

Nameless



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NAMELESS

CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| NAMELESS | 1 |
| In the Beginning | 3 |
| Nameless | 5 |
| The Rise And Fall of A Baby Girl | 9 |
| Thorny Life, Bare Feet | 17 |
| Jamila | 35 |
| Market Politics | 49 |
| Favour Under Law | 79 |
| Iquo's Farm | 89 |
| The Taxi Driver | 103 |
| Married Deities | 121 |
| AND THE EIGHT WRITERS RESTED | 129 |
| Biography - Writers | 131 |

N A M E L E S S

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning there were eight writers with a
deadline

And their ideas were without form, and void

And displeasure moved upon every brow

And out of the crucible of pain

Through quarrels and laughter and many drinks

They said:

Let there be a book!

They articulated their pain, isolated the issues

gave themselves freedom to dream, to create

And on the fifth day

Nameless was born

NAMELESS

Nameless is a city. A country within borders. A boundless space of ideas. A cosmos with realities, stark and painful, quiet and loud. A space crippled by fears. Nameless is populated. West African. It is in the minds of its people, black and proud. Some times Nameless is human. An idea. Sometimes it is in the past. Often times it is the now. Other times, it is the future.

The oldest residents know its dreams, its origins, beginning in a major stream and ending in a clear deep pond. The youngest residents know its pulse, feel its heat, its blood coursing through the veins of the country - the history they know is happening right before them, good and bad and ugly. Everyone knows its hopes.

Afele is the heart of Nameless. The marketplace of items and ideas; the centre where all things meet, where the blood of Nameless converges and gets pumped out into homes and heads and souls. It is the meeting point. It feeds Nameless and starves it.

NAMELESS

Nameless is ambitious. And in the third world. In darkness. With inadequate infrastructure. Darkened by the lack of electricity. Nameless is in light. Brightened by the hope in the eyes of its inhabitants. Slowed down by the potholes on the roads. Sped up by anticipation of change by desire. Nameless is rich. And poor. And in between.

Nameless is oppressed. Under surveillance. Nameless is free. To dream. Of change. Free. To dare. To live. To express. To break open the boxes in which sexuality and gender and tribe exist. Stifled and stifling. Free. To love and not to take oppression in the garbs of love. Free from the dubious bonds of religion and tradition, disguised as law.

Nameless is many things. It is the present we loathe. It is the past that haunts us. It is the future we want. Nameless is what we own, the things we are ashamed of, the hurt that binds us, the leaders who stain our present. Nameless is the clarity we have. It is the knowledge that things cannot remain the same. The hope that our children will only know our tears as history. It is all we must do to move us from the things that cage us to being able to fly free to a place beyond where nothing can stop us.

We are nameless.

And Nameless is us.



THE RISE AND FALL OF A BABY GIRL

Just a baby girl living my life.

That was the promise held out in the Instagram photos of strangers, on Facebook, in the buzz around the big city of Nameless and how it was superior to the drudgery of Iseyin, most prominently through the virtual existence of Sparkle, a fellow Iseyin girl who was now, from the unpopular, awkward daughter of one of the women in the fish market, transformed to an Instagram celebrity based in Nameless. The purveyor of that dream was the Tecno smartphone Oluwafisayomi got for her latest birthday. And the beginning of that dream was the name. No one popular had such an ugly name like Oluwafisayomi. So it had to be that in the beginning, Oluwafisayomi died. And Gold was born. Gold decided that she was going to live a *baby girl* life in any of the popular areas in the big city. The closest she seemed to be coming to this was through the pompous generosity of Alhaji Azeez.

"Don't worry. Let me just win this election. I will get you a flat away from Afele."

"I will get you a bigger generator."

"I will make you comfortable."

"Because you are my baby girl."

Gold knew more than most people, that, unlike the words of her mother's wisdom delivered mostly while smoking fish, good things did not come to those who waited. Not in Nameless. Here, good things came to those who hustled. That was how she got Alhaji Azeez in the first place - he used to patronize Modesta, a young woman trying to escape a village background like her, before Gold lured him away by allowing him to do the things Modesta wouldn't do, for the same price that Modesta charged.

In the long run, Alhaji Azeez's generosity grew, starting with one year's rent of her studio apartment behind the teeming Afele market. Now he came not only to feed his fetishes --he enjoyed putting his big toe between her legs and she let him pluck the hairs of her armpit until she screamed-- but also just to rest, to hide, or to whine about *that Igbo boy pretending to be a big boy from Nameless*.

That Igbo boy was Adekunle Nwakpa, an upstart whose mother was impregnated by an Igbo trader who left during the civil war and never came back. Alhaji Azeez refused to call him Adekunle.

“I go finish am. E get luck say things don change. Before, during Marwa time, who born de Omo Igbo wey go challenge me for here. I fit go their state dey drag position with them?”

Gold knew how to make the creases on his forehead flatten. When her fingers found the tense muscles on the base of his neck, that was when he made the promises. When the whining wound down to a moan, then the praises began. He would eulogise the manners in which she knew how to make him happy, how she was better than all his wives. From his first wife, Iya Yetunde who acted like a dunce most of the time, to his youngest Iya Bola who was too educated for her own good and seemed to enjoy causing trouble in the market. There was also his second wife, a troublesome woman who was always interrupting him and asking silly questions about things that didn't concern her. It was only Gold who let him be a man, a real man.

Today as he moaned, he was going to take her *out of this place*.

Today too, she did not tell him how stupid she thought the things he was saying were.

And in that cramped, often dark place, Alhaji Azeez became a man. And that Igbo man died along with his irritating wives, all his fears and inadequacies.

My government will finish the work that we have started. We will turn this Local Government into something Nameless people will be proud of. Nameless is dying. Foreign things are invading our community. I want to return Nameless to those of us who are indigenous to Nameless. The way we are going in the next ten years, Nameless people will be looking for a place to stay in this same Nameless with the way we have allowed strangers to feel comfortable.

He spoke in Yoruba and appealed to the largely homogenous crowd. People cheered and waved dustpans, the symbol of his party at this rally where Operation Flush Out was launched.

Because the rubbish heaps needed to be flushed out.

Because the ashawo needed to stop reducing the productivity of decent market men.

Because, if you checked, the men who sold pornographic CDs at the edges of Afele market were all settlers, as were the ashawo.

Because if you let them, these foreigners would choke good Nameless people with sex and filth and bad politics.

Her university forms had been filled and submitted. Three times.

Three times the bridge to an alternative life, blown up in her face when she stared at the admissions lists of the Lagos State University and didn't find Oluwafisayomi Akindele.

Oluwafisayomi had died, and forms filled by Gold could not bring her back to life.

The fourth time she paid 5,000 naira. This time she applied for a less prestigious, less sought after Diploma program. She heard that it was easier to switch to a preferred degree program once you were in. It would be easier to say to her mother that she was a student of LASU, than just she was doing business in Nameless Local Government.

Business meant nothing. Business was what paid for that Sparkles baby girl's Instagram life. And now that Oluwafisayomi was someone's baby girl herself, she knew how hard business was.

Three days to the release of the LASU list. Three days. To the announcement of the Local Government Election Results. Three nights since she had massaged the tense muscles of Alhaji Azeez. Three nights since she was his baby girl.

In the end it shocked her how easy things were. Easier than she anticipated.

How easy it was for an election to be won and lost.

How easy it was for crowds who waved dustpans to vote out a son of the soil and vote in an apparent stranger.

How easy it was to find her name on the list for Diploma in Science of Recycling.

How easy it was to change her mind about the department she wanted.

How easy they said it was to change departments.

How easy it was for a mourning politician to reject her calls. How easy it was to stop being his baby girl.

How easy violence started among those protesting the election results.

And how easy it ended, when the leader of the motor park touts was shot dead by soldiers.

In the end, Oluwafisayomi was born. Again.



THORNY LIFE, BARE FEET

Chuks Amadi walked into his favourite bar and was surprised how much like home the place felt. He had been moving around a lot these last few months and had gotten used to sleeping in different places while being entertained by different women. This city and this town felt different. It was a fairly large town called Nameless and he was beginning to think he could put down roots here. As he approached his favourite table at the back of the hall where his latest babe Modesta sat waiting for him, he noticed with mild irritation that everyone's attention was on the TV and not on him.

He sat and turned his chair around, trying to catch the news on the small flat screen TV hoisted on the wall. The news anchor droned on in a bored voice as images of people fleeing the conflict in the North-east flashed across the screen.

Everyone's attention was on the screen when Chuks spoke with a loud commanding tone, "See how they never talk about us soldiers." As though his thoughts had been transmitted into the TV, eliciting an in-

stant response, grim-faced soldiers appeared on the screen standing next to an armoured truck. Chuks shook his head. "This biased media never shows the real images. When we were at the battlefield, the kind of thing we saw was worse than the most horror film."

"What happened at the battlefield?" Modesta asked, awed that anything could be scarier than 'Willy Willy'.

"No be small thing, my sista!" Chuks' voice rose a number of decibels, soaking in her admiration. "Just imagine yourself coming eye to eye with someone who won't even shout if he was hit by a bullet."

Chuks lifted both hands and held them aloft as if they bore the weight of an unseen gun. "We were facing people like that!" he stressed.

"Na wa o!" Modesta said, as Chuks reached for her drink.

"That is why I had to leave nah." He continued. "Why will I stay to die for nothing when my big-big soja ogas are enjoying at home with their wives. Me I will be fighting madmen and snakes for inside thick forest, abi?"

Tijani, an older man who worked in the bar, was nearby and could hear their conversation clearly. He suddenly spoke up in agreement with Chuks.

"Our security forces should receive good money to reflect the dangerous work they do and the risks they take. This one way only big-big oga dey get plenty security no suppose continue, at all." Tijani said.

Chuks looked sideways to catch a glimpse of the elderly man speaking.

"It's true fa," Modesta agreed. "Dat one no go help. You hear wetin e talk. Bullet no dey scratch this people body sef." she kissed her teeth.

"But why we no get State Police sef? State police fit support federal police and soldiers fight this people." Tijani announced, obviously something he had thought long and hard about.

"You think that will solve our security problems?" Chuks countered. "State police can easily be abused. It has happened with small local forces made for traffic and local law enforcement by State governments in some places. With this terrorism wahala in the country, vigilante people fit become politicians' armed thugs, armed robbers and them fit even join the terrorist too. Even if dem like, make them carry the whole soja way dey Africa go there, these terrorists no go give up. Dem go kill our gallant people come clean mouth." Chuks concluded.

Suddenly laughter broke from the other end of the room as Ajasko stood up. “Chuks, shut up there! No be you wey run away from soja come here dey form expert?”

Chuks' eyes darted back and in a hurry to see who else was paying attention. He had only been in the army for under five years before he was posted to the Northeast. He had cried bitterly that night, remembering the lengths he had gone to, to falsify his basic school certificate result and lower his age considerably to get into the army. Even after that, he had only been accepted into the army as a personal favour to his uncle from the aged army recruiting sergeant who had served with Chuks' uncle during the civil war decades ago.

Life after being accepted in the Army was easy enough as Chuks was deployed to be an aide to another of his uncle's friends, a senior officer this time. That had allowed him a lot of freedom until the officer died. Then he was deployed to North-east where the country's armed forces were engaged in efforts to repel insurgents. Chuks only stayed a week, and he jumped on a freight train headed away from the region at the very first opportunity he got.

No one in Nameless was supposed to know this. He had confessed all this to Ajasko only last week when he had drunk too much beer. It wasn't just that he had been drunk, he had also gotten into a fight.

Chuks had the habit of using words like “bloody civilians” to people around the town. On that night, the so-called bloody civilians had had enough of his nonsense and had decided to take the matter into their own hands, bloodying him up with their fists for a change. When Ajasko came round the corner and saw the Nameless boys beating Chuks, he had offered to head for the small military base in the outskirts of the town to call some army boys to come and help their brother get revenge. It was to his greatest shock that Chuks had begged him, crying and trembling with his sprained knee and bruised face, not to call anybody but merely carry him somewhere before any soldier saw him. The fear in his eyes convinced Ajasko to act first and ask questions later. It was not till they had gotten to another bar that Chuks confessed to Ajasko that he had deserted the army and escaped from the Northeast. He told a stunned Ajasko that if the army found him he would be court martialled and executed.

Chuks had attempted to justify his actions by telling Ajasko about the nation's porous Northeastern borders and the proliferation of all sorts of small arms in the country. He kept repeating how these increased the incidence of armed robbery, armed militia activities, the continuous trend of militant insurgency, and how he knew his life would not amount to much if he remained in the Northeast wearing an army uniform.

Chuks kept talking about how things were taking a turn for the worst and a state of near anarchy looked imminent even beyond that part of the country, so he had escaped as early as he could. He had witnessed reprisal killings by armed militias across tribal lines in other parts of the country, and there were indiscriminate bomb blasts and senseless shootings. The ordinary people were taking the law into their own hands and this became the order of the day. Ordinary people were being targeted and killed along religious and ethnic lines. There wasn't any chance of getting justice for the victims of these acts of madness, he argued. Even the armed forces got in on the act and further tormented the people they were supposedly protecting.

