards him, and dropped beside him on the chair.

'Never and never again. You've hit your mark for the last time. I'll always be ready'.

'Like the last time'.

'But I said that flippantly'.

'Like you said the last time...Just admit it now. Admit I'm your boss, and I'll never do anything to win you again', she said as she cuddled him. He dropped his head on hers.

'You're not my boss. I'll always be steps ahead'.

'Why?'

'I'm a P.I, by the way, Merry Christmas'.

'I'm with the Federals. Merry Christmas'.

'You're not with the federals, you're with the locals'.

'The locals are with the federal and that means?' She said as watched him for an answer. He knew the answer but he loved to make her wait for it.

'Just say and let's watch this rubbish. It means what?'

'Information'.

'Yeah...So admit I'm your boss'.

'No. I'm the boss'.

'If you don't agree with me, at least the person kidnapping is a step ahead of you'.

'No... The person has kidnapped 24 people. I'll catch her'.

'That means I really knock you out', she said beaming. 'I told you about another kidnapped person while you were asleep'.

'Jesus...' Nosa shouted and jumped out of the chair. 'What's her name?'

'One Joana or something?'

'Oh, God! She cried that people were after her'.

'Was she the one that called yesterday?'

'Yes. But she hasn't publicized the revelation. Are you sure you got the name right?'

Shayla shrugged. 'Maybe I was knocked out too. Maybe it was the name you said while receiving that call that stuck to my brain'.

He rose and went to pick his phone. Joana complained of not sleeping well because of fear. She might still be awake. He dialed her number, but it was switched off.

'She had been kidnapped?'

'But who could be kidnapping these people. This person is good and slippery', Shayla commented and was lost in her thought. He glanced at her just in time to see her holding out 6 fingers to herself.

'I'm going after her', he announced and began to tidy the table.

'No. You're not going anywhere till the morning comes'.

'I'm on this case'.

She stomped her feet. 'No, baby. My people would be on it. I'll give you information'.

'You don't understand; she needs me'.

She rose as he turned after he picked his keys. She cocked her gun. He heard it well.

'What? What's wrong with you?' He asked as he hoped she was joking by pointing it at him.

'Nothing? You said I have the right to do this immediately you become heady'.

'I don't mean this way'.

'I'm not concerned o. Move to your corner of the bedroom'.

He sighed and moved to the bedroom. The last time he disbelieved her, she shot the gun to brush his skin, but not to give him a deeper wound. That was what happened when you fall in love with a woman obsessed with you.

'I'll give you all information you need. But this morning, till 10, you are for me'.

She made him cuff himself to the bed, then she dropped the gun on her side of the bed and climbed him. 'You're going nowhere, not now'.

Even if he tried to hurt her now, she was at a vantage position. And there was no need to go violent since it wasn't a matter of life and death. He slumped into the wood as she continually kissed and caressed him.

7 *Disappeared*

Joana's fat body, depression, and new-found faith couldn't make her jump over Raphael the moment she saw him. Before, she would have hugged him, brought down his head into... She shook her head. Thoughts and memories like those ones were meant to die with her baptism. They shouldn't be allowed to resurrect again.

He was as tall as ever. His broad shoulder still made her have a tinge of desire to hug him again, but she denied herself of it. It was unholy and she needed to abstain from every appearance of evil. He had a knack for keeping a white beard and an afro. He still kept them, the way she always admired them. His big chain shone from his neck alongside the bracelet and the ring he wore. If she didn't know him before, she might have assumed the ring was charmed as it was the custom of so many get-rich-quick guys.

'Jah!' Raphael shouted when he saw her pulling a Dhayour duffel bag. His scowl deepened as she got nearer. 'Joany, what have you done to yourself? No. This is pathetic, even the fish in the Sardine that had recently been growing thinner isn't as thin as this'.

'What?' She asked as she followed his gesture that she should enter the car. His eyes didn't leave her as she scrambled into his car. The darkness shouldn't cover how she was. If not for the reflection of the street light, and the busy street, she might have refused to meet him. He should have waited till the next day, but the fear releasing itself into her was a better motivation and persuasion than he.

'First of all', he said as he started the car. 'Jah! This is too much. Bottle. This is a bottle of urine'.

'What now? Raphael, you have started this your crazy ways of acting again'.

'When you started using my name and started speaking formally I knew you have changed...'

'Of course'.

'For bad. But this...You look worse. You are now looking like all those Deeper Life people. Why now?'

'See I've met Jesus. If any man is in Christ, old things are passed away. Hell and Heaven are real'.

'Of course. Of course, I know. Prophet Vegas, you know that my very handsome Prophet. He went to heaven last week', Raphael said and chuckled. 'When he first said it, I thought he was lying, but one of those tiny waist ladies in the church said he wasn't lying. Then, she winked at me. And I knew my prophet must have gone into trance after copulating with her'.

'But this one is real'.

'I know. All of them are real. But, God can't be wicked enough to take everybody to hell'.

'God is not wicked. He just has his rules and laws'.

'That's your problem. I know Jehovah well; he has his method. He knew all of us would not be faithful. That's why he made some of you faithful'.

'Raphael, see...Forget it. Just know that life is short'.

'Yes. I will forget it. My problem still remains that... why the sudden change? You look too drab. You are not wearing those...'He said and gestured at her breast. She felt naked in his presence.

'Stop that now. I'm a daughter of Zion'.

'I know'.

'So who was the person that had been calling to know about me?'

'I don't know yet, but I've given it to Emma...Emmanuel. You remember him now'.

She nodded. 'Your partner in crime'.

'No. Emma is not my partner in crime. He was my mentor. The guy was good. He can have three women in a row'.

'It's okay. What did he do?'

'Emma is now a bonafide Christian', he laughed. 'He called it something...Born something like that'.

'Born again...What did he say?'

'Yes. Born again. He has stopped going to clubs and the rest. Now, he is also crying about Heaven and Hell'.

'You see. If your teacher has changed, why can't you change?'

'Did God create us to go heaven?'

'Yes...'

'Why didn't he just create us in heaven?'

'Oh I see where you are going? So you think gallivanting about the whole town would do it? You have not change for better at all. And I'm surprised at your way of life'.

'See forget it. Emma will get the answer to me soon. The guy is good with all this computer stuff'.

'Good. Maybe I'll tell Nosa the person'.

'Which Nosa?'

'He's...What' your concern?'

'My concern is that you will marry me again'.

She laughed. 'What does light have to do with things of Darkness?'

'See this hippopotamus o. I'm darkness. I'm helping you to safety and you're calling me darkness'.

'I'm sorry'.

He bantered on as they drove into the darkness, into her unknown future. She knew the apostles ran from place to place because they were under siege because of the word of God. People wanted to kill them, persecutors. Her own fear wasn't about persecutors. It was from someone that was just kidnapping them and wasn't even demanding ransom. She allowed her mind meander into oblivion. If she was persecuted like the apostles, she would endure it, but she couldn't possibly die without the message of God to the world.

He checked his phone and yelled, 'thank God'.

She sat up with the expectation that he had gotten the response from Emmanuel. 'What's that?'

'My boys. Those boys are good. Ah! Bet9ja... You people have failed. My two odds make sense. Somebody must suffer. Your father'.

'What's all this? You haven't stopped gambling?'

'See this girl-she. Gambling is my water and blood. How do you think I maintain my fine look? When I finish with you, I will load games for tomorrow. Ah! Betnaija... Their mother'.

Joana hissed and turned to watch the darkness and the light that reflected through it. Raphael inserted a song and was dancing. At least, he should wait till she got down from the car before he rejoiced. She glanced at him as he rejoiced with his croaky voice. She turned to the window and thought of the many times of her life, and knew that if she got the opportunity to choose again, she would choose this one over and over again. Working for God was the sweetest thing that could ever happen to her.

Suddenly Raphael stopped. She turned to look at the place they were. They were in one of the brothels in town. The sounds of knockouts resounded from nearby stalls, and Raphael bared his teeth at the blasts from the knockout. He pointed at them and shook his head as if they brought out archived memory.

'What? What are we doing here?'

'Celebrating... Let's buy something to drink before anything happened to you'.

'Are you m... What's wrong with you? I told you I'm a Christian'.

'And I'm a Buddhist? Forget all those rubbish. Do I look like someone that has gummed his eyes? You are very safe here'.

'Raphael, stop all these jokes'.

He burst into laughter. 'But at least, let's eat pepper soup made with Catfish'.

'I don't eat the same food that sinners see as the best'.

'Jah!' Raphael exclaimed and raised his hands. The music from within the brothel spread outside and above the one he was playing in his car.

'You're not feeling fine. You ate these things when you were here. Somebody should help my memory? I even bought you Suya from Ibrahim, the Fulani. If not that he has gone home, we would have bought some'.

Joana shrugged. 'Those were in the days I was foolish'.

'Then, foolishly pay back all the money we used then'.

'Those were in my old life'.

'Something is wrong with your church brain', Raphael said as he hissed and turned. 'I'll look for someone better'.

He looked around and sighted a slim lady on Yellow shirt. He gestured at her. She rushed towards him with her tiny legs. Joana was sure he couldn't do anything foolish with her sitting there.

'Baby girl', he said and pointed his phone at her. 'I tried to call your number, but it wasn't going through'.

'That's because I forgot to give you my number', she said and flaunted her padded chest at him.

'Raphael, please let's go', she groaned.

'A minute', Raphael said and dashed out of the car. The lady outside rolled, but Raphael ran past her into the brothel and returned with four cans of beer. Joana slapped her hand on her face, while the lady stared in surprise.

'Till later baby girl. This church woman wants me to leave this beautiful place. Merry Christmas'.

'Miser', the slim lady yelled at him.

'Chicken... That's how every one of them does. They are looking for a husband on the road', Raphael yelled and drove off.

'What do you see in that woman?'

'Beauty is in the eyes of the beer-holder'.

Joana glanced at him and hissed. Then, looked back into the darkness that engulfed the roads of Fortunecity. Raphael hissed at her and opened a can of beer. It made a noise that propelled a big sigh from Joana.

He drove off and started the song playing in his car, and shouted along with the song. However, he became silent when the playlist got to 'Four years' by Stylplus. Gradually, houses started dissolving into grasses and the grasses soon started making way for huge trees. Then street light gave up on them and handed the watch to the moon.

'Raphael, where are we going?'

'I'm taking you to a place no one would ever think of finding you'.

'Where?'

'Prayer Mountain. My prayer mountain', he said and winked.

'What of my video testimony and the magazine?'

'You will do it.'

She became silent again and tried not to talk to him. At least, she was having it both ways-working with a heathen and still pleasing God. She preferred to term it as God having his way. On a normal circumstance, she wouldn't have trusted anyone, but she trusted Raphael. They had gone far in their relationship for her not to trust him. She might not like his method, but she liked him and believed he would never hurt her, even if they handed the world over to him.

When they got to the place, she was skeptical about heeding to Raphael. Despite the fact he told her he was taking her to a mountain, she never believed it would be a place like the one he had just brought her to. The peak of the mountain was the only thing protruding from the tall massive trees that surrounded it. Even in the darkness, the blackness of the mountain's peak highlighted the coldness that was building up in her heart. She shivered as they got out off the car. The rain was drizzling, and Raphael merely glanced at the drizzle as if it was a child jumping about excitedly because its favorite TV show was being played.

Raphael began to give her details of how the place was without a balanced network, and how lonely it might want to be.

'I thought it was a church'.

'A...?' Raphael said, hissed and chuckled. 'Me? Bring you to church? The only church I like is the one I attend and no other', he said as he brought out two torchlights from the duffel he withdrew from the trunk of his car.

'But when did you plan all this?'

'Since the day I met you. After you told me about the cruise you took and always wanted to take. I always wanted this to be our own cruise. I've been planning to leave the world alone and spend the rest of the year with you...On...' He said as his eyes roamed her body.

'Argh! You need God. The Bible says without holiness you can't see God, even heaven'.

'Who? Heaven? God? I don't want to see God now. I have a lot of plans for my life'.

Then, they came to the top of the mountain and he pointed the torch towards a direction. 'That's the house. It used to belong to me and my friends'.

'Do I know them?'

'Not sure'.

He turned and pointed to a very far end. 'I wanted you to come to this place. That place... I and my friends used to play a lot of games there. It's sloppy but one of us knows how to climb it. We would run and come out of the other end', Raphael said, smiled and shook his head.

'Let's go. I'm tired. And everywhere is dark'.

'Yes, I know. I'll remember to show you tomorrow. Immediately, we enter I'll take your phone'.

When Raphael was sure she was out of earshot, she dialed the number.

'She's disappeared', he said.

'Thank you'.

Then there was a pause at the other end.

'Where is she?'

'Remember our promise. I can't tell anybody where she is'.

'I remember. I just want to access her when it's time'.

Raphael shook his head. This wasn't time to even think about passing the information. 'Remember why you asked me to do this?'

'Yes. I know...'

'Okay. I'll update you soon. She wants to me to upload a video of her tomorrow'.

'We will do it. Just do everything to make her stay put'.

'I will. And I will change her mind about announcing herself to the world'.

8 Meddlers

There is this wait that can get on ones nerve, and if not watched, would ruin every accolade that one had gotten for being patient. Nosa impatiently kept a tab on the time and kept glancing at Shayla.

'Eat your food. Staring at the time wouldn't make everything resolve itself and would do you no good'.

'Your man said Joana hadn't come out since, and that's disturbing'.

'I told you they are good'.

'Please, let me go. Have I not fallen in love with the wrong woman like this?' Nosa said and sighed.

'Yes. You have fallen in love with a bloody wrong woman. How will you leave me for weeks and want to go before a new day, are you sick?'

'But you understand what's happening'.

'Story for the gods'.

'I need to see the other case. The new missing person'.

'I told you the police were at her place. Her case wasn't consistent with the others. She left home and wasn't found. You're not eating'.

He glanced at his food and winked at her. 'You know my mind is not here. I want to be out there, chasing every lead and clue'.

'I know and I also know this might be the last time I'll see you. So, no. Eat. Now'.

He sighed and fiddled with the food. Like Jesus, whose food wasn't meat and drink, but to do his father's will, Nosa's food wasn't yam and egg and tea; it was to feed on the grumpiness of some people; ask numerous irritating and accusative questions, and find out about the vilest of the thoughts of men. He shrugged and ate his food slowly, picking it as if it was laden with worms. He rose and Shayla's hand flew to the pistol she laid on the table.

'It's ten'.

She glanced at the food. 'You've not finished eating'.

He shook his head, took his key, and stormed into the room, and returned. 'If you're the man of the house then I would remain here. Did you woo me or did I?'

'Nosa, don't try it. Being huge or stubborn doesn't open the door. It's only the one with the key. Even if this door isn't locked, I'm the free passage to wherever you're going'.

The moment his hand touched the doorknob, a bullet scraped the edge of the door, a few inches from his hand.

'What's this?'

She shrugged and glanced at the food. 'I know you love me, and won't make me hurt you, but you have given me the go-ahead to always do this to you. Why are you always heady?'

'I need to go to find this woman'.

'No, you don't need to do anything. You're acting as if this case is your hemoglobin as if you can't live without it'.

He dragged the seat, collapsed into it, and stabbed his fork into the food and made noise with it. There was no way he would definitely obey her. The food would probably be sweet since she was a good cook, but his appetite had traded place with his inquisitiveness. The food was an insurmountable obstacle. The more he tried to push them into his mouth, the more he felt the urge to leave the house.

She dropped the gun on the floor in anger as she hopped out of her seat. The gun clattered for a while as her chair screeched and collapsed.

'I'm tired of you', she yelled and skipped near him as if her legs were on fire. 'Did I say you should love me? Why did I ever meet you? Maybe I wouldn't be worked up because of you? Simple food', she lamented and her voice began to break as tears clambered down her eyes. 'You treat me like a piece of shit'.

He rose and moved near her, but she withdrew. 'Don't you dare touch me'.

'I will eat', he said and sat. 'See. I'm eating'.

She continued crying as he gulped down the food. There was no way he would allow her to hold him down with something that could simply be solved by heeding to her desire. She kept hinting her approval at every swallow he had. The moment he finished eating, she went down on her knees and clasped her hands. 'I'm sorry'.

He stared at her disgustedly. She tried to hold his hand, but his cold glare made her withdraw it. He rose and went to get his stuff. She crawled towards him and tugged at his trouser. He gritted and glanced away. What could he do with her? She knew just how to pacify him. Their time together should have taught him that, but he still always fell into her trap. He rubbed her head, scattering her hair, and kissed her forehead.

'I've got to go'.

'I know...'

Her phone beeped. She sighed dejectedly and nodded as Nosa headed for the door. The journey from the boat to the beach felt like an eternity. He kept ruminating over everything she told him. He didn't even consider the cool breeze that trailed after him. There must be a way to solve this mystery without him losing contact with everyone that could help him solve the case. Even if Joana wasn't missing, she was still partially useless. What could make someone keep forgetting things?

The moment he got to the land, he rushed to his car and sped off. He contacted his computer analysts and informed them about the missing Joana, and how they must help her also. He then proceeded to try to contact Chloe, who said she was with Mummy Church and asked him to make sure he came home for Christmas. He felt happy that she had detached herself from his father, and was with someone that could really help her loose herself from the tendrils she had wrapped herself.

The problem now was that his analysts were right. There was no way anyone could have known where he was or even what he discussed with Joana if he wasn't bugged. They must have really bugged his phone and he would go to the end of the world to ensure he discovered who they were. How could they know he would be on the case? That means the person was either from Mr. Johnson's case or Joana was lying about her not telling anyone except him.

'Please, please get out of the way', he murmured. The happiness from meeting Moriah the previous day was still lingering within his bones, and he wouldn't allow anyone take the opportunity from him.

The car in front of him belonged to a learner, who kept to the middle of the road. Nosa honked repeatedly and hoped his anger wouldn't take over his desire to remain happy. There was no way he would allow anyone tamper with his crime scene. Crime scenes were like February 29; one would have to wait for an eternity before one could get a better clue.

When he got to Joana's house, upon entering the compound and being directed to Joana's place, he met her house had been scattered. He looked around for anybody to tell him what happened there, but no one was available to help him.

Seeing that he had no choice than to advance into the house, he withdrew his gun and proceeded to his house. The silence of the compound, as well as the graveness of the massive house, made him aware that it would be foolish to make any noise. He wondered how she coped living in such house alone. Yet, she would never in her right mind leave the house empty, and the door ajar.

He entered the compound and searched everywhere. Her clothes were all scattered on the ground. The objects in the house were scattered. In his quest for finding any evidence at all, he saw something in the mirror. Quickly, he withdrew to the passage, to a vantage point, to a place no one would suddenly jump on him. The mirror reflected someone's leg.

'Come out gently with your hand in the air'.

The room's door creaked, then the person slowly walked out with both hands in the air.

'Police. Who are you?' Nosa shouted from where he was.

'Boss. Please, please. I swear. I just needed the money'.

'What money? Were you here to steal?'

'I swear'.

'I don't believe you. Who are you?'

Nosa moved towards the room, but the man was faster. He hurriedly locked the door and held the doorknob with something bulky. Nosa pushed, groaned and pushed, but the door didn't budge. The only thing he heard was that of the person breaking a window and jumping out. He got a glimpse of the thief the moment he opened the door. He rushed through the door and sped after the man into the bushes behind the house. When he got there, he met the bush settling after being rattled. Nosa followed the man into the bush, determined to catch him, but had to stop because it would be a fruitless effort just like searching for a needle in a sea.

He sighed, marched towards his car, and dialed Raphael's number. They were friends from childhood. The womanizer just happened to be available at the right time for him and had been instrumental in making things work fast at the moment.

'Raph, her house was just burgled by someone'.

'That's serious. Thank God I called you for her safety'.

'I didn't take her serious at first. Thanks to you, I did now'.

'She has done her crazy testimony. Oh God! How did I ever fall in love with her? She must change. I'm not sure I can keep up with this her newly found love for God. People love God and don't die for it. Her own is worse'.

Nosa chuckled. 'Raph...That's your cross to bear. Beauty is in the eyes of the beer-holder. Tell her I said "hi"'.
'Remember, we don't want anybody to know'.

'Remember, we don't want anybody to know'.

'Brother, let them know. Everything is frustrating'.

'Remember your phone is hacked'.

He assumed that if he changed his sim card into another phone the person wouldn't get access to his calls, but getting to Joana's place had proven him wrong.

'I know. Let the idiot. You, idiot, listening at the other end. I will catch you'.

Raphael sigh. 'Guy, that's reckless. I miss Moriah. How far with the investigation? You should have gotten a lot by now'.

'Nothing. Raph. My mistress held me at a gun point'.

'Bad guy. Shayla is a stubborn girl. She isn't a bottle of urine. You should go gentle on her. Oh God!'

'What's that?'

'I just mentioned her name'.

Nosa started his car. 'You don't want to try her. Whoever is hacking my phone should be careful. Nobody dares try her. She's a legal tyrant. She can kill at the blink of the eyes'.

'By the way, Chloe called.'

'Why are you telling me? Were you not her best friend?'

'I was until that naughty Irene became closer. And I told that naughty one too to let's have fun before she traveled. That adamant idiot. I miss them all. I miss...' Raphael said and paused.

Nosa knew who he wanted to say, but didn't encourage him to talk further because he might spill the beans about Moriah's resurfacing.

'When last did you hear from Irene herself?' He said as he drove off and plugged his earpieces into the phone.

'Irene? Four days ago. We are not as close as I am with Chloe. But Chloe just snoozed off and forgot everyone for one week. She only says hi...hi now'.

'Irene is dead'.

'Wawu! Jah!'

'See, I have to go. The fact is, Chloe is withdrawing to herself again. Talk to her'.

'I will. Oh! Fine, Coke body Irene is dead'.

Chloe arranged everything the night before. Her father-in-law would be duly taken care by one of the house-helps she paid a lot. They had designated time to come but for the period of his stay, they would attend to him like the king he was.

Against the one-handed Mummy Church's cry, she called the police and paid them to watch Agnes. The DPO promised to send two guys the next morning. So, she drove off to her land, where she slept over. She got a video recorder for her and some food items to make her comfortable. Then, she informed the policemen assigned to her that she was on the move. They hinted her that she had just been followed.

When she got to the door of the building Agnes was staying, she looked about and gave a thumbs-up to the policemen in hiding. Sighing, she knocked. But Agnes didn't respond. She looked about and at the knob of the door. She was probably sleeping naked and it wouldn't be ideal for her to barge in. Chloe had to accord her the respect for humanity. She knocked again, harder this time. Yet, Agnes didn't answer the knock.

This time, Chloe was frightened. What if something had happened to her? She turned the knob of the door. It opened without any struggle. The room was only plastered and had just a small bed, which the man in charge of the place's security was supposed to use.

Chloe called Mummy Church.

'Hello, Sister Chloe. How are you?'

'I'm on my land now, and I can't find Sister Agnes'.

'Yes, she said she was afraid of being alone in that place, so I went back there to pick her and we've moved to a hotel'.

