

**SECRET DIARIES FROM  
HELL  
(Volume I)**

**RAY ANYASI**

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For my sweet mama,  
Philo Anyasi

*A ruler has to examine the dark side of human life and understand that men belong to that darkness.*

**Bessie Head -*Tales of Tenderness and Power***

## **In This Collection;**

**A Coward's Regret**

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**Someone Help Me Kill My Past**

# **A Coward's Regret**

I finally found the shame to tell this story. My father named me Jorge-Hernandez Castrella Gonzalez after a Cuban boxer he met the year I was born, but I grew up to become a sorry coward. I live in a little town near Ossa, near the Peru border region of northern Chile. Ossa use to be a gentle town blessed with beautiful sceneries and families that have perfected the art of minding their businesses. Everyone lived relatively happily till mid 2011 when young boys and girls began to disappear.

At the beginning, it was at a rate of a person or two in a month. Each case was duly reported to the police, but we were all aware of how ineffective police could be around here. They would do a flimsy nosing around on each case then put the victim on the eternal missing persons list. When we suspected the occurrences weren't just cheap coincidence, we called for and organized a more elaborate community security routine, it did not help either.

Things got out of hand in May 2012. Two people each were missing in the first three weeks and on the Thursday of the fourth week, seven girls were declared missing. In that last number was Senorita Selena Reyes.

I will be 27 in a few weeks and I have been dating Selena almost my entire adulthood. The last time we saw each other, we were having a petty argument over when to begin to live together. She was very traditional; she insisted we would have a wedding at the chapel conducted by Father Xavier Augustine before all our folks. What do I care about ceremonies? All I wanted was her waking up every morning under my roof. As

always, she won the argument, she then rode a bus to her father's house, except, she did not get to her father's house.

The next morning was crazy. I went with her parents to the police. I answered all the questions they had for me and did all I could to assist them do their job. That period, I was a mad man. I would wander the streets night and day with the innocent hopefulness of a five year old.

Three days into the search, the police still had no clue what might have happened to her and the other six girls. Selena's parents were devastated. I was going mad. I still traced the route from my house to her parent's house every five hours or so.

One evening, the fourth evening after her disappearance, I was walking by the market. I was lost in my thoughts and paid little attention to all that went on around me. I was rightly on the sidewalk made for walkers and moving slowly, so I cared less about motorists, but this one, he kept honking loudly after me. It did that for long before I noticed it. It was a Ford minivan. I flung a pedestrian glance at it then walked on. The Ford kept crawling right by me and honking continuously. It did that so annoyingly that others by the roadside began to yell swears at the driver.

It was then I decided to ask the driver what his problem was. I lowered my head a little to look through the window.

*Ahhh...a very familiar face.*

A face I would never forget, Martinez Calderon. We went to school together and he once dated my cousin, Maria. That was however not the reason I would never forget his face. Martinez bullied the crap out of me, that's the reason why I would never forget his face.

This time, he was beaming a generous smile at me.  
'Jorge-Hernandez *mi amigo*, come in now.'



'It has been ages,' I said the moment I sat on the passenger seat beside him. He wore Khaki brown pants and an off-white tank top; he also wore cheap metal-rimmed sunshades. Apart from the heavy beards he'd now grown, he had not changed much from the last time I saw him eight years ago in Santiago.

'*Si, mi amigo.*'

'*Como esta?*'

'I'm fine. Where are you headed?'

I shrugged, 'I have no distinct destination, just having a walk.'

'Hmm, interesting.'

'I heard you are based now in Albuquerque.'

'Yes, but I've been in town for the past couple of months. I have a business to take care of. What about you? What do you do?'

'I am very much in town. I run an electrical workshop.'

'Electrical workshop? Like you fix electrical stuff?'

'Yes, why do you look surprised?'

'No, no, no, I am not surprised. Maybe a bit happy. I have been driving around all day looking for someone to fix a broken generator for me.'

'Ridiculous, there are hundreds of us in this town.'

'Not just anyone. I need someone I can trust. It is, uhhh...it is, like a secret work. I want...'

'Secret work?'

'Classified. I know I can count on you.'

He drove me straight to this compound and I did not ask much question as we travelled all the way. I was only curious to see how *secret* or classified repairing a generator could be outside the Pentagon.

He pulled up beside a brick fence and we stepped out the vehicle without wasting time. He opened a wooden gate and let me in. It was an old brownstone reputed to have been built by President Jose Manuel Balmaceda himself. To the best of my knowledge, it was last

occupied by an aged Araucanian couple eleven years ago.

‘Does anyone live here?’ I asked him and began to slow down my steps behind him.

‘Not exactly,’ he said, and then he turned back to look at me, ‘I might not be in a mood to entertain too many questions, so it would be nice if you just stick to doing your job and leaving in peace.’ This tone he used reminded me more of the Martinez of years ago than the one who said almost every word through a broad smile in the car.

