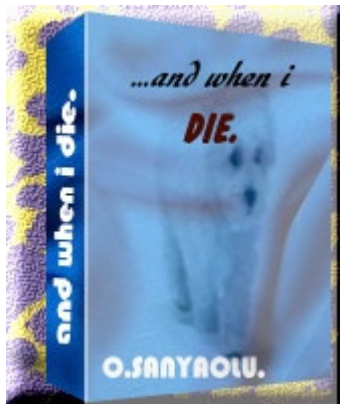


*...and when I*

***DIE.***



Wunmi-Ibukun-Sanyaolu.

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*.....to live in the heart of those who love you is not to die.*

# DEDICATION.

*This book is dedicated to late Isabella.*

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## *One.*

*"Goodnight John .....I mean, goodbye forever."*

Tinuade Philips stood facing the audience, with her arms folded tears dripped continuously from her eyes. The audience was moved with emotions some ladies were seen struggling to fight back the tears.

*"Lisa can you ever forgive me?"* Emeka McCauley knelt behind her holding on to her right leg.

*"I'm so ashamed of my self Lisa, even if it's goodbye forever, can you please forgive me?"*

His head stood bent and his arms glued to her right leg. Tinu exhibited pain in her voice as she gazed at the sky,

*"To forgive is divine".*

The audience watched with rapt attention the theater hall was quiet as a graveyard, no one was sure of what to expect next, tinu bent slightly occasionally hesitating, and then suddenly, faster than the speed of light, she picked him up holding his wrist firmly, pulling him to herself, his eyes seemed to have grown larger, he looked so surprised as she kissed him.

The audience shouted, giggling loudly, some whistled they wished the play would not end, the large blue stage curtains closed up covering the kissing couple.

The theater lights went on and the audience stood to leave.

They were seen in two's holding arms, some kissed as if to continue where the actors stopped.

Back in her hotel room, Tinuade Philips quickly got rid of her stage clothes, she felt sticky after three shows on that day; she rushed to the bathroom naked and hurriedly got under the shower.

She gradually applied soap and let the shower run for a very long time, caressing her slim body she was glad the three days of stage play was over.

Very early the next morning she'd be on her way home to see her charming dad, although she enjoyed every bit of her stay in Port Harcourt, she longed to see her dad.

The cold bath worked like medicine to her soul, she wished she could be under the shower till morning, reluctantly she turned off the shower and although she should have toweled her body she opted to get back to her room naked and wet, put on the air conditioner and hide under the cream duvet. She imagined how cold would run through her spine, how sweet her sleep will be like a baby's.

Tinu strolled naked out of the bathroom hugging her wet body, she made straight for the air conditioner wanting to turn it on.

Emeka McCauley sat calmly on her bed not sure of what to say or do, however he tried to comport himself, he brushed past a shocked Tinuade Philips, who stood still like she had just being electrocuted, he picked the large white towel and wrapped it round her cold body stylishly caressing her, tinu thought she had never being so electrified by the touch of any man, in fact she wasn't sure she could recall the last time a man touched her.

She fought hard to keep her eyes open wishing he'd draw her closer, kiss her deeper, repeat what had happened on stage, maybe it would be real this time, she wished he'd make her sleep sweeter by sharing her bed tonight.

Emeka noticed what he was doing to her body, he was always confident of his magical touch, however he was in her room to commend her for her near perfect performance on stage tonight and ask if she would like to co-star with him in his next movie **"black**

*star,*" already Emeka was chewing more than he could bite, he had taken more than enough ladies to bed during this outing and more than any thing all he desired was to be alone tonight.

*"May be some other time"*

Emeka realized he was thinking aloud,

*"Well I have to go; tinu may be we can think of bed some other time."*

He pecked her on her fore head and strolled out of the room, just as he made to shut the door, he turned back winking seductively.

*"Maybe just maybe some other time "*

Tinu could not believe what had just happened, she bit her lips painfully fighting hard to hold back the tears, she had just portrayed herself as a common whore, and she had just joined the list of countless women who were easy lays for Emeka McCauley.

*"He didn't sleep with me"*

She fought hard trying to defend her self.