Chuks had fled the conflict to escape the helpless situation as he saw it. He wasn't going to remain with other members of the nation's security forces and collect peanuts, with a joke for pension and insurance packages. Like most of his colleagues in the army, Chuks felt demotivated, so he demobilized himself and left. He wasn't the only one doing so. When he left, the Northeast was virtually deserted. Members of the communities that dared to stay back had to resort to vigilante efforts to provide reliable security for themselves. This was the practice beyond the Northeast as well. People were imprisoning themselves inside their homes, like they could fence out the world outside.

As a direct result of these communal efforts to provide reliable security, the State authorities appeared to now be physically and psychologically arming mentally and emotionally untrained youths. The vigilante groups they formed were becoming a problem in their own right, as they gained more authority.

Chuks kept lamenting all of this, drinking more beer all the while. Ajasko grew more and more disgusted by his new friend's cowardly actions. Chuks had collapsed in a heap in that bar and they hadn't seen each other since that day.

"Bros Ajasko, na me you wan enter today?" Chuks asked while trying to make his way towards the door. "Waiter please give my brother another bottle of stout so that he can enjoy the baby boy life too." He added drawing smiles from people around as his generosity was acknowledged. Ajasko hissed and drained his cup.

"Major today, captain tomorrow, lieutenant next tomorrow. Just kuku carry your wahala and go before somebody come report you for here. No dey add your mouth when real men who are fighting for yonda are talking."

The patrons at the bar took their attention off the screen for a second, waiting for a heated reply, but when the two adversaries did not continue, they lost

interest and went back to watching the news and drinking away their meagre earnings.

Chuks craftily made a hasty retreat to his room to resume his activities with Modesta, the girl he had met last night. She said she had just come in from the big coastal city and thinking of her name made Chuks smile as clearly modesty wasn't a virtue she possessed. Luckily modesty was not what he sought. He climbed the stairs with renewed gusto and promptly forgot about Ajasko and his aproko mouth.

Tijani the sixty year old cleaner was the only person who had paid close attention to the exchange between the two men, and he had a thoughtful look on his face as he made his way out of the room and back to his work post. He was in timely retirement because he was honest about his age at his time of employment. This was rare. It was considered almost normal to falsify documents or information, but Tijani had no respect for people who did not respect the due process and the law. Most of those he met in government service had fraudulently altered their ages to stay on, but Tijani was happy to leave even though he wasn't ready for retirement in the least. He chose to continue residing in the town he had actively served for thirty years, rather than return to his region of origin. He had gotten married,

started a family and built a small house in this town, where he was stationed, far away from his ethnic origins. Yes, Nameless had been good to him.

As an elderly man of minority origins, remaining with his family in a society not indigenous to him after retirement was an easy decision, because he had lived away from his own people most of his adult life. Returning back to his home town after retirement was never an option for him or his family. They had assimilated completely, and spoke the local dialect fluently. Tijani and his family were prepared to tolerate the tacit second-class status sometimes allotted to them by some strangers, but he and his family were generally happy.

His only source of sadness was Tabitha his wife who was suffering from diabetes and in dire need of money for medication. His pension had still not been cleared, and welfare and social security was non-existent, so he had taken a job in the hotel to make ends meet while the government prosecuted the pension thieves and returned the money to the rightful owners who had given their strength and their best years to the country.

It never escaped him that he was eligible to benefit from the existing pension scheme, but because payments were highly irregular and it is always a herculean feat to get any funds out of institutions when due, he had in essence re-joined the ever growing

number of unemployed who are not constitutionally provided for and are left to their own devices.

His brother's voice always rang in his head, reminding him that he should have had more children so that they could cater to him in his old age instead of waiting for the government to provide social security.

"TJ, children are wealth from God so do not deny yourself the gift that is your due. If you have many, at least one of them may have a good job so that they can care for you," was always his goodbye conversation with Tijani.

Tijani was struggling to make ends meet at such an advanced age, so he wondered how he could have taken care of more children. He was always glad he did not have more children, but once in a while, he did wonder if his brother was right.

Tijani was always amazed at the islands of prosperity which existed amidst oceans of poverty, without a formal social security structure. Nameless wasn't delivering the much-heralded dividends of democracy to the citizens like it shouts from the roof tops it is doing, especially to women. Poverty was still cemented among the low income earners. Crime rates had increased exponentially, life expectancy kept falling, maternal mortality rates kept rising, and

healthcare was only affordable to high paying customers.

Tijani wondered if any functional social security scheme would be implemented during his lifetime. He only hoped that his children would have available to them a welfare scheme funded by a progressive tax structure providing for and supporting the poorest, weakest and neediest of the society. The existence of such a social security framework would greatly reduce corruption, and public workers would be assured of an income and social services after retirement when they could no longer work. He had read reports that showed social security schemes made it possible for governments to raise entire strata of society from poverty, in a planned, scalable and measurable method.

That night as Tijani headed home, he was tired and worried as was usual with him. It dawned on him that if he played his cards right, he could get a sizable compensation from the military for exposing Chuks as a deserter. Tijani could really do with the money. Tani, his oldest daughter was just about rounding up her studies for a degree in Catering, and he knew she would be home expecting him to dole out more money for her upcoming practicals. He also thought of his second child Bitrus; the boy had completed his National Diploma three years ago and since then it had been near impossible for

him to secure admission back into the Polytechnic for his Higher Diploma. Tijani could not understand why Bitrus had to finish the same school and again seek admission to return to it. Like the entire nation, Tijani was not convinced that a university degree was more qualitative than a polytechnic higher diploma. He would rather Bitrus learned a trade rather than obtain his Higher Diploma and be further segregated against for not having a degree.

"At the rate things are headed, our future generations may not be adequately educated and our future teachers could end up being worse than their pupils," he said aloud to himself. "With the unattractive salaries paid to teachers, those who are the most suitable for the profession are not attracted to it, and even if they are attracted, don't have a fair chance of getting the jobs because the field is oversaturated by people who are clearly unqualified," he mused.

As he walked past houses with high fences and barbed wire bordered walls, the ever present rumbling of generators accompanying him, Tijani thought bitterly that the only children with access to qualitative and uninterrupted education were those of the ruling class. If qualitative education was readily available and affordable, then graduates of the nation's educational system would be considered amongst the best in the world. Parents like Tijani would then feel proud of educating their children

and look forward to seeing their graduate children work as researchers, scholars, professors and even philosophers, at home and abroad. This can only be the case when a ninety-eight percent literacy level is accomplished all over the nation. However with this same shoddy arrangement in place, building local capacity and leading in essentials couldn't even be achieved.

It had always baffled Tijani why different sides of the country have different literacy levels, with the gap being incredibly wide across certain parts of the nation. He wondered why he bothered to educate his children, when most educational certificates given by the local tertiary institutions were seemingly useless. Graduates tended to remain uneducated after spending years struggling through the country's formal education system. The average Nameless graduate lacks the ideal command of language, with archaic knowledge of their fields of study and little or zero practical knowledge. Tijani recalls he had to pay to have someone write the prerequisite WAEC and NECO examination for Bitrus after his previous results were very bad. It hurts him to his heart's core that he had to stoop that low, but corruption works best in this land.

The issues at the universities were really bad, with more people applying for admissions in than there were spots available. There weren't enough qualified

teachers where they are needed and in fields for which they are most required. Meanwhile, the incessant strikes by academic staffs caused so many delays and very few people graduated university without at least an extra year added.

Tijani felt Tani was wasting her time and his money in formal education. Her mother had already taught her to cook beautifully and he had a gut feeling that she would end up staying back home and unemployed, unless she developed the business acumen to start work as a caterer. Tijani knew in his gut that if unemployed graduates could be trained to be qualified teachers in the essential fields; especially science and technology, the problems of unemployment would be greatly reduced.

At this juncture Tijani made the definitive decision that he would have Bitrus join a skill acquisition programme. It is needless to have a good sounding prestigious formal education certificate and not be able to earn a living with it. Tijani would ensure Bitrus joins students that get trained in various technical areas so that they become self-reliant, enabling them to be self-employed and start cottage industries.

It became crucial for Tijani to get the reward for exposing Chuks. The money would really come in handy. He started to plan what he would do with the reward money he wasn't even sure was there.

The next day, it was already six in the evening when Tijani left for work. He was late, it would take him six minutes to make it to the hotel and he ought to have been at his post at six. He barely had enough time to get home, clean up and leave because he had to take Tabitha to see a new doctor to discuss some innovative traditional medication.

Tabitha's orthodox medication was so expensive, they had to find a permanent solution. The State appeared unwilling to fund basic healthcare. Health insurance for the masses was literally non-existent. Conditions of employment for medical personnel were bad, as qualified personnel left for other countries or set up really expensive private hospitals.

Poor people were left to patronize state hospitals that were at best death traps, though when they are first opened and in the absence of the incessant strikes by the public healthcare staff, they'd functioned well.

Tijani and Tabitha waited for hours to see the traditional medicine practitioner that doctor Jamila had told them about, but still they hadn't attended to Tabitha by the time Tijani was forced to hurry away to work.

By the time he managed to navigate and manoeuvre through the still busy Afele market, where stores were closing for the day, it was ten minutes after six. He was relieved to learn from a colleague that Chuks was still upstairs in his room with a new girl. But he headed upstairs anyway to ensure that he was still there, before he made the call. No point the authorities getting here only to find that Chuks had checked out.

He knocked and waited. There was no response at first. Then he heard a lady giggling from within the room. He knocked again, and this time Chuks' muffled voice answered. A few seconds later a half dressed Chuks opened the door.

"Ah Baba, na you? Please come in."

"Evening sir," Tijani greeted and followed Chuks into his room. On the bed, lying completely naked, the bed sheet barely covering her, was the young lady whose tinkling laughter he had heard. She was turned away from the door, her hip jutting at an angle, her long fake synthetic fibre hair covering half her face as she spoke into the phone she held to her ear. "Yes mummy, I am attending choir practice. I might return late."

What was it about her voice? But before Tijani had time to process this, she turned around and the light fell full on her face. Her face slackened in shock and

it could only be a mirror of Tijani's face. For it was Tani, Tijani's daughter.



JAMILA

Jamila walked briskly to her car, got in, and locked the door. It was not until the AC kicked in that she realised she had been holding her breath. She looked down at her hands and saw that they shook slightly. She clamped them between her thighs and forced herself to breathe, to be calm. Seeing her co-wife in Afele market had shaken her. It had been eight months since her husband took his latest wife, and there was never a time that Jamila was prepared for this reaction. The anxiety always started in the pit of her stomach and despite her best efforts to quench it, spread through her body until it reached her fingers. This was crazy. Insane. Where was this coming from? This was untenable. What was she going to do? But then, why had she gone to Afele market and not any of the others...?

She had had these feelings once before. During her second year in the university, a strong friendship had developed between herself and her course mate Barbara. Close on the heels of the friendship, an intense attraction had grown. A physical attraction, which took Jamila completely by surprise. They did

everything together, and Barbara encouraged Jamila to explore her alternative sexuality. During those curious months, they had attended parties, raves, pride. Jamila had grown to embrace her attraction to other women. After university, she had put it firmly behind her, stashed it away like somebody else's bad idea, never to see the light of day. Until she met Shakira, her husband's new wife.

That first night when Jamila was first introduced to Shakira, she felt all the old cravings crawling out of the pit where she had them buried.

Jamila's tongue tied up in knots every time Shakira was near, her brain going into a whirl. She watched Shakira around the house and fancied that she was being deliberately teased by Shakira's veiled stares and innuendos. Jamila knew she was being silly revelling in the thought that Shakira was dressing up for her. Shakira could not stand her. Still, Jamila sought her out; in the mornings before she headed to work, in the evenings when she returned. She always found an excuse to drop by Shakira's part of the house. She started to feel like she needed to see Shakira to get through the day - her slow way of talking, the way she flung her long braids over her shoulder, the bold stare, her swaying, sensuous walk. And Jamila liked to hear the kids talk about what 'aunty Shakira' had done that day. She listened with such rapt fascination about very mundane accounts

that she wondered if anyone else noticed that her face was heated, the way her lips parted, the sweat. And when she lay in bed at night, it was even more unbearable. When Alhaji was with Jamila, she thought of Shakira, and when he was with Shakira, Jamila felt a jealous rage well up in her.

To curb her raging emotions, Jamila reminded herself of all the times Shakira had tried to be mean to her, especially in the beginning when she first came - ignoring her greetings, the curt answers, and eventually, refusing to let Jamila carry her baby. That hurt the most, the day Shakira had turned away from her, refusing her help, that morning she'd been struggling to balance crying baby, diaper bag, and food warmer as she headed to her shop. Jamila had stretched out her hand to help calm the child when Shakira turned away and muttered, "This one wey no get pikin wan carry my own learn work." Jamila had heard every word then, and heard them again now. She closed her eyes, allowing the pain to wash through her afresh.

But now Alhaji was out of town. She and Shakira were both free in the mornings, and they had 'bumped' into each other three times in the last two days. Suddenly, the feelings of hurt and anger that she had conjured to help her cope vanished.

As was customary, they said good morning and asked after each other's health before going their

different ways. But in the last three days, since Alhaji had announced he was going to be traveling, Jamila's mind had gone into overdrive. She wondered what would happen in the two days Alhaji was going to spend out of Nameless. That was all the time she had to make the decision that could affect everything...

She swiftly put those thoughts out of her head as she swung the car into reverse and drove to the office. She checked her bag again to make sure she remembered to take the knitted muffler she had bought for Matron Oshaloye.