He showed me the generator under a zinc-roofed shelter, ‘Wait here,’ he said, ‘I will return shortly with tools.’

Without delay, he returned to hand me a dirty sack filled with tools. I went to work instantly. While I was working, I couldn’t stop wondering what made the work such a secret that just anyone can’t be trusted to do it and why Martinez thought I could be trusted to keep his secrets.

Clues to my answers were not too far away from me. I raised my eyes from the generator and saw a girl’s scarf, a multi-coloured silk scarf. I recognized it quickly even though it was heavily stained by grease and mud. Selena had it on her that evening she left my house.

Selena was right there in that building, I was sure. Droplets of sweat began to form on my forehead. I was trembling.

Martinez joined me again from the main building. ‘Any progress?’

I looked up at him, ‘Yes, yes,’ I had coupled back the generator and was getting ready to test it. I started it through the ignition key; a bulb glowed from the corridor. It worked, but not for long. We heard a loud cracking sound and saw a bright flash from a spark from inside the main building.

Martinez started running inside, 'Turn off the refrigerators, turn them off quick.' He was shouting as he ran, 'if the surge damages them we're finished.'

After ten minutes inside, he came out to meet me again, 'There was a little burning in a circuit box inside. Can you fix it?'

'I have to see it to know,' I said and followed him.

The moment I stepped into the sitting room, two of six bulky men pulled out pistols and pointed them at me.

'Who is this you got here?' they were asking angrily and rapidly.

I threw up my hands and was about to dash out through the door, but Martinez pulled me back.

'He is an old friend, a childhood pal. He is fixing the power source for us.'

I did not have the mind to look straight at their faces but I was sure from the way they spoke they were Mexicans and the dark men were Americans.

'Man, you can't go out the street and drag in anybody to this place. That is fucked up shit, men.'

'I told you he is not just anybody. I can trust him. He will fix the power and be gone quickly,' Martinez said calmly.

One of the black guys stood up and pointed his gun close to the back of my head, 'Now get your ass to work, if you as much as look around, you've got to be sure I'm gonna blow some brains unto the damn wall right here.'

Though I worked with faltering hands, I was able to do a quick job. They got their power back and I couldn't wait to be out. Martinez led me back to the gate. He gave me eight ten dollar bills. I did not say a word but turned quickly to leave through the gate. He forcefully grabbed my elbow to pull me back.

Then he whispered into my ears, 'If you make the mistake of telling anyone whatever you saw here, I will kill you.'

All I saw was a scarf, but I had no doubt they had Selena and the other missing people. From that place, I can't tell how I got back to my house. Till the morning, I couldn't figure out my mind, I wasn't saying anything, neither was I thinking. It was like I blanked out through the night from that moment I left the building.

It was at day break I began to think of running to the police, but just like always, I was scared, too scared to move an inch. I locked myself indoors all through the day. I knew where to get my Selena back, but too afraid to do a thing about it. It felt as if Martinez and his gang of heavies were stationed outside my door, waiting to see if I would step out to speak to anyone.

Very early the second morning, the news broke all over town. In that same compound, the police found fifteen bodies without internal organs. Selena's was one of them. All the culprits were gone with the harvested organs.

Every day in this town, I think of those fifteen boys and girls. I see their faces when I see their parents and siblings. I know they will never forgive me for folding my arms in pusillanimity when they needed me to show a little pluck for the first time in my life. They were sorely unfortunate that the only man who had the chance to rescue them was the most pathetic chicken to ever walk the earth.

**I Killed them Both**

Love at first sight was bullshit till I saw Sarah. Her skin was smooth, dark and shiny like the skin of a Moroto cobra in rainy season. She flashed a bright gorgeous smile –not at me, but at the driver of the bus we rode to work. Quickly, my mind captured that smile and stashed the picture away somewhere in my brain where it is untouchable. Simply put, her smile was only a tiny fraction of her entire beauty, yet, only the most blessed and purest of men deserved to be seeing such smile every day.

I said a hearty good morning to her and she blessed me with that smile, it was proof enough that God loves a man. That was how it seemed to me that morning, you must be loved by God if all you do to be gifted such a smile is to say a common good morning. That was how we became friends. Every day from that day onwards, we took not only the same route, but same bus to work. We will often sit next to each other and have a good cheerful conversation all through the ride. She constantly reminded me of that girl in that Bryan Adam's song, *Eastside Story* except that in my case, I gave her my name and number and got hers.

Soon after, I invited her to have lunch with me in my favorite restaurant –I mean the restaurant I'd loved to be frequenting if I were rich. She agreed to join me for the lunch but not that easily. She made me beg on a knee with a gift in my hands. That was just for me to have the chance to spend a fortune on a skimpy meal while sitting opposite her, grinning from ear to ear.