*"What difference did it make?"*

She asked herself, Emeka would have easily had her if he so desired. For long she had seen Emeka as a proud unruly chauvinist, indeed he was a prolific actor any day, he had featured in Nollywood and Hollywood films and he always delivered, he was no doubt charming, she also found him truly sexy, however tinu hated the way ladies threw themselves at him, before now she never seized to wonder what charmed them, maybe she knew better now.

Tinu rolled under the duvet closing her eyes, wishing sleep will come soon, and take her away and it will be morning soon when she would be on her way home to see her lovely dad.



## *Tina.*

Tinu drove slowly down the third mainland bridge; she made a left turn and was on her way to Victoria Island. Singing along with Tu-face she nodded calmly enjoying African queen.

She was exceptionally happy, not that there was a reason why, she ran her long nails through her braids occasionally checking out her pretty face, she turned right into *James Solomon close* and then left stopping in front of the large office complex where Babajide Cliff's office was situated.

Jide Cliff was a film producer she had closely worked with for about 5 years, he was a good friend and an exceptional person, and he always made her feel good. She packed her script into a large brown envelope as she adjusted her hair and added a light make up. She straightened her short skirt and sleeveless blue blouse as she strolled into Jide's office.

*"Hi Tinu, you look radiant as ever, how are you today?"*

It was Peju, Cliff's secretary, Peju was one of the reasons why Tinu always looked forward to visiting Cliff, she was not only beautiful she had a way with words and made everyone feel important and loved.

Tinu hugged her smiling,

*"Sweetheart you are not looking bad either, is Cliff in?"*

*"Yes, but he's with some people, I'd let him know you are here"*

Tinu sat calmly looking around, there was always something new about Cliff's office, he always made sure he amended his office

interiors and it always looked more beautiful, Tinu thought the large painting on the wall was royal.

The door to Cliff's office opened, a slim dark lady strolled out, tinu thought she was very pretty, she had this African look and her low hair cut made her look ageless.

Emeka McCauley came after her running his long fingers over the lady's bare back, spotting a black body hug and a pair of blue jeans Tinu found his perfume sexy and thought he looked really charming, she tried not to look at him but her face seemed to be glued to him as she noticed hair on his chest, she imagined what his bare chest will look like and what it will feel like for her to run her slim fingers through them.

Emeka coughed mischievously, pulling his girlfriend close to him and kissing her passionately, for a second time Tinu bit her lips painfully because of Emeka, she picked her scripts as she rushed past the kissing couple into Cliff's large office.

*"Hi tinu so good to see you"*

Cliff stood to hug Tinu,

*"You look charming,"*

*"Thanks Cliff, good morning."*

Tinu slumped into one of the large cushions, her emotions seemed to get to her, she fought to hold back tears, and more than anything she was very angry wondering why she was crying.

Was it because she saw Emeka kissing another woman or because in less than one month she had being caught foolishly lusting the proud Casanova or that she was simply scared that except in some other movie or stage play she might never have the opportunity to have

Emeka McCauley run his magic fingers over her hungry body or kiss her passionately like she had never being kissed all her life?

Tinu glanced into thin air she didn't know how much the tears ran down her cheeks damping her make up or that Cliff was now sitting right beside her wondering why she had to cry so much.

*"Cant you confide in me?"*

Cliff ran his dark fingers through her long braids; Tinu was not sure of what to say now Cliff pulled her up hugging her.

*"Its o.k. baby girl its o.k. "*

Tinu really appreciated the hug; she thought she needed the warmth, only that she wished it was Emeka McCauley hugging her. The door opened suddenly, Tinu turned to see a smiling Emeka McCauley, she had never seen such a wicked smile all her life.

*"I thought as much"*

Emeka said shutting the door behind, him "she sleeps around."  
He sat on the couch chewing gum; even as he smiled more wickedly, Tinu picked her envelope and walked out of the office.

## Three.

Brenda oiled Tinuade's long dark hair as she picked the hand drier, Tinu wanted to wear her natural hair for the next few weeks she wanted a new look, simple pony tail would do.