Jamila didn't understand why she couldn't get pregnant. Alhaji was rough, gruff, and not romantic at all, but if that had produced children for the others, why wasn't it good enough for her? Was it because she barely tolerated him, because hearing, "juya" set her teeth on edge? Was her fear of contracting an STD the reason she couldn't enjoy her husband? Or was it because... *astaghfirullah*, she muttered as she got to her office door. She wouldn't allow herself that thought.

She hung her white coat on the door and walked to the fridge to get a sip of water. She started to un-

wind her hijab when there was a knock on the door. "Come in", she breathed without turning round.

"Feels like today is never going to end, Lucy", Jamila said as she put the bottled water back in the fridge. "Right now I just want to go and sleep." She turned with a tired smile on her face that quickly morphed into narrowed eyes as she realized the person in the room with her wasn't Lucy, but a young lady with very pretty eyes looking back at her.

"I am sorry I am not Lucy, but she told me to knock on the door and see if you were inside".

Jamila hurriedly retied her hijab while thinking to herself that it was a good thing the person who came in was a woman, not a man. Mallam Kabir would be horrified to learn that another man had looked at her uncovered while at work. He took such things very seriously, especially, and he was an informer for her husband - this was the concession she'd had to make for him to allow her to work.

"Please sit down," she murmured while making her way behind the desk. "I am Doctor Jamila Mahmood and I assume you have an emergency if Lucy sent you in with a file already." She nodded at the blue file in the young lady's hands.

"Yes. Well, no. Not really." The lady stuttered. "My name is Anna and I am sorry you are having such a

long day. Lucy was called away by another doctor while she was bringing me in."

"It's ok, I should have looked before I spoke." Jamila said, taking the file from the young woman's hands and starting to flip through it. "How can I help?"

"Doctor, I am pregnant." Anna's voice shook.

"Ok. Have you done a pregnancy test?"

"Yes. I bought a kit from the pharmacy."

"When did you do it?" Jamila studied the open file before her.

"Last week."

Anna was pale, clearly anaemic. Pimples peppered her forehead, revealing some combination of bad nutrition. She looked young, her right hand was busy spinning the colourful plastic bracelets that hung on her left wrist.

"You do realise this is a fertility clinic." Jamila shut the file close. "I will have to refer you to somewhere you can get prenatal care."

Anna cleared her throat. "Doctor, it is a bit more complicated than that."

"What is the complication?"

"Please. I don't want the baby."

"Well, even if that was legal, you are in the wrong place." Jamila's delicate brows furrowed. "We help make babies here. Not get rid of them."

"Please doctor you have to help me." Anna's feverish eyes bored into Jamila. "No one else will, and if my parents find out, they will kill me. They will literally kill me!"

"Whose baby is it?"

"My boyfriend's."

"Is it a serious relationship?"

"Yes." chin trembled, Anna clasped her hands together. "But it is also an impossible one. He has no job and my father will sooner bury me than accept me being with a Muslim."

"Well. That surely complicates things." Jamila leaned back in her chair, arms crossed over her chest.

"That aside I do not want the baby. I cannot have a baby now." Anna cried. "It will literally end my life. But I want to do it safely."

"I am sorry. There is really nothing I can do for you here." Jamila was resolved on this issue.

Jamila let her mind drift a bit as she listened to the lady beg some more and explain how this was her last resort before her life ends. In the end Jamila had to ask her to leave.

I am a Muslim. It is illegal. It is wrong to take the life of a human being.

Jamila thought of all the things she could have told Anna, and felt conflicted about treating the termination of a pregnancy like an administrative process that she was unable to do.

On her way back to the clinic from lunch, Jamila saw a crowd gathered by the main roundabout near Afele Market roundabout. Somehow, she had managed to drive past this place again. Now, holdup was building and she was dragged to a complete halt because cars were parking for their occupants to go and take and look.

"What is going on there?" Jamila asked someone who was walking away from the crowd.

"Na one girl o." the passerby paused by Jamila's car. "E be like say she don die."

"And nobody is taking her to the hospital?"

Jamila parked her car and did the one thing she never did, she went to where a crowd was gathering.

"I am a doctor," she said as she made her way through the crowd of people struggling to take pictures with their phones. One person even had an iPad and was recording a video.

As she inched closer, she heard voices and they all seemed to agree on one thing. The lady seemed to have deliberately wandered into oncoming traffic. What would make this young beautiful girl want to take her life was the question that left them all puzzled. Some hissed, some cursed her, others sympathized and berated her critics. Still, their cameras and devices clicked. Their social media accounts would be fed.

The market commentator Bonaventure watched proceedings from his place at the edge of the crowd. Today's theme was patriotism. Yes it had to be, people didn't love their neighbours anymore and it was his duty to tell them. To guide them back on the straight and narrow.

Yes, straight and narrow! Imagine Chike who refused to give him pure water that day. So what he didn't have money to pay, didn't he say he would pay later? What if he was dying? Chike would let him die because he didn't have money? Ahh, these people truly needed salvaging.

“Our affections have deoxidized! Actualities have metamorphosed into fibs, falsehood and outright prevarications! The oeuvre by our parturients past currently stands endangered by selfish machinations aimed at self-aggrandizement!”

The words were still sputtering from his lips when he saw that the cause for the people gathered by the side of the road wasn't a money doubler or a performer of any kind, but because of the young woman sprawled on the ground. She looked unconscious, no movement of any sort.

Why were they taking photographs then? No one could help? He was even more convinced these were a people who had lost their way. He stood at the opposite side of the road and started taking pictures of them with his imaginary camera. A few of them saw him and put their cameras away.

They definitely needed him, he thought as he headed towards Iya Kazeem's shop to ask for water, maybe even a bite to eat.

Jamila knelt down, and to her horror, noticed the face was familiar. She took Anna's pulse and was relieved to feel the telltale beat that confirmed the young woman was not dead. Two men agreed to help her carry Anna into a taxi. Jamila did not want to use her own car and paid the taxi man twice the fare to drive behind her.

As she drove, contemplating her options with Anna, she felt a chill pass through her body. But knew she had but one choice.

Back at home. Jamila stepped in the shower, turned the water on full heat, then she scrubbed and scrubbed. She had managed to detach herself from all that she felt, believed, when at the hospital, what had to be done was done. But now she felt the cocoon cracking, her emotions were raw. Jamila felt chafed. When she saw Shakira walk through the general living room on her way to her side of the house, a sense of inevitability, irrefutability took hold within her. Shakira looked happy. Why shouldn't Jamila be happy too? For so long, she had denied herself that joy. Jamila tried to pace the feeling away as she had a hundred times before but for some reason today it was too strong. Her body trembled, her knees especially felt weak. Her heart was pounding as images of a naked Shakira flashed through her head. She jumped up from the sofa. What she was contemplating was crazy, more dangerous than what she had done in the hospital. But she felt again for the second time that she had no choice. Today was the day.

Shakira was walking out of the bathroom when Jamila walked into her side of the house. There was no excuse for why she was there. Shakira was star-

bled to find someone else in her quarters. Jamila stared at her and approached her, each step deliberate. Shakira backed away slowly, thinking Jamila was coming to attack her. When Jamila got close she abruptly stopped and pulled her brightly coloured boubou over her head. She let the gown fall to the ground. There was nothing underneath it.

Shakira's eyes widened with surprise.

"I look at you and I go crazy," Jamila said, her voice cracking. It was either going to work, or her marriage was over and she would suffer humiliation.



MARKET POLITICS

Alhaji Azeez raised his eyes from the centre table. His unseeing gaze had been focused on a spot for the past three or so minutes. In truth, he was pondering the words of this woman who was wiping beads of sweat off her brow. How anyone could sweat so profusely in this mild weather was beyond him. She was dressed in iro and buba, an off-white colour that emphasized the dark chocolate hue of her skin.

Alhaji Azeez had a strong dislike for large women. And he did not like dark women. Looking at his wives, one could easily tell. They were all slim-waisted and light-skinned. Even after they bore him sons and daughters, they kept their shape and remained as slim as when he had met them. How they came to achieve this he did not know or care. But they all knew that if they began to "spread", well, they had themselves to blame. He had said it often enough, even though it seemed like he was joking, "a larger woman will just make my penis lazy, I cannot help it," and he would guffaw at his own silly joke.

However there was no laughing at his visitor today. She was Iya Kazeem, Alhaji Maroof's wife. People said she was the one that wore the trousers in the home, and that she was the one who should not be crossed. Alhaji Azeez believed this too, and had often wondered what Alhaji Maroof saw in her. He was a soft-spoken and outwardly cultured man that never raised his voice. Yet Azeez had seen her scuttle off once when after a lot of posturing, Alhaji Maroof directed a piercing stare at Iya Kazeem and ordered her in mild tones to take herself out of his sight even though she had wanted to sit in on one of their meetings. Azeez saw then that despite all her gyrations, when it came to her husband, she was a pussycat. At the same time Azeez grudgingly admitted that it was her tireless energy that got him elected as Local Government chairman two years ago. At first he wondered why she had fought so hard on his case, spent so much money enticing the women traders at the market, even though his success seemed unlikely. He was younger than his opponent in a city that favoured age and respect, and he had far less money. But Alhaji Maroof and his wife had chosen to support him, and for that he would remain eternally grateful.

Azeez had shown this gratitude over the years in many ways, and they had a tacit understanding when it came to the subject of awarding contracts. Gradually, Alhaji Azeez saw that this couple worked

like a well-oiled machine. Alhaji Maroof had the trustful face, the connections, and his wife was the brawler. Together, they delivered, and reaped the benefits. Azeez paid them the necessary calls and shows of gratitude and solidarity now and then, but kept contact and interaction to a minimum. It was a wonder he was able to succeed in politics. He was not able to fawn over people, a cheap requisite in this game of politics. With the Maroofs, his dignity was intact. And an election was coming round again.

“How are the children?” Azeez inquired to keep up appearances.

“We thank God.” Iya Kazeem replied.

“How is the market?” He added.

“The market is the same, good today, bad tomorrow. Who knows what a new day will bring? We are just looking.” She replied dryly.

There was a brooding silence. To break it, Azeez cleared his throat and offered to fetch one of his wives to serve Iya Kazeem a drink, or perhaps she would like some food. She shook her head, impatiently tapping her left foot. There was a furtive air around her today, even for someone like her who was usually restless. Finally she asked, “Where is Iya Bola?”

Azeez was surprised, though he hid it well. Iya Kazeem asking for Iya Bola? Something had to be amiss. Iya Kazeem kept away from Iya Bola as much as possible – she even seemed to take pains to avoid her as Iya Bola had informed him. Iya Bola claimed not to mind Iya Kazeem’s cold shoulder, but as her husband, he knew she did. He knew her too well. She was the youngest of his wives, and in the constant jostling for relevance, they all sought to befriend Alhaji Maroof and his wife.

With his first two wives, these attentions were welcomed. The only exception was Iya Bola’s case. There was a note of aloofness in the way Iya Kazeem interacted with his youngest wife, and Azeez suspected that Iya Kazeem was a tad intimidated by Iya Bola even though she would rather die than admit it. And yet, here was Iya Kazeem asking after Iya Bola.

“Iya Bola is at work,” Azeez told Iya Kareem.

Iya Kazeem’s thick lips curled. Azeez watched her closely, slightly perturbed. “What is the matter?”

“Iya Bola is the matter. When you said you wanted to marry that woman, what did I tell you? Did my husband and I not warn you she was trouble? Why you would decide to bring that omo ibo...” Azeez cut her short, they had had this conversation before.

“Nkechi is not an omo ibo as you call her.”

“Listen to the name, it speaks for itself. Those people like money too much.”

Azeez had to smile at the irony. He did not know anyone who liked money more than Iya Kazeem. She owned the largest number of stalls in different markets and seemed to have her hands in every pie. By every standard, she was a wealthy woman, but it never seemed to be enough. She was a favourite topic of conversation among his wives when they gathered to recount experiences of their day. She was a Shylock of sorts, always lending money to a stall owner and when they were unable to pay, she would simply write off the debt as long as they agreed to her acquiring their stall. His wives wondered if Iya Kazeem had ambitions to take over the whole market. Needless to say she was not terribly popular, but they seemed to be afraid of her, and Al-haji Azeez detected a slight note of jealousy and wistfulness from his wives. All except Nkechi who owned just one stall where she sold fabrics.

Azeez waited for Iya Kazeem to continue. “We warned you, these graduate-type women speaking big-big grammar everywhere, this woman will put you in trouble. Did you listen? No. You who is like a son to us. Now look at the wahala this woman is bringing.”

“What wahala?” Azeez was now truly concerned. Iya Kazeem regarded him with cold eyes, as if he knew exactly what her problem was with his wife.

“What wahala indeed.” Iya Kazeem eyed him sceptically. “You mean you do not know?”

“Know what?”

Alhaji Azeez felt his muscles tense, he felt that Iya Kazeem’s next words would finally break the suspense.

“With all her degrees, she decided to come and disturb us in the market, calling herself a market woman. I knew something was wrong but did I know the extent of her greed? No. Iyaloja indeed. Where has she heard that a small girl like her can be Iyaloja? Ehn? Tell me.”

“Did you say Iyaloja?”