Aren't women impossible to comprehend? The same lady who gave me her number gleefully as if she's been

waiting half her lifetime to find me has succeeded in making getting a simple date as hard as getting a blowjob from a Khaleesi right in front of her Khal.

After spending a third of my monthly take-home pay on a Chinese dish in a Kampala restaurant, she said it was a fair meal and thanked me. *Fair meal? Are you fracking kidding me, miss?*

By my standards, we had a great time; I saw that smile over and over again. That was worth more than the miserable meal I paid for. I will say it once again, her smile was God's blessing best represented on a broken face.

Our friendship was the stuff of a fairy tale, at least from my end. My friends who saw us together envied me...well, even the once who said I was being *retardedly* disgraceful to manhood for being that *hot, hot* after just a girl. I had a head full of phrases and comments that people described me with as it concerned my friendship with Sarah. One friend said I was too lucky for his liking. So, on a certain evening after work, I decided to push that luck a little further. We met at the bus station. Just like me, she'd had a pretty tough day at work. We decided to take a sit under a tree and talk before we hop into a bus.

'I like you Sarah,' I said while scanning her countenance. It goes without saying; my heart was already beating fast, the way my voice came out was strange. I never heard myself sound like that; I never even thought it was humanly possible to sound like you were talking from an empty hole. I can't tell if that was how she heard me, anyway.

‘Of course you do,’ she giggled softly.

‘Do you like me too?’

‘Will I be sitting here if I didn’t?’ she sounded as if my question was the silliest thing she ever heard from a grownup.

Being loved back will mean a lot to any man. If the woman be Sarah, then it will mean everything. ‘Sarah, I like you beyond the, the...normal...normal like between friends. I mean –I love, love...you. I love you. I want you and I to, to, to be more than friends because I ar...ar...am in love with you, Sarah.’

As I stuttered and chewed my tongue for up to three minutes trying to say those few words, Sarah kept this bowled over stare on me like she thought I must be out of my mind. The moment I said the last word, she busted into a mocking laughter. It was humiliating. Embarrassing even, but I was prepared to soak that up.

‘Sarah, this is no laughing matter,’ I managed to say from trembling lips.

‘Of course it is no laughing matter, but it makes me laugh all the same.’

‘I know you would have preferred a more articulate speech, but please pardon my fal...’

‘It has nothing to do with the way you said it. No, not at all, my dear. As a matter of fact, I’m flattered to see that I took all your boldness away,’ she kept the smile everlasting as she spoke, ‘the thing is, you’re not just my type as it concerns intimacy. I like you, you’re nice and caring. You’re a good person, but definitely not the type I’d date. I’m sorry I laughed, seriously, I’m sorry.’

‘So, so, I can’t get anything from you?’



‘What do you mean by anything?’

I too don't know what I meant. I was just saying arrant gibberish.

‘We are still friends, aren't we?’ she said, ‘I like to remain your friend, always.’

The way I saw it then, it was the hardest thing to do in the world. To be just friends with such a woman with astronomical desirability. To think that you would eventually have to condescend to marrying a mere mortal female after being that close to a goddess. It was unthinkable.

That night I could not sleep. I talked about it over and over again with my roommate, Yacob. Yacob was what I considered a chronic loafer. He had no job or any formal training that could fetch him one, and he was uninterested in finding one by the way. He was annoyingly content with living off others. Yacob was what my father would have called a *lifetime receiver* if they had met. He lived in my apartment, he ate my food, he wore my cloths...everything he did, I funded and everything he used, I owned. I wasn't complaining though, he was a fun company to have. You never get a single boring moment with Yacob. So it was like having a live-in standup comedian at a little more cost than financial.

I talked to him about Sarah almost every night from that day I got that first smiled on the bus stashed away to that corner of my memory. Actually, he was the one who urged me to ask her for a proper affair. He said I'd regret not acting fast if another man came for her. The thought of such eventuality was unwelcomed...alarming

even. *Another man with my Sarah? Holding my Sarah? Kissing my Sarah? On top of my Sarah?*

*Stop it, stop it, don't go there. Not now, not ever.*

As I got myself a-tip-of-the-ice-berg ready to say it to Sarah, I could almost hear her saying her no, no, no. Obstinate into my ears, the ears of my heart, to say. Yacob does not think so. That particular night, he told me a girl is naturally programmed to say no at first; even to the man they'd die to have. He talked as if he'd read *The Female Mind Creation Manual*, by God, *et al.*

He encouraged me to keep asking till I get a yes from her.

*A yes would come?*

He could only say that because he wasn't there to see the look on her face while I spoke like a five-year-old in front of a clown. If he'd heard the heart aching sound of her laughter as if I was being world-*recordly* ridiculous, he wouldn't be asking me to try again.