'A hotel? A place where spiritual weeds are known to thrive'.

'I know, but we had no choice'.

'She needs to be in a place that no one would trace. I'm with the video camera to help her produce the videos of the vision she saw'.

Chloe felt like strangling Mummy Church for making such stupid foolish decisions.

'She wants...'

'Where are you?'

'You don't need to bother yourself. She's doing fine'.

'No. My heart is not at peace'.

'You don't need to feel obliged. We would...'

'Are you in a place to have a quality taste of the good morning? I'm not mocking you, but we both know that I have the resources to keep this woman safe. I can even get her police if she wants that'.

'No police...' Agnes and Mummy Church said.

'Don't involve the police'.

'But you still need a more secure place'.

'I told Mummy but she said she didn't trust... That she didn't want to stress you'.

'I want to be stressed. You're one of the people I've been hoping to meet for months. I need your safety than you'.

'But we... She is safer here'.

'She's not safe. Not anywhere. She can't taste or smell safety until this thing is over'.

'She didn't tell anyone except the two of us'.

'Let me feel the pain too. Where are you?'

'Mummy, let her...'

'Don't bother...'

'We are at Jummy Hotel. You know where that is?'

'Who doesn't know Jummy Hotel? I'm on my way'.

She hissed and hurried to her car, and had almost forgotten about the Policemen assigned to her. She beckoned to them and hinted at the latest development. They understood and hurried

To their own car. She drove off. Agnes thought she could be on her own, but there are consequences for being a lone ranger.

When she got to the hotel, she only had to tell the receptionists her name to get her Agnes' information. She had a major share with almost everything in Green City. The extremely rich Mr. Kings wasn't just rich and wasn't her father for nothing.

When she got to the door and knocked, Agnes opened the door and screamed in surprise.

'How did you get the room?' She said, backing away.

'If I could easily get it, tell me how no one else would get it'.

Mummy Church seemed rattled also because she struggled to get up from the chair she sat in. Agnes spun towards Mummy Church.

'I told you technology would affect things. Who knows? They might be listening to our conversations. Do you ever watch American detective films?'

'I'm a Christian and my focus is on heaven, I don't have time for frivolities'

'Films, frivolities? If not for the film, I wouldn't have known how to deal with some issues in my life'.

'That's unbiblical'.

'Mummy...!' Chloe said but was interrupted.

'Please, don't tell me Mummy is right. That's why many of us miss vital information'.

'It's okay. I've heard', Mummy Church shouted and waved her amputated hand. 'Let's discuss what is on ground'.

Chloe was perplexed. The woman was acting as if she didn't see a vision. She assumed those that saw visions always had a better behavior. 'No need to talk much, we need to leave immediately'.

'Why the haste?'

'Why the *haste*? The kingdom of God deals with time'.

Chloe opened the door and gestured for Agnes to leave. Mummy Church stared at her as if she had an ulterior motive, which was true. Yet, her ulterior motive was to know what she knew before she was finally kidnapped. Mummy Church shrugged and followed Agnes. Chloe locked the door, and went after them.

When they got into the car, they drove away with Chloe constantly watching the fearful Agnes vibrate. The journey to her land was like eating food in hurry: they were there in no time. Agnes jumped down, and Chloe did so too. Mummy Church, however, was reluctant in getting down from the car.

Chloe was very sure that she might be scheming things again. But whatever she had in mind, she would definitely fail. Chloe glanced back and nodded when the policemen gave her signals from the place they hid.

She hurried Agnes into the house and was followed by a moody Mummy Church. Agnes was excited when Chloe returned to her car to take the camera for the video coverage.

Agnes started out as many of them would start, and almost made Chloe shout at her to skip to the part where she and Jesus got to their destination. However, her preamble was too much and at some point, she would take a moment to cry or burst into hymns. Chloe and Mummy Church would either console her or rejoice with her. Time was of the essence, but Agnes didn't act as if she was aware of that.

Since Mummy Church had a mistrust for her, Chloe had to act carefully. Although she didn't see anything wrong in what she was doing, it was wise to give Caesar what he needed.

'So, when we got to heaven', Agnes continued and aroused Chloe's interest. She listened with all attention as she soaked the information in. Then the woman began to mention deeds of people and how they were happy in heaven and how some got the best of life. Chloe prayed someone could mistakenly see her mother; it would give her the assurance she needed that God can forgive her for giving birth to her child out of wedlock.

When she finished relaying her message, Chloe knew she just had to do what she planned before. Agnes' message was the strangest of all and should be the one to be preserved. The others continually came back with a report of hell, but she came back with a report of heaven. Chloe picked her phone and called the policemen to come out of hiding. They needed to guard this woman in somewhere very safe.

She turned to the woman, and glanced at the insecure Mummy Church. There was nothing that could be done that moment than to let them know the truth.

'You said we shouldn't involve the police, but you see that you need their protection'

'Y...'

'I'm paying them to protect you', Chloe said, raising her voice to subdue whatever Agnes wanted to say.

'I told you she would follow the law', Agnes shouted at Mummy Church.

'That's a lie from the pit of hell, and it provokes punishment. I was the one that told you'.

Chloe was surprised. Although, she shouldn't have been surprised. Mummy Church was a double-faced woman, who could act 'good' around one and backbite about the same person.

'I'm saving your life', Chloe shouted. 'Do you think if I upload this video, they wouldn't find you? They would smell you like ants smell out sugar. The kidnapper would pluck you away from the reach of the numerous people your life would bless like fruits do'.

'Don't you dare tell me what I know is a lie', Agnes yelled and walked over to the mini bed, where her bag lay. She spun and hit her chest. 'I know how much I lived in fear before I told anyone. Now, I told Mummy Church and I told you to make me safe. Do you think I would have asked you for help if not that I had refused to obey God If I wasn't like Jonah?'

'Sister... It's okay', Mummy Church said.

'It's not okay. You said we could trust her'.

Mummy Church grabbed her own head. 'I told you? Did I mention anything as regarding her except that she and her husband are known for following the law? Is anything ominous in that?'

'You people have proven yourself to be people I can't trust'.

Agnes carried her bag and stormed out. However, Chloe didn't have to chase her because right outside were the policemen. She sighed and decided to watch the event unfold.

'Madam, you won't be able to leave this place'.

'You see what I'm saying?'

Chloe moved near and dragged Agnes' bag, and flung it into the house. 'Sometimes, people especially the one with the problem, are not always aware of what they want'.

'Policemen, this woman is not supposed to harass me. I'm the one with the vision and don't want your protection. God is my protection. At least, I have done His wish and He would save me'.

'Mummy Church, say something, tell her to return to the house for her safety', Chloe turned to Mummy Church.

'I can't. In fact, she should run as fast as she could from Green City, from Fortunecity, from Nigeria. Away from here'.

'That's like taking a plant with disease and planting them in another ground. This kidnapper would keep searching everywhere for her unless you don't want me to upload the video'.

Agnes shook her head vigorously. 'You must upload it'.

'Yes, you must upload it', one of the policemen said.

'I don't understand, are you the one with the video? If God doesn't want me to upload it, I won't', Agnes barked and ran inside for her bag.

'God would want you, and we need this kidnapper to come after you so we can get him'.

'Like a trap. She is a bait?' Chloe asked in lower tones.

'That's the word', the first policeman said.

'That's...!' Mummy Church said as she placed her good hand on her hand. 'That's wicked. The Bible adjures us to not tempt people'.

'The Lord, our God', Agnes affirmed. 'This is like trying to know God's power'.

'Impossible', Chloe said. 'Officers, that wasn't the plan'.

The policeman folded his hand as if the words weren't coming out as expected. 'We would use this place as a bait'.

'No', Agnes said and rushed out with her bag. 'I'm not going to be used as a bait. My God wouldn't support such craziness'.

'That's the right thing to do', the policeman said.

'Then, you need Jesus. He would direct you', the woman said and dashed for the path that led out of the bush.

'Sister.... What are you doing?' Chloe shouted after her.

'Yo... 'The fairer police shouted and raced after her.

Agnes got wind of the fact that she was being chased, and ran like a whirlwind. The grasses she encountered were soon swirling as the other police joined in the chase. They shouted as they ran after her.

'You caused this', Mummy Church said to Chloe and ran after them. 'You always go to places you're not wanted'.

Chloe was so surprised that she stood, transfixed. She only wanted to help someone into safety. If Jesus came and the trumpet was blown, many people would die because they didn't have the message from this woman. The Police's job was to guard this message and not to become a rodent. She ran after them, but fell into the grass. She dusted her gown, and removed her shoe. Then, she continued her race after them. They kept chasing Agnes, whose speed looked like an animal whose tail was on fire. She had an unusual strength for race, and Chloe would commend her for that. Before long, the second police had caught her. He jumped on her and held her firmly to the ground.

'Leave me', Agnes screamed, and twisted, but his firm grip held her in place. Very soon, the other policeman was holding her still.

'This woman is stubborn. She is following us to the station'.

'But it has to be her freewill'.

'Freewill be damned'.

'Sister Chloe, these are your people. Talk to them', Mummy Church exclaimed and gestured at her.

The lady kept shrieking and trying to kick her way through, but the policemen seemed to be prepared for her. One of them cuffed her hands, and slammed her face into the bonnet of the car, making Chloe wince.

'Careful', she shouted. 'You don't want her maimed'.

'Sorry, madam. We're taking her to our office. She would be safer there'.

Chloe turned and pointed to the house. 'She would be safer here. Or a hotel or any other place than the police station'.

The dark policeman shook his head vigorously. 'This woman is adamant and wouldn't help our case. Even if she would still be taken to a place for her to be used as the bait, we would still take her to the station'.

'You're taking her nowhere', Mummy Church cried, and pulled at their clothes.

'Watch us'.

Mummy Church's eyes were now red. 'Leave her alone. She is God's vessel unto honor'.

'Who will help us get the other vessel?'

'What are your names?' Chloe shouted and pulled the door. But the two women were flung back. 'I will make sure you're sacked. I brought you here with my money. You people were given to me after I gave your boss money to release you to do as I wish'.

The other police hissed and started the car. The fair one poked his head outside.

'Call the police and tell them that Marcus and Vincent are with the woman. Tell them my code if you need that. Do you need that also? So, they would tell me what to do?'

They drove away with Agnes, screaming in the car, and Mummy Church beating their trunk till they drove off. Chloe too tried to run after them but had to stop when she was exhausted.

'It's your fault'.

'I was only trying to help'.

'You have not helped yourself. People die around you... You're cursed. Now, you've caused trouble for another one. You always go where no one wants you. You're not wanted. You entered your parents lives when they hadn't married. You entered Nosa's life and gave him a child. We never wanted you in this case'.

Chloe gritted and swallowed as the images of her dead children, her sad, caring father, and her friend. Immediately, she remembered her mother's word that she was cursed. She blinked back tears.

'We would find her', Chloe said with a husky voice.

'The police... I'll call their DPO. He gave me the boys', she said as she began to dial his phone number.

'Put it on speaker phone'.

Chloe glared at her and dialed DPO.

'Mrs. Kings Obaigbanwen. It's nice to have you call us again'.

'Your boys have just caused havoc and earthquake here. They've opened a bottle of two-week-old urine'.

'My boys?'

'Yes, the ones you sent to me...'

'Yes. Those boys. I'm sorry. The idiots came back here some minutes ago and said they got to your place late. I was infuriated. But they would head over there now'.

Mummy Church yelled, and untied her scarf, and wrapped it around her waist.

'But they just left. Two men; Marcus and...' Chloe said

'And Vincent. Marcus and Vincent', Mummy Church added.

'There is no one by that name here'.

'But they just carried her away because she wanted to run away because she didn't want police's protection'.

'No. There is no one by that name. Let me call...'

The DPO called someone and after a few seconds, he asked the person some questions about Marcus and Vincent.

'Madam, there is no one by that name'.

Chloe collapsed to the dusty, hard floor as her mind because to process the thing that just happened there. She had just allowed the kidnappers get the one she was searching for.

'Where are you? Madam Kings, where are you?' The DPO shouted.

Mummy Church yelled and stomped the ground. 'You will find them'.

9 Baselines

Since he was very sure that Raphael was in total control of Joana's case, he decided to go to the churches that were mentioned in the videos. There would be something to help him catch the kidnapers.

Upon getting to The Bringer of Light Ministries, he swallowed hard at the money that had been spent on the church's building. At this point, he wouldn't blame Nigeria's 'Daddy Freeze' and even Fortunecity's 'Bad belle' for always ridiculing Pastors. The compound was very large, and from where he stood, he might not even get a view of the end of the church.

After being directed to where he would park his car, he waited for the secretary of the church whom he had called. The protocol of the church was such that he wouldn't see the General Overseer, Dr. Immaculate John, until the secretary had talked to him. A man, who was older than expected, who would be around 60 years, walked towards him smartly like a 39-year-old man.

'Good erm... morning sir', he said as the man acknowledge him and shook his hand. 'So, sir I want to meet the secretary'.

The man chuckled. 'I assumed you expected a cheeky girl. No. I'm the secretary'.

'Oh! I just wanted to confirm. I knew you spoke to me the other time, but I thought...'

'Yes, I get that a lot. It's Daddy's way of life'.

'Daddy? Dr. Immaculate?'

From all indications, the man was far older than Dr. Immaculate. If he wouldn't be old enough to be his father, he would be old enough to be his uncle. But the man still accorded him respect. Nosa fused into the piety. 'Oh Daddy!'

'Yes. He doesn't love to be in a situation of great temptation as a young blood, like David. So, he made me his secretary being a man that has served in the vineyard for years'.

'Vineyard? As in wine vineyard? I never knew we had that in Fortunecity'.

The man smiled. 'No. I'm talking about God's vineyard. Do you go to church at all?'

'Oh! Of course'

'Are you saved?'

'Ehn...I believe in Jesus'.

'Hmmm. You should give God your all. Let him be your savior. Your world would revolve more in peace and tranquility if you give him all'.

Nosa nodded as they moved into a richly painted house, which housed objects that projected affluence. The old secretary led him to small office as he kept lecturing him about Heaven.

'Daddy said I should handle anything you have for us'.

'But I need some questions answered by him'

'I know. I'm his secretary, he shares every detail with me'.

'You don't get...'

'Young man, I'm not a fool at my old age. The joy of the Lord is my strength. I have the mind of God. I can do all things through Christ that strengthens'.

'Okay, sir. What was Pastor's reaction to the slanders about his church?'

'Slanders? There have been no slanders.'

Nosa sat back and stroked his chin. 'Do you mean he hasn't heard about the things some people that returned with visions said about him?'

'We heard. But he didn't hear anything'.

'What do you mean?'

'I filter most of his documents. I've told the police all of these before'.

'And as I said, I'm a P.I'.

'Parish Instructor...Oh! Private Investigator'

Nosa chuckled and sat up.

'Old age is telling on me'.

'I get'.

'But there's no way. He wouldn't have heard about it'.

'In what way?'

'There's no way. He has a policy. Whenever you start saying "Daddy, have you heard what this person said"; he would stop you and tell you no, and wouldn't wish to listen to the matter because it might be defaming and could make him sad'.

Nosa admired the Pastor. He should imbibe such character. That would help him a lot.

'Well, he needs to hear about them because according to what I heard, your church is one of the two top churches that were slandered in the messages of those that went to hell'.

'Well, God will continually take the ladies into hiding: He will make their scheme stop. They are devilish, sir', the old secretary said. 'The only problem I have with them is that fear sells'.

The man's face was already wrinkled. His skinned head shone in the light. There was something about this man that compelled Nosa to trust what he was saying about the Pastor.

'But sir do you think anyone from the church would do such thing?'

'Are they demonically possessed? Our Daddy has taught us that if anyone slaps us we should present the other cheek. Although I respect myself enough not to allow my face to be smitten'.

Nosa laughed. 'I wish it were true'.

'It is. No one from this church would have such audacity'.

Nosa tried different investigative skills but it was futile. He knew he had to head for the other churches.

As the secretary saw him off, his phone rang. Nosa walked off to his car. However, not before he heard, 'we lost it. To her. This woman is becoming a bone in the throat'.

The moment he entered his car, Raphael called again. Nosa wished this guy really knew how he felt about him, maybe he wouldn't keep calling. The way Raphael became closer to his wife even after what he tried to do to Moriah still bemused him. He, whom everyone knew was fond of sleeping with anything in a skirt, became closer to his wife than Nosa. He was always angry at Raphael for trying to rape Moriah, and wouldn't have talked to him if not for series of death around him, which compelled Raphael to come around. During those trying periods, Moriah only called and didn't give him the chance to trace the call before she disconnected it.

'What now?'

'I just went to see Joana to show her the edited version of the testimony'

'And you can't wait till after you've seen Chloe'.

'Chloe gave me a specific time'.

Nosa sighed. He was getting worked up, and sweat was already popping out of his skin. 'I should have known. See Raph, she needs to cry or talk. Just make her do one. Perform your magic'.

'Trust me. I'll make her pop out of her miry ground'.

Nosa nodded. 'Okay later'.

'No...No, not later. Joana said she remembers the names she heard and has written it for me'.

'Give me'.

'Over this phone?'

'Text it'.

'No. Everything about you is bugged. You're another experiment that would soon turn to a bottle of urine'.

Nosa hissed and thought for a while. 'Okay, let's meet at the first place the two of us met'.

'Ahhh! Bad child. Bad guy. Okay', Raphael said excitedly.

'By four?'

'Four like foursome'.

'Raph... You're a dog', Nosa said and chuckled.

'Learning from the master. Just try to come early. We really need to talk'.

'Hope all is well?'

'Yes. It's nothing much. It's about Fela Durotoye'.

'What's about him? I like him. The man would make sense as our President, Nigerian President'.

'That's why when we meet, we need to talk about volunteering for him, and I need you to help me talk to Chloe as regarding money. You know what I mean. We need this man in this country'.

'When we meet'.

'Yes. Meanwhile, you should come to our tree house one day. I've placed both of our pictures. I need Moriah's recent picture and Chloe is refusing to have hers there'.

'Raph, when we meet'

'Foursome'.

'Argh!!!'

That was one thing about Raphael, you would have a reason to laugh. He decided to go to the other churches, but he got the same outcome as the first. The case was still at a standstill. Mr. Johnson's call came in and went off immediately. The man was surely an idiot. He wanted the case to end immediately and give all the praise to his Eagle Eyes Security.

Shayla had never imagined that pregnancy could make her heavy. Despite her complaint about the pregnancy, it wasn't protruding, maybe because it was in its third month.

She wore a blue polo, a pair of blue Jeans trousers, and a blue cap to match. Despite her being in the car, she regularly glanced at different places because she wouldn't want any of her colleagues to see her.

She tapped the steering wheel, and continually shook her head. If Joana hadn't poked her nose, she would have lured out the women's kidnapper and would have still cured the spread of rumors about those men of God. Now, she would use her as the bait, and she would do anything it required to get the kidnapper.

Bringing her out of her deep thought, Segun knocked her side of the car. He looked away and she gestured for him to enter the passenger's seat. He walked briskly, entered and faced her.

'Someone beat us to it. I think it's the kidnapper'.

'How will the kidnapper know about the paper?'

'I don't know...'

'Don't tell me you don't know. I made a fool of myself with Nosa so you can find it. Instead, you refused to pick up my call. Were you with Katrina?'

He looked away.

'I knew it. You were now calling me when he caught the person you sent'.

'Almost caught. That's okay. I'll find that fat prostitute'.

'Do, and don't mess up this time. I hope it's not your name she heard at all'.

'I hope too. If I catch that Victoria. Her big mouth'.

'Get away. This kidnapper has links and a lot of people helping them. You need to be careful'.

'Okay boss', he said as he stepped out of the car.

'If you die before we end this case, I'll come after you in the grave and kill you again'.

He slammed the door and she drove off. He had always had a desire to know the safe house she hid the ladies, but she refused to tell him the location. Although she trusted him, she didn't trust the fact that he might say something to someone. Who knows, he might tell the police something to save Katrina from the prison?

Katrina was their new recruit, and the two of them were supposed to be on a mission in Fortunecity, but the two of them diverted and stole. He was lucky to be saved by a mysterious woman, whom he refused to name, but Katrina didn't get the same fate as he. She had been in the police custody ever since. Nevertheless, she still sensed Katrina's stay at the prison as something fishy because Rachael and the whole of F.A.L.T (Fortunecity Association of Life Takers) would have ensured that she was released.

When she got to the compound and honked, the gateman opened the gate instantly. They didn't exchange pleasantries. The compound was buried in the suburb of Fortunecity. The fence around it couldn't easily be climbed. F.A.L.T built such houses at different places in Fortunecity and Nigeria as a whole.

She got out of the car, strapped her weapon bag around her, and marched into the house. She nodded to acknowledge the two hefty guards at the entrance of the sitting room.

When she entered the sitting room, two of the missing ladies- Victoria Akachi Amadi and Lila Uzo- were seated on the cushions, waiting for her. They must have been waiting for her since they called her that morning because Lila pouted like she did whenever she was angry. Shayla dropped into one of the green seats across them, and waited for them to talk. However, after waiting and glancing at their silent frowning faces, which seemed lightened by the cream coloured paint of the house, she decided to trigger the conversation.

'I got your message'.

'That's why you're here, of course now', Lila hissed and looked away.

'See, Shayla, when I'm released from this place, I want to go back to my old life. As in, when I got here everything about my former life just got a boner and the desires rushed back. That stupid life was boring. Me? Living like a real church girl?' Victoria said, groaned, snapped her fingers, and looked away.

'Me too. I wasn't born to live a dull life. Look at me, I'm like a ghost. No. Vampire. Drab. Ah. Yuck', Lila said and began to turn her arms as if she was inspecting them. Just like the first

time she met her, Lila was wearing a black fishnet leggings and a pink spaghetti, with no aim to cover anything on her body.

Shayla eyed them as she headed for the other side of the house. 'You two are crazy. Is it because we didn't allow the kidnapper have his way with you?'

She was recruited to be the middleman between the churches and the prostitutes. After 'Desire Greatness Ministry' saw that people were getting visions about heaven, they decided to raise fake visionaries. She was given the duty of prepping them. In retaliation, some rich loyal men from Bringer of Life Ministries also paid Chief Suberu, and she was also given the job to prep them, and to guide them all. In order to have time for it, Rachael ordered her to do something that would make her suspended from the police force, where she was acting as the inside man, and she did more than that: when she saw a member of Gragus Team, she expelled all her anger on him.

In the other part of the house were the prostitutes meant to work for Bringer of Life Ministries. The contract was such that they couldn't tell any other person, not even their fellow prostitutes. And they adhered to their part of the contract until someone killed two of the plants, and she had to start bringing them together into hiding; yet, she still separated those from different churches, and had refused to let them meet one another.

Her main concern was how to save the other fake women in the trap of the kidnapper, and how to catch the kidnapper. Whenever she caught the kidnapper, she would ensure she broke his leg, and make him go through pain for causing the death of innocent struggling women.

'If you say so', Victoria said, curled on the chair, wearing a dark-blue bum short and a silver blouse. 'Then, ten million per year is not enough. Increase it'.

