

GENERATION

OF INGRATES

Dedication

This work is a dedication to Helechi, Rhoda Abu whose tenth-year anniversary is marked this year. This is to appreciate you immensely.

INTRODUCTION

In these later days, men shall be ungrateful even to their forebears (2Ti.3:2)

The word ingratitude connotes lack of appreciation for a sacrifice, favour, assistance, help, gift, support, honouring invitations for weddings and other ceremonies or make sacrifices to someone or group of people from someone or even a group of people to people, country to country or region to region. But a lot of beneficiaries of these seem to substitute the term ingratitude; an anonym, a variant attribute to recognizing this benevolence by contrary action(s). Saying 'Thank you', 'Am grateful', 'God bless you', are some expressions of gratitude.

It might not wonder you to note that assistance, support, gifts are not necessarily born out of abundance but sometimes out of painful sacrifices. It is an outflow of love from one to the other. Love that does not inhere in sacrifice is simply self-seeking, so says Sister Theresa of Assis.

The Bible, 2Tim.3:2 says, in these last days men will become ungrateful. Many reasons may account for why people are ungrateful these days arising from both social and psychological trauma or just simply out of poor habitual moods or were acting in delusion.

The scriptural passage from the ancient Book of books, the Holy Bible depicts the analogy of what

was to come, long ago; over Two thousand years. The characteristic display of verminous attitude in some unidentified, non-specific quarters but from people. It is so grieving the fact that the holy writ admonishes such behavior of man in times to come. For no fortuitous reason or reasons, the faith of man, nay mankind to deserve such behavior begs the impression of the universal book of salvation, deluding to achieve an aim in life might be one hidden inclination to such display of action.

My friend, Manga, Abraham Zachi, wrote on his facebook wall, and is he is here quoted “The mistake of an ingrate is that he thinks he does not need you ever again, tomorrow”

Ingratitude lies in the heart of egotism, carelessness, unappreciative individuals to honor issues of ethical life, behavior and issues of command and order. Like a general universal and conventional norm of many societies, to do a retrospect of events in their lives as a component of self-indulgence it's worth visiting this unappreciative attitude of man. A super structure of morality, looking into issues that hitherto would have taken a different perspective and interpretation or to add to the milieu of events in societies.

This is not to serve as a pundit for the escalation of any impressive work. The message here is to make my audience understand the painful art of ingratitude and deceit. Few cases are mentioned here not because they beg for attention, but to appreciating moral laxity in man and not for any form of attenuation but to put at tandem what had been written many years ago; to come to pass as

prophetic declarations in the lives of many. And woe to you in which these declarations come to pass except for serious considerations. This is not talking of fictitious issues but facts that have come to stay experientially. And I do know that many a person have had injurious concerns on one event or the other where one was not considered and ignored by the role, support, commitment, contribution, sacrifice etc. that he or she had put to a case in the life time of others into oblivion. Many have suffered several repeated assailants of economic, political, communal sacrifices, financial assistance, bodily pains due to once gullibility, trust unattended to and unaddressed, lacking reciprocity nor being appreciated by recipient colleagues, brothers, sisters, community, friends, siblings, children and relations taking it either as a right or out of share nonchalance; a reciprocal attitude that should ginger another repetition to sacrificial future duty which men have failed to recognize, appreciate and or comment on the positive sides of humanity.

There are several ways of appreciating or showing or expressing gratitude to good deeds; these are not limited to sending "a thank you gift, writing a letter or handwritten card, saying 'thank you, I'm really grateful for your help', returning the favor offering to help with something they need and taking them out for meal"

Other means of appreciation include acknowledgement, recognition, thanks, gratefulness, indebtedness, obligation, testimonial, tribute etc. etc.

Expressing gratitude is linked to improved physical and mental health. It builds trust for one another instead of nonchalant behavior. Those who appreciate are better preferred and perceived to be more innovative than those who don't. Take this as in work place and in private life. Delusion to people who trust you is more dangerous than an armed man.