What I thought that night was, I must be out of my mind. How could I even dream of such a union, not to talk of asking for it? Sarah was way too good for me. A girl like her should have or be waiting for a better man to come around, someone definitely wealthier with a high class. I must have been dreaming to think that ordinary me could have extraordinary her.

I would wake up now from my dream and begin to hope to meet half-a-Sarah someday, but Yacob won't let me. He insisted he was sure about what he was saying. I was easily inclined to put a little faith in his theory. Why not? He was the guy who had nothing to impress a lady

with, yet occasionally got decent hook-ups. So, I let him take an advisory role in my *Project win Sarah*.

Yacob went to work immediately. He suggested that if he added his voice to my case to her, I might gain some points. He asked me to invite her to our apartment...my apartment. The idea was simple, bring her and let him spend time singing my praise in the sweetest tune ever. Sweet talk was his thing. He could convince an ostrich it flies faster than an eagle. He said I would come off as the generous and altruistic gentleman who keeps an annoying old friend in his apartment. He was self deprecatory too. I liked the idea, why not? If I have spent all these year putting up with all his big-baby crap, reaping something priceless from it won't be a bad idea at all.

Getting Sarah to agree to visit was another hell of a hurdle. It was twice as hard as getting that lunch date. I preached, I begged, I sent gifts...heck, I even had to punch a man in the face for brushing against her on a walkway.

Then she agreed to visit my apartment by 2:00pm on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012. On that Saturday, I, Constance Matulele, was a very happy man. Happier than Nelson Mandela on the day of his release from jail. I sanctioned Yacob to clean the apartment as hard as was humanly possible and cook her favorite meal. Sweet potatoes porridge with smoked fish. I bought new table covers and curtains for the doors and windows. One would think we were expecting a Saudi princess. To Yacob's credit, he was a terrific cook; the meal was

just...well, half Sarah-befitting. And it was impossibly impressive still.

Then she showed up in all her majesty. Wearing a new-looking light pink silk gown that stopped shyly before her thighs ended and at the top part of it, the V-neck line allowed the inner cheeks of her fist-sized breasts push out bravely into plain view. *Way to go, girl.* The queenly gown was hung over her shoulders by half inch wide, dark pink straps that perfectly overlaid the black straps of her push-up bra. It was a perfect overlay that you would hardly notice the bra straps which were half inch wide too...like she was dressed up by a mathematician. She had an orange scarf, not on her head, no...over her shoulders. It covered the baby-skin of her upper chest and her cleavage. But she took it off as she stepped into my apartment.

*Feed thy eyes oh ye sons of mortal men, for this day you...*

4:16pm. That was the exact time of her arrival. After all the anticipation and waiting, her graceful legs stepped through my door, it was worth the wait. I introduced her to Yacob quickly and he went to work at once. Trying his best to translate my six years of shit taking into priceless jewels that would beautify my plain personality before her royal majesty...or so I thought.

He began to tell jokes after jokes and making witticisms fluidly. I liked that he kept her happy, but a part of me was jealous that she'd never been that excited in my company. What the heck, he was my live-in leech of a comedian...my money; I could as well take the credit. *Be entertained precious Sarah.*

We served her the meal; she gave it an easy pass mark. I served her a glass of fruit juice, an expensive one, mind you. She took only a sip of it then made a bitter face; you'd think it was vinegar in the glass. She said she'd prefer diet coke instead. Not a funny joke.

Instantly, I grew wheels under my feet and was at the nearest department store before a second thought. They were out of stock; I checked the next store, same story. I then had to go a lot further than would take a jiffy. In the end, it took me about twenty-seven minutes to find a bottle of diet coke and return to the dignitary I was hosting in my apartment.

In my apartment, right in the middle of my sitting room, a dreadful shock was waiting for me.

In the excitement of having found what the Queen demanded, I busted into the room, Yacob and Sarah swiftly jumped off each other. They couldn't be quick enough for me not to see what they were into. Everything now seemed like a horrible dream, but I remember clearly their position –after they had disentangled, that is. What they were doing had no other explanation.

She was slow to withdraw her left hand from inside his sagging dirty, denim pants, not quick like he was in withdrawing his hands from wherever they had been. Inside her bra...maybe, because now more than half of the entire fist-sized breasts were outside their cups, daring for more engagement.

Yacob stood away with his hands thrown up.

‘This is not what it looks like, Constance, let me explain...’ he was saying rapidly, and then swearing by some never-heard-before deities of Bunyoro.

Sarah wasn’t saying anything, she was busy rearranging her hair and pulling down her gown properly, she left the breasts as out as they were as if they had a role to play in making things calm or they’ll defend her if things escalate. Her composure was nowhere near apologetic and it made me mad.