'Why not ask for your pictures to be posted on the church's bulletin. Fools', she said and slammed the door behind her.

10 *Hoping*

The journey home was filled a lot of horrific lamentations from Mummy Church. Chloe wished she had truly not meddled in the business of the visionary and had helped the vision in the little way she could, she wouldn't have received such words from Mummy Church. She choked back tears many tears.

'You must find her for me', Mummy Church said as Chloe drove into the estate Mummy Church and her husband resided. The street was disturbed by the continuous bang from the knockouts being thrown into the air. The DPO had promised to help them search for this particular woman above others. So, she didn't know what Mummy Church wanted from her again.

'Even if you hid her, what would be would be'.

'Don't you dare tell me rubbish. If you had always remained in the place assigned to you, no cursed thing would have happened to her. You should go to the prayer mountains available in the world and let them know that you need to wash away the curse that has followed you from birth'.

Chloe sucked it up, and opened her mouth to talk, but stopped, seeing that they had gotten to Mummy Church's house. The bungalow stood out among others with a big banner of Pastor Fowosere and his wife, hung in front of the gate.

'I'm so sorry. But it was needed'.

'Don't tell me rubbish. I'll be back at your place', Mummy Church said as she banged the door, and stormed into her own house.

Chloe knew it would take her a great effort to reach home without any incidents. Then, the worst thing that could ever happen to human being happened to her there, she saw her Aunt's car. Chloe gritted as she honked to greet her aunt as they got near each other.

'Your psychiatrist called me to say...' Her Aunt said from her car.

'I'm fine'.

'No. He believed you're ticking like a bomb'.

'I'm not ticking. I've stopped going for long'.

'And you're doing what?'

'None of your business'.

'Hope you're not working?' Her Aunt shouted.

'Merry Christmas'.

'Remember my brother's contract'.

'To hell with... Merry Christmas', Chloe said and drove off. She was in bigger problem, and the only thing her Auntie was so concerned about was her contract with her father. God would make sure he rotted in hell for his useless contract.

Nosa stared at his wristwatch for a long time before he decided it was time to leave. He had called Raphael repeatedly, but he wasn't picking his call and that was very typical of him whenever he was with a lady. Nosa had been sitting in the pub the two of them first met. Then, they were in their early teens. Nosa came there when he was only fourteen years because he wanted to know the feeling of being in such place, while Raphael was sent there by his drunk father, who was now dead.

Angry, Nosa drove off to Moriah's house. She would yell at him for coming to her place for the second time in two days. There was no way he would ever escape her repulsion. Times like that required that he used the best people. For reasons he couldn't totally agree with, she decided to pick a slum over a coded place. He had called his people for this exact work, but they were still stalling. She was the one that could do it within minutes.

He fumed as he kept dialing Raphael's number. The guy was something else. He shouldn't have trusted him with Joana's life.

Immediately he came in sight of Moriah's house, he saw some preachers and hissed. These were another set of Christians that disgraced God. He knew he was one of those sets that oscillated between the love of God and the love for other things. But these set disgraced God by looking drab and useless, more useless than those he saw at Victoria's place. At least those ones were moderate in their drabness. Most of them were always decent, neat, and presentable.

These sets, however, were known to always wear big things, probably to show that their God was big. God is big, no doubt. One could see it on the side of the sun, the earth and the water. But why must everything about them show that God was too big? The clothes were always oversize. For the men, they draped themselves in archaic suits that shouldn't be seen on anybody; and the ladies, their skirts were wide enough to wrap five little children. Despite that, they took pride in telling those whose ties were thin that they were sinners because they didn't wear the same fat ties as they. So, when one of them, a lady- lanky and hungry-looking-clambered towards him, he prepared his answer for her.

'Brother, Jesus loves...'

'Don't bother...'

'I have to. You're a sinner'.

Nosa spun in his track and sized her up. 'And you're God. You're my judge?'

'Repent. The kingdom of God is at hand'.

'I know...'

'Turn from your sinful ways'.

He hissed and walked away. But like his shadow, she trailed him with her husky voice. Normally, if not for her extra large worn-out bible, one would have assumed she was a smoker because her lips were black and her eyes red. And who knows, she might be a smoker. Many of them were known to pretend to be on fire for God but were always battling with an addiction or the other.

'Hell is real. You're going to hell if you don't repent'.

He chuckled. 'You... I'm a Christian, sister'.

That statement made her pause in her speech, and like the midday shadow, she seemed to stop for a while, and he thought he had finally warded her off until he saw her shake her head and run after him. 'No. You're not. You're wearing Jeans. Those that went to hell saw it. It's a product of the devil'.

Nosa scoffed and almost buckled as he repeatedly knocked on Moriah's gate. There was nothing he couldn't give to be off the street. He waited at the gate and gritted as the lanky preacher-lady hobbled towards him.

'Take this tract. Read it. God will speak life to you. Forsake sin'.

Nosa refused to look at her pointed hand. She stood firmly and hurriedly turned to passersby to give them tracts. Whenever she did that, she would spring back towards him as if that was her default settings, and the others were frivolities. She acted as if he was a bone, while she was a dog, and she would do anything to remove the bar between them.

'Narrow is the path. Heaven is narrow. Do you want to go to hell?'

Nosa felt like slapping her head away or zip her mouth for eternity. Where was Moriah for God's sake? She was taking too long. Or was she refusing to open the door for him again? At least, even if she would reject him, she should save him from this God-forsaken preacher. He brought out his phone and dialed her phone number again.

'This tract will teach you about God. Hell...Is...Real'.

'I know. Jesus has saved me'.

'Don't say that. All have sinned and have fallen short of the kingdom of God. You, me and everyone have fallen short of the kingdom of God. But...'

'I'm not a sinner'.

'Then, you lie and the truth is not in you.'

'God! Oh God! I didn't know you're now on earth. Please God forgive me', Nosa said, knelt before her, clasped his hands together and pretended to be in a sorrowful mood, and closed his eyes.

'What's this?' The perplexed preacher lady shouted and withdrew from him.

'I'm praying for forgiveness'.

'I'm not God. Pray to God. Pray to God Almighty'.

Nosa bared his teeth at her. 'See... That's a guy smoking at the other end. Join him like Jesus Christ did to the prostitutes and preach the gospel. He needs it, not me. Why are you trying to open the eyes of the one that can see when you can possibly open the eyes of the blind?'

The lady was perplexed and batted her eyes repeated as she watched Nosa in awe. 'You uttered that from your mouth. That's vile. That's of Lucifer. You're of the devil your father. God will change you. I come against you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth'.

Nosa was surprised. She jumped about like a bulldog that was smacked on the head and was practically barking at him. Passers-by stared at them. The world seemed to rotate around her as he wished the ground would swallow her. Or if he could catch the attention of one of her owners, her brethren so that they would come around to put a leash on her, to clamp her mouth together. Where was Moriah? He could have left the place, but he needed that information about Raphael desperately.

He turned to the preaching lady to talk, but kept to himself, and turned again to the gate. She shouted at him to look at her. Then the door opened.

'Nos...' Moriah began to say but stopped as she glanced from Nosa to the woman, who had progressed to raking about Devil and demons.

'Please, let's go inside', Nosa pleaded.

'No', Moriah said defiantly and gave him an amused smile. 'Someone is preaching to you'.

'Let me through. You don't want to be exposed. It's another bottle of urine'.

'It's healthy'.

'Moriah...'

Moriah, still looking sexy and sweaty, placed her hand across the entrance. Naturally, if she gave him the chance, he would have carried her into the house, to her bedroom, kissing her all the way. However, the only thing he needed there was to escape the psychopath behind him.

'Oh! It's this... No wonder you refused to listen to God's word. You're here to meet a prostitute'.

'Me?' Moriah asked and shifted out of Nosa's way. He, seeing the opportunity, ran into the compound, sighed, and thought otherwise.

'Yes. You. Come to Christ and forsake the path of the devil. This is Dev...'

Moriah jumped on her. The woman crashed to the ground, her Bible flying away, revealing a lot of papers and her bag also joined in flying out of her hands.

She screamed but not as loud as Moriah, who railed curses on her and pelted her face with punches. She kept punching as if she had to melt the lady's face with her punches before her anger could be deflated.

'God punish you. How dare you? Me? Prostitute?'

Nosa pulled her off the wailing woman, who was now defaced with punches from Moriah. Her hair was now scattered, but that didn't stop her from yelling.

'God would destroy you like he did Sodom and Gomorrah', the lady shouted as she struggled to get up.

Nosa hurriedly carried Moriah. Her legs flailed in the air as he dragged her away. She yelled and he could feel the venom of her anger in her expanding body.

'Leave me. Leave me to deal with this imbecile. I'll show you. You're not holy pass. I can be whatever I want. Nobody. I know their types...'

Nosa shoved her into the house as he began to lock the gate. She rushed towards the woman and tried to run past the gate. Nosa pulled her. The lady screamed in pain and shouted that she would surely be blessed because she was being persecuted by the devil. She picked herself, and packed her things, and screamed, 'The truth is a needle. It would pierce you'.

'I know their type. They are prostitutes', Moriah shouted as she banged on the gate.

After being assured that he had locked the gate, Nosa carried her towards the room. At first, she fought him, but when he didn't drop her, she giggled.

'Put me down. Nosa...Put me down'.

By this time, regardless of his initial desire, he wanted that moment with her. He kissed her neck, and she giggled.

'No. Pastor's child'

'I don't care'.

'God will punish us'.

'I don't care'.

'Your wife. I don't...'

'Chloe will never know. Remember we don't want to turn her bad'.

'And I don't want you to be bad'.

She pulled away, but he kept pecking her neck. She cringed.

'Don't you get? I'm bad already.'

'Not as bad as me'

'I know. But, I want you'.

'Not now. Not here'

'Inside'.

'Never'.

'Impossible'.

'Watch me', she said and released herself to his continual pecking. He released her and she turned to kiss him. He let go of his grasp and was engrossed in kissing until she suddenly pushed him away and grinned.

'I told you'.

'You cheated'.

'Woman power'.

He shook his head and straightened his cloth. Things and times were bad, but he must give in the moment, her moment, for his own sake also.

'I told you not to come here often'

'This is a case of emergency'.

'Are you being chased?'

'I'm always being chased'

'Is your life in danger?'

'My life is always in danger especially when I'm not with you'.

She opened her door and allowed him to enter immediately.

'I told you to let me put a tracker on you'.

'For God's sake, you've not forgotten this: I'm not to be tracked'.

'Your death sentence. Things could get out of hand'.

'Remember that case I was called for yesterday'.

She stared into space for some moments and shook her head. 'I don't remember your case. I don't want to remember your case. I'm nothing to you. I'm not your mistress or your wife. Well, maybe I'm your girlfriend. I think I am'

Nosa batted his eyes repeatedly. 'What are you saying? I wish I had time for this. You're not my mistress or my wife. You're my love.'

'Don't you dare go there'.

'Moriah, this case is massive. I can't find Raphael. He visited my wife this morning. I can't find the womanizer'.

'He visited...'

'Chloe'.

'And you allowed him. Have you forgotten he had...?'

'Crush on her. I know'.

'Yet, you allowed him. That's bad and reckless. Why are you always reckless?' Moriah said as she edged towards the door. She turned to him with sad eyes. 'I could have trusted him, but after our last encounter, I don't think I can trust him'.

He nodded and rubbed her arm. She gave him a galling look and brushed his hands away. He raised his hands into the sky and followed her indoors.

'So, we were supposed to meet at Korede's bar'

'Seriously?' she said and smiled. 'The two of you?'

'I know, right? I was hoping it would help me forgive him for being so crazy around you'.

'That place holds a lot of memory', she said as she began to type into her computer,' the good, the bad, and the ugly. But more of the bad'.

'So, I waited there for more than an hour. He didn't show up'.

'Raphael. He must have met a lady on the way'.

'I know. But, I seriously need to find him. He has something on this investigation'.

'Before he returned to heaven through the same door he used in coming to the earth'.

Nosa stared at her for a while, trying to decipher what she was saying, and when he understood that she meant he might die through sex, he frowned. 'That's gross'.

She rolled her eyes. 'I've told you not to associate with me, daddy's boy'.

'Find him'.

'Okay. I'll triangulate the phone towers around his phone and then ping his lo...'

'Don't give me the details. Find him'.

She nodded and proceeded to type into her laptop. She was like a goddess and the computers were like her subjects. Notifications from different computers popped up repeatedly, and she kept typing until she got his location. 'He's...'

'Where's that?'

'I don't know but I think...You know what? Bring your phone'.

He stared at her suspiciously, and she got the meaning.

'I swear. I won't do anything stupid. I won't bug your phone'.

She collected his phone and did what she knew how to do best. Before long, she returned the phone to him. He collected the phone and rubbed her arm. 'Thank you'.

She pulled him nearer and kissed him longingly. He felt like going on and on till the end of the world came. He could give up everything for being near her. But he couldn't stay for long because she would soon draw away and call him reckless. With her, he always tried to caution himself. Painful though, he pulled away and she swallowed hard.

'Why didn't you say yes to my proposal? We can still work something out'.

She wagged her tongue at him, and he could swear he saw her eyes become red, but he didn't want to dwell on that.

'I will make you bad', she said as she warded him off.

'I want to be bad'.

They silently walked on till they got to her gate. After she typed something into the computer at the gate, she held his hands and kissed it longingly. 'I don't want you to be bad. I love you'.

He opened the door, and there he met a lady, another breed of the first preacher. She ran up to him and said, handing him a tract. 'Sir, have you given your life to Christ?'

She received the most shocking news of her life: they've lost the woman they've been after since the previous day. She rushed out of the house.

'I'll handle this'.

11 The Voyage

Everything seemed calm and she would have loved it to remain so. However, it was eerie. Who wouldn't want silence? It was beautiful. She enjoyed silence a lot even before she got born again. Those days, because of the numerous blasting speakers of the clubs and the motels she used to work; and the rancor and noises of the different prostitutes, she always craved for silence. Once, she had gone to the beach with a customer on his voyage. Just the two of them. Most of the time, she always left him weak on the bed. The peace of that place, she longed for it once more.

However, the only thing silence could do to her now was to make her sit up in fear. In fact, her fears were numerous that she was afraid she would die from them.

To add to her woe, the trees around the mountain began to howl like a pack of wolves. She sat up and looked about in the house. The house had touches of a woman and the pictures of Raphael and Nosa. He placed two empty frames beside those. They seemed to be friends as Raphael had claimed.

By the way, Raphael was supposed to have arrived. He promised to be there in the evening to stay with her, and she wasn't doubtful because he always kept to time. She had given him the benefit of a doubt for like two hours, and she knew something was wrong. Someone must have gotten to him. The devil had used them to get to him. If something happened to Raphael, she would never forgive herself for allowing him to get involved in her case. He may still have the devilish habits in him, but she was so sure she could still change him.

There was no other way she could do anything than to leave the place to call him on phone. The night was already settling on the mountain and she would have been too afraid of going out, but her greater fear was to be sure she wouldn't sleep alone in that place. God had manifested himself by allowing Raphael to agree to stay with her. If he also refused to show up, that could only mean God was getting angry at her for hiding behind papers to tell about his coming.

'God help me. Forgive me', she mumbled as she shut the door behind her, and stepped into the windy night. The trees from their different corners looked like human figures, and she knew within a few seconds, she would die from fright. So, she ran back into the house.

She meandered about and searched for her phone. It didn't take a minute to find her phone. With its torchlight, she found her way down the mountain. The journey down the mountain was rough and almost made her heart jump out through her mouth.

The only things she needed was to get a good network. She raised her phone, and the network bar was empty. She hissed and kept walking down the mountain.

As soon as she got down from the frightful dark mountain into the drizzles on the ground, she remembered that her Glo SIM card was also at the back of her phone case. She stopped using it for security and sanctity reasons. Now, it was time to use one of her sinful cloths in order to

remain sane. The network, Glo, which always had the home advantage, had been known for its ability to be useful in times like that. It could get network connection anywhere.

The sun was peeping from behind the trees, behind the orange cloud, waving its last goodbye at Fortunecity. Immediately she inserted the SIM card into the phone, it got connected. She dialed Raphael repeatedly, but his number kept ringing. That was a clear indication that God didn't want her to work with him anymore. In fact, that means she couldn't stay in that place.

The battery of her phone began to drain quickly. Then, it occurred to her that after she dismantled the phone, Raphael took the better battery. Before she released the battery, he tried to collect the phone, but she refused and succumbed when he said he would opt for only the battery. She used the other one after he left since he didn't know she had a backup battery. She picked out Nosa's number and called him. After a few descriptions, he got where she was, and that excited her. He told her to stay put, but the howling tree and the numerous shadows that played neared the mountain made her know she couldn't go back to the house. Probably when he had her time, she would beg Raphael to get her things for her.

However, after sitting at the bottom of the mountain for ten minutes, she knew it was the high time she started making life-saving decisions by herself, and she stopped relying on people to come up with the ideas. If she could get to the city early enough, she could surely get where Nosa was.

As the night edged nearer alongside the drizzles and the cold of the mountain, she knew she was in for a troublesome time.

'No. No. God. Help me. I trust in you. I'll do what you want'.

At that moment a car drove towards her. Her heart flopped with joy, and she flagged it down as if she just saw Jesus. Her long fat skirt danced around her like a balloon.

'Help', she yelled at the car.

The driver reduced the pace of the car and stopped in front of her. The woman in the car wore dark shades, a polo, and black trousers. Another darkness. She should reject the offer. However, the Bible says that if the Lord be for us even our enemy will do things in our favor. That must be the hand of God.

'Hey! Lady. How're you? Are you stuck?'

'Yes. Are you the hand of God?'

The lady removed her glasses and peered at her. Then, she paused for a while and chuckled. 'Oh! I get! I guess I'm the hand of God!'

'Okay! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!'

She said as she entered the car. Now that she was in the car, she remembered that she must call Nosa. Yet, she feared for her phone's battery. A biro was lying on the dashboard of the car.

She picked it and turned to the woman. 'Can I use this?'

The woman nodded, and Joana hurriedly wrote Nosa's number on her palm. As if the phone's battery was waiting for her to do that, it went off immediately. She gritted and turned to

the woman. She held her lips and watched the dark shade of the woman, and hoped she was about to do the right thing.

'Please, can I use your phone to make a very important call?'

'Hmm...Of course. Just try to go easy on the call credit'.

She dialed Nosa's number, and her fear made her body shake, causing her to hold the phone so hard.

'Where are you?' Nosa asked immediately she informed him she was the one on call.

'I just left the mountain...'

'But I asked you to stop, to wait for me'.

'This place is terrible'.

'Wait for me. Ten minutes to be there'.

'A woman is helping me'.

'I will soon be there for...What! What woman? What's her name?'

'Sorry, he's asking who you're'.

'Shayla', the woman replied in a low tone.

'Shayla'.

'Shayla?' Nosa asked.

'Shayla', Joana said

'Shayla?'

'Yes. Shayla'

'Don't try to do anything stupid. Try to run. God! I should have known. She's the kidnapper. Give her the phone, and try to run'.

'Oh...Ah' She was perplexed and didn't know what to do. The only thing she could do was to release her scarf.

'He wants to give you directions'.

Working as a prostitute had made her enjoy a lot of free rides, and had made her lose grip off the reality of life that there can never be free rides in life. She should have known the ride and the sudden appearance of the car was too good to be true. Just as the lady collected the phone, her scarf flew off.

'My scarf'.

The lady stopped the car and grumbled into her phone. Joana jumped out and ran for the scarf, but not before she noticed the lady's broad smile as she heard Nosa's voice on the phone.

The lady smashed the phone on the ground. Joana ran after her scarf. Fortunately, the breeze made it roll towards the forest. The path Raphael pointed out to her the other day, which he said led into the forest was just standing out at her. She ran into it. Prostitution was bad but made her agile especially when she had to stand up to her mates.

The sun was sinking, and she wished she was on that Voyage again, and not on the ridges, not fighting for her life, not in love with Jesus. She ran and shook the thought out of her head. Jesus was everything. Heaven was real, and that was her aim. But for now, her short-term aim was for God to save her from whoever that woman was. Nosa didn't tell her who she was dealing with. He only told her that he would be there for a short while.

'Oh. God. I'll do what you want. Just save me', she cried as she scampered through the forest. She ran into the forest as the leaves continuously slapped her body.

'Stop. Hey, stop', the Shayla lady shouted from her car. But she wasn't ready to wait. Even if she was pointing a gun at her, if she didn't shoot her, she wouldn't stop.

Joana ran and didn't stop stomping the grasses until she got to a sloppy part. She was plunged down the hilly part, which had little rough edges. She shrieked as she tumbled through the forest until she got to the end of the slope. Miraculously, she fell into a bush. They scratched her though, but she preferred their scratches to the Shayla lady at the top of the hill. She had forgotten about the slope.

When she glanced up and saw that she wasn't made yet, she rejoiced as she ran off into the thickness of the forest, and allowed herself to be immersed by the darkness that was invading the massive forest. All she needed there was to find the place Raphael said led outside. Then, probably, Nosa would find her, and she would finally get to see her voyage again.

12 Grassed

When Nosa heard Shayla's words, he felt like running mad. She was the one. He should have known. She had all the help she needed to carry out such feat. He should have suspected that she was involved. The problem he had there was to know how deeply involved she was in all these. He sped off in his car and called Moriah. When he lied to Joana the other time that he knew the place she was, he only stalled her. Immediately he dropped the call, he had called his computer guys but they were yet to give him a reply.

'You're calling me'.

'Moriah. Not now'.

'I will block your line from reaching me till Friday'.

'Not now. I need your help'.

'Johnson would soon be here'.

'I will be brief. I need you to help me search for anywhere in Fortunecity that has mountain'.

'Why? And have you tried our mountain?'

'Oh, God! Our mountain. You're right...Damn right'

'Where are you?'

'I'm looking for her. The person I'm looking for... The woman I was supposed to protect'.

'And she's at our mountain?'

'- our mountain'

'She's at our mountain? How did she...?'

'I don't know. I'll call you back', he said and hoped he wouldn't break the rule of never disconnecting the call whenever Moriah was talking.

'It's Raphael. Raphael did this. I'll kill...'

Nosa disconnected the call and focused on the road. Someone drove in front of him stupidly. He hissed and gritted. No matter how angry he was, he shouldn't let his anger take control of his words towards other road users.

The driver, who was wrong, shouted, 'your father!' But Nosa held his calm and was sure he would pounce on Shayla the moment he saw her.

He wondered what he would do as he bit his lower lip, and placed a call to the number Shayla used in calling him again, but the phone wasn't connecting. He decided to call Shayla's line, and luckily, the number went through.

'Shayla', he shouted the moment the call got connected. 'If anything happens to that woman. I'll destroy you'.

'Hey. Calm down. I should be the one ranting. What woman?'

'Shut up. Shut that thing you call a mouth. I'll hunt you down'.

'Nosa'.