Iya Kazeem fired on, ignoring him. “That your wife does not understand the way things work. She is talking of taxes, the kind of things she is saying, the women are not happy. She can never mind her business, how can she be gathering my girls around her stall like that? Imagine that nonsense. Alhaji Azeez, I have come to you as a mother to advise you, tell Iya Bola to desist from this ambition of hers. We like things the way they are.”

There were few times Alhaji Azeez was struck dumbfounded as he was at that moment.

“Oho so she has not even told you. She is even going behind your back. Don’t say I did not warn you. My husband is not happy with the idea.” Iya Kazeem shot him a meaningful stare.

Immediately sensing a challenge, Azeez rose and tried to hold her gaze, but her cold eyes caused Azeez to break off first. He stared at the ground.

“We, my husband and I, and my girls at the market, feel that your first wife, Iya Yetunde, would be a better choice.”

“I will deal with this.” Azeez tried to sound reassuring.

“You better do o. Ehen. My husband sends his regards.” She rose to leave, fastening her wrapper more securely around her waist. “Greet the children when they return from school.”

Azeez nodded lost in thought as Iya Kazeem strode away. He could hear her voice echoing long after she has left. It made no sense, her words. Nkechi, aspiring to be an Iyaloja. Where did that come from?

She flipped open the class register and pretended to count the number of ticks by each name.

“Listen to me...”

She raised her head and cocked it to one side, a smile playing at the corner of her mouth. The light filtering in through a split in the drawn up blinds bathed one half of her face and cast the other in shadow. “Yes?”

It wasn't often that Lenny was lost for words Ngozi ploughed on to seize the moment.

“Do you know the best place to make change happen from?”

“No.”

“I will tell you. From within, that's where. We have talked and talked about what is wrong with the market. Now I have this idea that I think is brilliant and I expected support from you, not disapproval. Can you not see?”

“Let's say I cannot. Educate me.”

Ngozi sighed. “As we both know, the market has a lot of poor women who basically live from hand to mouth, these are the women that have become my friends since I opened that fabric shop. These women are amazing, and their lives can be im-

proved if they have access to loans, low interest loans that they can use to trade. You know how it is when they try to get loans from the banks... I want to start a market cooperative tax, where the market women who have more stores and earn more income pay a higher market tax and the tax can be available as loans to the poor market women. This fund will raise these women out of poverty. A progressive tax is the answer to the developmental needs of that place, and I will make it happen.”

Lenny studied Nkechi, the anger seeping away as they regarded each other.

“You are right.” Lenny said, inhaling deeply. “I am just worried about you.”

“Have I not always taken care of myself?” Nkechi rose from the chair, came around the desk and stood in front of Lenny. The look in her eyes was earnest, determined. She brushed imaginary lint off Lenny's shirt. Her hand played with the top button and lingered there, as they moved closer to each other. They regarded each other silently, and then slowly, Lenny's head towards her and everything else was forgotten.

“Good afternoon Iyaloja.” Tawa prostrated as she entered Nkechi’s fabric stall at the bustling marketplace.

Nkechi made an attempt at showing offence but it was a weak one, she was pleased at the appellation. “Tawa, I am not Iyaloja yet.”

“You are already a mother to us.” Tawa smiled, highlighting the marks that adorned her cheeks. She settled on an empty stool near to the seated Iya Bola. “Iyaloja have you heard about what happened to Iya Adijat?”

If Nkechi was to admit it herself, she had become something of a godmother to the many women who earned their living through trade in the marketplace, it was only natural that news of the break-in of Iya Adijat’s stall had reached Iya Bola’s ears. She had not witnessed it herself but she might as well have, Nkechi could describe the way Iya Adijat leapt with her hands on her head, tears streaming down her face when she discovered her goods had been wiped out in the robbery. Iya Adijat had been inconsolable, rolling in the mud and filth of the market floor.

“Tawa, everyone has heard about that story.” Nkechi swiped at a fly that had landed on the sleeve of her lace buba.

“Not this one.” Tawa leaned in, occupying Nkechi’s space. “Mr Jegede has refused to give Iya Adijat the money she has a right to.”

“What do you mean.” Nkechi asked.

Jegede owned Green River Insurance. His office was at a ramshackle dilapidated building not far from the marketplace. When he had first attempted to convince market women of the need to insure their goods, the women had laughed him off. His pretentious accent and badly mangled Yoruba were unfortunate vehicles to attempt to transfer his idea to the market women. It was then that he had approached Iya Bola. Nkechi had seen the wisdom in paying 100 naira per day to protect her wares in case of any unforeseen accident. It had helped that Lenny, her children’s lesson teacher had mentioned that the school she taught in also used the services of Green River Insurance. Now Lily of the Valley was not exactly a top-notch school where blue-collar children answered roll call, however it was the best that Iya Bola could afford, and she trusted the proprietor of the school and staff there, like Lenny.

If Mrs Bosede considered it wise to buy a health insurance package from Green River Insurance, then there was no reason for her not to get insurance too. Anything could happen in the market, whether theft, fire or loss of goods.

“Iya Bola,” Tawa sighed. ‘that useless man Jegede has refused to pay up Iya Adijat's insurance o.” she clicked her tongue. “Despite the money we have been paying him every month, he spoke his big English and said he has no money to give Iya Adijat.”

Nkechi shifted in the plastic chair. “Tawa let us not jump into conclusions. There must be a reason why Jegede did not pay out the insurance.” She racked her mind for an explanation and hit a brick wall.

Tawa sighed again. ‘there is talk in the market Iya Bola, that Jegede is *living a baby boy life*. He is enjoying the fruits of our labour.”

“What is the meaning of baby boy life o,” Nkechi laughed. “Tawa, there must be a reason behind Jegede not paying Iya Adijat’s money. I will look into it.”

Nkechi again imagined a situation where the market women’s cooperative union, would buy the insurance for their members rather than the individuals in the market buying it themselves. It was clear Jegede didn’t feel threatened by one market woman, but she wondered if he could afford to ignore all the market women. Whist she agreed with the idea of insurance for the market women, it was clear Green River Insurance was not the best vehicle for them.

Reaching home after a long day at the market was something Nkechi always looked forward to. She was pleased to see her children seated on a mat outside in the quadrangle with their school books open in front of them. Lenny their lesson teacher, and another staff member of the school they attended, Lily of the Valley, sat on a chair in front of them. They were so engrossed in their lessons that they did not notice their mother observing them. It warmed her heart to see the fruits of her womb being so studious, as judging by the fast approaching dusk, Nkechi had not even expected to see Lenny at the house.

“Mummy!” it was Taiwo that caught sight of her first, soon all four of them were rushing forward to hug her.

Nkechi made sure to smother kisses and hugs on each of her children. She gave Bola the nylon bag, hot with the puff-puff inside it, to share with her younger siblings, and sent them inside. It was only when the children left that she noticed the tired look on Lenny’s face. Lenny was tall and did not try to appear smaller the way some people did. Usually Lenny had a smile that brought out the deep dimples on each side of what were obviously gorgeous lips, and eyes always twinkling so much that sometimes Nkechi considered jumping Lenny in public. But that day, Lenny sagged as though a heavy

weight weighing down from the gods themselves. There were dark bags below Lenny's eyes, and the cheery smile was absent from Lenny's face. So worried by this new Lenny, Nkechi reached to hug and offer some comfort. "Lenny, I hope there's nothing wrong?" she said wrapping an arm around Lenny's shoulder.

"Good after noon ma." Lenny dragged a tired hand down the face Nkechi never got tired of looking at. "Iya Bola I..." Nkechi was shocked to see Lenny's hands shake while struggling for words. "It is... Adigun my..." Lenny's eyes were red and Iya Bola cut the conversation quickly to offer them some private moment to regroup.

"Ah. Bola!" Nkechi screamed for her eldest child.

Bola appeared almost immediately, her lips oily from the puff-puff. "Get a glass of water and bring it to that corner beside the room."

Lenny eyes closed momentarily as Nkechi steered them around the corner towards one of the only place in the polygamous house hold they could have a bit of privacy. Her heart wrenched to think of the way Lenny must have struggled trying to teach the children while bearing such a heavy burden. Experience with her fellow traders at the market place had taught her that in such times it was good to let it out.

In the isolated corner, Lenny finally let loose while Nkechi tried to get the crux of the matter.

“Take it easy my dear.” Nkechi said while rubbing Lenny’s back.

Then she asked cautiously. “I hope no one died.”

Lenny’s head shook indicating no. “Adigun... he is not dead, but he... he is in the hospital.”

At that point, Nkechi decided she would not ask any more questions but just offer a listening ear when Lenny was ready to speak. She sat beside Lenny, occasionally whispering “sorry” and ‘take it easy” to show her empathy. Later on, Nkechi listened in horror as Lenny explained what had led to the break down in such a manner.

Adigun, a fellow teacher at Lily of the Valley school, a hard working fellow despite the low salary, had fallen seriously ill. From the first time he had been sick, it had been one issue after the other. Under the school’s proprietor Mrs. Bosede, all teachers had signed up for a health insurance scheme at Springfield Clinics, a privately-owned institution that boasted advanced health care. Adigun’s wife had taken him to Springfield when he showed the first signs of being ill, and had been turned back after the hospital informed her that they would not be taking in Adigun because they had yet to receive his de tails

from the insurance company. Adigun's wife had to borrow money from relatives to install her husband in a hospital that they could not afford.

While looking after her sick husband, she had had to jump from Green River Insurance offices to the school and back. Each time she visited Green River Insurance, Jegede had insisted that he had sent her husband's details to the hospital, and that if anything was wrong, it must be Springfield's responsibility. As she was passed back and forth like a basket ball on the court, it was finally revealed that Adigun had leukemia.

"Nkechi." Lenny added in a sad voice. "I saw Adigun in the hospital today, and he looked like a skeleton wearing human skin. The doctors say he doesn't have much time to live."

"God forbid it." Nkechi snapped her fingers. "Don't say that eh, Adigun will be healed. I know he is your very good friend and I know he will need your strength. You can't afford to be negative at this point"

"The way Adigun's poor wife has been running around." Lenny sighed. "They just got married last year, and she is pregnant. Mrs. Bosede is suspecting that Jegede has swindled all of us. It is horrible that Adigun is in this kind of condition and that wicked man does not seem to care."

The next day as Nkechi walked to her stall in Afele market, she thought of the last time someone had mentioned Jegede to her, it was always a complaint. Tawa had been the first to warn her about Jegede's possible evil schemes, and to think that she had defended the man there. Nkechi kissed her teeth in frustration: the whole situation seemed hopeless. And for Jegede to be accused in such a manner not once but twice was alarming.

Thoughts on Jegede consumed her as she rounded the corner where the yam sellers displayed their wares. Iya Bola was dragged out of her musing by the boys that carried the yams for customers on wheel barrows. What alarmed Iya Bola was the careless manner in which they tossed the empty plastic bags of water they had used to wash their yams into the open gutters.

"Hey Mallam" Iya Bola yelled. "Mallam" she called again, the boys looked at themselves clearly unsure whether to answer her.

There were few things that irritated Nkechi more than littering, and one of them was people not listening to her when she spoke to them. Iya Bola seized the opportunity to put the Jegede problem on the backburner. She made a sudden detour and

headed straight for the yam sellers, "Didn't you hear me calling you?" she asked, arms akimbo.

"Iya, you I hear me but name is not Mallam, na Hussain." said the yam seller in broken English.

"Why are you people throwing waste into the gutter? Can't you see it will block it when the next rains come?" Iya Bola asked.

"Iya me I no know am for waste, na nylon we dey throway for gutter" Hussain shrugged.

"Hussain, don't you know it's your action of blocking the gutter that is causing our market to flood?" She pointed an accusing finger at the clogged up gutter. "Abi you don't know? Is this gutter your rubbish dump?"

Iya Bola regarded these seasonal traders with suspicion. Depending on the season they would always come, sell their yams, and then leave. These traders were not members of any market union and so were not as invested in the market as the other traders, they slept in the market, and more often than not left the market worse than they had met it, with their profit of course.

A small crowd had grown to watch the confrontation between Iya Bola and the yam sellers.

"Joor Iya Bola, leave these almajiri boys alone." a woman from the crowd announced.

"Ha so you don't know that what these boys are doing is blocking these drains?" Nkechi now spoke to the gathering. "When next it rains don't you know more shops will get flooded? Why do you think Hajia Ruka store got destroyed? If small rain water is not allowed to flow out of the market, if we keep blocking the drains with waste, then there will only be more flood." she explained.

"Iya you no block am for gutter ooh....." interrupted Hussain.

"Eeh Hussain abeg," Iya Bola flicked her hand in dismissal. "I don't have time for your stories, oya tell your boys to start clearing this gutter now. Now!"

Iya Bola's tone offered no room for argument. Her earlier explanation had linked the drains blocked with refuse, to the floods, and most importantly, to the yam seller. The crowd grew restless, pointing and gesticulating.

"Iya make I no vex, you go clear the gutter for Iya." Hussain could tell he was outnumbered in this one, he hurried off to shout his mates into action to clear the blocked gutters.

As the youths picked the empty plastic bags from the gutters, the market commentator Bonaventure seized the opportunity to break out of the crowd and address them.

"Spick and span, spick and span, progenitors, ingrain in your offspring, the necessity that is spick and span," Bonaventure screamed at the top of his lungs, hoping that perhaps one of those dirty market traders would clean their surroundings, stop dumping refuse everywhere but at the agreed dump site, and make it an easier environment for him to purchase his food and wares.