I couldn’t understand it, I still can’t. I mean...how could a girl who couldn’t give me as little as a warm hug descend this low to Yacob? Yacob? No, the good-for-nothing other-people dependent Yacob? The incurable body-odor Yacob? Even at that moment he smelled like a three days rotten smoked fish. I can never have a face-to-face conversation with Yacob, when he speaks, his mouth smelled like the devil *pooed* inside his stomach. How could she bring herself to be an arm’s length near him, let alone kiss him? What did he do to her? How can they do this unspeakable outrage to me?

All the majesty of her personality I held in my head vanished quickly. In my sight at that moment, she became the dirtiest thing I’d ever looked upon. More dirty than Yacob.

She took her scarf and began to tie it over her head to cover her hair completely. Now she looked like faithful mama Sarai having no idea what papa Abbey was up to with the handmaid.

*She is mocking me and I know it in its bare face.*

Yacob was on his knees speaking frantically. I wasn’t hearing anything he was saying anymore. A million

thoughts ran through my head so fast it was like I wasn't thinking at all.

My hands dipped into the bag I held on the other hand. I brought out the bottle of soft drink she demanded and without thinking, flung it at her quickly.

She had no time to react before it hit her on the left temple.

From that moment on, everything began to happen fast. She sprawled uncontrollably all over the floor. She did not scream in pain or shock. Just a quiet squawk before she hit the ground on the back of her head. Yacob sprang from his knees to hold her head up.

The bottle was broken into three sizeable places and many more tiny jewelry pieces. And my anger was rising even further. I picked a piece of the bottle, Yacob turned to me to wonder what I was up to.

*He should have known.*

I drove the piece of bottle through his neck. He held his throat and fell on his back. I did not take a second look at the fool. His blood was spouting up to the ceiling and spraying all over us like a colorful fountain on Halloween.

I couldn't control myself anymore; I grabbed a longer piece of the bottle and began to stab it continuously on Sarah's chest and neck like a maniac. I did it up to thirty times before I was able to make myself stop. By that time, my hand had been deeply cut on my palms by the bottle. Everything and everyone in the room was soaked in blood. Her blood, his blood, and mine, everywhere I looked.

That moment, the devil in me disappeared and I was left to realize what in the world I'd just done.

I had two bodies to explain.

I became scared, very scared. I had to do something fast. I cleaned myself and changed my cloths, and I bandaged my cut hand.

All I could think of that time was to run away and as I write this, I'm still running. Not just from the legal consequence of my crime, but from their ghosts. I see their faces all the time. The face of Yacob when he was pleading for mercy and forgiveness in the name of those stupid deities, and the face of Sarah, the innocent look she maintained as if she meant to say to me that a goddess can never be wrong.

I've been able to cross the border into Kenya, but there is no border to cross inside my head. I'm trapped in the torturous gaol of my conscience.

Have they really done anything to deserve such cold-blooded horrible death?

Theirs was a rare and impeccable boy meets girl tale, but I killed them.



# **How I Sold My Soul**

I often ask myself if there is ever a measure of desperation that can justifiably lead a man to become the devil's dirty-job man. The answer I get each time depends on my mood at that time. Well, that is me finding excuse for all the wrongs I have done to half of humanity. Did I just say *half*? I guess I am just insufferably pathetic.

My name is Mallick Chapra; I grew up in Tehata in the north eastern region of West Bengal state in India.

When I was growing up, I was inundated with what people in my village were saying about me being such a phenomenally bright kid. It somehow got into my head. I was always thinking people expect much more from me than from the other kids.

As I grew up, I attended the University of Delhi. It is one of the most notable tertiary institutions in India; it means it is one of the most expensive to be in.

*How did a village boy whose father is only a peasant farmer get to afford such an expensive school without a scholarship grant?*

People often ask. I say it is part of the purposefully orchestrated elements of the complication of my situation.

You see, I am the only son among six sisters. If you know anything about India, especially my region, you would know what an issue that is for a parent. It means six dowries to pay and at least one University degree to fund.

My father was a little old *shrewdie* –or so he thought. He made himself this clever plan to meet all his responsibilities with the least sweat.

‘It will be killing seven stones with one bird,’ he said while beaming at us that early morning he woke us to announce it. I did not bother to correct his expression; you wouldn’t want to dampen his mood that morning if you were there too.

To be fair to him, his plan sounded a bit smart at that time. He would sell all his farmlands with the exception of one, the smallest of them all. The money he would realize would be enough to send me to the most prestigious Universities in India to study the most prestigious profession in the world. That would make a good-paying job as certain for me as night follows day.

When I then begin to earn super big, I would easily fund the dowries of my six sisters. After that, I would help him set up a petty business that can continue to put food on his table because he might be too old to farm by then. He said with this plan well executed, he can die a satisfied man with six daughters successfully married to decent men and a son who lives the big life...AWESOME!

My father was dead serious about this plan; he stayed committed and played his role true to the letter. He was lucky to find wealthy buyers for his farmlands, two of them. One was a pharmaceutical company, the other an estate developer. After he had put aside plenty funds for my University degree, he had something left to upgrade our house from a thatched roof to zinc.