Her phone beeped, Tinu searched her big brown hand bag for her Nokia phone, she had just received a text message from Cliff, she pressed the o.k. button and read it:

*Hi angel its Emeka's birthday and we are having a birthday bash today by 12 noon pls be there.*

**Cliff.**

Tinu sighed she wasn't sure she wanted to see Emeka, she wasn't just in the mood to see him kissing some other woman or flaunting his foolish male chauvinist attitude towards her, she toyed over the idea of being a part of the birthday bash.

Brenda packed her hair using an orange hair bond to match the orange short sleeve blouse she was wearing; she paid Brenda and strolled out of the salon.

Just beside it was a card shop, tinu strolled in to pick up a cute plain birthday card for Emeka wondering what she would write in it,

*"May be a simple happy birthday will do."*

She drove out of the shopping mall into a very busy traffic.

Tinu drove through Immanuel Street and turned left towards Shonibare estate, she waved at the excited estate security man who apparently recognized her as a movie star.

Driving straight down she turned right, she had never being to Emeka's house however she had passed by it several times with her

colleagues, she parked before the large brown gate blaring her horn, an elderly man opened the gate, he also seemed to recognized her as he immediately let her in.

Tinu noticed that the only car that was in the compound were Emeka's, she checked her wristwatch it was some minute past one, wondering if she came too early she relaxed in the car as she addressed the plain card.

A young lady strolled towards her obviously one of Emeka's numerous concubines,

*"Hi Tinu"*

She managed to salute her; she did not look friendly, staring at her as if to say:

*"How can I help you?"*

*"Is Emeka around?"*

Tinu managed to ask,

*"Nope."*

The lady kept the stare, tinu noticed a little girl afar on a wheel chair, she looked ten years old and was Emeka McCauley's replica, and tinu never knew Emeka had a daughter.

She smiled wondering if she knew anything at all about this man that constantly haunted her emotionally.

She picked her phone, ignoring the lady who stood glued watching her as if she didn't want to take any chance.

Cliff's phone rang for a while, Tinu checked her wrist watch again it was now half past one.

Cliff laughed as he picked his phone,

"Tinu where are you?"

"Where else will I be? 'Am in Emeka's house of course, and no one else is here yet."

"Sorry girlfriend its April fools day",

Cliff hung up from his end.

Tinu sighed, she felt she was actually a fool to think of being a part of Emeka McCauley birthday bash; Tinu did not enjoy the joke at all.

The lady hissed obviously tired of standing still, as she strolled inside, tinu noticed her short jeans pant and her chocolate brown bare back top, she laughed thinking of what Emeka did with all these women.

She waved at the little girl who seemed to enjoy the drama the two ladies just acted, she wheeled her chair towards Tinu, apparently she just realized it was Tinuade Philips after all, tinu smiled wanting to make friends with the little replica of Emeka McCauley.

"Hi young lady,"

Tinu was amazed at the extent of their resemblance, but to her surprise the little girl hissed,

"Tinuade Phillips, I knew you'd soon be one of his concubines."

She was looking at the petit card tinu was addressing to Emeka, she hissed again, wheeling her chair away.

Tinu laughed, now she was very sure the girl was Emeka's daughter, at least they had the same pride and rude words in common.

Tinu lay on her cream leather couch toying with the lace of her hair net, tiny drops of tears came down from her eyes, she had laughed

so much she felt some pains by her side. She was watching the latest edition of the night of a thousand laughs; she woke up feeling very lazy, she decided to listen to jokes so as to relax before rounding up the script she was writing.

Her door bell rang; she was not expecting anybody and she wished she could be all by her self throughout the day. She stopped the C.d player and strolled lazily to the door peeping through the pigeon hole, she realized it was Babajide Cliff.

She was not sure she wanted to see him, she was yet to get over the stupid prank he had played on her last week Reluctantly she opened the door,

"Hi tinu, why haven't you being picking my calls?"

Tinu strolled back to her couch ignoring him; Cliff sat beside her,

"Are you still angry over what happened last week? Honestly am very sorry"

Cliff hugged her from the side,

"It's ok Cliff"

Tinu managed to say, looking away from him"

"I've being calling you since last week, Emeka has just finished writing a movie and we have a mini auditioning in his house today, he wants you to be there."

"No way Cliff,"

Tinu objected vehemently,

"There is no way I will drive into Emeka's house again."