Taking a break from his declarations, he made a left towards the mama put shack when he sighted Yona blowing her nose and wiping her hand on her skirt. He spun and headed off across the street to drop his pure water sachet in the trash. Mysteriously, the need to eat at her shack had been suddenly expunged after what he had just seen her do.

Iya Bola watched Bonaventure move back and forth. She was satisfied to see the boys working to clean the gutters, and saw the approval on the faces of the market women. Her heart expanded with pride, and at the same time a sense of urgency settled on her.

Under her breath, Iya Bola whispered to herself "I have to organise these women, I just have to."



Nkechi raised her head from the tray of beans she was picking and smiled up at her husband. “Yes, I want to be Iyaloja.”

“This is nothing short of madness.” Alhaji Azeez’s said. His eyes protruding from his round face.

“I know. But so is the sorry state of things in that market.” Nkechi pointed out, then she wisely

changed her tone. It paid to be pleading, “Will you not support me?”

Azeez who had been standing till that point, settled on the bench beside Nkechi. He put his arm around her.

“You know I am up for re-election.” his voice was low in her ear. “Iya Kazeem was here the other day, I have been meaning to talk to you.”

“Hmmm.” was all Nkechi could say.

“You see how hard it is to keep a hold of you.” There was reproach in her husband’s voice. “Because of all this your running up and down in the market, even your husband has diffiulties in finding you.”

Nkechi pursed her lips, she could point out that it was him, her dear husband, that never seemed to be at home. Trust him to try to shift the blame on her and accuse her of neglecting her wifely duties.

“The warning was clear.” Azeez continued, his grip on her slim shoulder tightened. “I have decided. It will stay in the family. Iya Yetunde your senior wife can run for the position.”

At his words, Nkechi’s eyebrows drew to the bridge of her nose, she shrugged his hand off her shoulder and stood suddenly, upending the tray. Black-eyed peas spilled to the concrete ground, the tray crashed loudly.

“Have I not always obeyed you in all things?” Nkechi saw red. “Did I not marry you despite my family’s strong opposition? Did I not have four children when I only wanted two? Did I not become a Muslim?” Nkechi was pleased to note her husband’s shocked face.

“My husband, in this I am sorry, I cannot agree with you. I cannot *not* do this. Look around you. Women are suffering, the market structure is in tatters. Your so-called godmother makes a living by taking money from vulnerable women. Did you see what happened after the last floods? Iya Yetunde indeed. They want someone they can control. What does she know?”

Nkechi kissed her teeth, spun dramatically and strode away. She walked with long angry strides until she came to the open space at the back of the house, the quadrangle where her children gathered. Bola, the oldest, a girl of eleven was braiding Kehinde’s hair and Yemi squatted beside the low wall close by regaling them with tales from school.

Bola took the role of oldest sister very seriously. As she braided Kehinde’s hair, she swatted her head from time to time when the child nodded off. Yemi was her second child and looked most like her mother, both in looks and temperament. Her second daughter was bold and daring and her antics at

school were always cause for concern but made for good stories. The twins, Kehinde and Taiwo were still young, they loved mimicking their older sisters. At the moment, Taiwo was running around chasing after a lizard.

“Taiwo!” Nkechi yelled when he rushed past her. “What are you doing?”

“Catching lizards!” he called back.

“Have you washed the plates I asked you to wash?”

“Mummy, that’s woman’s work. I told you, I will rather...”

Nkechi narrowed her eyes at him. He was so young yet he had already imbibed these ideas on what was women’s work. At his mother’s sharp gaze, Taiwo grunted and stalked off indoors to do exactly what she had asked.

“Woman’s work indeed,” Nkechi murmured under her breath as her phone vibrated in the pocket of the house gown she wore.

As she accepted the call, Nkechi was distracted by Bola’s gaze. Recently Bola had taken to staring at her like she was a stranger. At first she thought she had upset her daughter, then she suspected an early onset of puberty. The call was from her friend Bisi. Still upset from her husband’s words, Nkechi unloaded her current source of distress onto her

friend. Yet talking about it made her even more upset.

“Whether anyone likes it or not, I will be Iyaloja” Nkechi caught Bola studying her, as soon as Bola noticed, she turned and stared at the ceiling. Conversation over, Nkechi made her way to her daughter.

“Bola dear, is everything all right?” she asked.

Bola swallowed. “Mummy are you going into politics?”

The question made Nkechi almost stumble. With the way she was talking to Bisi on the phone, it should be no surprise that her daughter had overheard the entire conversation.

“Yes darling.” as she gained control of her composure.

“Is that democracy?”

“Yes it is democracy.” she frowned. “Why. Are you learning about democracy in school?”

“We studied it in social studies last year.”

Despite the conversation, Nkechi’s heart swelled at her daughter’s great memory. “I am glad you remember what you did last year.”

“I am confused mummy.” Bola pouted.

“About what darling?”

“You said it is democracy? And in democracy, the will of the people is supreme.”

“Yes.”

“But on the phone you said that whether people like it or not you will be Iyaloja. Is that not a dictatorship? Shouldn’t you let the people choose?”

Nkechi felt a like she was standing against gale winds. She felt light headed from the shock of what she had just heard.

“Firstly Bola, you should never eavesdrop on people’s conversation.” she reproached. “That is very rude!”

“I am sorry mum.”

“Secondly my dear,” Nkechi softened her tone. “That was just an expression. Because I want to go into politics there are all sorts of situations that I have to deal with that frustrate me. Do you understand?”

Her daughter nodded, even though her eyes showed that she did not understand. It seemed Nkechi had successfully wriggled her way out of the most intense humiliation she had ever experienced. In some ways she felt like a fraud. But then, her daughter’s questions helped put things in perspective.



Nkechi could not stop her ambitions, not with so many situations on ground. On a Wednesday, Iya Bola visited her market stall to find a dozen women crowded in front of it. They were all women she recognised, and they were all in states of distress. Some sat on the ground, hands on their heads and others stood with their arms crossed over their

breasts, shaking their heads. Her heart pounded as it tried to leap through her mouth, a sense of trepidation settled on Iya Bola. What had happened now.

“Jegade wants to ruin us!” Mummy Camsi wailed.

“Iya Bola something must be done.” Hajia Ruka sat from her seated position.

At that moment Iya Bola decided. “We must go and confront him. What kind of wickedness is this?”

It was as the women headed towards the rundown building that housed Green Life Insurances that Iya Bola got the full story. Hajia Ruka’s stall had been flooded and Jegede had again refused to compensate her. Enough was enough, Jegede was going to have to answer for his crimes. Together with her fellow traders, he would have to explain why he was not paying his clients, why he was not doing what he promised when he advertised his insurance business to them. Iya Bola felt some sort of responsibility, it was she who had encouraged the women here to insure their goods with Jegede. The corrupt man with his arrogant airs would pay for trying to cheat market women under her watch.



FAVOUR UNDER LAW

"A blogger's life is lonely but that of the unemployed youth is lonelier."

Doyin said the words out loud before typing them out. He looked at the words on his old laptop's cracked screen; a gift from an expatriate oil driller, and considered them carefully. What he had just typed made sense to him, he decided. He glanced at his wristwatch, there was still some time, he would write some more before heading out for the Nameless Youth Council that evening. It would be nice to be able to inform the rest of the guys that he had finished writing his latest blog post. They always looked forward to his writing and Doyin knew that they would be eager to hear him describe how he had captured their agitation for employment and youth empowerment.

His fingers flexed over the keyboard in anticipation.

He heard the explosion about then.

Tamuno was looking for the left boot, he had already tied up the lace of the right boot before he discovered the other one was missing. It was about time for him to head for the Nameless Youth Council. As the leader of the secret militant youth group, he had to be early and lead by example. Walking around in his near empty single room, he searched everywhere, desperately looking under his low bamboo bed too, but that boot was not anywhere in the unkempt room. Clearly his neighbour's dog must have snuck in while he had his siesta with his door wide open, and dragged the boot out, the furry thief. That would be the third time this week the blasted dog had mistaken his boot for a dead cat or some kind of bush meat. Then again he could not entirely blame the dog, perhaps the animal was just attracted to the foul smell that emanated from his boots. Tamuno looked down at his laced up right foot, his boots could use several washings.

As Tamuno made to storm out of the room in search of the cursed canine, the thunderous explosion rocked him off his feet.

Awaji spread clear lip gloss on her full lips. She smiled at her reflection and winked. She knew she was not exactly the prettiest girl by any means, but she liked what she saw in the mirror. The fitting dress she wore showed her shapely body, she had

curves in all the right places. Awaji was used to trying to be attractive, mainly because of the huge forehead she was born with. When she was in secondary school she was mercilessly teased for her head, she would be told that her skull must have turned around on its very own after God created and inserted it under her skin. Still Awaji liked to think that she had outgrown that bullying, it was a testament to her resilience that she could look at herself in the mirror and decide that she looked good and was ready to go. Besides, her looks were not of utmost importance where she was going.

She had been introduced into the Nameless Youth Council as a first year student in Chemical Engineering at the University and within three months her enthusiasm for the cause had taken her to the helm of its leadership. She lead the group alongside Tamuno, one of the founding members, and she was as brave as she was just. The members of their group really enjoyed her presence, and her authority was unchallenged. As was usual, the meeting would go on into the night; there were so many issues affecting the unprivileged of Nameless, the young graduates that could not find jobs, those affected by the continuous environmental degradation caused by oil spills.

It would be nice too, if after the meeting, one of the guys would be gutsy enough to walk her home, walk

her to his home that is. Then there was a sudden loud bang. Awaji did not know when she scrambled under the low wooden table. In her panic, all thoughts of a romantic liaison were wiped from her mind. What on earth could have caused the earth to shudder in such a manner?

Mama Iquo was in her small stall in Afele market when an oil truck carrying kerosene dipped into a deep crater in the main paved road in Nameless and burst one of its rear tyres. The truck spun out of its driver's control, ran off the road just beside Afele market's main gate, and fell into a ditch. The truck's sizeable storage tank upturned halfway into the ditch and there was a spill. Kerosene flowed freely onto the road and into the depths of the ditch.

There was a stampede as everyone in Afele market lurched forward. Market women ignored their stalls, grabbed containers of every size and make, and headed for the spill to scoop up some of the precious liquid. This was an opportunity to supplement their family incomes. Cheap unadulterated kerosene was hard to come by in this economy, and free kerosene can only be a godsend. But it appeared the inconsolable truck driver was not an angel on a divine errand for the supreme deity. He stood aside and watched in visible agony as the multitude of women, men and children crowded at the ditch.

Even elderly men passing on their old rickety bicycles forgot their ages and went on all fours to collect scarce kerosene.

Mama Iquo had merely stood aside to observe the madness. Questions swarmed through her head, for one, why was the kerosene being moved by tanker? When she went to buy periwinkle near the ocean-front, she had seen miles of pipes for moving petroleum products. So why was this truck still carrying kerosene through a busy market?

It must have been some divine premonition, or as she would have explained it, her wicked late husband had not succeeded in convincing his fellow dead ancestors to send for her to continue slaving over him in the afterlife. Later the aged Mama Iquo would use every ancient proverb she could recollect to describe what had happened next. She would vehemently state that it must have been her precious daughter's powerful prayers that kept her from joining the rush for awoof kerosene.

The old woman was well out of danger when the stupid irate truck driver decided that he could scare away the scooping crowd by threatening them with his cigarette lighter. He shouted at the top of his voice and clicked on the lighter. No one paid him any attention, so he edged even closer. He came too close, and a swinging arm of a passing scooper knocked the lit lighter off his shaky sweaty hand.

The spilled kerosene ignited slowly at first, and in the noise surrounding all the chaos of scooping kerosene, no one heard the panicking driver shout out frantic words of caution to the crowd. The fire spread and raced faster towards the soaked women, children and men busy collecting the scarce fuel.

The first most of them knew about the fire was the huge explosion, as the racing fire reached the truck proper. The fire was burning in no time, it was like the Devil had started it himself and sent it out of the abyss. Virtually everyone already scooping the kerosene was alight and soon engulfed by the flames. The flames spread like wildfire in the heart of the savannah during harmattan.

When Doyin got to the site of the explosion, Tamuno was already there, with his right foot in his ankle high boot and his left foot in an open top sandal. The scene was horrific. In the midst of bodies writhing in the fire, screaming for help, one burning figure ran out of the inferno and rolled along the ground. The bystanders moved away from him, so scared for their own lives that none of them considered lifting a finger to help him.

Awaji had just arrived and she immediately rushed towards the burning man who rolled on the ground, screaming for others to do what he was doing. She prayed that they heard her above the loud roars and screaming as she remembered the tips that had been

given to participants in a first aid training she had attended last year. Carefully, Awaji took off the scarf she had wrapped on her head and attempted to beat the fire off the burning man. She screamed to Doyin and Tamuno to do the same with other people as they ran out of the inferno in an attempt to save their lives.

"Lugubrious!! Odoriferous! This terra firma upon which we have made our habitation is in a state of disma pisma! Repent! Transform your cognition from the scuttlebutt plaguing our subsistence, and transmute! Transmute my fellow travellers! Wholesomeness precedes *cherubianism*..."

Bonaventure paused at that last word - he knew it was wrong.