My role was to go to school and come out with good grades. In that aspect I did not disappoint. I came out with the second best grade in my class. On my graduation day, my father cleared out all his savings to

throw a party. That was not to be considered reckless by him; his son was going to be snapped up by a big internationally known health institution very soon.

Graduating with good grades was not an end; it was only a means to the end we desired. It seemed that fact managed to escape every other person's mind that evening at the party. Though I stayed positive about reaching that goal, I did not pack my suitcase and run off to that la-la land with my father. I knew there would be intimidating job interviews to sit through. I knew there would be weeks or maybe months of finger drumming, waiting for that call from a prospective employer.

It started out just that way. The first three job interviews I went for jolted me with a disturbing reality. I was not as bright as I thought I was or there were just too many geniuses out there who compared better. I never made the final cut no matter how much I impressed myself in the interview.

I told that to my father, but it was not enough to put him on the road back from his dreamland.

'Keep trying, Mallick my son, keep trying.' He said. 'Every hospital that has rejected you would soon come running after you when they wake up from their sleep and realize what a treasure they have allowed go. The sad news for them will be that by that time you would be somewhere else earning twice what they can ever offer.'

*How in the world could he say that with such certainty?*

I travelled back to Bangalore and kept trying, this time with more vigor. The 24<sup>th</sup> interview I went for was the one that made me most crazy. A new hospital built by a

Silicon Valley firm to cater for the healthcare needs of its expatriates and other IT execs in Bangalore were hiring. They needed only three freshly graduated local surgeons with good IQs and abilities to learn fast. I thought, *Booom! That is sure another way I can be described.*

I applied instantly. I was invited to the interview sessions. We were up to three thousand that showed up. We were first put through a written IQ test. I easily flew through that and got into the shortlisted 400 who would take part in another written interview. This time, we were tested on a variety of subjects from clinical knowledge to bed side manners. They asked how you could tell a mother that you just mistakenly slit her son's aorta in a surgery. I simply answered I would do my best not to mistakenly slit her son's aorta in the first place.

I scaled through this huddle, alongside 49 others. We were arguably the 50 most brilliant Indians without a job. Only three would find one at the end of the day. I began to have a good feeling I would be in that number. It was my lucky day finally; the pay was good, working conditions were only next to heaven. I felt free to take a sweet jolly stroll down that cool breezy lane leading to my father's dreamland. I could become all he dreamt I could be after all.

The next process of the interview was to put 50 of us remaining through a one-on-one oral test with the chief surgeon. He was a British-Indian with grey over-grown beards and bald scalp. He called each person by number from a list with a loud voice that sank the heart of whoever he called.

We crowded the lobby to his office in wait for our turns. After questioning, a candidate would leave through a different door that led to a larger waiting room. This was to ensure that those at the lobby do not begin to ask what the questions were.

I heard his loud baritone call my number, 'Number 31.'

I hurried into his office, feeling lucky and a bit more confident than every other person. He fixed a stern look at me, sitting behind his large mahogany desk.

'Good day, sir,' I said with a forced smile.

He gestured at the seat opposite him. I sat.

'Chapra Mallick,' he called while adjusting his glass frame and looking at the sheet of paper he held.

'Yes, sir.'

He raised his head to take a thorough look at my face. I forced another smile. It was not working for me.

He pointed his left hand at the door, the door I came in through. 'Leave,' he said with a deep voice I barely heard.

'Sorry?'

'I ask that you leave my office, gentleman.'

I did not get whatever joke was going on, I must be missing something. 'But...bu..but...'

'Thanks for honoring our invitation, but we can't hire you, sir. I wish you only the best in your search for employment somewhere else.'

*Somewhere else? Is this old man kidding me?*

I searched his face for a sign he might be joking. No, I was not being *punked*. He meant what he was saying.

He raised his voice, louder than he ever did. 'Number 32.'

I noticed my legs were heavy now, my stomach began to cramp. I needed air badly; his office now seemed too small. I managed to stand up and faced the other door.

'No,' he said huskily, 'leave through the same door you came in.'

*Why not?* I was not asked a single question. I was feeling like an idiot.

Number 32 came in. the sultry lady I was eyeing all day. This time my head was bowed as I found my way through the door.

At the lobby, the candidates left to be interviewed began to ask me, 'What did he ask you?' all eighteen of them were asking the same goddamned question.

There was supposed to be a question for Buddha's sake. How can I be rejected by a man who only saw my name and face? Am I being followed by an evil spirit?

I looked at them who questioned me. They waited earnestly for my response. Instead of an answer, I broke down and began to cry. I wept shamelessly.

After that sleepless night came a bright morning. I got a call from a hospital manager. He saw my CV on the internet and wanted us to meet. I went to see him in his office that day.