He disconnected the call and sped off. His mind wasn't at peace even twenty minutes after he sighted the top of the mountain. He just wished he was headed to the right place because the mountain was just at the end of the city, near Black Town. He would have to take another 180-degree turn to go to the next mountain. He was so much in a haste that he didn't reduce his speed when he got to some dangerous bends, even if cars rarely took that route.

Moreover, when he and the others always came there, they barely encountered cars except for occasional trucks. However, that was when the three of them still always had a good time, when Moriah always wanted them to escape the clingy nature of Chloe since she always refused to go with them to the mountain because of some evil occurrences that surrounded it.

So, when he saw a car parked at the side of the road, he tried to avoid it. Then, it occurred to him that no car should be parked on the mountain. There wasn't ever any reason for anybody to park there. The church nearer to the mountain had moved away to a farther distant.

He stopped the car and jumped as he removed his gun from its holster. With the way he was angry, it would take a great deal of control not to shoot Shayla when he saw. She betrayed his trust and played him for a fool. She had just used his bald head to play drums, and he would make her smell the disgusting scent of animal skin.

Despite the receding daylight, he was still able to see a pathway and deep footprints in the marshy floor, leading away into the forest. The wind around the mountain howled like the rage in his stomach, and he gripped his gun harder.

He looked around for a while. There wasn't anyone around to answer his questions if he asked any. So, he ran into the forest and would have turned back had he not noticed a fresh slide through the slope on the ground. When he, Moriah and Raphael used to come there, they had a day fixed for playing hide and seek in the forest. One of the ways to know if any of them had passed that side was to check the slope. Then, only he knew about a secret thick root that stretched to the base of the slope, and that infuriated the others who always wanted to know about the root.

Quickly, he grabbed the root, which he was too happy to still find, and climbed down the slope. He wasn't clear about what to do when he got down.

'Shayla', he shouted. 'I'm here for you'.

He shouted again and ran off into the woods. If for no other reason, for the sake and the fact he really wanted to get the name of the person involved, he must catch her. The only thing that might stop his hand from killing her would be to know the whereabouts of the missing ladies. Would he really need it?

'Shayla', he shouted again and brushed the bushes aside.

Suddenly, a gunshot rang in the wood and made birds fly into the dark sky. They scattered in the air and chirped terribly. Immediately, someone screamed from the far end of the forest. Nosa's adrenaline pumped faster and his speed increased as he climbed the path of the forest. The bushes around the path were becoming too overgrown for him, but he still knew how to maneuver through it. This time, he was no longer careful of being heard.

'Shayla, you're so dead', he yelled and charged into the woods. The dead of Green City would increase in the number that day.

The woman that screamed kept screaming her head off. By this time, other people had joined the wailing woman in her scream. He ran towards the place with the hope he wasn't heading into another trap.

When he got to the place the scream came from, he saw a man lying on the ground writhing in pain. A young woman was crying over the man that seemed to have been shot. The woman wore the same cloth as one of his preaching disturbers. By this time, a number of the others there had used their phone as torchlight. Nosa was angry at the way the whole event was changing directions. The people around the woman were mostly teenagers. She cried and pleaded for his help.

'Please help'.

'Who shot him?'

'A woman'

'Where is she?'

'She ran towards the top'.

He wanted to stay back to help the dying man, but if he left Shayla, many people would still die. Like his mother used to say, the pollution was from him. Nosa clambered up the hill just as four gunshots rang in the highway. Despite being one of their regular route in their plays, the road was harder to clamber through because of the darkness. By the time he climbed up, he saw a car driving off.

'I'll kill you', he shouted as he ran after the car. He stopped in his track and returned to his car in an effort race after them. However, when he tried to chase Shayla with his car, he discovered that the front tires, as well as the headlamps, had been shot. He tried to drive the car like that, but the only thing he could do was to struggle with it.

Nosa screamed into the darkness, and he punched the wheel thrice. There was no way he could move. The only place of solace was their tree-house. He ran into the road with the hope of finding someone to help him. There was no one to call. He might have called Chloe but she didn't know the place because every time they asked her to follow them, she always refused. Also, he couldn't call Shayla because she was the culprit. So, he dialed Moriah's phone number.

'Don't tell me you need another thing. Just tell me you just want to hear my voice'.

Nosa sighed into the phone, and with a weary voice, he said, 'please, can you come to our tree house?'

'Why? I don't want to have memories right now'.

'Come on. I'm stuck here'.

'How?'

'My mistress, Shayla- she is behind all the trouble'.

'That's impossible'.

'It is... I'm here because she shot my tires and headlamps. I can't find any car here'.

'Oh, that's a bad way to crash. I'll come for you. This event is turning into a bottle of urine. Now, you see what would have happened if we kept our bicycles there'.

'I'll be inside the house'.

'They would have been useful. I'll be there soon'.

He disconnected the phone, and picked some vital things from his car, and dragged himself into their tree-house. At that moment, he was happy that Raphael was a fan of hiding things in the oddest of place, and that he never gave up on people, even when they were fighting him. Last year, when he came to renovate the place, he called Nosa and told him he had kept a key for them in a small hole around the door. Then, Nosa rebuffed his effort and told him to never bring up the issue of the house because it revived memories.

Nosa walked through the path and climbed into the room. The moment he entered the house, he knew how much he missed the serenity of the place. Angry at the whole events that had happened that day, he slumped into one of the chairs. Raphael had really renovated the place.

They got the house when they were in their 100 level in the university. They had made a plan to go tour Fortunecity after they've written their final exam paper. The plan was that the four of them would take a ride through the road of the forest with Chloe's car, which they agreed to use after a long deliberation about using their bicycles which they changed because Chloe couldn't ride a bicycle. But unfortunately, Chloe fell sick on the D-day. Since none of them could drive a car because of their strict fathers, they agreed to go without Chloe on their bicycle.

Upon getting to that side of the mountain, they met an old man who had just tumbled down the mountains and was terribly injured. When they asked him for his place of abode, he directed them to the house.

At that time, the house was in a terrible state. Raphael took up the task of arranging the house while Moriah and Nosa took up the task of taking care of the old man. The old man, whom they later called 'Mountain Papa' explained to them that his children had left him for long, and the only thing he could call his own was the house, which he tried to take care like his own son. He was off into the forest to gather some woods when he slipped and injured himself.

From that time, they all decided to always visit him, and that was how he began to call them his children. And true to his word, they acted like his children.

Since Chloe's father had taken her on a holiday, she couldn't be a part of their holiday project, which was to take care of the Mountain Papa. They spent a lot of money, which, luckily, Chloe was too happy to supply because of her absence.

Despite their effort, Mountain Papa died some days to their resumption. They all cried because they had lost a great friend. On his dying bed, Mountain Papa willed the house to them. And they too began to care for it to preserve the memory of something they've all done; taking care of Mountain Papa. Every year they all contributed money to take care of Mountain Papa's house. Although Chloe refused to see the house because she believed something didn't want her to see the house, hence the death of Mountain Papa before her arrival, she was still part of the project. So, she didn't know the place.

He glanced through the pictures on the wall - of him and Raphael. He wished Moriah was ready to talk to Raphael, maybe he would have her pictures there. He also wished they had the picture of mountain Papa. They would have included Chloe's picture also, but she refused to have her picture hanged on the wall. The only thing she wanted to have associated with the house was her money.

Nosa, fuming at how he would have caught up with Shayla and would have rescued Joana, if he wasn't indeed reckless, turned from the pictures. He knew he shouldn't have shouted, but he couldn't let Shayla go without seeing the trouble she had caused.

Seeing that he would be idle for the next twenty-five minutes Moriah was expected to come for him, he brought out his phone to watch the movie on it. Since the TV series he was watching was on his laptop, he decided to focus on the movies on his phone. One shouldn't miss two things at a time. Their foolish trouble had really made things worse for him. They all should die and rot with their cry about heaven.

Their tree-house was always a place they all found solace when they were deep trouble. It was his own turn to find solace.

Just as the film got to its climax, Moriah knocked on the door. He rushed off the couch to meet her as she opened the door. They had to leave immediately. But she pushed past him and shouted in amazement at the change in the house.

'Yes, he has really tried', Nosa said from the door.

She nodded and looked around the house. The moment she saw their pictures hanged on the wall, she burst into tears. Nosa was perplexed and he ran to meet her. She raised her hands to show she was fine, and tried to smile but burst into tears again. Nosa pulled her nearer. The world be damned. If Moriah was crying, there was no way he would leave her, and attend to anything wrong with them, and the missing women.

'I'm sorry', she said as she wiped tears from her face. 'I just remembered everything. The memory flooded back. Oh! I miss this place'.

'Me too'.

'Let's go', she muttered as she brushed his hands away, and didn't look at his face again as she rushed outside as if she would burst into tears again.

He smiled. It took him a great effort too not to burst into tears at the sight of their picture. He had missed every one of them being together. 'You know what? After this whole ordeal, we should all hang out here'.

She nodded. 'Chloe?'

'We would do as we always did. We would bring her here through Skype'.

Moriah nodded as she pointed out the path they used to race through. Despite the darkness, the funny memory of the place rushed back. She owned the idea of the game.

'Why haven't you written any game yet?' He asked as he went downhill.

She held on to the bushes around. 'Many reasons, but I'm working on one already'.

'Good. I hope it features all our games'.

'Of course. It features us, and many stages'.

'That's good. Any name?'

'None, yet. I would have called it 'Fortunecity Three Musketeers' but Chloe wouldn't be too happy to be exempted'.

'I trust you. Talk to Chloe about it. She's good with names', he said with the deliberate effort not to rush as she was holding his cloth now.

For some unexplainable reasons, she dropped his cloth, and he turned to look at her. Only to be met by her hand, trying to smack his head. Since he had changed position, she fell into him and they fell through the remaining part of the mountain. Within a few seconds, they stumbled to the ground, with her lying on him. He touched his head and saw that he wasn't injured. She chuckled. Memories of the times they've all fallen in that same manner rushed back.

'I should name this side: the fall of death', she said.

He roared with laughter. And she joined him. Even if he had the mind of catching the thief that night, it wasn't possible now.

'Are you sure it is good to let her know I'm back?'

'Chloe? Yes. She would be super-excited'.

Moriah sighed and was silent for seconds. 'I just hope'.

They entered the car, and she played their favorite songs of the year before their separation- 'Four years' by Stylplus of Nigeria.

Memories of the old times flooded back; the memories of how they climbed the mountains together, the bicycle races, the hide-and-seek games for money, and the times they've all vacated home to have picnics, the times they all spent in secondary school. All these came flooding back, and tears formed in his eyes as Moriah drove off. She brought her hands to touch him, and he let it remain there. There were many desires that he longed for.

He wanted to be that good boy, whose only goal was to have Moriah as a wife; he wanted to be like Raphael, whose main goal was to be on top of every situation; he wanted to have Chloe only as a crush, nothing more; he wanted to have Moriah, whose daily dream was to write the best games in the world. The games Moriah wrote and made them all participate in. He wanted all those things that propelled and brought them together. He sighed as the car drove off.

She drove him off to his house.

When she got to his house, the fear that made her stay away all those years returned. She saw her secret expanding in front of Nosa, and his world of love crashing down.

'Your hive', she mumbled as she got down.

'The bee is inside'.

'Seriously?'

Nosa nodded. They used the concept of the hive for their fathers' houses. They believed the old men's statements were always dedicated to sting them.

'How come you didn't tell me?'

'I met him asleep. He's yet to see me too since yesterday'.

Moriah shook her head. 'I'm not sure I'll enter the house'.

Although she was sure he would control his desire to lavish them with copious insults, she was sure his father reaction would still be the same around her.

'Seriously. Will you now leave without hitting your target? Let me get Chloe here', he said.

'Okay, but how will you cope in this hive?'

'I'm not sleeping here tonight. I must find somewhere else to sleep tonight'.

'Will you crash at my place till tomorrow?'

'Seriously? Seriously? That's smooth like a clean shot'.

Nosa excitedly hugged her and rushed to the house to get Chloe. In her joy that things were edging towards perfection, she didn't notice a car drive into the street. It was until it came near her that she realized that it was coming towards her. When the car stopped in front of her, Chloe stepped down from the car. Upon seeing her, Moriah had mixed feelings. She didn't know if she should be excited about seeing her or afraid.

'Moriah?' Chloe said with her pretentious smile.

'Chloe', she said, and turned towards the gate, and shouted. 'Nosa'.

At least, if Nosa was there with her, Chloe wouldn't be threatening her with her secret. Chloe laughed wickedly as she edged forward, and hugged her. She didn't need anyone to tell her she became stiff at the contact with Chloe because she didn't even reciprocate Chloe's hug.

Chloe whispered into her ears. 'I'm very sure this is a courtesy visit or have you told Nosa what happened at the Tree-house?'

Moriah gritted. 'He doesn't know you know the place'.

'Then, let's leave it like that. Remember our contract. Don't open the bottle of urine'.

'It's still firmly closed'.

'Good girl. And you didn't call me yesterday'.

'Free me. I'm tired of this your regular check-up that you can't involve Nosa'.

'Will you rather I call you regularly or tell Nosa about our ticking bomb'.

Nosa stumbled out of the gate towards them and beamed with joy. Chloe turned to him and hugged him.

'Oh! I'm sorry, baby, that I left Papa at home'.

Nosa frowned. 'What's my own with Papa? You know me now, one bullet to the chest and to the head. A quick death. This one that you're going out. I'm happy'.

'I've haven't become gregarious over the night. I and Mummy Church quickly went to a prayer meeting, and I didn't know it would be intense and would take time'.

'C'mon. Take your time', Nosa said and turned to Moriah. 'I see you too have met. We found the lost girl'.

Chloe laughed. Moriah inhaled and tried to fake her smile.

'Yes, the lost girl'.

'I'm not a girl. I'm a lady', she said and hoped it would break the ice that was building up in her already. At that moment, Moriah knew she would cry if she didn't leave him soon.

'My car... The person I was chasing shot the tire and rendered it useless for pursuit, but I've got my people on her. They would find her'.

Chloe nodded. 'Pick another one tomorrow'.

'I'll do that this evening. I have to return to the place I slept yesterday'.

'By this time?' Chloe asked and glanced at Moriah. She understood the meaning and bit her lower lip.

'I have to be there earlier. At least, I came home for the Christmas'.

'You know you and Papa have not even discussed since he arrived'.

'And allow him to buzz on me? No. I'm not talking to him. Leave him in his bed. He should be sleeping by now'.

'I'm sure you won't have any excuse when you finish the case'.

'I'm very sure I'll have an excuse to never be around that man'.

'Your father', Chloe corrected and glared at Moriah.

'Yes, your father', Moriah said correcting him also. Nosa looked perplexed.

'What's with the two of you? Why are you acting as if you're my mother? I know my mother. I'll call her if I need advice', he said and marched into the house.

Chloe edged towards her. 'Remember Patoranking's song. No kissing. No touching. No hugging, and no nothing. If I should smell anything, then the world would help him know that you're a...'

'I will heed your word', Moriah said. 'At least, it was his men that found me'.

A car revved within the compound.

'They found you? Or you found them. No one can find you if you don't want to', Chloe said with clenched teeth and fists. 'So, that means it was you he saw yesterday morning when he ran out. No wonder you didn't check up on me'.

'You're evil'.

'I have all of your interests at heart'.

Nosa drove to the gate and opened it. Chloe brushed Moriah's dress at the chest while Nosa returned to his car.

'You might be the mother of computers. I am the mother of info. I'll know. I know he is following you home. He must not enter your compound today or forever. How you'll do that is up to you', Chloe said and gave her plastic smile again as she returned to her own car, and reversed for Nosa to drive out.

'When all this is over, we want to have a get-together at our Tree-house. I promised him I will tell you. After the get-together, I will go'.

'Why are you telling me? I told you the place is cursed for me. The last time I came, my eyes saw the evil in man. No, the evil in women'.

'Then, Skype'.

'I'll Skype'.

'Promise?'

'Promise. No matter where I am'.

Moriah nodded, entered her car and drove out of the way. Their farewell greeting was totally animated, and Moriah couldn't stay any longer in front of the devil Nosa referred to as a wife.

Upon getting to her compound, Nosa was still far behind with the car. She hurriedly got down and locked the gate. That surprised him that he parked, jumped out of the car, and banged at the gate. She crashed into the gate.

'I'm sorry for raising your hopes. I saw Chloe and remembered everything. You're married'.

'No. Don't do this tonight'.

'I'm sorry Nosa'.

'Don't do this'.

'I'm dead sorry'.

'No, you're not. If you're, you will open this door'.

'I'm sorry'.

'Damn', Nosa screamed and hit the gate.

He slid down the gate and refused to believe her. She burst into tears again, and this time, she didn't want him to hear her. If he heard her he might want to know why she was crying. So, she rushed into the house and cried her eyes. She had allowed a little desire make her lose the person she loved most in the world and made her lose her freedom as well as a good friend. It had made her a servant to the green snake called Chloe.

She knew Nosa wouldn't return home, so she filled two baskets with wraps of cookies, gala, chin-chin, and two cartons of juices each. Then, she returned outside.

'Nosa, take from the top of the gate', she called and raised the basket. If he took the basket, then they would be doing the same thing they always do at the beginning of the year, a tradition they've stopped for close to ten years now.

'New year's night', Nosa said and collected the basket. Raphael started the tradition.

'To the womanizer'.

'Yeah, to the womanizer', Nosa replied. In a few minutes, the door of his car opened and closed. She returned to her own car and knew they would both sit there and wait for the morning. She burst into tears again.

13 The Good Old Path

Shayla was still fuming about Nosa's call and the ladies' foolishness when she stomped out of the other section of the house to meet the discontent prostitutes. The ones in the other room were also making ludicrous demands. They said they needed a bit of freedom. What freedom? They were even lucky to be alive. If Rachael hadn't ordered her to put them in a safe house, she would have ensured they tasted the same fate as those kidnapped.

She glanced at her phone repeatedly. There was fire on the mountain. Her Intel who worked as a computer analyst at Glo Fortunecity had just told her that the man, Raphael, she was following was nowhere to be found. Also, Segun also had told her that he was so sure he knew where their fat ex-prostitute would be. She had asked him to go to the place and make sure he did anything to get the information about the name she heard from Victoria, even if he had to torture out of her. At this point of the case, he dared not make any mistake. After he had done that, they must use the woman as a trap for the kidnapper. Segun would take the glory while she would be exonerated for torturing a criminal and return to her work, where she was working as a spy for Fortunecity Association of Life Takers (F.A.L.T).

However, she must find a way to douse the wisp of smoke that was showing its face in the safe house. With what she was facing at the moment, she couldn't help but agree with Racheal, who insisted on not making the ladies have contact.

'You girls would either...'

'Who is a girl', Lila shouted and hissed. 'Let's know what we are doing? I'm not your mate in any way. How old are you? Can you be up to twenty years?'

'I'm only fourteen years', Shayla retorted and held her shaking hand in place. She was already getting anxious and would soon do something stupid. She gritted, knowing that her shaking hand would only stop if she left the place or removed two of Lila's teeth.

'Lila, ice your temper. Let's give a conclusion on this...' Victoria said as if she was assured of Shayla's change of mind.

'We're not making any conclusion', Shayla growled. 'You girls are lucky to be alive. By the time that kidnapper gets hold of you, you'll know what I'm saying. If not for me, you...'

Lila edged forward in her seat and looked disgusted. 'What are you? If not for you, would I be here in the first place?'

'Then, pop out', Shayla shouted at her. By this time, both of her hands were now shaking, and it was beginning to reflect in her voice. In place of talking, she always preferred using her hand. The result was always awesome, quick and conclusively.

'Don't look down on me. I have connections', Lila said as she adjusted herself on the edge of the seat. 'I have real and big connections'.

Shayla cracked up with laughter. 'You? Those that were kidnapped, even the rich ones among them, were kidnapped despite their numerous boyfriends. Who are you?'

'I have mouth', Lila shouted, pointed angrily at her mouth and said with much vigor. 'This...My mouth...It will work for me, I swear. It will work!'

Shayla sat up. 'Even the mouth of the best speech maker cannot...Wait! Are you saying...? That's impossible!'

'Nothing is impossible. With me, nothing is impossible!'

'God that wants to punish you is planning to use my gun', Shayla snarled as she withdrew her gun from her bag and brandished it in front of Lila. That should scare her enough to keep shut. She was supposed to be somewhere else, but there she was, battling with these goats. 'Do you think babbling about our contract would have no consequences?'

'You can't kill me. Watch and see. I'm leaving this rotten place, this rotten life. I wasn't a Christian and I'm not ready to be one. I'm tired of all these and I know you won't want to be in this place too if you were me!'

'Ice your temper', Victoria shouted without facing anyone, while her hands stiffened as if she was about to crush her own head. 'Use protection on your words!'

'What protection? May protection burst. See, you, this small Shayla, I will show you that you can't kill me. It's not even possible!'

'That's very possible. And who is this flat brain Victoria telling to shut up? See, don't let me waste my bullets on you two. I've done things I wouldn't normally have done. And what are you crying over? Are you not being paid?'

Victoria stood to interfere. 'We can find a better...'

'I was being paid for what I loved; riding men', Lila said and waved disgustedly. 'Not this...This erm...Dirty lifestyle of pretending I saw visions of hell. God is just kind; he would have struck me dead. I'm tired!'

Shayla inhaled sharply and scoffed. 'See a Pig complaining about death. Your life is in mess already. We are just trying to put you in a glass cabinet so that people will assume you're good. My hand is becoming numb. In order words, I'm no more in control. My shaky hand can press the trigger. Beware and back off!'

'Lila, we can wait. Shayla, what if we have a definite day we'll stop all these?'

'Babe, you have no day. The contract remains the same. Don't expect any date. This is the 21st century. You go when I say you go!'

Lila rose angrily. 'Stop me then. Unless you kill me!'

She really would have loved to do that, to gun them down but her contractor and Rachael would want otherwise. Lila throttled out of the parlor and banged the door behind her.

'You better talk to her', Shayla shouted to Victoria. 'Calm her down, if not you'll lay her corpse into the ground!'

'You too calm down and stop being a b...'

'If you dare finish that word', Shayla said as she rose from her chair. 'I will tear your mouth without fear.'

Victoria gave her a curt look and paused to say something, but she kept quiet.

Shayla was marching out of the house when her phone rang. Rachael was on the line. Racheal was younger than she and would be maybe three or four years younger, but no one dared have an encounter with her. The ones that tried it all died including Rachael's instructors. She had been trained to withstand any type of pain and to know how to solve issues. She thrived on things that others would easily fail at.

'Kill one of the girls. The commissioner wants them all dead. Let's kill one of them now, I'm still strategizing, but killing one of them is the best move for now'.

'Hope it wouldn't backfire?'

Rachael chuckled. 'Backfire? You know me. It's a good move and worthy of our trial. It never and would never backfire'.

'What about the other girls? What would happen to them?'

'Leave them in the safe house'.

'Okay', she said and her voice faltered.

'Hey! I know what you will want to do. Don't try it. Make sure one of them dies'.