Doyin took a minute from tending to the injured to hiss.

"What kind of person is this Bonaventure sef? No wonder everyone says he is a mad man. Instead of him to help people that are hurt he's adding to the chaos with noise and big grammar! One day I will rub pepper on the mic of that his public address system. He will go and meet his God from there."

Mama Iquo handed Tamuno a small pail of water as he rushed past her. Tamuno emptied the water on the burning man's back, while Doyin rushed to the aid of another figure who had escaped the burning inferno. As the youths rushed back and forth trying their best to aid those who had managed to get out of the fire, Mama Iquo watched in horror.

Again she asked herself, "Why can't kerosene be moved by pipes?"



IQUO'S FARM

Iquo had always had a nose for business.

Whilst she was in the University, she started a fast food stand where she served pies and pastries. When the naira was devalued considerably, known brands such as Coca Cola became too expensive and out of reach of students. This was a major problem for Iquo as the cost of drinks in her stand became a major factor in her purchase decisions.

To remedy this situation, Iquo did backward integration, entered into a contract with Madam Lolo Agnes, the wife of the traditional Chief of Nameless, the closest town to where her university was located, to supply her a bag of fresh oranges every morning. Iquo bought a juicer and simply squeezed out orange juice, which she chilled and sold as a substitute for CocaCola. Her customers called it Iquo Soda: she called it a cash cow.

This was Iquo's introduction to the business potential of agriculture, and she never looked back. She started I-juice while she was still a student. She

added pineapples to her range of juices, and she began packaging and preserving the juice. She started a small scale factory where she processed oranges and pineapples to juice drinks. She expanded her market share, and began to deliver her fruit juice to smaller stores around Nameless and beyond, even as far as the capital city. Her juice drink was well received, it was natural and fresh. Iquo was able to take her drinks to the weekly Afele market, where traders from other towns still came once a week, just like they have done for countless decades, long before the old stream dried up. Her juice drinks were bought and distributed to other markets.

Iquo's big break came in 2008; when Lolo Agnes offered Iquo her large farm for sale. Lolo Agnes had an orchard of orange trees and a pineapple plantation on the farm. It was a great deal as the aged Lolo Agnes could no longer manage the sizeable farm and she wanted to cash out. The farm was about 15 hectares, on the major highway to the state capital, between Nameless and the University. It produced an average yield, but lost most of its produce to waste from lack of storage and theft from university students out to supplement their little allowances.

Iquo took Lolo Agnes' offer, sold her car, took a bank loan, mortgaged her factory and bought the land. She was a good manager. She secured the whole farm, built irrigation channels, storage plants

and a processing factory inside the farm, and she was able to drop her cost of production and raise yields, thus raising her revenues. By 2013, I-juice was a successful undertaking, as healthy diets had become a norm and her juices were now sold in major stores across the region and far beyond. She was already exporting small quantities to other West African towns and European markets.

Iquo was out on the field when Nneka, her Regional bank manager, based in Nameless, called her.

“Ms. Iquo, can we have a short meeting?” Nneka asked, “Sure” Iquo answered, “I will come and see you later in the day”.

“Actually Ms. Iquo”, Nneka responded “I am in your head office at the farms, can we meet there please?”

Iquo was impressed, she had wanted Nneka to visit her farm for ages. Iquo always met Nneka at the regional head office in Nameless when she wanted a major line of overdraft. She had recently applied to the bank for funds to build a new small scale power plant that would utilise the biomass waste created by her farm and generate power for the nearby palm oil factory down the road. She needed to have a solution to the unreliable local power, so she had required a line of credit from the bank to finance the project.

The bank must have run its numbers and realised it was a fantastic deal for them, and had sent Nneka to tie up the deal, Iquo had imagined, smiling with the thought. "Tamuno," she called out to her young foreman. "Tell the tractor man to do another pass, I will be back in one hour."

When she got to her corporate office on the farm, after the short walk, she found Nneka waiting for her with another official. This other man was obviously a banker, he looked too well dressed to come to a farm and inspect a biomass power plant, Iquo thought. He looked like all bankers do while sitting behind a desk working in their offices or seeing clients. He did not look impressed.

"Hello Nneka, it's a pleasure to have you at I-farms," Iquo smiled. "I hope you have been kept comfortable while you waited?"

Nneka was polite but curt. "Hello Ms. Iquo, I would like to introduce Mr. Harry. He is from the legal department of the bank, all the way from our headquarters. Our bank has serious concerns with your paperwork."

Paperwork? That surprised Iquo as she sat back to hear more. She is a very meticulous person and had checked and double checked everything before handing in her application for the overdraft. She is certain it was a clean offer.

"What paperwork Nneka?" Iquo asked out loud. "I have enjoyed a good relationship with your bank now for almost nine years and I use the same documents for the overdrafts, what paperwork do you refer to?"

"If I may," the other well-dressed gentleman interrupted Nneka, who had almost started to speak. "We are referring to the title deeds of your farm."

"What about them?" Iquo asked? "You gave me a loan with them nine years ago."

"Yes we did," Nneka said "And that's the problem."

"What problem?" Iquo asked.

"Well you see at the time the land was transferred to you by the native owners of the land, it was a simple trade between you. We are now privy to a decision by the state government to acquire the land under the Right of Eminent Domain as contained in the Land Use Act," Harry said. "We understand the Governor has signed away nine out of the fifteen hectares on this farm to a multinational shopping chain who desire to build a shopping mall and a hotel on it."

Iquo could not believe what she was hearing. She looked at Nneka, expecting him to disagree with Mr. Harry, Nneka was silent.

"Can they do that? Can they take away my land?" asked Iquo. "I have a title to it."

"Ms. Iquo," Harry continued. "When you bought the land, you were given a title deed officially endorsed by the Chief of Nameless, the legal paramount traditional ruler of this territory, but you never registered the title deed with the central land registrar in the state capital. So now, in effect, the state is saying you don't own the land."

"They cannot deny I own the land," Iquo interrupted. "I pay them taxes from this land!"

Harry tried to explain further. "Even if you own the land and have a deed, the State Government has the right to take the land from you in the overriding public interest."

"What overriding public interest? How is a small public interest and my farm not," asked Iquo in disbelief.

"Ms. Iquo, the state is saying you didn't bring your Local Government title to be registered in the state registry, and that invalidates your title," said a sympathetic Nneka.

Iquo was livid.

"Nneka, I submitted my title deeds and transfer papers to the state government lands office, when I bought the land in 2008. I submitted my docu-

ments, but the Governor, then Chief Akpan, didn't sign it for 4 years and he lost re-election in 2012! I was then told my documents would start the process again as a new administration had taken over. My papers are still there, in the land office! They have them! So how can they now take over my land, if they have not signed the deed of transfer of title for 2 years!"

"Ms. Iquo," Nneka spoke up sensing Iquo was clearly disgusted and in a rage. "Please calm down."

Iquo looked away and hissed loudly.

"We have come here as your bankers to advise you of this development so you can take appropriate steps." Nneka said. "As it stands we will have to stop all facilities to your farm and call in all outstanding loans. If nine hectares are taken off your farm, your revenues cannot sustain your cash flow and you won't remain profitable. Please take all necessary steps to address this."

Iquo needed less than a minute to realize Nneka was right. The small scale power plant, her future expansion plans, her facilities with the bank, it would simply be impossible to sustain all these if she lost even an inch of this land. This is not a time for temper, but for lawyers.

"Nneka," Iquo said "You cannot call in your facilities. I have used a working capital upgrade every year to hire excess machinery and workers to harvest the crop during the rainy season. The pineapples need to be packaged, and shipped off, the oranges need to be sorted, and...." Iquo choked.

"I am sure you are a wonderful farmer, Ms. Iquo. But please understand the bank's position. We cannot extend or operate a facility to you should you fail to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy for your land," Mr Harry interjected.

Iquo was dumbfounded, she was employing hundreds of farm workers, paying taxes to the state government, exporting her crops, and even planning to generate power. She had obtained the elusive bank financing. But here she was, about to be sabotaged by the same state governor whose motto was 'Prosperity for Our State.'

This was madness.

"So what are my options?" Iquo asked, attempting to calm down her nerves.

"Well, you can sue the state government and they will offer you compensation," Harry said

"Compensation!" Iquo had no idea she had shouted. "Mr. Harry, we all know the state government compensation will be minuscule and compensation

won't give my workers jobs or feed their families." Iquo said forcefully.

"The thing I can't get my head around is why my right to land can be set aside and practically extinguished by the same state seeking to give life to another private company?" Iquo sort of asked. "Why is land transfer so cumbersome and difficult in our nation. Why should it take more than three months for a simple transfer of title of land to be signed by the Governor? If I had bought a car from you Mr. Harry, would we need to go to the Governor to endorse some evidence of that transfer? Can the governor not see how this Land Use law stifles agricultural production and employment?" Iquo asked

"Ms. Iquo, you need to understand our position," Nneka said with his eyes almost pleading.

"No Nneka, you need to understand mine," Iquo returned. "Why can't we have a registry where land is mapped by GPS and transfers are evidenced by a simple transfer contract, the way we do with vehicles or shares? Why must the Governor himself sign?" Iquo asked again in an uncontrolled high pitch. "Please I need to speak to my lawyer," she concluded and stormed out, leaving Nneka and Mr Harry motionless and staring after her like bad children being punished for bad behaviour.

Three months went by quickly. Iquo was relentless in getting the government off her back. She got an injunction from the High Court that ensured the status quo remained. The government didn't evict her and the bank didn't call in its loan... yet. She continued to harvest her fruits and process them into juice drinks but had to stop plans for the biomass plant while her case against the government was in court.

Tamuno, Iquo's young aggressive farm foreman, who led the local youth body, wanted her to let him take more militant action against the authorities. He had gone against her wishes to assemble his "troops" and harass the local councillor, who knew next to nothing about the whole issue. Iquo understood Tamuno's impatience, he was about to lose his job at the farm if she lost the farm to the government. Iquo however instructed Tamuno to desist.

Then the battle she had helplessly watched from the sidelines came to an unexpected end. She lost, but still won. The Governor's assurance to the multinational company planning to build the mall and hotel was taking too long to finalise, and they got quite impatient. They couldn't wait as long as it would take to get the a legal verdict. They were sceptical and they were unwilling to wait much longer.

Iquo started to devise other plans to forge ahead, because it appeared certain she would lose her farm

for a pittance in compensation. She could get new land for her farm, but she had no cash to buy the new land and transfer her assets, and it was clear her bankers would not help out. When her lawyer called, she was going home, dejected with the disappointment of losing her farm, her fruit trees, her land, her biomass plant, her plans, and all her big dreams.

Iquo answered her cell phone and her heart sank to the depth of her guts when she heard her lawyer's voice at the other end. It had to be the verdict, she thought. It was a verdict all right, but it was hers to make, it turned out.

Acting on the multinational firm's instructions, their lawyers had opened negotiations with her lawyer. The multinationals had offered to pay her for her farm, her fruit trees, her land and her biomass plant in exchange for the full unencumbered title to the land. They would pay it full and multiple times over to reflect goodwill value. Iquo heard but didn't believe her lawyer, She asked for clarity. The lawyer repeated himself, slower this time. It dawned on Iquo that she could sell everything at her own price and come away with enough cash to relocate the entire farm and workers, without a bank loan. She would not be selling her dreams.

"It is a lie!" Iquo shouted into the phone in joyful disbelief, "lawyer, you are lying!!!!"

"Na wetin madam?" Tamuno asked, standing next to her. He was already as excited as she was before he knew what she was so visibly happy about.

Iquo didn't answer Tamuno and she ignored the phone as she grabbed Tamuno and danced along with him. Tamuno gladly obliged her and tried his luck further by lowering his touch below the respectable waist line level of her back. She wasn't too excited to forget she is a decent lady. She slapped away Tamuno's hand and eyed him menacingly.

"Sorry ma!" the shamed Tamuno pleaded.

Iquo was just too happy to be angry.

Afele Taxi Park



THE TAXI DRIVER

Pam adjusted his face cap lower and looked at his car parked behind two other cars. It was common occurrence for people to block your car after you parked at the market but Pam never got used to it. It was annoying and time consuming, even more irritating was that all the guilty party would do when called out, was apologise after making you waste the whole day waiting for them. As he stood there pondering his next move, a young man waved at him from across the street. Pam turned around just to check if there was someone behind him the young man was waving at, and he was quite surprised to find that there was no one.

Pam was used to feeling like he was watched by the Nameless Security Agency popularly called NSA but never before had the watchers made contact with him. Not for the first time since his ordeal started, his heartbeat accelerated and his palms instantly went wet with sweat. He tried very hard to concentrate on something else to control the sudden rapid beat of his heart. He had been reading different tips online on how to handle anxiety attacks, but despite

his best efforts, he had not quite mastered it. In a few seconds, his mouth was as dry, his hands shook, and he felt faint and disorientated. He needed to get a hold and activate his coping mechanisms immediately.

He took a deep breath and placed his hand over his diaphragm to feel the air go into his lungs. He started yoga breathing through his nose, inhaling and then slowly expelling it after five seconds. Allowing his field of vision to broaden, Pam only started to calm down when he could see from the corners of his eyes.

These anxiety attacks had started after November 2014, after he was doxed.