The pay was amazing, \$75K per annum. It meant in only two years, I could put down money for six dowries and in the third, set up a business for my father. Our dreamland was now at its least fantastic, but it came with

a price. To be able to earn all that money, I had to agree to go ethically bankrupt.

Millal clinic was where parents who want to selectively abort female fetuses go to. That was exactly my job description. The first patient I had was a couple who already had a son.

What my stupid corrupt mind told me that time was, *look at the good side, you are saving this little boy from the future pressure of struggling to fund a dowry if his parents cannot afford it. Save the little boy from the miserable life you had.*

I did 31 more before I came back to my senses and resigned. Every time I see a woman, especially the ones who have become of immense value to society, a part of me dies. I never stop wondering if I had killed the next generation's Indira Gandhi.



**Someone Help Me Kill My  
Past**

I must be the reason the world rotates and revolves. I must be why they say everything that goes around comes around. I say this because my life has decided to be religiously Karma-compliant in so many ways. Every damn thing I have ever done wrong has come back to haunt me. Every mistake, every misjudgment, every mischief, every misconduct, every single thing with the exception of nothing; they'd all sailed unforgivably into my future to wait for me.

Usually, they would hit me hard like a boomerang then leave me to my regrets, but this one will never go away.

I joined the Biafran army in mid 1968 when the Nigerian civil war was at its deadliest. My son, Theophilus had just been born a few months back. It pained me to have to leave him and his mother behind in my village, but that was what all the men were doing those days.

When the war ended, I moved back to Benin with my family and managed to get our lives working again. Theo grew up and was ready for college; I was able to raise adequate funds to send him to the UK. When he finished school and became a man, he got a good job and sent me money often. He made me a happy man again.

Five years ago, Theo got married to a French girl, Christine. At first, I had a problem with my first son getting married to a foreigner, but he assured me it will

not in any way detach him from his roots. I only got to meet Christine six days ago when he eventually brought her to visit me in Orlu, the south-eastern Nigerian town where I live.

Christine turned out to be an incredibly loveable decent lady. Everything about our culture fascinated her. She likes to listen to me tell stories, any kind of story. She would take a little stool and sit by the side of my easy chair. That is how I know she's set to listen to my stories about my forefathers and their lifestyle. Those moments fill our evenings. Sometimes, it would take Theo to urge her to bed *so papa can rest too*.

On this particular evening, I decided I had talked too much about myself. On the other hand, Christine had told me very little about herself. I thought it would be interesting if I let her talk about her parents and childhood.

'Tell me about you,' I said to her.

'About me?'

'Yes, you. Your growing up, it must be interesting.'

'My mother lives in the small town of Le Peyrou, south of central Aurillac,' she said.

I was nodding like I knew where that was, 'Hmm, Aurillac,' I repeated to myself.

'You know there?'

'It's in France, right? It has to be in France,' I nodded with certainty like I put it there.

'About 150 miles east of Bordeaux,' she added.

Now it was no more interesting, I stopped nodding before she would decide to begin a geography lecture.

By the way it was why I wouldn't enjoy a conversation with a European; they could bore a monk with details.

'She likes Theo,' she said.

'My boy is likeable to all,' I said proudly, 'where did you grow up?'

'In Fargues-Saint-Hilaire near Bordeaux, with my mother. She worked as a hotel maid for a long time before she remarried and relocated and I moved to London.'

'You talk so little about your father,' I said, curious.

'Because I know so little about him.'

'What happened?'

'He left my mother three months before I was born. My mother said he was a good man and loved her so much, but I do not see anything good in what he did to his wife and his unborn child.'

'He just packed his things and left the house and that was it?' I thought it was so gross but did not say it. Maybe she could read that from my countenance.

'Practically. Yes, he just left us.' She shrugged pitifully.

'Have you seen him since you were born?'

'He never returned to us or to anyone who knew him. My mother waited for twelve years, hoping he will come back to her,' she shook her head and slightly bowed it, perhaps to hide her eyes which were gathering tears from me, 'he hurt her so bad.'

'I am so sorry about what he did to you, it sounds exceedingly hideous.'

'The annoying thing is, she keeps making excuses for him. She said they were so in love it would be hard to

believe he would leave her that way. Up to last year when I last saw my mother, she still kept a locket he gave her. His picture in it and on the back, they engraved the words, *NICHOLAS EN ROSSAINE, TOUJOURS*. He had a replica with her picture, according to her.'

'Nicholas en Rossaine...' I muttered to myself and allowed my voice trail off. 'Is that his name? Nicholas?'

'Yes, my mother is Rassaine.'

That was the point things began to get really curious, 'What did your father do in those days for a living?'

'He worked in a manufacturing plant in Bordeaux, but was just fired before he left. My mother said things were going terribly bad for him. He was broke. Nothing seemed to be working for him. Before he started the job at the plant, he was a captain in the army. He was expelled for what he thought was a minor offence.'