Cliff smiled,

" Alright, I will drop you there right away, we have a meeting with non-cast members before the auditioning, am a bit late for the meeting we could go together right away but you'd have to wait for the meeting to end before auditioning starts, and that will be in three hours time."

Tinu thought it was a nice idea; she strolled to her room to change her dress.

She never ceased to wonder why Emeka wanted her to be a part of his movie even though he hated her guts so much, well maybe he recognized that she was a good actress and he obviously wanted the best for his film.



## *Four.*

Cliff saluted the elderly gateman as he drove into Emeka's large compound.

Holding an obviously scared Tinuade he strolled into the palatial sitting room, Tinu admired the sitting room quietly sitting on one of his royal looking chairs.

Cliff ran up the stairs to let Emeka know he was around by-passing the little girl tinu met the other time, she was engrossed with the piano.

Gradually some other non-cast crew members arrived; they saluted tinu and sat beside her.

After a while Emeka and Cliff came down the stairs joking in pidgin English obviously about one of Emeka's sexual escapades, Emeka saluted all of them looking exceptionally happy.

All though he was wearing a pair of boxer shorts and a sleeveless singlet, tinu found him as charming as ever however she was quick to turn away from him to avoid being embarrassed a third time.

Tinu was shocked at how well Emeka saluted her, as he sat beside her,

*"It's so nice to have you in my house for the very first time, what do I offer you?"*

*"Nothing, thanks."*

Tinu wanted to tell him it was not her first time in his house however she kept mute feigning a smile. Finally Emeka, Cliff and other members of the non-cast crew excused themselves moving towards the garden behind the house.

*"Sorry tinu we have to meet before the mini auditioning I will check on you occasionally".*

Cliff patted her on her back as he hurried out to meet the others, tinu relaxed carefully checking out the sitting room and enjoying the melody as the little girl played the organ far across the living room. She watched as she repeatedly tried to get the keys to Mark Idudu's **"Mom was my hero"** Tinu thought she could help her out, reluctantly she got up to meet the little girl not aware of what she might say to her today,

*"Hi, em I don't know your name,"*

Tinu gently placed her hand on the little girls shoulder. *"You think I can help you?"*

The little girls reply was very sharp however tinu did not understand what she meant.

*"I don't understand you,"*

The little girl did no look up,

*"You think I can help you get to my dad?"*

Tinu smiled

*"Oh- oh so he's your dad after all"*

She was thinking aloud,"

*"Are you blind?"*

Tinu ignored the her rude comment,

*"Well you were not getting the keys to that song and I thought I could to help you out."*

*"Well angel of mine, '**mum was my hero**' has a difficult key, even my music teacher couldn't get it and I sure don't think....."*

Tinu smiled proudly,

*"I wrote that song you know"*

The little girl looked at tinu for the very first time, tinu was not sure of what the expression on her face meant,

*"You did?"*

*"Yes I did, Mark Idudu is my child hood friend, and in fact I write most of his songs."*

The little girl wheeled her chair out of the way as if to allow tinu play the song still expressing shock as tinu sat by the organ to do "**mum was my hero**", the best song Tinuade Philips ever wrote.

Tears trickled her face as she hummed the song remembering her late mother: **Jane Omowunmi Philips** whom she dedicated the song to, the little girl cried too, tinu was not sure of why she cried, was it because of the lyrics of the song? Or was it because Tinu was crying?

Cliff came in to check on Tinu as he had promised, he smiled as he spotted her with the little girl playing the organ and left immediately to get back to business.

The little girl clapped excitedly as Tinu finished playing the song, Tinu was glad she had touched this little heart. "

*"So will you tell me your name now?"*

*"Amarachi McCauley, dad calls me Ama,"*

She dried her tears smiling back at Tinuade Philips.

Tinu enjoyed every bit of shooting Emeka McCauley film '**black star**', she had worked closely with Cliff and Emeka, and had tried as much as she could to avoid having personal contact with Emeka.

She guessed he must have been avoiding her too however perhaps because it was Emeka's film he avoided all the ladies on set as much as he could, at times publicly embarrassing some stubborn ones.