Doxed, he thought. What a simple word for such a horrible event that had destroyed his life. He had never even heard of doxing until Adekunle had called, asking him to get to safety immediately. Since that call, his life had never been the same. Adekunle was the catalyst. The beginning and main reason behind all his problems. The thought of him still brought mixed emotions bubbling to the surface of Pam's heart. He still wondered why anyone would put all his real personal information name, address, phone number, emails and passwords, bank accounts, his family members and his whole history since he was a kid, just to call it being doxed. They had meticulously released everything about him

into public space and deliberately made it look like there was more than friendship between Adekunle and himself.

He had met Adekunle Nwakpa at one of those NGO events. Now he could not even remember which one, NGO events had the tendency to blend into one long panel discussion with the same people talking about the same issues. At first he had not noticed the opinionated man with the thoughtful but radical ideas from across the room. But the more the man spoke, the more sense he made, and the more people paid attention to him. Pam was no different, and like most of the room at that meeting, found himself agreeing with most of what the gentleman said.

It was not till three other panels later that they were officially introduced. Pam first paid a genuine compliment to Adekunle about his contribution before they went on to discuss other issues. Pam and Adekunle had exchanged email addresses and from then on, they had constantly kept in touch. At first their emails were work-related, articles and breaking news on topics they were both working on. Eventually they were trading music and links to funny cat gifs on the internet. As Pam had only returned to Nameless from Obodo Oyinbo, his circle of friends was very small. He was glad to meet someone intellectual and funny he could spend time

with in social circles. At least every day Pam knew to expect music videos and movies from his new friend Adekunle and as they became friends rather than acquaintances, once a week they met up to roast bole in Adekunle's house. Adekunle's wife Kauna was a very warm woman with constant anecdotes, when she laughed it came from somewhere deep in her belly. Pam liked Adekunle, but he liked Adekunle's and his wife even more.

He deliberately cleared his mind of those old happy memories and straightened his shoulders, prepared to meet someone who he assumed was part of the NSA watching team.

He plastered a fake smile on his face, determined not to give his watchers the satisfaction of seeing his fear and walked onwards to meet his first tormentor.

"So you people are not just robots on the internet Abi. I am glad to see that blood flows in your veins. I am Pam." he said as soon as he was close to the man. "but I assume you already knew this?"

The young man stared back at him with a blank smile on his face and took the proffered hand.

"Well really, I do not have to work with anyone to know who you are. You are one of the most popular

men in Nameless. I am happy to finally meet you in the flesh too."

Pam took in the man's demeanor, the fraying tie and heavy bags his eyes carried suggested that this man was a harmless junior operative. One of those tech boys who spent all day staring at a computer screen and monitoring everything.

"To what do I owe this pleasure? Is it a slow week in the NSA office?" Pam asked him testily.

"No." the young man sighed. "Can I help with your bags? I can see your car is blocked, my taxi is right around the corner if you want to come with me."

Pam instinctively drew back, it suddenly seemed no coincidence that his car was blocked from all sides. The thought that this was a kidnap attempt crossed his mind, but then Pam shook his head. If they had wanted to kidnap him, they would have done it a long time ago. He had on numerous occasions used the app Informacam on his android phone to see if there were other people in his compound with him and once, he had found other Bluetooth and radio devices registered within the vicinity. Since they found ways of coming around him without his knowledge, he figured they could have taken him if they wanted to.

Picking up the bags stuffed with the variety of items he had purchased from the nearby market, Pam followed the man to the car. Together they loaded his purchases into a green and white painted taxi and he hopped into the front seat. From the outside, the taxi looked as ugly and battered as thousands of others like it that rattled to and fro in Nameless. However the inside of the taxi was something else entirely, as it was little shy of luxurious. Pam realised the NSA was more sophisticated than he had given them credit for. The dents and scrapes that marred the taxi's green and white surface belied the front and rear camera inside it. There were numerous other gadgets Pam had no hope of identifying without the help of the internet.

He made a mental note to try and remember the specs of what he could see so that he could draw it for Riyana. Riyana was his lawyer who originally worked for the Online User Defenders. The OUF was a human rights organisation which had been specifically set up to protect the rights and privacy of persons on the internet. He had never even heard of them before his world turned upside down.

The agent pulled out of the parking lot and headed towards Pam's house.

"My name is Yaro by the way," he said as a form of formal introduction. "I am the new head of the anti-terrorism unit and I came to see you in person be-

cause I want to explain some issues to you. I want you to be fully aware and properly carried along even before we proceed." He said softly.

"Do you think you can at least listen to my proposal as I drive you to your house?" Pam knew he had no choice since he was already in the car with him but he swallowed the sarcastic retort that would have been his answer and nodded yes.

"Since your profile was intentionally made public by unknown persons, you have become a very important campaigner for internet safety and privacy, but I am here today to tell you that you have to stop." Yaro said as he stepped on the brake and the car swerved a little.

Yaro looked at Pam from the side of his eye to watch his reaction before continuing.

"From the communications, we are noticing that your publicity is exciting some friends of ours. According to the packet inspection and data we gathered this week, Goguwa is going to contact you sometime this week." Yaro said.

It had been a long time since Pam had been genuinely shocked, but at Yaro's words he literally felt his heart stop. Goguwa was the name of the leader of the biggest terrorist group in Nameless since the 1990s. The man had risen to global attention after

he was revealed to be the mastermind behind a series of terrorist attacks against the UN building, mosques, churches, schools, markets and random public spaces. There was no logic or reason to his actions and he had quickly become the most wanted person in Nameless.

"Are you sure?" Pam's eyes widened. "But, why me. Why now?"

"Well you have been on TV, radio, Facebook, Twitter and newspapers teaching people how to avoid state surveillance." Yaro shrugged. "You really are making our job more challenging. We have noticed over half the people using the internet in Nameless are now using some sort of encrypted network. ToR browser and Firefox with extensions seems to have overtaken Internet Explorer and other less safer browsing apps since you started your campaign," he replied calmly.

"I mean, just the week you were on TV talking about Surespot, most users stopped using Whatsapp and downloaded that instead. Even Chatsecure is getting more use than ever before. I went home the other day and my 17 year old nephew was teaching his friends how to download HTTPS Everywhere and use Ghostery on their Firefox browsers. I was mildly amused at first, but now I wish you had not started this campaign to tell citizens how we gather infor-

mation on them.” There was a bit of steel in Yaro's voice this time when he spoke.

Pam could only listen to the man's words because he was unsure of what to say. Was he supposed to apologise to the NSA for telling the truth about how they invaded everyone's privacy?

“Terrorists are closely observing your tactics Pam, and we need to stop this. We believe in privacy, yes, but we are doing this for purely security reasons, for securing the lives of the people in Nameless.”

Pam plucked a loose thread from the edge of his kaftan. “Why do you always hide behind terrorism when it comes to crossing the line and overriding citizen's privacy?” he said. “I know there are terrorists, but does that mean you should read everyone's emails, listen to everyone's phone calls and watch everyone's homes and offices?”

“Don't be naïve Pam! How else do you want us to keep the people of Nameless safe?” Yaro said as he made a turn to the left.

“How about monitoring only people who are suspects to a crime. Or even getting a warrant from a court before you can read, search and take over people's homes, computers and phones? I mean you can't put everyone under the microscope simply because you are able to. It is against the law of evi-

dence and against the constitution." Pam said passionately as they drove past a building he recognised.

"Yes it is. But all that is ideal. In the real world we need to do what we must do to keep you safe." Yaro said with a smug smile. "And it is only the computer that reads through all texts, emails and messaging apps not human beings."

Pam cleared his throat. "But you save a copy of all what we send over text and messaging apps and human beings have access to those right?"

"Yes," accepted Yaro grudgingly. "But our people at the NSA know not to do what is not correct..."

"Yeah, yeah. That it is not correct but does anyone watch them to ensure that they don't cross the line? Can you guarantee us that jealous and creepy agents are not stalking their objects of affections?"

"No one can guarantee that, Pam" Yaro replied

"Then I rest my case." Pam said sadly.

It took a short while for Pam to recognise the open rusted black gate to the right was his house. Yaro parked the taxi cab outside the gate.

"Do you want Goguwa to blow up another school or market?"

"Of course I don't," answered Pam, angrily. "I know government surveillance is here to stay, I understand the argument about terror, but I want government surveillance regulated and debated. You guys can't keep playing God, deciding who to watch and who to pick up and torture. Go to court, argue your case, get a warrant to search and arrest suspects. Investigate crimes, not just pick up people that match your profiling and beat out a coerced confession out of them." Pam continued "What happens to the data you collect? Where will you keep it? and how are you sure it won't fall into other hands?" He wasn't expecting Yaro to answer so he just went on. "It is just like you almost destroyed my life. You have too much power to do that to other citizens of Nameless." Yaro didn't respond. "I will not stand by to let that happen," Pam flung in conclusion at Yaro, opened the door and started to get out of the car.

For the first time Yaro looked very sorry as he reached across the car to stop him.

"I am really sorry about what happened to you but I can assure you that the doxing did not happen from the NSA office."

"Please do not add insult to injury." Pam said as he flung the open door away and stepped out. Yaro stayed in the car but turned off the engine. "I won't have you lie to my face," Pam continued. "You know your people went out to make it look like Adekunle

and I were sleeping together. I could have been attacked and killed by any Nameless crowd!"

"I know." Yaro replied. "But I will tell you again that it was not from the NSA office. I do have some theories I can share with you on how it might have happened but you cannot quote me on it. Deal?" Yaro whispered.

Pam thought for a few seconds as he stood by the door of the car before nodding okay.

"We have a feeling that Alhaji Azeez paid some of his cronies at a GSM network to give them all of Adekunle's records. When they could not find anything incriminating to make him less likely to be elected as the chairman of Nameless, they decided to use your information and release a few details to make it look like two of you were sleeping together. It also did not help that you went on holiday together with him and there was a picture of you two hugging, which you both posted on Facebook." Yaro finished.

"I refused to believe you just said that! Can't two men just be friends without it being sexual?" Pam demanded.

"They can. And now both your names have been cleared by the public. I just want you to know it was not something my office did. We brought these for-

eign companies for security but we cannot know what these politicians do with it. Don't forget you are the ones voting them."

"See Yaro I am tired of hearing your excuses. I want to go to my house," Pam said as he started gathering his purchases from Yaro's cab.

"Does that mean you will not help us?" Yaro asked.

"I never said that. But I have one demand first," Pam replied knowing he finally had a bargaining chip.

"As someone who works in the NSA, what security measures do you take?" Pam asked.

Yaro looked at Pam thoughtfully for a second before answering

"You know it is not about the tools one uses, because there is no absolute security on the internet right?"

Pam nodded yes.

"Well, when I am at work, all our computers are Ubuntu instead of Mac or Windows. The security community knows how Ubuntu works but no one knows how the Mac or Windows works, so we avoid them to ensure we don't end up giving sensitive information about the people and government of Nameless to foreign governments. But on my per-

sonal time, I prefer using Tails as it makes the computer forget everything after I shut down.

"For our official communication, we use PGP on all our emails, and instead of using Yahoo and Google we use riseup.net while waiting for the politicians in Nameless to pay for our own to be locally hosted. You know how politicians take time before they release the funds for anything ba?' He asked jokingly.

"For quick discussions with other agents on our mobile, we use an app called Redphone for calls, and Textsecure for texts"

"So that means everyone uses android in the NSA?" Pam quickly asked.

"No. Redphone and Textsecure are called Silentphone and silent text on the Apple store." Yaro said with a smile.

"Does that mean NSA doesn't use Blackberry or Nokia anymore?"

"No. All official phones and devices are android phones that we have rooted. We ensure that apps like Orweb, Orbot, Textsecure, Chatsecure, Jitsi and search engines like DuckDuckGo have replaced google on those phones." Yaro finished.

Pam racked his brain to see if he had any more questions. But before he could speak again, Yaro raised his hand and stopped him.

“I know you want to hear more but that is as much as I can share with you. The rest of the stuff you are already doing as we have seen that you now avoid using Internet Explorer, Safari or Chrome.”

“Yeah. I use the Tor browser, Firefox or Chromium as long as Ghostery, Adblock plus, do not track me, HTTPS Everywhere and Click & Clean are activated on the add ons.” Pam agreed.

“I want to thank you for telling me all these. I know you usually don't share trade secrets with other people outside your field. I just wish I knew how I could help. Goguwa has nothing to do with me.”

“Well we imagine he wants to see how he can exploit your dislike for our agency but we will see what he wants when he finally makes contact with you. I assume you know what an E911 is?”

“Not really.” Pam said.

“Well it is a device that allows us to activate the camera and the microphone on your phone remotely. Courtesy demands that I should make you aware that we will be doing that often with you, so don't be surprised if your phone is constantly drained of battery.”

Pam looked at him in surprise. This was news to him. He took out his phone from his breast pocket and looked at it as he asked, "Would I know when you are listening to my conversation?"

"No you wouldn't. I suggest you keep your phone in another room when you are having a conversation with Lyop." He said. Finally mentioning Pam's girlfriend and tacitly telling him that they had been listening to him for a while.

Pam acknowledged the gesture and tried not to show his annoyance at such blatant disregard for his privacy. He wondered what else they had been doing and how long it had been going on.

"Oh one last thing." Yaro said as he turned to restart the car. "When my office says 'Citizens that have done nothing wrong, have nothing to fear,' remind the public that the onus is not on citizens to prove they were not doing anything wrong."