'He must have been frustrated.'

'There are no excuses for what he did.'

'Did he say where he was going to when he left?'

'He was not specific, he wanted to join the army again, but they won't take him back. He said to my mother he was going to join the army of another country, but she did not want him to be a soldier anymore. They were expecting a baby for God's sake. He had insisted that being a soldier was all he knew best to be. It became a long-standing argument between them. Then one morning, my mother woke up and instead of her man beside her, all she saw was a note. He was gone to a foreign land and left nothing but a promise to return soon with enough money to restart their lives together.'

‘Maybe he does not deserve as much blame as we put on him,’ I said, staring blankly into the increasingly blackening sky.

‘My mother said he was a good man. I don’t know what to believe. Why can’t a man stay back at least to meet his first child? Why can’t he stay with his wife through whatever circumstance? Why then do they say it’s for better and for worse?’

Her voice was faltering. I had no answer for her, all I had was a fear that had become all too familiar, yet unaccustomed to. It was that scary feeling that yet another element of my atrocious past was storming right back to me with its torturous nemesis.

‘Did your mother tell you what he looked like?’

She stood up and went inside the house. She returned shortly with a pocket-sized photograph of him and handed it to me.

I recognized the flaming blue eyes. I remembered the ruddy hair, the firm jaws under a tanned chiseled face. I remembered everything.

Frame by frame, all the events of 30 years ago rushed back to me like it was yesterday.

‘Nicholas the red gorilla,’ I said slowly and thoughtfully.

That was what we called him. He was one of the troops of French mercenary soldiers that came to fight for the Biafran army. After they helped push back federal troops in the first Onitsha battle, Nicholas the red gorilla was asked to command our battalion.

He was mean in training; he made us do the toughest routine than any other battalion. It goes without saying; Nicholas had little or no fan in the battalion.

I guess the only reason people took a second look at Nicholas was that he always wore a locket with the picture of a charming lady with a sultry smile.

Sometimes, he would fumble with the locket or simply clutch it while he spoke to us.

Before Nicholas came, we smoked marijuana freely. A soldier would hold a wrap between his lips as he spoke to a fellow...or even a commander and no one cried taboo. That was the first activity he outlawed the moment he took charge. If any soldier was caught smoking marijuana, the punishment was severe. It included being wiped forty strokes and forfeiting food for an entire day. There was also the risk of demotion in military rank.

It was not long before we proved to Nicholas we owned the town. We found a way around it. We smoked in a hideout in the forest where only a few of us knew. All about this location was coded, it had a code name, even the signal to assemble there was coded. One evening we were there, me and two others. It was supposed to be just like every other day; little did we know that stories of our joint had leaked to Nicholas the red gorilla.

Each man was on his second wrap when I looked up, and who I saw standing only eight feet before us was the devil himself. He had a hellish sneer on his face; there was no forgiveness for us, that much was assured.

What happened next happened so fast. I swear we did not pre-plan to do what we did next.

Just like Nicholas thought us in training, I and the soldier on my right picked up our rifles and fired simultaneously at him. Point blank hit.

I still can't explain how it happened so seamless yet unintended. I was not thinking at all, my mind was blank...no, too full of marijuana shit. It played out as if we had it all planned, like we had rehearsed it before.

What I would never forget was the shock in his eyes.

He did not fall immediately, he staggered and leaned on a tree trunk.

The shooting was brief. I dropped my rifle and ran towards him. I was not thinking clearly for sure. I wanted to hold him close, like I was thinking I had healing powers.

One of my partners pulled me back, 'What are you doing?'

'I thin...I, we should help him.'

'Do not allow his blood to stain you,' he said coldly, 'and we have to get out of here quickly.'

They ran away immediately. I stood there staring at the man, now dead on the ground. He held his locket tightly.

It was as if I was half crazy and half stupid. I bent over and took the locket from him. I turned the back and saw the words. *NICHOLAS EN ROSSAINE, TOUJOURS.*

How can I tell this tale to Christine? My hands began to tremble hard as I held the photograph and stared blankly.

'Are you okay, papa?' she asked.

Her voice reverberated distantly like she spoke into an endless hollow. Like I was in a deep, deep pit and



she was over it. I let the photograph fall off my hands and managed to get up.

‘What is the matter, papa?’

I was walking away. I could not say a word to her. My tongue felt dead, my entire body felt lifeless. I was a dead man walking. Like I had died and presenting myself to the demons of hell.

Christine would hate me forever; she would run away from me because I would be no better than a monster to her. She will no longer call me papa with that adoring voice.

I know I must confess it to her, but how? I went straight to my bed to think of how. It must be done by morning. She deserves to know the truth to forgive her father. Rossaine, too need to know Nicholas protected the locket of her picture with his last breath.

I owed them the truth, I must tell them the truth.

*...but how?*

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