Shayla returned to the house. She was always good and loved killing corrupt men, but always felt bad anytime she was ordered to kill anyone that reminded of what she used to be before she was kidnapped at the age of nineteen by Chief Suberu's men to be trained as an assassin. These girls were only trying to meet both ends meet, and shouldn't be plunged into men's feeling of pride. If the commissioner wasn't proud, he wouldn't have collected money from men who wanted to shut up people who were talking against their place of worship. Despite not being a regular churchgoer, she still always found a reason to believe God is alive and would punish people for killing the innocent ones.

She licked her lower lips and knew what to do. She would make Lila disappear, and cover-up for her death with something else. Suddenly, the door to the rooms Lila and Victoria were staying flew open and Lila rolled out a bag. She now wore a black jacket over her spaghetti top. 'I'm going. Vicky, you can decide to stay here'.

'You're not going anywhere. Sit right there, we need to talk', Shayla said dejectedly. She knew how it would be if she discovered that she was being made to disappear. She would be living everything she adored behind and would be flushed to a place no one would ever suspect.

'Can you see, Lila?' Victoria said as slumped into one of the seats. 'She's ready to talk. We will have a good thing to get from here'.

'No. I'm tired', Lila said, shook her head vigorously, pulled her bag and tramped towards the door. Shayla was so furious that she shot at the handle of the door. Lila screamed and jumped

back, making her bag slam onto the ground. Victoria also shrieked. She spun to face Shayla with an alarmed glare.

'Witch. You're a witch. Wicked Witch. I'm going. I'm leaving this devilish place', she said, panting hurriedly. Her breathing was loud and jagged. She remained in the same position as her glances went from Shayla to her fallen bag then to Victoria and back to Shayla.

Shayla loved the fear that oozed out of her. It was good and could easily be influenced. That gunshot would make her look like a puppet. She would dance to any direction Shayla wanted. It would give her control over her. With shaky hands, Shayla gestured towards the door to their room. Lila stared at her as if she was calculating on how to avoid Shayla. Shayla was very sure she would calm down.

'Seat your prostitute-self down on that chair before I put a lot of holes through you'.

However, Lila wasn't one to be easily controlled; she sprung back into action and ran for her bag. Shayla held the gun firmly.

'She is holding an iron', Victoria screamed with a quivering voice. 'Lila. No. She is holding an iron. She is holding a cold gun'.

Trembling and shaking her head as if she was drugged, Lila spun towards the door. 'I'm going. I'm leaving. I'm tired'.

Shayla hardened her grip on the gun. If her hand continued shaking like it was doing at the moment, she would shoot Lila without controlling the trigger. She wanted to avoid shooting any vital organ on this stupid girl. Can't she just stay put till they solved everything?

She growled with clenched teeth. 'Don't do anything stupid? Lila, don't do anything stupid'.

Her muscles were already tensed, and she could feel it even in her voice, and her own breath was becoming louder than anything in the room as her eyes kept widening in its socket.

'No. My daughter is at home. Do you know who she is with?'

'I don't bloody care'.

'You should care. You're pregnant. I can see it. Don't do this to me'.

'We can talk all this out', Victoria shouted as she tried to lower Shayla's stiff hand. With a push of the hand from Shayla, she tumbled to the nearest chair.

'No. I'm not talking', Lila shouted and grabbed her bag nearer.

'Lila, it's just for few days. We will leave this place'.

'Don't tell me poo. My daughter is with my condescending Aunty. That's the only person close enough to me that will accept her. And that woman will ruin her life like she ruined mine'.

'How's that my concern? My concern now is your safety. And that, your mouth stay put'.

'The woman will make her what she made me. If I'm not there, she would turn my daughter into a prostitute'.

Shayla looked at her and inhaled angrily. 'Your daughter can never be a prostitute for two days, idiot'.

'Two days, can you hear the uselessness spilling out of her mouth?' Lila shouted, grabbed her bag and stormed towards the door. Victoria ran to meet her, and stopped her, but she shoved her aside and pulled the bag away. 'Don't you dare'.

'I'm going', she said without turning back.

'You're not going'.

'You're a mother'

'About to be'.

Lila ran for the door but didn't get there before Shayla shot her thigh. Lila wailed and crumbled to the ground, holding her jiggling legs while Victoria screamed, 'you've killed her!'

'My leg', Lila screamed with all her strength as she rolled from side to side with the leg still raised high.

'She's not dead'.

'My leg'.

'Oh, God! You shot her'.

'Get a grip on that and help her'.

Victoria, still perplexed and shaking, hobbled to her side and held the bloody leg for the screaming Lila.

Victoria began to cry in tune with Lila's cry.

'The witch. My leg. The witch shot me'.

'Come and help her'.

'Get her up and move toward that room', Shayla ordered and pointed towards the door separating from others. There was nothing she could do at the moment than to take them into the place. She couldn't leave them there. To save Lila, she needed the First aid box but to get it meant she had to go to the other side of the house.

'Carry her'.

Lila groaned as she was in much pain, but with the way Victoria was going, one would assume she was also in pain.

'Move... Move'.

She faced them as she hurried to the door and pressed the security code for the door. Then, she opened it and opened the next. Immediately they entered the flat of the other ladies, they rose to meet them.

'Victoria', one of them exclaimed.

'Vicky', the other shouted.

The ladies shouted and rushed to her side. It was expected that they knew each other.

'Who sh...' said the one called Keisha, whose backside could make any man turn to look at her the fourth time. 'You shot her'.

Shayla withdrew from them. 'Lay her on that bed'.

After they did, she barked instructions to them and told them to steer clear of her side of the room.

'You were supposed to take care of us', Victoria muttered.

'I'm sorry... To take care of us? She had been torturing us', Keisha shouted as she paced the room. 'God knows where she put the others'.

'The others were not fake', Shayla barked as she brought out a knife, and began to work on the wound.

'I am not...'

'Shush it. You all know you were fake'.

The ladies kept quiet, and she focused on the wounded, screaming prostitute in front of her.

'At least, let us go back to our fake life', groaned Lila and winced.

'You still have the mouth to talk' Shayla sneered and rammed a soaked cotton into Lila's mouth. She shrieked and spat out repeatedly. Then, Shayla continued working amidst the various snide from the insolent ungrateful prostitutes.

After Shayla was sure she had removed the bullet and had cleaned the wound, she turned to them and stared at their different bodies in draped in their petty clothes. 'I want to save you. Every one of you. But you're ingrates and fools. Your kidnapper is still outside'.

The thin one, who had refused to talk all the while, turned to Keisha and Victoria with outstretched arms and said, 'Kidnapper?' She kidnapped us'.

'I'm not...'

'She's not the kidnapper' Victoria said.

'Why is she now holding us?'

'I'm saving your sorry brains...'

'No...No...'

'Are you girls mad? If you don't know, the dead ladies were also fake. They were planted. Who do you want to pretend to? All these people are also pretending'.

At that moment, a message entered her phone: *There are consequences of inaction and delayed ones.*

Shayla stared at the ladies' eyes to be sure none of them was the spy. She looked about to detect any hidden camera. The ladies stared at her as if she was going insane. But with Rachael, one couldn't be safer. She moved out of the room and turned suddenly, pulling out her gun. She pointed it at Lila's head. The other ladies screamed and scrambled for cover, which wasn't available. So, they clamped their hands over their heads. She shot Lila and left the room in the wake of the gun's noise and the scream of the other ladies.

14 The Regrets

Shayla drove out of the compound, rubbing her stomach and heaving repeatedly as she made sure she didn't cry. The hole she made in Lila's head flashed back to her. Unlike the other times she had killed other people, she couldn't wash or will this guilt away. Normally, she would have taken a strong hot drink to wash it down, but she didn't have the time. She had just deprived a woman of ever seeing her daughter again. And maybe, it was true. Maybe Lila's Aunt would make her baby a prostitute. Maybe she should have gone easy on her. She shouldn't have really shown her Edo side. She was an architect to the fact that Lila's child would have to cry over the grave of her mother. Would she want such life for her own baby, for Nosa's baby?

When she got to Segun's location, he was looking lost as he sat in his car, and she felt like screaming at him. He said he knew where the missing ex-prostitute was, but his car was nothing near any house. The only thing she heard was rigorous prayers from the top of the mountain. As she reduced her pace to park near him, she was met by people lamenting as they helped someone that seemed to have been injured.

Not ready to cause a scene, Shayla reined her anger, and talked with clenched teeth, whispering, 'what did you do this time?'

'I lost her'.

'Was that why Nosa called me the other time?'

Segun blinked and hit his head severally. 'I lost her. I swear by my head, I got here early. I swear. Immediately Olivia told me that the man in the customer care didn't come here, I did my research and I rushed here. I did. But I think someone got here before us. I think the Gragus team got here before us'.

She stared at him and wished she was Medusa; he would have become a stone for his stupidity. She stiffened her hand in anger and gave him a cold glare that made him cringe.

'You lost her. She was our only hope. You lost her'.

'I didn't. I haven't just found her.'

'Why were you now waiting?'

'Because I don't think she's here, and I don't know where to go. I suspect she had been taken like the rest. We are back to the first set'.

'That's not true. My source was real and you confirmed it from your source'.

'Yes. That's why I would have been surprised too. When I got here, I met a church. I even pretended to want to see their prophet so that he can pray for me all in the name of scouting for her, but there was no one there that looked like her. The place church compound is something like... how will I put it? It's like a field. You know what I mean'.

'I don't know what you mean and I don't want to know'.

'I mean she isn't here'.

'Then, we've got to get going'.

She tried to fathom all the possible solutions and knew she had to return to her base, and do what most people in F.A.L.T hated- being dependent on Racheal. She called her as she drove off, and gave her the details of how events ran at her side.

'We need all the help necessary. This person had taken everyone we could use to catch him. What do we do?'

'What do you do? We need to salvage the situation. News has gotten to me that the Gragus Team is behind or in support of this person, and be careful. This person's style is different and seemed to be an effort from both someone within our group and someone not totally a male. Yet, this person is good'.

'Okay. What to do?'

'You shouldn't ask me that. You know, don't you? I'll send help. But whatever you do, be smart. Something is brewing here. Meanwhile, Bennett is dead'.

'Leech is dead? Oh!' She said and sucked her breath as she imagined the still body of the one person that always took her breath any time she saw him. 'How did that happen? How's Jessica taking it?'

'Don't bother yourself with the unglorified details but just stay sharp especially with your baby'

'How did you...?'

'I'm Rachael'.

She wanted to scream that Rachael wasn't God, but had to refrain herself from doing something stupid. However, when the call got disconnected, she screamed loudly. Bennett was dead, and Rachael was acting like God. She screamed and drove off as she stared into the darkness of the road.

Now, that they've lost her again, she had to employ another tactic in knowing where the woman was before things went out of hand. She directed Segun to go to and start searching for another person with vision. Segun complained about having a lot on his plate.

'Then, eat them and empty your bowel in the prison. I won't mind defiling Rachael and Chief', she grumbled to him as she started the car again. She had to return to bury Lila's corpse.

When she got there, the other ladies were weeping over the corpse. She cocked her gun, bringing them back to reality and ordered them to carry the corpse outside. While two of them were doing that, she ordered the last one to put a shovel in the backseat of her car. Then, she opened the trunk of the car and ordered them to dump her corpse there. Seeing that she was ready, she asked them to return to the room and gave the guards orders to watch them closely.

She couldn't understand the reasons she was doing what she was doing, but she couldn't let a mother die without the proper covering of a grave. Would her own unborn child have wanted that for her?

She drove off to a deep part of the forest around and dug it up. As she did so, her mind went back to the day she stood on the edge of the grave of her parents, who died in an accident. The silence of that day flooded back to her and she stared blankly at the empty grave. The numbness that had taken over her returned to her with a lot of emotion. Digging the grave felt like a wake-up call for the tears that had been in hiding all this while. She shook her head to send the tears away.

'Things are not the same. The dead cannot rise again', she said as she slammed the shovel on the dark pile of sand.

With a sweaty body, she dumped Lila into the grave she dug, and covered it up. As she straightened the bulge of the grave, the moonlight crawled out of the clouds that gathered in the sky, above the mountains, and she remembered how she sat watching the moon in the night after she had had the cause to bury her parents. The memory of those times brought her to her knees and she yelled, 'why?'

She crumbled to the floor and cried for the guilt of killing Lila, for losing Joana, for Bennett that was claimed to be dead, for her parents, for living a life she couldn't pass to her own daughter.

If things could work out well as planned she would leave this lifestyle and go somewhere far, somewhere she could start all over. With a painful heart and a tired body, she dragged herself to her car. The next day, she would return go to Moriah to help her in the search. It was high time they used the best and faced the problem squarely.

Nosa watched the gate and must have slept off around 3 am. However, the next morning's sun met him on the way from Moriah's house. He honked thrice to inform her of his exit from the place. She honked to let him know she understood him.

Nosa brought out his phone and began to trace Raphael's phone. It took him a while before he finally found out where the phone was pinged from. If he got to Raphael, he would destroy him before he listened to his explanation.

The journey to the place the phone was pinged from was like a road through hell. When he finally saw Raphael's car, it was parked into the drainage on the road. That was very unlike Raphael. Nosa hurried off his car and saw the side of Raphael's car had been crashed into. Right on the floor was his android phone, which had been terribly smashed. Nosa shouted in horror.

'No. No'.

There was no hope anywhere. There was no way he could find the answer now. He searched his car, but all he could see were CDs of different musicians- gospel, secular, Fuji, foreign. Also, he saw the X-rated magazines that were neatly arranged by the side of the driver's seat which were now splashed with blood.

After thoroughly searching for anything at all, he knew it was a fruitless effort. There was definitely nothing he could do at that time than to go Shayla's place. Someone had gotten to Raphael, and had probably, injured him badly.

So, he returned to his car and drove off to the beach. Still angry at her, he knew he would never forgive her for what she had done. He should have seen through all the façade, but he was only concerned that she wanted to destroy the joy in his family that he didn't take notice of her other actions.

In his rating, she always came third even though he still hadn't told her. As wise as she seemed, she still didn't know about Moriah and he loved it like that.

When he drove to the beach, he stormed into the house and began to search for any clue at all. He ransacked the house and searched everywhere. He was too pissed to listen to anything. In his reckless search, he unearthed a file and saw a list that he would have thought had no significance if he didn't see Moriah's phone number in it. He was so surprised. Right in front of her name was the word 'Supplier'.

That infuriated him beyond words. So, Moriah was involved with Shayla? He crunched the paper in hand as he felt hot blood circulate his body. He brought out his phone from his pocket and dialed Moriah's number.

'You...!' He barked immediately the phone got connected.

'Nosa?' She said, startled. In their days of knowing one another, he had never used such condescending tone on her. Even after knowing what she did for a living, even after she told him that she couldn't marry him, he refrained from the use of such tones. She had betrayed and deceived and made him look like a fool. There was no way he would forgive her this time. She knew that Shayla was involved in the kidnapping and death of these ladies, and she kept helping her. There was no way he would accept any explanation or excuses from her.

He shook his head and disconnected his call as he headed towards her house. She would hear the last of his anger. He drove off and repeatedly disconnected her call. She was never loyal; he knew that, but he never knew she would play a part in one of his downfalls. His investigation was supposed to go smoothly if she hadn't disrupted it. He dialed Shayla's phone number again but it was disconnected.

'The Witch', he muttered.

The journey to her place was warlike. Unlike the other times that he was the one being victimized by other road users, he drove recklessly.

'I'll kill you, imbeciles', Nosa shouted as the other drivers complained about the way he was driving. Instead of apologizing, he screamed curses at them. They were all untrustworthy.

When he got to her house, she rushed to the gate. He was soon accosted by one of those preachers, who insisted on giving him a tract. He barked at her, and she withdrew, glaring at his furious eyes. Immediately she opened the gate, she pulled him inside. Despite his anger, he allowed her to pull him. When they were still University friends, she was the only one who knew how to stop him from doing stupid things whenever he was angry. One of her tactics was pulling or pushing away from where he wanted to make a fuss.

A very good case was the day someone was trying to evict Moriah out of her house because a richer girl wanted the same room. Nosa was ready to beat the landlord to a pulp, but she pulled him away and the anger subsided. Although Chloe got a new house for Moriah, and the girl committed suicide in the same house six months later, Nosa would have disfigured their faces.

However, not today. There was nothing she would do to make him stop being angry.

'You're despicable'

'Nosy...'

'Don't you dare chew my name in that filthy mouth of yours like a chewing gum'.

She looked rattled and stared at him. 'What did I do wrong?'

'What? What did you do wrong? Can you hear the poo you're spilling from your mouth? What did you do wrong?'

She blinked several times and opened her hands.

'You knew Shayla'.

'Yes. She's your mistress'.

'No. No. Don't give me that crap. You knew her as a customer or the real customer'.

'Oh. She...Oh... Nosa it's not like that'.

'You knew her'.

'She doesn't know I know you'.

'You knew her. And the two of you played me'.

'I wouldn't do that. Nosa, please hear me out'

'You both played me: My only lead is gone. You helped her'.

'I didn't help her'.

'I knew I was bugged, but I couldn't have suspected that she did it'.

'Oh no. I didn't help her bug anything. The thing I gave her to bug you wasn't even to listen to you. I claimed it didn't work because of some jargons just to make her not bug you. She didn't get information from you'.

'Keep that lie to yourself: Someone has been listening to me'.

'I'm not the one. I can help you stop it', she said and held his hand, which he flung away.

Withdrawing from her touch, he shouted, 'Don't you dare touch me. Don't you just dare. You're...'

'Nosa. I only acted as their transit of illegal entry from Togo to Fortuncity, Nigeria'.

'Who did you bring?'

'A guy named Segun and one lady'.

'What about them?'

'The lady is in the police custody, but the Segun guy is still roaming Fortunecity as a wanted person'.

'Just like you'.

'Nosa... Hear me out'.

'Don't call my name. You're a betrayer'.

'Nosa', she called as he stormed out.

'Nosa', she screamed as he banged the door behind him.

When he got to his car, he found a tract about those that saw visions. It entailed stories of different people that had gone to hell through visions. He had read it before. The way people went to hell these days was disturbing. And was stupid. If those idiots had not caught the disease of seeing visions of heaven maybe everything that happened to him wouldn't have happened. He crunched the paper and threw it into the nearest dustbin.

15 Fireflies

The next morning didn't have to meet her on the boat because by 5 am she had received a distress call from Segun that they've just found the body of one of the missing fake visionaries.

'Where?'

'This time, this person is so desperate, she blasted her head off.'

'Oh, God! Where?'

'The fallen statue.'

She inhaled loudly and rushed out of her bed. The person had just shown that the fake people were fallen. He had dropped the dead woman in the fallen image of a past bad leader. The image used to stand erect, but a whirlwind fell it. Regardless of the fact that she was suspended, she called people from the Police force and within a few minutes, she watched them carry her body away. After the place was cleared, Segun drove up to her.

'My head is banging', Segun complained.

'Why?'

'I'm yet to sleep.'

'What were you doing?'

'I'm after something for Rachael. We are...'

 He said and stopped talking. He opened his mouth, inhaled, exhaled and shook his head. 'It's a secret work we've all being doing'.

'And I'm exempted?'

'No. You're part of the plan. Why do you think Rachael told you to find a way to be suspended?'

'She is dreaming'.

'Be careful'.

'She won't kill me'.

'No. But she is right, always right'.

'I'm even supposed to be in the police to know some top secrets'.

'This work has a chance to backfire. I'm sure she has her reason'.

'Reasons be damned. I shouldn't be exempted from anything'.

Segun shrugged and looked away. Whatever they were doing must be top secret, and he wasn't even supposed to hint her, but since he had done, she would find out what it was. In fact,

she would make sure she solved the women issues herself and get the glory. Then, Racheal would know how good she was.

The only person that could help her track down the whereabouts of the missing Joana in a few minutes was Moriah, who still had a little misgiving about her. She would employ every means possible to get to the end of the situation before the Commissioner of Police killed off every one they paid to boost their pride and that of his useless church. She wouldn't want anything to happen to her own baby because of the evil her hands had been forced to work.

The journey to Moriah's place felt like an eternity. When she entered the useless street Moriah lived, Shayla felt like slapping Moriah for using that place as a base. Her house was one of the very few that looked presentable in the area. Even at that, she couldn't believe that she could remain sane in such a place. The street was laden with beggars, many of whom were having guns hidden under their wrappers. And preachers, who kept shouting things that no one was ready to listen to. Even the few that did try to listen were doing so with the hope they would be given things to sustain them for a long time.

She closed her nose as she walked from her car to Moriah's gate.

'House of the most wanted person. What the hell is wrong with this girl?' She mumbled.

People like that ought to be in hiding, not living in plain sight. However, when she stared at the beggars and noticed that their eyes followed her, she knew Moriah had men guarding her.

She pressed the bell continually but got no response. That wasn't what she planned. Yet, she couldn't leave without getting what she wanted. So, the only option available was to call her on the phone.

'Moriah', Shayla said calmly as she clamped the phone to her ear. She hated what she wanted to do, but if it meant losing her most precious jewel, she would. In fact, losing it would make Nosa closer to her.

'I'm not opening this door', Moriah shouted from the other side of the gate. She didn't know she was there all the while.

'Since when have you stopped opening doors for me?'

'Since we got Nosa involved. Since he came here to talk about how reckless you were to let him on the details of how I was involved with you'.

'I can handle Nosa. Open this thing. We're all in deeper trouble than you're seeing'.

She fiddled with her bag. The news about Leech's death still had a toll on her. She couldn't talk much, and the only way she could let Moriah see her pain was if she herself felt that pain. She gritted and raised a pocket knife into the view of the camera.

'Can you see the knife?'

'You can't do anything', Moriah shouted with a stiff tone. Some of the beggars were beginning to sit up.

'Open the door now or you would have the blood of this baby on your hand'.

'Nothing must happen to Nosa's baby or you would face the consequences'.

'No. Don't tell me hogwash. You know a baby's worth. If you really care for the baby, open the door'.

The last time they were together she had threatened to stab herself in the stomach, killing Nosa's baby. She knew Nosa was Moriah's weakness and she would exploit it to the last drop of his blood. She awaited Moriah's response.

'You're not talking and that's okay by me and for me', Shayla said as she shifted back.

She took the knife and pressed its edge into her stomach. Passers-by began to miss steps as they glanced and stared and stopped to watch her. Yet, she wasn't perturbed. The only things she needed at that time was to have what she needed. She cringed as the pain increased.

'That's your baby'.

'Open the door', she yelled as the knife began to pierce her skin, and blood began to drip out.

'No...Ouch...Stop. That's Nosa's baby'.

'You this slut. I won't have to tell you any other thing'.

'Stop... That's Nosa's baby'.

'Then, Open the damn thing'.

Moriah flung the door and Shayla sighed as she covered her cloth. Immediately she locked the gate behind her, Moriah ran into the house and returned with a first aid box. Shayla tried to ward her off, but she was already crying as she continually slapped Shayla's hands away to treat her.