For the second time that day, Pam was very surprised. "Are you giving me tips on how to fight your agency?"

"Well I am a citizen first, before being an agent of the NSA. I want justice, but I also want to see that it is not abused. That can only be achieved if citizens understand privacy and have an honest debate and pass stringent laws to protect it. The people of

Nameless might not have much to hide but it doesn't mean they have everything to share." Yaro said as a parting shot. "I hope we understand each other better now?"

Pam smiled and nodded. Suddenly he realized circumstances being different, he could really get along with Yaro and admire him, aside from his loathsome job.

Yaro started the taxi and drove away as Pam entered the gate and headed for his front door. His arms were laden with the bags he had with him. He wondered if Lyop would believe him when she gets home and he tells her what has happened. He also wondered if he would ever be able to look at another taxi cab without wondering who was in it and what they could do remotely. He shook his head of that thought and headed up the short stairs to his front door. He was genuinely looking forward to being contacted by Goguwa. At least the NSA could trap him and put an end to his reign of terror. It sounded simple enough.

Pam inserted his key and opened the front door, He stepped into his sitting room, and there sitting in his favourite armchair was the heavily bearded Goguwa, already here to make contact. Pam swallowed and stood speechless. Suddenly, it didn't sound simple any longer. He couldn't remember returning his phone back into his breast pocket.



MARRIED DEITIES

Oluoma looked at herself in the mirror admiring herself. "This is truly God's work, his very good work." She looked at the half-dimple smothered in makeup and nodded in approval.

Reducing the volume on the rendition of 'Jesus is the answer for the world today' playing on their bedroom radio, Oluoma briefly recited part of the speech she would give at the proposed thanksgiving ceremony, when she became a member of the House of Representatives.

The elections, to her mind, were a foregone conclusion, only the devil could stop her now. Didn't The Bible say Satan was under her feet? She murmured "Satan don fall for ground," as she struggled with the zipper on the back of her dress. Her glee froze as she realized her arms were stressed in the two minutes they had been sent to the back of the blouse.

"I need to lose weight ooh" she said out loud, "This is definitely not the life of a baby girl."

Just then she sounded like her daughter Chiamaka who always used that phrase to get out of chores she didn't want to do. Was there anything Chiamaka liked to do? Not even lectures in Nameless' nearby private University appealed to her, the spoilt girl.

Pastor Ekwueme tickled her from behind, amusing and annoying Oluoma at the same time. How didn't she hear him enter the room?

"Dee, you know I have told you I don't like this thing you always do, eh. What if I had fallen down?"

He ignored her mock anger. "Then I would have fallen with you, my love. We would have descended into the depths of love, eeh Omalicha m... Egovin nwa... Ada Ada mmadu!"

Oluoma smiled. After all, she was better than Odinkenma whose husband paid her no compliments.

"Have the last guests gone?" Oluoma asked. She was tired of smiling at people, tired of catching a glimpse of people stuffing their bags and purses with fried meat and canned drinks.

"Yes they have gone. The stewards are stacking up the chairs outside already, but the canopy people will come tomorrow. Incompetent buffoons. First they came late to set up, and now say they can't stay

to clear the canopies as agreed because they close early on Sundays.”

“No problem as long as they clear them early tomorrow. I’m not comfortable with us parking our cars outside,” she said. Oluoma was done changing into her nightgown and flicked the face wipe in her hand into the bin. She opened the bedroom door. “Let me check on the children,” she murmured as she shut the door behind her.

"Dee biko, I thought you said you were tired. I'm tired too." Oluoma said.

She resented this habit her husband had of waking her up in the middle of the night to do “God’s work”, as he called it. She was annoyed at his insensitivity, not at all impressed by his determination to keep up the early morning ritual come rain or shine. For God’s sake, Sunday had been super busy. From playing the dutiful pastor’s wife and mother at the two services in church that morning, it was home to boss the caterers and event planner for the celebration her husband insisted they have. What was the celebration even about? The birth of their fourth son and sixth child. It involved the customary slaughtering of a cow, and her husband had taken it up a few notches by buying her that gold jewellery set she eyed covetously the last time they

were on holiday, not like she didn't deserve it, and more.

She was honestly tired of giving birth; she was sick and even more tired of being pregnant. She was unhappy with her body, constantly afraid her husband's eyes would stray to figures slimmer and still better put together than hers.

However tonight she was so angry she didn't care if he went to a cat or dog to satisfy his urges, she just wanted to sleep, to be left alone.

Ekwueme's hand fell from Oluoma's rounded shoulder. "I don't know why you always do this, Oluoma, doesn't The Bible say not to deny your spouse? Did you not see it there that your body is mine and vice versa? Why are you allowing the Devil to use you? Why?"

"Ekwueme biko, biko, biko." Oluoma sat up on the bed, and glared at her husband. "Stop right there with all the scriptures please. Do you want to kill me? I've been on my feet since 4am yesterday, catering to you and the children, supervising caterers and others for the reception, and breastfeeding a two-week-old. And you know my body has not healed yet. When did I go to have the stitches removed for God's sake? This thing of waking me up every early morning has to stop!"

"Blood of Jesus! Oluoma! Are you talking to me like this? When did you start talking to me like this? Am I the one you're talking to like this Oluoma?" Pastor Ekwueme Nwabuike asked furiously. His nostrils flared and he suddenly felt so hot despite the air conditioning. He blamed himself for allowing her to follow this politics thing; perhaps she now felt she was the man in their relationship. He stood up, manhood and ego now in urgent need of inflation.

"Ekwueme." Oluoma's voice was as tired as her body, "I am only trying to say I'm tired, very tired. You know we have a meeting tomorrow I can't miss because elections are close by. I am truly tired, body, mind and spirit. What is the point if I don't respond eeh? What if I get pregnant again eeh? With a body that has not healed, it would kill me, Dee. Do you want to kill me?"

"Shut up Oluoma, shut up. You are now bringing down your voice after shouting at me abi? What kind of foolish question is that? You're asking if I want to kill you. Why would I want to do that? A whole man of God? Wait, what is even wrong with getting pregnant? So you want to us disobey God's mandate eh kwa?"

Anger at his words drove her tiredness away and launched Oluoma to her feet by this time. If she was not going to sleep, her husband would get the full extent of her, minus her body of course.

“Ekwueme, God wants us to do a lot of things, not only multiply and replenish the earth. What happened to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and do good to our neighbours and enemies? Did The Bible say you should kill your wife with sex? Did it? Ngwa did it?” She demanded.

Oluoma’s voice was laced with a double scoop of sarcasm and derision, and so she was a little puzzled when her husband burst into laughter. Mock laughter, but laughter nonetheless.

Then it got worse, he actually started clapping. Oluoma braced herself, but it was his words that hit her. “See who is talking about feeding the poor, and clothing the naked. Even if I am blind, deaf and dumb, we both know you have squandered at least 70% of the appropriation your office has received. Is it 70% or is it everything sef?”

Ekwueme wouldn't let Oluoma get in another word until he was finished. “Yet you can open your dirty mouth and tell me about what God said, onye oshi di ka gi! Is it the Women’s Empowerment Project Purse, or the Community Development Initiative? Do you not remember you told me how you misappropriated the money, or are you just stupid?”

“Don’t call me names Ekwueme, don’t try it!” Oluoma wagged her finger at her husband in warning. “Saint Ekwueme talking about a wife that steals. Did

you not accept our tithes and offerings with open hands? Did you not trouble us to make donations after donations? Ehn, answer me! To chair the church harvest, to donate over and over again to all the endless building projects? The money was not stolen then abi? Useless man, pot calling kettle black! All of this because of sex? Come and have sex now, come! Come and climb on top of me by force, see if I won't use this my fat to press the air out of your body, useless man. Meanwhile, we are planning for your private jet o." At that moment, her cruel hiss could put serpents to shame.

Ekweme was suddenly disgusted, first at how fat his wife was, and at himself for deceiving her. Clearly the gloves were off and he had never been one for a conflict. The early years of their marriage had showed him how awful his wife could be when she was provoked, and this sounded like one of those times, when they lived from hand to mouth. With more affluent years, she had become less feisty. Now it looked like the volcano in her soul had not gone extinct after all, it had merely been dormant. Tonight, it had erupted in its true nature and blasphemous molten magma spew out of her fat gut. Shameless cow.

"Oluoma go and sleep, I don't want to do again, since you don't have the fear of God, since you tore out the page in your Bible where God said women

should submit to their men, since you cannot accord me the respect I deserve as a man of God, then biko, take your body and go, I will go downstairs and spend some time in prayer." Ekweme said, heading for the door suddenly tired.

Oluoma was just getting started though, and her sulphur-ridden words followed his every step. "Pray ooh, better pray well! Ask God for deliverance from the lusts of the flesh! Ask God to help you remove the trailer in your eye before you look at the bicycle in your wife's eye, inugo!" She rushed her words, determined he would hear everything.

Oluoma followed closely behind Ekweme, she would have the last word. "No, come and do! Come and have sex, Pastor Ekwueme the sex machine. You're calling me a thief, is it not the money I brought that ensured you still have a church? Come and do ooh, come and have sex!"

Ekweme banged the door; stung, humiliated and convinced his wife had to leave politics. But if his God had indeed enabled him with the gift of prophesy like he had led his congregation to believe, he would have known that it had always been out of his hands.

A N D T H E E I G H T
W R I T E R S
R E S T E D

BIOGRAPHY - WRITERS



Azeenarh Mohammed wears many hats. A project manager most of the time, a digital security trainer, queer advocate, feminist, brooding activist, wannabe hacker the rest of the time. She has found the sports that she loves and is trying very hard to let those sports kill her. When not arguing that the future will be made up of bikes, trains and teleportation, she can be found walking on the wrong side of the street while explaining for the umpteenth time why she does not answer phone calls.



Chioma Agwuegbo is a social media strategist. Her background is in radio and radio drama production, first for Aso Radio and Television Services, and then for the BBC Media Action, both in Abuja. She set up CC Consulting Services after obtaining a Masters Degree in Social Media from Birmingham City University, and has a growing portfolio of clients including the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), MTV Staying Alive Foundation (Shuga), etc. She is also Editor of YNaija2015, a site strictly dedicated to political news and analysis in a language young people understand.



Elnathan John is a full time writer who trained as a lawyer in Nigeria. His writing has been published in *Per Contra*, *ZAM Magazine*, *Evergreen Review*, *Sentinel Nigeria*, *Chimurenga's The Chronic* and *The Caine Prize for African Writing anthology 2013 and 2014*. He writes political satire for which he hopes to someday get arrested and famous. He also teaches writing. Although he has tried very hard, he has never won anything. He doesn't like mentioning it, but in 2013, he was shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing, for a story many people did not like. He still wonders if it was accidental but likes the acclaim this has given him globally. He loves Twitter. One day, he will quit drinking. He is unmarried and currently attempting to lose weight. He is planning his mid-life crisis to include contemplating a tattoo and a vasectomy.



Fola Lawal is a project coordinator, environmental enthusiast, charity worker, and a social media brand-integrator for companies and individuals. Quite often, she helps writers write more profitably. These days, Fola divides her energy between managing her book-publishing business and encouraging her social media fans to save the world, one tweet at a time.



Kalu A. Aja is husband to Oma, son, father to ‘the boys,’ and financial planner during the day. Kalu describes himself as a fiscal conservative with a strong belief in limited governments. Kalu writes part time on issues to do with governance, fiscal federalism and the efficacy of the Nigerian Federation, and also acts as a life coach to many. An alumni of the Lagos Business School and the New York Institute of Finance, he is a firm believer that Enyimba Football Club of Aba, Nigeria is the best football club in the world.



Pearl Osibu is a feminist, humanist, Facebook trouble maker, blog warrior, saint of peace. Pearl writes by night - fiction, nonfiction, social commentary, TV and film. You can read her work on <http://pearlosibu.wordpress.com/> (Fifty Shades of me), <http://www.sabinews.com/category/columnists/pearls-of-wisdom-with-pearl/> and Mnet/Multichoice Tinsel. By day, she designs and sews clothes. Yeah, she's multi-talented like that. You want to be on her good side. On twitter she is @pearlosibu where you wish she shared her nudes. She doesn't. Oops



Rafeeat Aliyu likes to call herself a writer. She blogs and tweets as Eccentric Yoruba and more recently Cosmic Yoruba. Under that handle she writes for ThisisAfrica.me and HOLAAfrica. She is also a contributor to Muslimah Media Watch and Afrimind. She is a big fan of speculative fiction and horror and her short story *Ofe!* is published in the AfroSF anthology. She promises to have more speculative fiction available in the future. When she is not writing, she enjoys reading about gender and sexuality in West African histories, listening to kizomba, folk metal and Afro-house music, watching Japanese dramas and enjoying African cuisine. Few things make Rafeeat as happy as reading well-written and researched African historical fiction.



Yas Niger is a writer and poet of Hausa origins, with strong progressive traditional views and has a Masters degree in Education. An activist and social media commentator, Yas writes on contemporary Northern Nigerian and African issues, as they reflect civilized virtues. He has a preference for simple poetry and unconventional literary prose, in a removed, assertive manner. Yas reflects on secular relationships, as they relate to everyday living.

I'm already missing you Mum...

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