EnterME

The first person I should recognize in this ignoble roster of ingratitude and deluding is myself. I have severally wanted to do the things I ought to have done. I tried to make amends, at restitution, compensation and sometimes pay a higher cost for what I ought to have neglected.

Coming from Kuje one fateful evening; it was an eve night of the new year, 2024. A promise of a new dawn for all elements of hardships and events, the average man had gone through in multi activities for livelihood. Life was becoming dreary and severe. Hoping and praying for a new year which promises a new lease of life. All, answer to God the creator from such demonic hemorrhage we have all gone through the year and praying for a better year.

My mission to Kuje was very simple, to get myself and friends the white liquid produced from the palm frond tree, that wonder tree of life, permitting the excitement of the new year to a serenading self-inducement and galvanizing one to a more serious year, giving hope to new survival.

After a few gulps, I pedaled on the road just in time to catch the new year's evening 'night' watch Mass, ushering the new year. It was quite late. The Mass was for 8.00pm. By 7pm, I was still driving home, which for more than one hour will get me home. Negotiating the National Stadium, by the Abuja city-gate, home ward, I slumbered on the steering wheel! Within that split of second I heard a loud sound. I shuddered. I found

myself on the road, alone inside the vehicle, unscratched. No approaching traffic vehicles. I veered to the right and parked properly. Two tires on the Driver's side had been torn apart as if a hack knife had pierced them through.

I picked the pieces that had broken apart from the body parts and put them back in their places. A young man came and asked," What was that?" Seeing I was all alone.

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"Was that you?" He queried.

"Yes" I responded with clear staring eyes.

"I heard a thunderous sound beyond what I am seeing"

"It was only God"

"Certainly" He concord. "Do you have a spare tire?" He inquired.

"Yes. I do have one but two are destroyed" I responded hopelessly.

"Ok, let me check a vulcanizer around this place to see if he was still around." I doubted if anyone would still be around this New Year eve. He dashed into the dark, and I kept waiting in light traffic that was going on; fewer vehicles were now plying the road for a traffic that was much heavy at day time.

What seemed an endless wait prevailed. Then he emerged with someone I considered to be the vulcanizer behind him. There were both burdened with tyers; one was the fixed spare and the other was to replace the pieced one. And straight both men went to work. With that concision work, in no time the vehicle was fixed. We negotiated the cost of replacement. Thank God; I had prepared myself for the new year with some money never to enter the year without cash. I

settled the bill and now turned to my 'Angel' as the case now was. "What can I do for you my dear friend?" "Oh nothing!" He said "I was just going to the Church for the New year eve and came across this mishap."

I knew the area very well and there was no church nearby this vicinity. I accepted his excuse and requested for his phone number to call him at a more convenient time to see what I could really do for him or recommend him for a job. I was so sure to call him for his worth of goodness. I pinched the last Three thousand Naira in my pocket and gave him, promising that more would be his as we made progress in this new milieu. I was quite sincere about that. He left appreciatingly.

I got home quite early to meet my family already preparing for the evening vigil Mass, the "Thanksgiving night." I hid the experience expression from my family members until many days after in order not to shatter the effect of a blissful New Year celebration. They would have been mourning or still, be in a hospital while others were celebrating the birth of a new year.

But that was all! I forgot the young man. Scarcely as I tried, I couldn't find his number any longer on my phone. My imagination led me to ignore the young man as an 'Angel' who came at an instance of my destitute moment.

And that was all! I regret not giving him my phone number. He could have called me. It was dark, I could hardly make his face anywhere in broad day light.

I bore the quilt eternally of a compassionate young man, who in spite of all odd time endeavored to be with me in this calamity.

It was in my early years, about ten or so years of my life. It was usually exciting to have and be in a group of youths your own age. So it was that on this hot afternoon, I came out of my cocooning, the only boy in my compound attending school. I was strange to my other house mates; what is doing going to school? Wasting his time!

I found my age mates by the river, nay stream, having their fun bathing in the flowing water. Quite large, at a long length; crossing from one point of the bank to the other in full excitement of their game. I simply joined the crowd in that ecstasy oblivious of the fact that I was a novice in the matters of the water. Soon, I got into the game as team player. The character of the team in motion; running after many to catch just one. I was the monster chasing for a prey; just a touch with one, would suffice. In my hurry I plunged into an unknown ditch beneath the water. I sunk deep.