'You're a wretched witch', Moriah said as she applied spirit to the wound. 'I hate you and God would definitely punish you'.

'What do you know about God, you wretched slut?' Shayla groaned and winced.

Moriah hissed and closed the first aid box. By this time, something beeped. Moriah glanced at it and stared for a while and shook her head. Shayla turned comically to look at what she was staring at. The lights on the small machine placed on the door kept changing color from green to yellow. She hissed and turned to Moriah.

'People have been calling me witch lately, and I don't think a slut like you have the right to call me one'.

'What do you want?'

'Aside that you stop screwing my man, I need to track down a woman'.

'Firstly, I'm not a slut. Secondly, he loved me first before you or Chloe or whoever in this world. He loves me'.

'Calm down'.

'Thirdly, if you don't stop referring to me as a harlot or slut or its equivalents, I don't see how I will help you. Fourthly, I'm not a slut again and why should I help you?'

Shayla rolled her eyes and pointed the knife at her stomach. 'Because you know what's at stake here and you're not stupid dear'.

Suddenly, the thing that was beeping began to beep sporadically. Moriah ran past her towards the machine and stared at it in fear. The light changed from yellow to orange and to pink. Suddenly, a sporadic shootout began outside the house. People screamed. Moriah peeped and yelled. Shayla didn't need to know what was happening outside before she brought out her gun, and gripped it with all her mind, for her baby's safety. The shooting in its loudness began to move towards the house, and an alarm began to blare. Immediately, an alarm within the house too began to blare.

'Oh, God! I think I've been burned', Moriah shouted and ran for the house. 'Come on'.

Knowing that she preferred to be in custody of the slut than to be near the unknown shooter or shooters, she ran after Moriah.

'How...?' She yelled as she gripped her bag to make sure it didn't prevent her movement. Within few seconds, she was neck to neck with Moriah, whose short tight skirt was deterrent to her fast movement.

'I don't know why, but some people are coming for me', Moriah said as they rushed into the house. She slammed the door behind them while the people outside kept shooting. Then, someone must have been free from others because, despite the numerous shooting and the unstoppable shrieks from women, someone began to shoot at her gate. Before the door was locked, Shayla saw dusts raised into the air by the people around the house.

Moriah bolted the door and pressed another button that raised a glass wall. Moriah felt like screaming at her that to what end was the door there for, but she held her peace. In that instance, her mind felt partially ready to die. Probably, she might end up in the same place as Bennett Adeoti or as Lila or even her own parents. If those people that had been screaming about hell were right, she should probably say her last prayer.

'Stay put', Moriah shouted and began to type into her laptop. Within a few minutes, her wardrobe began to spin, and soon they were faced with an armory. Adrenaline shots pulsed through Shayla's body as she watched the numerous guns face her. She felt like caressing each of the guns, and that made her moan.

'Rubbish', Moriah said and hissed as she pushed past her. 'Pick one already or as many as you want'.

Shayla stared at the gun hungrily. She quickly pressed the speed dial for emergency meant to call F.A.L.T, whenever one of them was in danger. She was lucky she had asked for back-up before, even if these people weren't the Gragus team, Rachael would have told Chioma, their schedule officer, and Chief Suberu's P.A, to dispatch help to GreenCity for help.

16 Let Nosa Know

Nosa was still fixed on finding either Shayla or the middleman, Segun. He decided it was high time he met with his computer analysts. They too were eager to meet him. They updated him on everything, but after all, they ended up telling him that they were stagnant. Therefore, the only option was to return to Shayla's boat.

He returned to Shayla's boat to ransack it. If he did his search well, he would probably see things there that would enhance his investigation. He drove in a haste, with the hope that he would meet Shayla at home. If he met her by chance, she would answer for her crime. He would make her see the back of her neck whether she was carrying his baby or not. Just as he got to the river bank, Shayla called him. Just what he needed. He hurriedly picked the call.

'If you're bold enough, let...'

'Help us, Nosa'.

Gunshots rang in the background.

'Help. You're my last resort', Shayla screamed.

'Calm down! Where are you?'

'Shoot', someone screamed. The voice looked like that of Moriah's.

'I'm at Moriah's...'

'Get down', Moriah screamed. 'Drop the phone. Oh, God! The door. Get behind the crate. Get going. More guns'.

Nosa turned and almost fell as he raced for the car. 'Hang on'.

Even if he had no reason to fight for her life, his child was still in her. Within a few minutes, he was stepping on the accelerator of the car and was speeding off.

'I'm coming. Don't switch off your phone ', he yelled and made sure the phone remained in the loudspeaker. Then, he was faced by an obedient road user. 'Get your haggard car out of my way'.

'No. Nosa... Find Segun. I'll send you his file and his number'.

Nosa's speed was soon aggravating curses and abuses from other road users who tried to avoid him by all means, and that was his own desire. 'I'll get you soon'.

'No... Nosa... They are here. Oh God, my baby'.

'Leave my house', Moriah shrieked, and gunshots rang again.

'Moriah get your head down. The... God. Get your head down'.

'No...' Nosa yelled as he had to screech to a halt to avoid being crushed by a trailer.

There was an increase in the gunshots, and soon things were falling. Moriah was shrieking, while Shayla kept shouting 'her baby'.

'You should be the police here', Moriah shrieked and was soon railing curses on the people shooting at them.

'That's before I got this burden'.

'Shut your crazy mouth. You're calling our baby a burden'.

'You too, shut up and shoot'.

Gunshots rang again. 'That side. No. The trajectory points for my... Get off. Take that'.

'I'm out...' Shayla screamed.

'Help. No. No', Moriah screamed.

'Run', Nosa suggested. But Moriah's scream soon overshadowed every noise in the house. Within minutes, some people were screaming instructions, and Moriah's voice, as well as Shayla's, wasn't heard any more. He tried to tell himself that nothing had happened to them, but the silence was too overbearing. He sped off. However, when he saw that nothing was happening again, he had to shout their names.

'Talk to me. What's happening?'

The silence was seriously unnerving. He shouldn't lose his cool at this time, but it seemed he had just lost some of the people closest to his heart. If his baby or Moriah died, he would ensure that they heard the last of it. He would hunt every one of them down, and made sure they died a very slow death. Some minutes later, he heard a throaty voice, 'Find Queen's estate. You'll meet them there'.

Nosa remembered that estate. Chloe had plans to buy it sometimes ago. He shouldn't change direction just yet. As much as he wanted to kill them immediately, he had to ensure his back-up was sound. He would have to rely on his own hackers. He called them and gave them instructions on what to do. However, they told him that if he went there, he would have to go blind because there was nothing much that would help them direct him.

Then, he proceeded to call Chloe. She would have the best description of the place from where he was. He dialed her number but it kept ringing and sending him to the voicemail. His heart skipped beat. He didn't want voicemail. What did he need the voicemail for?

'They've gotten to Chloe too', he muttered.

He shook his head. If truly they had Moriah and Shayla, he would find a way of getting to them. But he had to be sure that they truly had Chloe before he proceeded to find the others. With that, he spun the car around and headed for their own estate as he kept redialing Chloe's number.

When he got home, he met the gate intact and found no form of a struggle anywhere. Yet, he removed his gun from his holster as he gently progressed into the unusually silent compound.

The house wasn't locked and Chloe's phone was laying on the table. He raced to his father's room to ask him about her whereabouts but met only the housekeeper making the bed.

'Where's my wife?'

'She went out'.

'With my father?'

'Yes, and Mummy Church'

He dialed Pastor's wife's number. 'Mummy, please help me give the phone to Chloe?'

'Sister Chloe, your husband'.

'Okay... I wanted to be sure you were there'.

'I am'.

'Good. Thank God! What would have happened if I lost you?'

'What are you saying? Where are you? Should I come to meet you?'

'No. Don't bother', he said and heaved. 'Did you finally buy that Queen estate?'

'No... One of those General Overseers beat me to it'.

'Damn'.

'Nosa'

'Sorry'.

'What is the best route to take into the estate?'

'Just the entrance now. And that place was a mess the last time I went there'.

She had always insisted that he refrained from using foul languages. He should have known. The problem now remained was why someone would take Moriah and Shayla as hostages.

Then, he remembered Dr. Immaculate John's secretary saying a lady beat them to buy the land. Chloe has been the only one buying lands crazily in recent times. Could it be the man lied or she was lying? But Chloe had never had a reason to lie on such matter; in fact, she always wanted people to know she bought those lands and not her father. In other words, the General Overseer was lying all along. He was the one kidnapping people, but why? And if he wasn't the one, was another woman involved in this case?

When Chloe got the strangest call in her life, she felt like screaming her head off. She had switched off her phone because of the way Mummy Church kept calling. However, when Chloe finally switched it on, and Mummy Church's call found its way into her phone, she started her rants. By this time, she had finally stretched Chloe to a point that she would soon snap. Immediately she asked for the latest update and Chloe didn't give her something good, she disconnected the call and came to her place.

So, when Mummy Church came knocking at her door, she knew she had no other option than to leave the phone switched on. She was on Chloe's neck till her father-in-law came into the sitting room to settle the matter. They had just finished explaining the situation to her father-in-law when she received the call.

'Oh God!' Mummy Church shouted as soon as she told her that they found the bodies of the two police officers as well as that of Agnes.

'You killed her', Mummy Church yelled as she rose from her seat. 'I told you. Don't involve the police. Don't poke your nose'.

Her father-in-law looked disappointed as he always did whenever he saw her and her daughter, and she felt like crying in front of the man, whom she always adored after her father.

'Let's be sure, she is the one', her father-in-law said with Yoruba language. Despite being from Edo state, he always loved speaking Yoruba especially when he saw someone that understood it.

'Daddy, can police be blind?' Mummy Church shouted in English and wailed. She slumped to the ground, and wailed, placing her good hand on her head. Chloe hated that she was seating on the ground with the beautiful gown she got from Hadassah's shop. Chloe wished things hadn't gone against her plan. Her plan had been annulled.

'I'll go and check the body', she said weakly after she stopped staring into the empty space.

Someone had just punctured her hope of ever talking to the woman. She rose weakly, grabbed her car key, and trudged towards the door. Like her Aunt said, she was ticking, and would soon explode.

'You're not going alone', Mummy church said and rose.

Chloe shook her head. 'No. Let me see the bad news alone'.

'No. I'm coming with you'.

'That's ideal. She knows the woman better', her father-in-law. And Chloe felt like telling him to keep quiet. He was already meddling in their business and was infuriating her.

'No. I need to face the music myself'.

'I'm coming with you'.

She stared at the woman and hoped she would be able to cope with the horror of what she was about to see.

'The way the two of you are acting is too weird. Mrs. Fowosere, I can't leave you alone with my daughter. She has made a mistake, but shouldn't be overbeaten for it. Whatever God has planned would have happened eventually'.

'Don't tell me rubbish, old man', Mummy Church said and sniffed as she grabbed her bag. She pushed past Chloe and walked towards the parking lot. 'Tell your cursed daughter-in-law to take me to Agnes' corpse'.

'You can see my point', her father-in-law reiterated. This time Joel, her cat strutted out and meowed away from her father-in-law, who also sneered at it.

'It's true. You don't need to follow us'.

'We both know you can't talk me out of this. I'm still the head of this house'.

'No, Papa. Nosa is the head of this house', Chloe said and almost bit her tongue. She shouldn't have said that, but she needed him to back off. He stared at her for a while and smiled.

'I told you girls, you need a man with you', he said grabbed his Bible and headed for the car. She rammed her fist into the wall. These people would force her hands to do things she would forever hate herself for. She hurriedly sent a message to the person assigned to her case, dropped the phone, rushed into the house to get her handbag and rushed out.

She gritted, grabbed her bag, walked off to the car, opened it and clambered into it. Soon, she was opening the doors for a fuming Mummy Church, and her smiling father-in-law. They drove off in silence and she wished they would back off. There was no way she would let them in on what would happen soon. If they were chanced to see the corpse, they might be one soon. She searched for her phone and groaned as she remembered dropping it on the table. That was very stupid of her. If she was near Moriah, she might have finally found a reason for Moriah to call her reckless. When they were all together, she always believed that everyone was careless. So being able to avoid that for the many years they were together had made her have an edge over Moriah.

Soon, Nosa called, and she knew she had to do all she wanted to do before he finally came to term with the knowledge of the things she had done. She gritted after she handed the phone back to Mummy Church.

'You don't need to do this', Chloe muttered as she stopped the car outside the house they were supposed to see the corpses.

'Wait! Are we not supposed to meet them at either a morgue or a hospital or the police station?' Her father-in-law said.

'That's why I was against you people smelling this place. It is the place the ordeal took place. It's a bottle of stale urine'.

'No', Mummy Church cried as she rushed out of the car, leaving her car behind.

Chloe gritted and felt like grabbing her, tying her down in a seat until she had seen the horror that awaited her. However, her father-in-law was soon getting down from the car, and she knew she was done for. Luckily, they were met by the person assigned to them, who introduced himself as Chris. He opened the door and led them into the house.

'Where are the other people?' Her father-in-law asked as he entered after her.

'Which other people?' Chris asked as he walked carefully. Chloe suspected what had happened in the house was truly something horrific, but she couldn't stop at that moment.

'Are you sure you people want to do this?' She asked.

'Let's go', Mummy Church whispered.

'So, the police sent only one man to investigate death', her father-in-law said.

Chris didn't answer but led the way to the sitting room. The door was the first evidence of an encounter. It was thoroughly disfigured with holes from rapid gunfire. The assailants must have shot sporadically because the guys in the sitting room seemed to have been caught unawares. Agnes was lying on her face with a thick black rope still tied around her. A hole was punctured into her back by a bullet. Blood oozed from the shot part of her body. Mummy Church wailed.

'You killed her', Mummy Church shouted, and ran to the rollover Agnes' corpse. 'We asked you not to tell the police but because you just like illegal things, she is dead. You like to meddle in people's business'.

Chloe saw an iron chair at a corner and held it for comfort. She was angry at herself and at the world for making everything go against her. She groaned in pain. She felt herself ticking terribly and heartbeat doing the same. Her miserable life had extended its arm to the people around her. The words of her mother rushed back. The way she used to talk to her as if it was her fault that her parents had premarital sex that led to her birth.

As if reading her mind, Mummy Church yelled, 'that's why your life would always see death. I was avoiding you like a plague immediately we saw you around her. Your life smells of death'.

'Madam', her father-in-law said and tried to hold her, but she brushed his hand off.

'Leave me. For what you did, you yourself know that you will never make heaven'.

Chloe's grip on the chair tightened. She knew. She had just killed Agnes that had a vision of heaven. The only one that had seen a vision of heaven among those in Fortunecity. Now, she was in deep trouble. She could feel tears welling in her heart. The tears for everyone she had been a cause for their death. Her mother, whose words still rang in her ears, whose life she took with a knife because she always taunted her about being born by mistake, whose death reprimanded her to the office of a psychiatrist. She could still feel the sandy feeling on the corpse of her daughter, whom she herself gave birth to out of wedlock.

Unlike the way she blamed Mr. Kings, her dad, for making her own mother give birth to her out of wedlock, she couldn't blame Nosa. She was the one at fault. Although she might want to push the blame on Moriah, she still was at fault. Moriah only did something bad, but she made Nosa have sex that night and that made her give birth to a child out of wedlock too.

'It's God that is punishing you. I knew. But I wanted to be sure that you've been forgiven. I didn't know that God had not forgiven you'.

'Madam, please', her father-in-law said and pulled Mummy Church away. But she wriggled out of his grasp and turned to Chloe. She waved at her face while raising the amputated hand to support the good one.

'God has not forgiven you for having fornication with your husband', Mummy Church said, 'that's why you would always encounter such pain in your life and people would keep dying around you'.

Chloe's mind flooded to her teenage time, and how her own mother had always told her how she was a child birthed out of her and her father's fornication. She remembered the feeling of

guilt she used to have because of her parents' fornication. The pain. She remembered once again how she stabbed her mother to death, and how her father employed every lawyer in the world to exonerate her, and how he paid a psychiatrist to treat her. She always wanted to forget that event. And it took her a while to get healed from the trauma because she met Nosa, Moriah, and Raphael. However, the wound had just been peeled. Mummy Church had used her words to open it afresh.

She yelled in frustration and gripped the chair harder. She could feel herself terribly ticking, and about to burst.

'Mummy Church, stop'.

'Don't you tell me to stop. You this fornicator. You've pulled death along with you everywhere you go'.

'Stop... Stop'.

'You're evil. You're cursed. You're...'

Chloe yelled again and lifted the chair.

'Don't', she shouted and slammed it on Mummy Church's head. Mummy Church yelled and crumbled to the ground. Hot blood splashed on her face, but she wasn't done.

'You', she yelled and crushed it again. This time Mummy Church gave a prolong cry and stopped. Blood oozed out of her head. Her father-in-law was too stunned to move near her. His face too had been splattered with blood.

'Ever' she screamed and hit Mummy Church, who was wincing now. Mummy Church screamed. Then, Chloe paused, for a while as she panted. Crunched, Mummy Church struggled to crawl out, but Chloe wasn't done with her. She yelled incoherently and began to hit Mummy Church repeatedly with the chair as she mumbled. 'Don't you ever remind me I carry death'.

Bone cracked and skulls crunched. The murkiness of the blood began to invade the room. Her Father-in-law stood in a corner, whimpering as if he had just seen a ghost. She marched to Chris.

'Give me your gun', she grumbled.

He hurriedly removed it and handed it over to her. She returned to Mummy Church's corpse and finished a whole magazine in her head.

'Give me another magazine'.

Her father-in-law screamed and ran away, but with a look from her. Chris chased him, and in a few minutes, he was dragging him into the house.

'Stay put. Chris, hold him', she mumbled and gestured with the gun that he should move to the place the corpses were. Her father-in-law wriggled out of Chris' hands and ran off, but was soon stopped again.

'What's wrong with you Gragus team? I should have gone with F.A.L.T. They won't allow an old man overpower them'.

Chris frowned and pushed her father-in-law, who was shaking like a wet leaf, to the place she gestured. He glanced at the corpse repeatedly as if they would jump at him and continually praying in tongues.

'I told you not to follow me. I told you it was a very stinking deadly stale urine. I told you not to open it, but you were adamant you wanted to be a part of those that would ensure we open it very well, right? Now, it has burst all over your face, and it would choke you till you die'.

'I can still go back'.

'No. You were Mr. Know-it-all. The stench of arrogance on you is like dirty socks. All of you, God-forsaken idiots, who have dedicated your lives to torment people that do wrong. Was it my fault that I was born illegally?'

'Your mother did it'.

'Don't tell me rubbish as if I'm mad. I know my mother did it, and I know she is dead. But I still see the look on your face every time you see me and my daughter'.

'Ah! That's a big lie. I love her like my own daughter'.

'I told you not to come with us. The bottle was weak, but no. You wanted to be a mediator'.

'I'm sure it was her own poke nosing that made those F.A.L.T know where these men were hiding the woman. I needed her. God. I needed her to know where my daughter is. I will kill F.A.L.T. Now, we have to go the hard way like Segun suggested'.

'Your daughter is dead'.

'Shut up! Shut up! I'm not mad. I know she is dead. I want to know if she went to heaven, but they killed Agnes. I will kill everyone. I will kill you all', she yelled and shot her father-in-law in the head first. She would have loved to give him a slow death, but it was wise to kill him on the head and chest, to help him die at once just like Nosa had always wanted. She had just fulfilled the wish of the only man she would ever love.

She tapped Chris. 'You know where to be'.

He frowned.

'C'mon, see yourself as my designated survivor like they said in one of the TV series my husband is watching. You would be useful when the time is upon us'.

'I just hope. I don't want to miss out on the action'.

She tapped his cheek. 'Whatever we are doing now is the preamble. Let's me go and wait for my husband'.

17 Pulling Chloe out of The Set

When he entered the estate, Nosa, with his gun drawn, was soon accosted by clues that pointed him to the house he was supposed to meet the people that kidnapped Moriah and Shayla. The streets were empty and silent. The only noise he heard came from the rustling leaves, which were everywhere. Air blew them from the roofs of houses that had no curtains, and doors that were kept ajar. He proceeded through the silence without making any noise. The fog of the harmattan still hung in the air and made the place ominous than it would have been. His footsteps resounded in the empty houses.

The houses were built in the same styles, but their colors had faded off. The buildings' colors looked as if they used to be cream and light blue. However, the paints were peeling off the building to the ground and were beginning to look like townsmen standing at the bottom of a monument. He paused and looked around to be sure he was in the right place.

Then, he remembered that he had acted recklessly: he didn't inform any other person for back-up. So, hurriedly he sent his address and certain instructions to his computer analysts but discovered too late that he had included Mr. Johnson's among those he sent the message to. That was a big mess.

'We have our contract', he muttered, assuring himself that he wouldn't send police again.

The empty street seemed to be closing in on him and had presences that made him turn from side to side. Something moved to his left, he turned and saw an arrow pointing him towards another street that was bereft of humanity. Nosa, taking deliberate and careful steps, walked towards the place he was directed to. He looked to his left and right but saw nothing of importance.

Suddenly, something stung him. He turned hurriedly, hoping to shoot someone, but he saw no one. He felt weak. Upon looking down, he saw the feathery tail of a tranquilizer. Groaning as he removed it, he yanked it off his body. At this point, the street began to look as if it was a ghost town because shadows began to come from different places. He fell on one knee, groaning, and his gun clattering to the floor. Everything suddenly became blurry. Then, he crashed to the ground and lost consciousness.

When he woke again, he met himself chained to the wall. The people that chained him did so as if they had been practicing it their whole life. He yelled and pulled the chain, but it was a fruitless effort.

'Who dares kidnap me?' He yelled and yanked the chains.

The bulb in the room was dim. Cobwebs served as the aesthetic of the place. The room was plastered like every other normal house he had seen. However, this time, there were a lot of hard remnants of cement on the floor. With the way the chains hanging from the wall, one could easily fathom that they made the chain recently, and should imply that the wall would come off if he continued shaking it.

From the different sides of the room, women cried out their eyes and called on to God to save them. Many of them kept singing chain breaking songs. Many of their voices had degenerated to croaking, and many of them were now husky. Chains were rattling weakly as the women moved forward and backward. If they truly brought Shayla and Moriah there, he would have seen them. Notwithstanding the darkness, he would have recognized them.

However, he saw Joana sprawled in the dirt, and snoring loudly. Her hands were bound but despite that, she was sleeping like a baby, inhaling the dust.

'Where am I?' He shouted.

The question now was that if this person kidnapped Shayla also, who was the person? The only thing that could be the plausible explanation was that Shayla only tried to trick him.

Suddenly, two men came towards him. They had masks on. They wore baggy clothes that would make one unsure of their body structure. Yet, he was sure with a little calculation, he could easily decipher who they were if they ever had an encounter outside their hideout.