In eight weeks it was all over and post production commenced, she sat in her room going through some pictures she took during recording and sipping a cold glass of coke, her phone rang, "

*"Hi tinu"*

She recognized little ama's voice

*"Hi li'l angel and how are you today?"*

Tinu was very excited to hear from Amarachi McCauley,

*"Fine, its just that it's my birthday tomorrow and there is something special about it, dad's too busy with "black star" would you be nice enough to take me out please?"*

Tinu was quiet for a while; she checked her schedule for the next day

*"o.k. li'l angel"*

She finally said.

*"Thanks a lot!"*

Ama shouted *"I'll expect you."*

It was an exciting day for both ladies, they started the day at Lekki beach Mayegun it was fun and quiet because beach visitors were

not much, probably because it was a Tuesday there was more than enough to munch, they both talked about their common pain, 'the pain of having to lose their moms at an early age'.

Tinu knew she had to be strong for Ama's sake.

*"So what makes this birthday so special?"*

Tinu wanted to make ama forget about her mom at least for a while.

*"Oh I feel it's going to be my last."*

*"Why do you talk like that?"*

Tinu was shocked dropping her Shawama on the beach sand.

*"I'm sick, I have leukemia and God has kept me this long, I guess it's time to go, thanks for giving me a befitting final birthday."*

Ama smiled, Tinu noticed an extra ordinary glow on her face, and she looked very beautiful.

*"If God kept you this long, don't you think he can still keep you, for many more years?"*

Tinu was crying profusely, she felt like someone was stabbing her in the heart, ama dried her tears

*"It's o.k. aunt tinu don't cry."*

The rest of the day was rather sober however tinu tried to ensure that ama had a nice time, they watched a film at silver birds cinemas and ended the evening eating catfish pepper soup at tinu's favorite joint.

Tinu drove ama home at about eight pm, she was so tired and sad and all she wanted to do was to drop ama and leave.

*"Won't you put me to bed?"*

Tinu smiled at the mischievous looking ten year old, she enjoyed every single part of pampering the spoilt little brat, tears dripped of her eyes at the thought of loosing her new little friend.

Tinu helped her unpack her wheel chair and carried her like a baby upstairs to her room.

Tinu had to wait for her to have her bath, change into her pajamas and then she tucked her in bed,

*"Now li'l angel can I leave?"*

*"Nope, you have to read me a bed time story",*

The naughty looking girl passed tinu an African bed time story book.

*"Oluronbi cried begging the iroko tree to forgive her....."*

Tinu yawned as she watched her li'l angel sleep off, tinu smiled picking her car keys she tip toed out of ama's room praying she doesn't wake up now, gently shutting the door after her, she rushed through the long corridor it was quiet dark tinu wondered why Emeka choose to use a colored bulb, it didn't take long before she realized why.

She noticed two people glued together just before the staircase, of course it was Mr. women and yet another prey of his, they were kissing deeply as the lady moaned loudly, not even the sound of her pencil heeled shoe distracted them, tinu hissed loudly obviously wanting to be noticed, suddenly she looked back Emeka stared back at her smiling wickedly he unbuttoned the lady's blouse even as he winked at tinu ,tinu hissed again turning to leave.

She noticed two people glued together just before the staircase, of course it was Mr. women and yet another prey of his, they were kissing deeply as the lady moaned loudly, not even the sound of her pencil heeled shoe distracted them, tinu hissed loudly obviously wanting to be noticed, suddenly she looked back Emeka stared back

at her smiling wickedly he unbuttoned the lady's blouse even as he winked at tinu, tinu hissed again turning to leave.

## *Five.*

Mark Idudu had just returned from an African wide tour, he had called Tinu the previous night and they were to meet this morning at the Lords club Maryland.

Tinu had written a few songs while he was away and felt mark will want to have them, she wore a pink top and matching pink pants and planned to check on her little angel when she was through with Mark.

As she turned into the Lords club, she spotted Mark's car and just as she made to park beside his car she noticed Mark strolling towards her perhaps to welcome her.

He wore dread locks and she thought this new look fitted him perfectly,

*"Hi Mark"*

Tinu hugged him she loved his perfume.

*'Hi Tinu you look smashing and ageless as ever"*

Tinu blushed, she had been Mark's friend for so many years yet she couldn't recall him ever complimenting her neither for her looks nor for her songs. Tinu smiled again as he led her towards the bar.

*"What would you like to take?"*

Mark smiled revealing his charming dimples,

*"Nothing,"*

Tinu felt that whoever taught Mark how to be a gentle man must have had so much work to do.



"I have some new songs you might like."

Tinu unzipped her large pink bag,

"Not now Tinu, that's not why I called you."

That Tinu was shocked was an understatement, she looked strangely at the young man,

"Hope all is well, Mark?"

"Are you dating any one presently?"

Mark looked rather serious,

"Nope."

Tinu wasn't sure of where that reply came from, she never expected Mark to talk to her about dating or her love life, they were just platonic childhood friends and that was all.

"Tinu we are childhood friends and I know you very well, I want you to marry me"

Mark brought out a small black box, Tinu guessed it was an engagement ring, she wasn't sure of what to say or do,

"I don't know."

That was the second time she'd speak without knowing where the words came from.

"I'm sorry Mark, I have to leave now."

Tinu picked her bag and hurried to the car, she was not sure she wouldn't drop before she gets to her car, her legs felt too heavy to carry her. When she managed to get to the car she took a deep breath, afraid to look back, she started her car engine and drove off.

Tinu noticed Emeka's cars were all in the compound; it was so unusual for him to be home at that time of the day. She strolled in calling ama, she went straight to her room tapping the door lightly, Emeka sat beside her bed holding her slender hand, ama was not looking too well but she was very glad to see tinu.

"My spirit must have brought you here I tried calling you what happened to your phone?"

"Nothing"

Tinu smiled, checking to be sure her phone was on, she was not too comfortable being around Emeka, she moved close to ama wondering why she lost so much weight.

"What's wrong with my little angel?"

"Good morning Emeka, please pardon my ill manners"

Emeka smiled he didn't look too happy.

"Hi",

Was all he could say.

"Time up mom, I got to go."

Tinu wasn't sure of what shocked her more, the fact that she called her mom or that she said she had to go, Tinu realized how much she had emaciated.

"Angel, please don't do this to me."

"Dad please can I speak with her in camera?"

Emeka sighed heavily; he managed to say o.k. slowly strolling out of the room, obviously devastated.

"Do you love my dad?"

Ama seemed to struggle with those words.

"Ama some one just proposed to me now,"

Tinu wanted to gist her about Mark, "you didn't answer my question."

Ama's eyes grew frail and lifeless,

*"Ama please don't let's go there."*

*"That means you do."*

Ama tried to sit up, Tinu supported her placing a pillow behind her.

*"I didn't say so."*

Tinu was not sure of how she'd get out of the trap Ama had set for her.

"And you've not said you don't either, but I know you do, I have always seen it in your eyes , more than I ever did I can see it now, its written all over you, look into the eyes of a dying friend and tell me you don't love Emeka McCauley."

Tinu looked away, trying not to think, for the second time in one day she was faced with matters of the heart and for the second time she wasn't sure of what to say or do.

*"Ama I..... I love Emeka, but he womanizes and he doesn't seem to like me."*

*"That's wrong Tinu, I can explain myself,"*

Emeka strolled back into the room, Tinu was more confused than ever, he had been eavesdropping he held her arms, looking straight into her eyes.

Tinu was too scared to look at him, she shyly looked away,

*"For a long time I felt women were sex tools, I thought I could never love any woman again, since I lost my wife ama's mom to leukemia. When I found you I saw the same things I saw in Chinelo many years ago in you, I did all I could not to love you, that was why I wanted to hate you, the more I tried the more I loved you, you are just not like all of them you are different."*

Ama smiled lying down, apparently too weak to sit up.

*"Tinu 'am the second man to propose to you today, maybe it's your lucky day, will you marry me?"*  
*Emeka remembered the scene of the last stage play they held in Port Harcourt, he held onto her left leg looking down, Tinu smiled pulling him up, obviously remembering that scene too.*

*"Yes emmy I will, I will marry you"*

Emeka lifted her up, turning her around, Tinu screamed, there was a mixture of fear and excitement in her voice.  
Ama smiled, it was her last moments alive, it was her happiest, it was her best, she breathed her last.

*Hi friend,*

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