One of them waited behind and pointed a gun at him while the other one began to unlock his chain. He decided to hold his calm when one of them shoved him forward. He kept moving in total discomfort and hoped one of those he sent the messages would arrive early to help him. However, the person pushing him overdid it and shoved him harder this time, and this aggravated Nosa's anger. He spun and tried to hit his assailant, but the assailant was ready for him: he gave him a double punch in the rib. Nosa groaned and bent over as he tried to catch his breath, but he wasn't given any time to rest before he was shoved again. The person was lucky they weren't dealing with guns.

'Don't hurt my husband'.

He froze and looked up slowly, hoping his ears were wrong. The person was putting on a mask, but he was sure that was Chloe behind the mask. The person walked away and the ones that had just released him kept pushing him after her. Her body structure was enough to give her away, but he wanted to believe he was dreaming. If he ever got the chance to have revenge, he would make sure he removed the wrist of the one pushing him first. When they got to an empty passage, the person turned and removed her mask. He was right, after all. Chloe was smiling sheepishly at him and was blinking repeatedly like a toy.

'Are you-'

'He's my husband or have you tasted another world and believed that I'm no longer your wife? I'm still your wife. I love you than the world would ever know. You know, right?'

Nosa glanced at the men. Then at Chloe. 'Chloe... That's impossible'.

He spun round to the men. 'What technology are you using?'

'It's me, baby'.

'You? No. That's impossible. I just spoke to you. You were with Papa and Pastor's wife'.

'Yes. I was with them and now I'm here. How does that smell? Nice, right?'

'What...What are you doing here?'

'Are you that dumb or do you just need a confirmation? Well, if you need a taste of reality, I will bring it so near that you would even smell its body odor. I'm your mole and also the one that called for the kidnapping of everyone here, including you'.

'That's not true'.

'Take him to meet the rest'.

They pushed him away. But he spun and struggled with them. There was definitely no way he would allow himself to be fooled and be pushed away from the one that did so.

'What rest? Why are you doing this?'

'Take him away. I hope these people would be kind enough to do what we want', Chloe said and whistled as she walked away.

When he entered the room, he met a groaning Shayla, a silent Raphael, and a yelling Moriah. They all were surprised to see him. They all stared at those pushing into the room.

'Nosy'.

'Nosa'.

They dragged him to the last chain in the room and locked him down there. They were all looking tattered. Raphael's head, as well as some other parts of his body, was bandaged. Shayla and Moriah's body had a lot plasters on various injuries.

'Why did you bring him here?' Shayla yelled.

Chloe entered after them. 'I thought I told you to gag her'.

'I thought it was just.... Okay, I'll get it', one of them said and turned to get the object to gag her.

Chloe turned toward him with a grim face, then beckoned at his back as if he had eyes at the back of his head. 'Come. Come. Bring a whip, a chair, and a rope too. Okay, you, follow him'.

She pointed to the other assailant, and he followed the first one. Chloe placed her hands on her head as she paced the room.

'Chloe, what happened to you?' Nosa asked after trying unflinchingly to release himself from the lock.

'She won't talk', Raphael said dejectedly. 'I kept asking her why she had to kidnap me. I don't see visions. Chloe, I came to your place to make you happy; instead, you kidnapped me. You kidnapped me. You've always paid evil for our good because of what? One mistake. Why?'

She glanced at him, smiled sheepishly as if he said something she should have paid attention to if she wasn't strategizing. The whole silent treatment was unnerving and making Nosa angry.

'Talk', Nosa shouted. This time, his anger was getting to its peak. 'Tell me something. There is no reason for my kidnap. I've lost all the necessary clue. You could have gone on pretending about all these and I would still not know'.

Chloe glanced at him and opened her mouth to talk, but hissed and gave the air a back-hand slap. Her face was creased as she seemed focused on something. Her acne had reduced to just one. If he only he could get through to her, to draw her out of the zone she had wrapped herself in. He wanted to know what he did wrong or what the others did wrong. She couldn't have just brought them there without a good reason.

The men, who went for the things she itemized, returned with them. They stood near the door as she continually paced the arena. Moriah returned to her wailing, while Shayla returned to her groaning. Chloe looked at them for sometimes and resumed her pacing.

'Talk! Say something and snap out of this field of war that you've entrenched yourself in. When things happen, we crawl out of it', Nosa barked at her. He was probably at fault and stupid for letting himself believe that their love had finally healed Chloe. When he first heard how she killed her mother, he made them all promise to never discuss it but to always show her love. Now, she had made their love look useless.

'Take her', Chloe said, pointing at Shayla, 'tie the meddling idiots to that chair, and for God's sake, gag her well. I don't need any interruption in this little reunion'.

The guys marched off to Shayla's side after they've dropped the things she asked them to bring. However, they didn't get near her before she jumped and kicked the first one that came near her. He growled and tried to confront her again. Yet, she gave him another kick, this time in his groin. He hollered and fell. The other one, being assured that she got the first one because of his lack of judgment, moved nearer with careful steps and the look of an owl.

She did as if she wanted to hit him, he paused and shifted backward. She gave him a kick in his right ear. He groaned, became dizzy and turned from side to side with his hand clasped on his ear. She gave him another one that made him fall flat on the floor. This time, the one on the floor was struggling to get up. She pulled nearer to him, the chain was long enough to allow her. The chain rattled from its position as if it would break out of the wall. With a strong aim for his chin, she kicked the one struggling to get up. He groaned and staggered back, tending to his injured jaw.

'What? This team... You people are nincompoops', Chloe shouted, and stormed off to the door, and called from outside. 'Four guys from there'.

She strutted back into the room.

'Raphael, do something', Nosa yelled. 'Talk to her'.

'Raphael? The only person that can talk to me here is probably, you, Nosa. He is the only one that still has the right to talk to me. Well, in some sense. He is a womanizer, and that's still acceptable. But you two, Raphael and our wild Moriah, have no right to talk to me'.

'Loosen her and tie her to the chair', Chloe said to the four men that rushed into the room. 'Your people are proving to be useless. I should have used your competition'.

'See me, I took down two of their men while being chained. Gragus Team is the worst set of assassins in the world. You should have come for us, F.A.L.T. With Rachael, everything would have gone on smoothly', Shayla said from her side.

Chloe moved to her in surprise. She stared at Nosa and the others for a while. Then, she walked to Nosa and slapped him twice.

'You brought a snake into our midst. I should have known, but I wanted to believe the front she brought. I thought she was truly a police that had gone rogue. God, you people are good', Chloe said and turned to the Gragus Team. 'Can you see? This is just a member of F.A.L.T, those guys are good'.

Nosa shook his head as if it would peel off the pain from Chloe's slaps, and was soon fuming as he turned to Shayla. 'What are you? What are you people?'

Shayla gritted, stared at her feet, and allowed the four men to take her away. They dragged her to the seats, and soon two of them began to tie her to the chair, while the other two helped the two injured people up.

'Gag her'.

One of them picked a handkerchief and gagged her. Chloe waved and the room was soon cleared, leaving only the five of them. Raphael was still muttering about how he made a simple mistake.

'Calm down. You want me to talk, right? I will talk', Chloe said and picked the whip from the floor. She raised it and with a great force brought it down on Shayla's laps. Shayla winced and Nosa gaped. 'That's for disappointing us all'.

She whipped her again.

'Stop', Moriah shouted.

'Shush. I know Nosa is disappointed in me. At least, he would realize that people are better than him. Yes, you should be disappointed. We are all disappointments to one another. But...'

Chloe whipped Shayla again.

'C'mon stop this nuisance', Moriah shouted.

'Shush that rubbish wild mouth. Snake, that's for trying to kill our baby'.

She strolled to the front. 'You see these three and I are friends, and no one can easily break into our midst. We had our issues, but four years...' She said and began to sing their favorite song.

Nosa felt like rushing at her, but being constrained by the chain, he was forced to listen to her sweet voice. She used to have the best voice among them all.

Moriah stared at her and nodded as tears poured down her face. Raphael stared up at the roof and smiled, shaking his head in a sort of regretful way that made Nosa wonder what was happening to everyone. Her voice was louder than those of the women wailing within the compound.

When she finished, she clapped repeatedly and flogged Shayla again, who winced this time.

'Leave her be', Nosa grumbled.

Chloe raised her hands, moved back, dropped the whip and sat on a stool opposite them.

'Nosa is the one pained here. Moriah and I met because of Nosa. Do you remember those days?'

'Why are we here?' Nosa grumbled.

'Nosa made me meet Raphael too. They were all friends. Those days were heavenly. Then, one by one we all disappointed Nosa'.

Nosa glanced at Moriah. She hadn't disappointed him in any way. She only ran away from him when his desire for her was skyrocketing despite all her attempt to bury it, especially when Chloe was pregnant for him.

'Who should I start with? Whose bottle of urine should I open? I think Raphael would do. He was accused of raping Moriah thereby disappointing Nosa. Unknown to Nosa, Moriah was the nymphomaniac, who tortured Raphael's virgin state and made him have a longing for anything in a skirt. Nosa, you saw her as holy, right? She wasn't. She always loved to have sex, but because you were daddy's child and a true child of God, she didn't want to defile you before time. However, since Raphael was the son of a drunk, it would be easy to manipulate him to her own desire. To the extent that the day he now had the urge, she refused'.

'What are you talking about?'

'Oh! Yes, you didn't know. That's a serious case'.

Raphael looked up dejectedly and said, 'when Moriah said that...'

'Shut up, manhood. This is my story. So, Raphael so much had the urge that I stumbled on them, but not before I heard what Moriah had done'.

Nosa glanced at Raphael, who stared at the wall. Then, he glanced at Moriah, who sniffed and glanced away.

'What did Moriah do?'

'So all I've been saying since is of no use'.

'It is... I mean why did she now tell me he raped her? How did you know?'

'How did I not know? Remember that day you couldn't make it to the tree-house, and you begged me to take something to them, which I refused blatantly. I wanted to surprise them all. But I guess they knew you weren't coming...'

'We didn't know he wasn't coming', Raphael said.

Chloe picked the whip and pointed it at Raphael. 'I hate that place. I always do. I hate what it had done to us all', she said and moved about.

'I'm tired of all this', Nosa grumbled. 'Why are you telling me now?'

'I'm telling you because we all disappointed you. Oh! I almost forgot. I entered the house and saw Raphael stack naked begging Moriah to have sex with him. Before that, he had ferociously recanted all the things they've done together while I was outside. When they saw me,

they begged me not to tell you. That was when I know that Moriah couldn't be around any of you, especially you, Nosa'.

'But I want to be', Nosa growled. 'I wanted her to be my first'.

I know. I always smelt such desire in you, and that was why I gave you a child out of wedlock, that night. That was why my daughter died. That's why we are all here, you know. That's why I made sure Moriah lied about Raphael, and I told Raphael he was my slave or dog from that day. And I made sure Moriah left us alone, but still regularly informed me of my welfare. I like her a lot as much as I like Raphael. Even when I told Raphael he was my dog, I didn't really use it against him until the day he came to visit me and I already heard your conversation with him. I told him to tell me what he knew about the investigation, but he was adamant and was trying to talk about Irene. Who talks about the dead? I wanted him to go free. However, we needed the information, so my guys had to bring him here to get the details from him'.

'It was you all along', Nosa said.

'It was me all along. I...'. She said and brought out a pocket knife from the band of her long skirt, which was sweeping the floor. Nosa held his breath as she came towards him, brandishing her ominous smile.

'Get away from me'.

'Hey! Calm down, baby', she said and unbuckled the belt.

In a few minutes, she was battling with his belt. Soon, Nosa was faced with a microphone. That was his bug. He was rattled and might have fallen backward if he wasn't chained to a wall. Yet, his mouth was opened in surprise.

'I know', she said eagerly. 'I know you would be surprised'.

'You placed...'

'Placed the microphone in your belt'.

'The bug was from you?' Raphael said. 'I should have known'.

'Known? You know how to be innovative. Seeing evil in people isn't in you. You always knew what I was capable of, but you assured yourself it was all a lie. You knew how I must have done something to that lady that abused me that I was born out of wedlock when she was sending Moriah out, but you were refused to accept it. I saw the way you looked at me suspiciously the day we heard the girl committed suicide, and how you shook it away. You knew what I could have done but you didn't talk. You didn't believe it could be me. You knew even before Nosa that I used to see a psychiatrist. You knew I had it in me, but you wanted to see the good in me'.

Raphael sighed, and Nosa stared at Raphael. Raphael stared at her and sighed again.

'What do you want from us? Why are we here?' Raphael finally said. 'Why are you opening this bottle?'

'Reunion'.

'What's your mission by bringing us here?' Raphael shouted.

'I needed Moriah to bring you, Nosa, here. Shayla was just a mistake that we never saw coming. I would have killed her too, but our baby is in her'.

'My baby', Nosa said and glanced at the pleading eyes of Shayla. 'The baby is for me and Shayla'.

'I should have killed her to take another child out of the misery of being called a child born out of wedlock. But she is a life, and we need all lives to go to heaven'.

'Then, why were you keen on my finding the missing women?' Moriah said.

She turned and pointed at Moriah. 'I totally forgot you, my woman crush. I always loved you. You were the perfect brainy girl, child of a pastor, and beautiful. Well, until you decided that disfiguring yourself was the best thing to do in life. I loved and love you'.

'What do you want from her?' Nosa asked.

'Nothing. Just to make me wonder how she could sacrifice anything for her sweet Nosa. We all did. You know we all sacrificed things for ourselves. It's high time', Chloe said and turned to Nosa. She moved to him and tapped his cheek. 'You should sacrifice for the good of the world, and for the sake of our child. I want to know if my baby went to heaven or hell. If she went to hell that means, we should start putting women that got pregnant out of wedlock out of their troubles by making sure their children return to heaven from whence it came'.

Nosa stared at her for a while, and at Raphael. 'You are joking? Are you seriously having that foolish thought?'

'Why do you think we are carrying out this project? Its mission is to save lives'.

'But what about their dying parents?' Moriah asked dejectedly.

'We save their lives too. I know it sounds absurd, but everything in life sounds absurd, but it is better to lose the eyes than to lose the whole body to perdition'.

'All these women had been induced into coma many times to see heaven or hell again and to get information about heaven, but they didn't get anything. So, I have been looking for someone with a neutral opinion, and who else than you? That was why we used Moriah to drag you down here. She had to be the bait for you to be brought down here'.

'What about me?' Raphael said. 'Why am I here?'

'I've told you before. You had the information about where Joana was'.

'No. Don't give me that. I suspected but I just felt... You were good and traumatized by many things. In fact, you called me before I even called Joana'.

'That was almost coincidental, and it made sense immediately Nosa called you and informed you about how he needed your help. I was elated. So, I had to make my men bring you here to ask you questions. I told you already. Meanwhile, Mummy Church and Papa are dead'.

'What? My father?'

'I thought you would be happy. One to the head and one to the chest'.

She walked to the door and shouted for the guys to come, and she directed them to take Nosa to the research room. Within a few seconds, two men came for Nosa.

'Chloe don't do this. I swear. I would come for you', Moriah shouted.

Chloe raised her head and mimicked Moriah. That was when it occurred to Nosa that she was the one that mimicked Shayla the previous day. Nosa struggled with the men.

Moriah screamed. 'I will kill you. Okay. I'll leave and not return, ever. Leave him'.

Shayla kept groaning from her seat. Nosa struggled with them and wished he got the same training that Shayla got that made her use her kicks judiciously. If he was to deal with guns he might have overpowered them, but right now all he had was his beastly strength, which wasn't like that of the men dragging him away.

When they got to the room she directed them to a male doctor, who directed them to place him on a bed. He still struggled with them and was soon hit on the back of the head. He groaned as his eyes caught a CVR machine, which was placed in a corner. The men strapped him to the bed amidst his weary groans and withdrew to leave him to battle with the belts used in strapping him.

'This is what will happen', Chloe said as the doctor wrapped his body with something that helped the CVR machine read his heartbeat. 'When we wake you, you would be so weak and wish to die. That means you have to tell us the truth about whatever you see. If you lie. You see that lie detector, it would know. And we would kill you like we did the others. I thought I would set all these women free, but the presence of a lot of known people have made me change my decisions. I can't let you jeopardize the plan I have for later'.

He groaned to tell her he would come for her, but she held his lips together and shook her head as if she was telling a whining baby to stop crying.

'But for you, you will go as many time as you can until you get me my information'.

She turned to the doctor and gestured for him to carry on. The doctor tapped the syringe repeatedly and injected Nosa. He groaned loudly as the pain surged through his body. Then, he yelled with the hope that it would reduce the pain, but the pain wasn't reduced instead it made him dizzy.

In a few minutes, he began to fade off into oblivion and soon lost consciousness. Suddenly, he had to open his eyes when a blinding light reflected into eyes. He was mesmerized by that. Gradually, he opened his eyes and saw himself in the hospital bed. That was curious. How was he two? He looked at himself and soon began to move about.

Suddenly, a wind came from nowhere and blew him away into an utter darkness. He kept yelling as he was being plummeted into the hole. After a while, he was being pulled out. He sighed in relief and held on to the hands. The turbulence he had just faced was enough. He allowed the hands pull him out of the darkness, and was very sure he wouldn't release it until he was sure of his own safety. However, when they came to light, he didn't see a regular human being. He was being pulled by what had been numerous portrayed in movies as a beast.

Nosa yelled, and pulled back, but the beast seemed prepared. With firm grips, it pulled him away, and he shouted. Yet, the beast held him still and dragged him upward. Immediately he landed on a ground, and as he was being loosened a bit, he ran forward, and soon stumbled upon a lot of people walking hurriedly towards a path. The heat that emitted from the place was enough to kill anyone, but he still felt drawn to the path. Along with the others, he was crying as he was being pulled. Soon, they were drawn to a lake. Smoke steamed from the lake in such a way that he had never seen. He screamed.

The more they moved nearer, the more the heat melted the hair on his body. He cried, and yelled and had the desire to turn back, but he just couldn't do anything to save himself. Just as he got to the edge of the lake, he screamed, 'Jesus'.

Immediately, someone like an angel came to carry him out of the place. Everything was looking a movie to him. Someone was definitely playing with his mind. To make matters worse, unlike what he had been seeing and been taught, he was saved by a dark female angel.

'Angels are not black', he muttered after some seconds of being sure that he was away from the heat. He shook his head, closed his eyes and was sure he would soon wake from whatever place he was.

'That's what you been trained to believe. The Bible says we have a God of all flesh. Have you ever reasoned that God too can be black?'

'That's bottle of milk. We all know that God is fair in complexion. No doubt'.

'So, who created you?'

'God'.

'Then, are you saying God is foolish?'

'How dare I talk to the almighty God in such manner?'

'That's what you mean when you say a fair God is creating a dark person'.

That rattled Nosa for a while. He had never for once assumed that God in his holiness would be dark. He stared at the dark angel again and hoped he wasn't in hell already. There wasn't a thing that could prove her right. God isn't dark.

'Who created the reds? Who created albinos? The Bible is not lying when it says that God created humans in His image. It is written also that on the last day when you see him you shall see yourselves as him. Does that mean your skin color would change? No. It means that when you look at your God you would see yourself and when you look at your neighbors, and at God, you would see both yourself and God'.

'Calm down. Everything is fuzzy. I'm dreaming. Where are your wings? Why are you a woman...? A female angel?'

The angel laughed. 'You have grown with a bad tradition. The human culture had trained themselves to believe that anything that moves at a fast speed must be propelled by something. We are of the heavenlies. We're propelled by our desire to go to where we are going. Our transportation is our desire. That was why the prince of Persia could stop us because they have

allowed their desire mix with their spiritual being, and that stopped the angel sent to Daniel. Angels have no wings'.

'But the drawings of angel...'

'Are of a man. I know your father makes you read the Bible very well. Did you ever see any place in the bible where angels were said to have wings? Only the Cherubim and Seraphim. The angels are not winged'

'I still am not convinced. Why are you a lady?'

'There are female angels too. The Bible says male and female did God create when he was creating man. He also did that for angels'.

Nosa was totally confused. Who should he believe? The angel was disproving things he had learnt from childhood that nobody even cared to ask questions about; instead, they all grew accepting the notions as part of the Bible.

'Thank you for saving me?'

'I didn't save you'.

'God did'.

'Indirectly, yes. But you saved yourself. All these are in your mind. These are the answers your mind had been looking for, for years, that made you hate going to church. I only came to project the answers your mind had been unraveling, which you've been too busy to answer for yourself'.

Nosa was so shocked. He looked at himself, naked as against what he had been taught.

'How then did I save myself from falling into the lake of fire?'

The angel laughed. 'Firstly, that is not a representation of the lake of fire. The lake of fire is totally different in the way people end up there, but it's not in my place to answer that. This lake of fire is a projection of everything you've read and heard growing up'.

'But they saw visions. Those people that saw visions. They saw the visions. I am very sure of that'.

'No, they didn't. Well, some did. But they were few. The imaginations of man's heart are so great that it takes a lot from the heart to believe its non- existence. Many times, some of the deepest imagination of men sends fear into them. Sometimes, the devil utilizes this fear and makes them really visit some realm of heavens, where he has the chance to go. Since he had been known to come as an angel of light, he always deceives many into believing that they are visiting heaven. Whereas, they are only being shown projections of their fear'.

'But they all claim they saw Jesus'.

'God's message would never bring fear. It would only bring instructions on how to be better. God doesn't delight in making people know the horror of hell by giving numerous examples of it. Have you ever seen Jesus emphasize the horror of hell in his teachings? He brushes the topic and

proceeds to tell you about heaven. Even at that, he doesn't dwell on going to heaven or hell, he dwells on your lives on earth. How you live it for mankind and to bring glory to God'.

'So, I'm not dead'.

'Dead? No. You're in a coma and I'm a projection of your rebellion and questions. You would soon wake up'.

'Leave them to me', someone that had the same voice as Segun said with pride and strutted towards her. Shayla swallowed and hoped she could talk but the gag held her mouth in place. She should have known that Segun was double-faced.

Another lady entered with a mask over her face. Her body structure was really killing, and Shayla knew only one lady that always made her emotion about women rise in such way. She moaned the name of Rachael. The one that spoke like Segun peeped outside and soon looked in and removed his masks. Water welled in her eyes as she realized it was Segun. If she wanted to accuse him or beg him, she didn't have the chance. The other person removed her own mask too to show her face, and hurriedly crouched near Shayla.

'Segun had been spying for me on the Gragus Team. He had killed and done things for me. Your call made me know we had to act fast'.

Shayla nodded as Rachael began to remove her gag. Then, she loosened the rope used in tying her down.

'Segun, my bag', Rachael whispered to Segun, who was at the door, watching out for people.

As it was typical of Rachael, she hurriedly removed her bottle of coffee and gulped it. She always had a lot of that at hand. She was good without the bottle of coffee, but whenever she took one, not even ten men could stand her in a physical combat or any other feat.

'These are...'

'With Nosa. They are his people. You know Nosa, my...'

'Lover', Rachael said disgustedly. 'Can any of them be of help?'

'Yes. The lady. The man hasn't been tested with a gun'.

'He is useless? Let him use the chair to defend himself. Take your gun and give Moriah the gun. She is the Moriah, right?'

Shayla nodded. Rachael always knew everything about her. Shayla's mind reveled as she touched her gun. She kissed it. The first person to die would definitely be Chloe. Her death should soon teach the Gragus men that one doesn't play with F.A.L.T.

Rachael picked the locks of the chain on Moriah and Raphael's chain. Immediately it came off, she gently dropped them.

'In-coming', Segun hissed.

'To the corner'.

Everybody ran to a corner. However, Raphael's leg hit the chair.

'Why are you like this?' Moriah mumbled. Rachael frowned and glanced at her in awe. Shayla knew she would love Moriah because Rachael also loved neat jobs.

The person coming heard the chair and ran inside. However, Segun was waiting for him. Soon, he was strangling the man.

'Third mask', Segun groaned as soon the man dropped dead. Shayla ran to his side and helped him carry the dead man to a corner.

'Good', Rachael said when they were all ready. She distributed knives among them, and soon they were ready to fight. She gave Moriah a gun. And with a nod from her, the members of F.A.L.T wore their masks.

'You two, stay back until we tell you', Rachael said and raised her hands. The F.A.L.T members understood. They entered the holding room one after the other with their weapons hidden. They walked as if they were surveying the room. The Gragus Team kept moving up and down from different directions. Rachael brought out a small pad. Shayla knew that plan. It means some people were outside. Suddenly, there was a loud bang from outside the torture room. The women inside kept quiet for a while. The three F.A.L.T members in the house stood near other Gragus men. Rachael did her flashing fingers countdown. Immediately, she got to zero, they attacked the nearest Gragus men. Since they had the element of surprise, they were soon killing all the Gragus men as more members of F.A.L.T tramped in. Some of her favorites were among them- Once, who was known to kill once-and-for-all; Jasper; even Jennifer, Chief Suberu's daughter, whom he mustn't know left home on such expedition. They all fought valiantly, and soon the only persons remaining were the doctor and Chloe in the room.

By this time, Moriah and Raphael had come out of hiding. Raphael was hiding behind the screaming women; while, Moriah helped out in the shooting. Some men had gone to bring out Chloe and the Doctor. Shayla couldn't wait to be sure Nosa was alright. She ran after Rachael to the room. When they got to the room, Chloe and the doctor were already kneeling down. Within a twinkle of an eye, Rachael shot the doctor in the head.

'That's my kill', Shayla shouted as Rachael pointed the gun at Chloe's head as Moriah ran to Nosa's side. Hurriedly, she removed the belt used to tie him down. He moaned.

Rachael nodded and moved back. Shayla rushed to the other room, grabbed the whip and returned to face the downcasted Chloe. Shayla, panting hard, spun the whip vigorously, then lashed Chloe, who yelled. A tinge of delight passed Shayla's heart.

'That's for flogging me'.

She flogged her again. 'That's for disappointing us. For disappointing Nosa'.

She flogged her again, and Chloe cried out in pain. 'That's for flogging the mother of everybody's baby'.

Then, she flogged her repeatedly. As she flogged her, she remembered that if Chloe had not kidnapped those women, Lila would still be alive. And she too wouldn't have killed her. Things wouldn't have been bad. Innocent men, pretending to be strong like her, wouldn't lose their lives because they were helping her. 'For... All... The... Good... People... In... This... World'.

Suddenly, someone ran into the room and shouted that the Police were on their way.

'How come?' Shayla shouted at Rachael.

Rachael looked bemused too. She looked about. 'Police? Probably your P.I boyfriend'.

'No...I ...' Nosa said weakly as he stood with the help of Moriah. 'Oh! Mr. Johnson. He always returned to the police'.

'We would leave you to the women', Rachael said and pulled Shayla away. Shayla felt cheated and stupid. She should have killed Chloe, but she still felt bad that Nosa would be sad if she killed Chloe, and probably hate her. However, to her amazement and joy, Nosa collected Moriah's gun and pointed it at Chloe.

'I'll destroy you...'

Raphael held his hand. 'Nosa, you don't want to. For the sake of her... She is insane. She needs medical attention. She has suffered enough with you'.

'I don't bloody care', he yelled with such anger that she rarely saw in him.

Rachael pulled her away towards the noise of the women that had been released. Many of them were screaming incoherently and running about. Rachael always had a plan for things like this. So, when she saw most of F.A.L.T running towards a bush path and Rachael dragging there, she knew she had no other option than to leave with them.

'So, Segun...' Shayla started to say.

'Has been fooling you? I know. He was working for me to penetrate the Gragus Team. They were becoming a nuisance', Rachael replied.

'That means Katrina was truly arrested'.

'No. She just had to go to the prison to get some information for us as regarding them. She would be released tonight'.

Shayla nodded as she realized all that had happened behind her back.

'I must really commend Segun, he really tried'.

'Yes. He did a good job until he was to visit those that had the other woman. He made a mess there. It took us a lot of effort to lose Gragus Team from our scent'.

When they were out of the possible reach of the Police, Rachael dragged to stay back. The others kept rushing away, she dragged Shayla into the bush and pushed her. She stumbled and hurriedly jumped up. Shayla was surprised, but she understood the meaning. Someone had paid for her life. She tried to raise her gun.

'No. Don't do anything stupid. Let's salvage the matter with all senses'.

Then, she remembered Lila. Maybe she was getting the punishment from God for killing a mother. However, she wouldn't be heady as Lila. Since death was staring at her in the face, she would gently welcome it and go with it. Tears gathered in her eyes and found their way down her cheeks.

'Yell and I'm sorry about this', Rachael said and shot at her hand. She made sure the bullet grazed her hand. Shayla yelled and understood what Rachael was trying to do. Rachael shot a tree around her three times. Shayla fell on her knees and knew she had just been redeemed.

'Now, you're dead. Leave Fortuncity. Take those fake ladies with you. Give them new identities. The Commissioner wants you all dead. He has paid for your lives. You're dead'.

Shayla, with tears in the eyes, rushed to Rachael, who was always reluctant to take a hug and covered her with her hands and tears. She might be younger than she was, but she had a larger and wiser heart than she. As the pain in her heart increased, so did the pain in her hand.

'Leave and treat that hand', Rachael said and left.

Shayla watched her leave and she sat on the thorny grass without minding the pain. She had just been saved by the one she always wanted to be better. Her life had received its own redemption. In her new life, she wanted to taste a form of religion too. Even if she might not find all the answers to life there, she would find a reason to live. Birds sang over her, she looked up as she watched the sun coming out of the cloud over her. She had finally being saved. Her mind went back tonight and the cloud, she burst into tears and hoped the emptiness of the place they were would envelop her voice, and her tears. She wailed, and yelled and shouted for joy. Then, she brought her phone and threw it away with a second glance.

18 Maybes and Wonders

In the tree house as the three of them sat around a table with different types of food garnishing the top, Nosa watched Moriah cry again as they all forgave one another of their past sins as darkness and cold covered the surroundings. He wondered what would happen from that time, but he was sure he had a lot of questions that needed answers. Moriah had played a great deal in making sure Chloe was still alive. That Monday afternoon, he would have killed Chloe, but Moriah pleaded on her behalf. She and Raphael gave him reasons to leave her. After many pleas from them, he still allowed the police take her custody.

Moriah and Raphael played a larger role in how she remained in a good position. Raphael was the face, while Moriah kept providing the money. They were able to pay for a top lawyer, who argued and provided substantial evidence against the state to make the judge send Chloe to a psychiatric hospital in time. So, they were all surprised when they received a skype call notification.

'Can it...'

'Chloe?'

Raphael shook his head, but still ran to his phone and connected it. There, was Chloe smiling at them like she used to. She was wearing the psychiatric home's uniform for the mentally disabled. Her acne was finally gone. She was looking as beautiful as he used to know her. He was sure he could never root for her like he used to.

'Happy new year', Chloe said and they replied as they always did, seeing that she always connected to them late.

'Just like years before', Raphael said as he gulped a glass of wine.

'Improved version. Now, we are sitting to eat in memory of three dead bees', Chloe said as she showed them her own bottle of wine. She still had her way of getting things. Nosa smiled warily. Chloe had never called any of their fathers bees before.

'You said bee', Moriah said and tears returned to her eyes.

'I said bees. I know. At least, we all have one remaining'.

'One?' Moriah said as she wiped tears from her face.

'Yes. Your father. Our new papa'.

'Not me and you. He is *disbeed*. He is dead to me'.

'There are times you, like Nosa, would wish you saw him at least for the last time'.

'I don't want anything'.

'Things would be happening soon. I'm here with Papa's... Nosa's bee's friend. He said there would be the destruction of Fortunecity with water. Just like the days of Noah. The man is exposing me to a lot of bottle of stale urine'.

'Well, you are all...' Nosa started to say.

Moriah seemed to have anticipated what he wanted to say and pinched him.

'Good people', Moriah said.

Chloe laughed. 'I know what he wanted to say. We're all mad. But we're not. Things are happening. I have been looking for three people all this while. Did you see my acne, then? They were three. Immediately we found Joana and Agnes that those F.A.L.T members killed, two disappeared. But it was until I got here that I found the third person. I had been the one all these while. I'm seeing a vision of when the rapture would happen'.

'No. Chloe', Raphael said disgustedly. 'Not a memorable day like this'.

'Yes. We want to enjoy the New Year memory', Moriah said as her fingers played on the tumbler she was holding.

'To the bees', Chloe shouted excitedly.

'To the bees', Moriah said and burst into tears.

Nosa drew her nearer and raised his cup. Ever since the ordeal happened, he had been staring and trying to laugh. But he couldn't laugh much. His smiles were short-lived and wary. Most times, he wished he could cry, but tears avoided him. So, seeing a crying Moriah and petting her, showed his conscience wasn't dead. Maybe he also needed to talk to a psychiatrist.

Then, they proceeded to sing the song 'Four years' by Stylplus. Raphael waved the ticket he bought to have a cruise with Joana on a voyage for a week, just the two of them.

'By the ways, guys, my game is out, and I finally got a name', Moriah announced. 'Mountain and the...'

'The Bee', Chloe said.

'How did you know?'

'She told me during my last visit to her'.

'We should play it after the prayers'.

Nosa nodded and soon, he listened to them half-heartedly until Chloe said her goodbyes and they promised to visit her.

That evening, Nosa climbed down the mountain and dialed Shayla's number again for the fifteenth time that day. It rang and soon stopped again. He wanted to know how their baby was faring, but she refused to pick his number.

'Nosa', Moriah called from the top of the mountain. 'It's time to pray. The new-year watch for the bees and Mountain Papa would start soon'.

He nodded and climbed up the mountain. As he climbed the mountain, his mind roved to all his family members that were available. His mother alongside his siblings would be at home weeping over his father, whose burial they all had just returned from to have their New-year tradition. Nosa saw the love that people had for one another and wondered why he didn't cry. He had been looking blankly at the ordeal. His father was a great man, whose only flaw was always being near perfect. There was nothing in the world that he had caught him doing that was illegal. The New Year didn't meet him on earth. The New Year didn't meet him and his wife, Chloe, together. The New Year didn't meet him and Shayla and their baby, together. He wished he could be there for the baby, to listen to its heart throbbing in its mother's belly.

Maybe he would have had a family if he was there for his wife. Maybe he would have known about Shayla if he had shown her love. Maybe, if he had shown his father love, he would have stayed put and wouldn't have followed Chloe. Maybe, if he had stayed back to listen to Mummy Church, if he didn't detest her, maybe Chloe wouldn't have heard about the other woman; Agnes. Maybe, if he had always agreed with his father on issues, he would have had a way to make Moriah happy and invariably Chloe. Maybe she wouldn't have had reasons to kill if he had just broken his method and had slept with Moriah before Chloe did.

As he clambered to the top, he looked at the empty, lonely road and knew his life would be like that for a long time, even with Moriah in it. The gathering cold and darkness that approached their tree-house had been in his heart all this while, and he wasn't sure he could drive them out. He wiped a drop of tears from his eyes and entered the house, and Moriah locked the door behind him.

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Thank you all. And I'm sorry if I always went into hiding. Just understand that is my new lifestyle, but come to pull me out once in a while; yet, don't expect it to be a regular thing. Writing is my new home.

For Readers That Got Here

That night, January 1st, 2017, Chloe walked out through the back door of the psychiatric home, turned to the woman that helped her.

'I'll never forget this'.

The plump dark woman, who was draped in a bulky sweater and had eyes of a rat, which were proudly adorned by her glasses. 'Madam Kings. I can never forget you in my life for all you've done for me and my family'.

'Thank you'.

Chloe walked out into the cold night amidst the noise of people around celebrating the New Year. She clambered up a tree and saw the rope meant for her. She used it to drop down to the other side of the compound. Chris was already waiting for her, and he helped her down. Then, covered her in a big jacket.

'Now, you see', she said as she sat comfortably in the car he parked at the back of the compound. 'You're my designated survivor. Let's go and purify the world'.

About The Author

Akintayo Akinjide writes at Writertain, where he writes ways writers can improve their craft and also serve as a book publishing consultant. He loves teaching and expends his energy on making sure things work for other people. He is also referred to as Divepen, and is also a moderator of the Literature Section of the largest forum in West-Africa, Nairaland.

He is passionate the truth. He started Fortunecity stories as a way to bridge the gap between all the irregularities in this world, and hopes that his books would help anyone in need of solutions and would entertain people.

Thank You

Chris stopped the car, and turned to face her. 'Don't you think I should have killed her? She is a witness'.

'No. She is a believer. We need more', Chloe said as she stared into the emptiness and frivolity of the 1st of January. 'We need more hands on deck for the gathering that would happen soon'.

Other Books By Akintayo Akinjide

- Grabbing the Hot Gate
- Purified Tomorrow: The Mad Awakening

Excerpt

From 'Purified Tomorrow: The Mad Awakening'

Carl opened his eyes sluggishly, and took a long time to understand that he wasn't in a knock place. He tried to accustom his eyes with the thick darkness he was in. His eyes fluttered as he rolled his neck, trying to figure out where he was. At least if one was in a dark place, there was no way the darkness would be so thick, but the place seemed impenetrable by any ray of light, making him assume he was finally dead. One of those philosophy teachers in his school once theorized that when they died that everything might be dark and they might remain in the darkness of the abyss, useless and for nothing. But how could he be dead?

All he remembered was that he was coming out of Joyce's house to get ready for his own part of the plan. He was being careful to check if the street was empty, when he saw a head materialize out of the air. He was so stunned that he couldn't shout before the man covered his mouth. The man wore one of those chameleon types of uniform. They had a bit of struggle, but before he could get hold of himself, another head materialized and stabbed him with a syringe. Whatever was in the syringe made him lose consciousness immediately, but not before he saw the other man putting on a sort of cap that made him become invisible. His fear now was that the uniformed men he witnessed the other time later saw him after they killed the old man. If it were so, he had to find a way to escape from the place he was.

With every part of his body blaring an alarm, he decided to stand, but was stopped by something that held him down. The thing was metallic. It held him in place. There was also metal chains holding his hands and legs firmly to the chair. Staring about to check for any ray of light, or anything to help him know what part he was sitting on, he was sure he might finally meet his demise in this place. The thought of being there was infuriating on its own. His eyes roamed in its socket as he hoped his eyes would blend with the darkness. Everything was silent. He wondered what could have happened, and why they must have wanted him. He wasn't from a wealthy family. He wasn't exceptionally brilliant. He wasn't a geek like Fred. So, he was so sure the person that kidnapped him would see his worthlessness and return him to help Joyce. There was no way she would even believe anything he told her, but he would still give it a trial. She must have been expecting him. No one could tell him how many hours he had been out. If he had been gone for long, then someone other than him must have gone to her rescue, and that meant they would have alerted the police.

Suddenly, someone yelled, 'where am I?'

Carl almost jumped out of his skin, and might have probably jumped out of the metal chair if the metals didn't hold him in place. He never assumed anyone was there with him.

'Who is there?' Another voice yelled.

'Where are we?' Another voice shouted. He would have calmly watched them scream and not flinch, but the darkness was making him falter in his calmness. Everything made him edgy. The noise retrogressed to murmur, then sprung into a full-fledged hysteria. Noises diffused into the dark hole or room or whatever they were in. Carl was very sure the people in the place were mad because they were all getting on his nerve. He held his breathe with a little assurance that the humanity ingrained into them would soon resurface, but none of them seemed to falter. He was so annoyed and vexed now and was sure that the frustration was getting to the 100% of his breaking point. He assumed he would keep his emotions together until a lady began to shriek. That was the crux of the whole matter.

He screamed, 'Shut up! Shut up! Shut your trap! Shut your trap! Shut it!'

Everywhere became silent. He cleared his voice as he tried to stabilize his voice. He still always wondered why humans have to behave like chickens whenever they are in terrible situations. They all kept quiet as if they were expecting an instruction. He wasn't the speech-giver type of guy. He never loved climbing the podium to address people. He was always the background type of guy. There was no way they were getting any word from him again, other than for him to yell, if they mistakenly reverted to their former noise.

Someone got tired of waiting and shouted, 'where are...'

The light came up, making the person's voice fade. Carl closed his eyes, and tried opening it again, slowly this time. His eyes widened in surprise as he glanced about in surprise. Like he suspected, they were in a train-like vessel. The top was rigged with strong metals, and air ducts that looked more like an exhibition than a real thing. Their chair was made of silver medals that held them together. Everyone in the place wore the same grey silver uniform that had semblance with swimming trunks; and the color stretched down the line until what looked like the end of the train, was as if one was staring at a tiny bird in the sky.

He could see the same look on almost everybody in the room. They all looked surprised, and he was sure he wore the same look too. The people that were shouting seemed too shocked to utter a sound. Before anyone could make a comment about where they were and before Carl could try to fathom what that place was, the door beside him slid open. Despite the silence with which the door opened, most people glanced towards the door, and those that didn't see the door open were informed by their neighbors or they noticed what everyone was doing, and did the same.

A woman entered. She was wearing the same uniform as theirs, only that hers was red. She was followed by two people with the yellow uniform. They held guns and looked fierce. The lady was slim and could pass for a model. Only that she had an unusual gait, and balance that would make anyone continually scared of her. And despite her beautifully packed blond hair, she had a diamond shaped face, which looked like that of a robot's. And her eyes were very tiny, black, lifeless; another reason to be afraid of her. Someone whimpered in front of Carl. He hurriedly glanced at the fearful person, and back at the lady.

'Good morning, my name is Diana, and I welcome you to Etyes, the home of Peacemakers' she said into a public address system.

Snippets From 'Grabbing The Hot Gate'

Immediately Stella switched on the light, Gladys held her breathe. The room was a home to the scariest objects she had ever encountered. It wasn't a room on its own. There was a pyre and there were a lot of statues. Different tools laid on the pyre. There were two cages that hung from the ceiling of the room and some were on the floor. The hanging cages were big enough to take ten full-grown people, but the scariest part was that it hung over a horribly dark hole, from where simmers of smoke climbed out in the shape of rats. Gladys stirred to face Stella.

Stella entered the room slowly, her eyes were fixed on Gladys. Everything seemed to fade away. The terror of the room was grounded out of existence as Stella's blood-red evil eyes stared back at her.

For some absurd reason, she turned again. Her fear wasn't about the ominous room or the fearsome way Stella stared and advanced towards her, it was for the fact that she remembered that place from her dream.

'What is this?'

'The seed has been planted. You know where you are'.

'Do you mean?' Gladys asked and hurriedly glanced about to see if there was any way to escape. It couldn't be true. There was no way she drank part of the blood. She touched her lips and excited laughter from Stella.

'Yes. You know where we are', Stella said with such grace as she strutted towards her as if four hefty men were behind her.

Gladys shook her head, hyperventilating and panting. Stella's body frame was thin and if she rushed into her, she would definitely be able to escape. Sweat covered her body. Stella kept edging towards her and Gladys withdrew. 'It's a lie...'

'Tell me which part is a lie. I think you know I'm not lying. This is the major inconsistency with the word of God you should have looked out for'.

'You are a liar'.

'It's not in my nature to want to say the truth, but this is the truth. I guessed I've sinned against lord Lucifer for saying the truth, but he wouldn't be as mad as if I told you it was a figment of your imagination'.

'I'm dreaming. I'll wake up'.

Gladys ran to the pyre, touched it. It was real. It couldn't be real. She jumped, screamed, turned to check if she would at least wake from her dream. Everything was real in the house. What of herself? She pinched herself and the pain lingered to show her they are real.

'I'm a child of God. You can't do anything to me'.

'Well, in your words, technically, I'm not doing anything to you. I told you I would be here with you all the way'.

Gladys felt her mouth become dry. 'Please, let me go. Whatever'.

'Gladys, fear not...You are in safe hands. You will get raw power'.

'No. I don't want. I invoke the curse of God on you. In the name of Jesus, I am freed from whatever thing you have done and want to do to me'.

Stella laughed hysterically. 'You know my father or one of my fathers as I have had many fathers; the Australian father once told me about the story of a soldier who left the shore of America to fight the Germans. When he got there, instead of accepting defeat he kept invoking the power of being an American. In other words, he had left American soil and no longer had the protection of their power especially as he went AWOL'.

'I'm a child of God'.

Stella shrugged. 'Well, it depends on which God you're talking about: You have no right again as a Christian to make any demands. You've broken the edge and a snake has entered. I have entered. In fact, the snake is so pregnant within you and would soon give birth'.

'Shut up! I rebuke you. You're nothing but a liar and I will show you what stuff I'm made of'.

Gladys ran towards her. If the name of Jesus wasn't working, the strength Jesus gave her would do. She struck Stella's head. She was thicker than the frail Stella, her punch should have brought Stella down, but Stella was as fast as light. She side-stepped and rammed her fist into Gladys's ribs. The pain surged through her body to her head. Gladys yelled and crumbled to the ground, holding her side, but she tried to rise when she saw Stella advancing.

'You're a devil...', she said with clenched teeth as she grasped the pyre for support, groaning. A hammer rested on the pyre. Gladys picked it and stood straight, still panting heavily.

'God forgive me', she muttered as she poised herself to strike Stella. Although it was painful to do, she used all her strength to slack the tight blue armless gown she was wearing. People had commended the clothe after she got it from Fundel Collections, now Stella was making her tear the beautiful thing. She would crush her, and beg God for forgiveness later.

'Wow. I've never been called a devil in my 950 years plus on earth. Even Lord Lucifer would agree that I'm the next in command'.

Gladys stared at her in awe. What was she doing? How did she get involved with someone like this? Was she crazy? Was she blind? But she couldn't give herself an answer before a kick

sent her sprawling on the floor. The hammer flew out of her hand while her hearing aid rattled away to one side, and Gladys was so sure she heard another rib-cracking before her hearing aid fell off. She crawled towards the Pyre to pick her hearing aid. With quivering hands, she positioned it in her ear, firmly. There was no way she would die without trying to fight off this evil that called herself her mentor. Stella sneered at her and punched her jaw thrice before bending near her bleeding head.

'It's a simple thing. You can either take it compulsorily or willingly'.

'No', she grunted.