I struggled to keep up the water level but it was in vain, I had gone too deep below. I gulped some water. I was in trouble. I was drowning with no knowledge of how to swim. My mates looked at me hoping I could rescue myself. Little did they know that I was strange to the things of the water.

I gulped the water the second time and I saw in a jiffy, Ruwo, a partially deaf nubile girl, a niece to my mother, and rising up to the challenge, dived into the water and sprang up with me up, lifting me to the bank of the

stream. She placed me on my back and gently deflated my stomach with a gentle push over my stomach. My colleagues picked up their wares one after the other and quietly slipped out of sight.

Many years afterwards, I imagined I could have been dead, thanking God for His rescue, He always admonished that I should show gratitude to the one who did the rescuing mission on that fateful day.

I left my station and travelled home to see her. I found her on a market day in the market place. I handed her two pieces of wrappers and some money, and she wept glorifying God for being remembered.

LOBASHI

He was a gentle man! He maintained his craft carefully not bordering on what others thought of him. A good farmer with good harvests at the end of the year. He ventures into nocturnal hunting which gave him superlative catches making meat not lacking in the house. He also doubles as a great fisher man, providing very juicy fresh fish at due season. Living with him was fun and life.

With his father, grand pa, I partook much in their palm wine episodes, sipping 'small' as was recommended. Afterwards we delved into our playful inanities.

My mother ranked next to him in sibling arrangement slide. I never saw him visit friend or friends. He seldom moved out of his domicile except stayed tuned to his father's couch and gossiped, or stray in stories that never was our interests. Lobashi was a solitude. Occasionally, they would disagree with the father but in no time, the duo was back to their usual routine.

He was not into scolding us but took a swipe on us and a reserve for not going to the farm on Sundays. Yet he complains that we ate on Sundays. We all ignored his

tantrums to no significant effect on us except that we avoided his gloomy face.

Sometimes, the elderly had their philosophy of life which conflicts in the new milieu. He often wondered why we said that 'fada has no wife'.

"Do you sleep with him at night? And you say "fada" has no wife! Deceiving gullible, impressionable minds like you". He would always hiss way into sorrowful moods. I wouldn't know if he pitied us or the 'fada'. But I know there were still men in the society which we lived that had no wife.

Until both men separated from having a team farm, we trekked about five kilometers each day to the farm. It became a dilemma when both men separated, each owning his own farm lands. We had the privilege of choosing who to go with. Lobashi had his two sons to go with him. I felt lonely to go with grand pa. I joined the team against grand pa. It was against all odds to make such a choice. Grand pa was quite reticent in his own world. I never found him go to the market, visit relations, or paid visits to grieved families. He only waited for the day of his death; as he says, my mates have all gone the way of their fathers, "I, alone am left!"

But grand pa was still strong to go about his farm chores; picking the weeds from the farm that had been set by his numerous in-laws, checking the welfare of his yam tendrils and the foliage of them, smiling at the green lush of corn. Though he disliked the application of fertilizer to his crops, he would only apply such to where he felt would be needed for sales in the market for his economic wellbeing but not for his stomach. According to him it has the potency of churning his stomach painful. And at the end of the year, requests for harvest

for all crops; guinea-corn, millet, yams, beans where he and his wife, Ine, would sit and relax and have their fill.

Uncle Lobashi did well on his farm with lots of produce to his credit. The work of a hardworking trio, nee, quadruple adds to a lot of harvest at the end of the year. Guinea-corn was only meant for sales at the middle of the year when food became hard to come by. He made his money. He calls on one friend from outside our vicinity to come and he negotiates the price for a new set of second-hand old clothes which he kept in his iron box for eternity, without use any day. He has this humour about trendy things in his life which made him remove his natural dentition replacing them with a set of artificial arrangement paid by him for himself. He found it novel exposing his gum in a show of one who had acquired a new set of the white man's teeth. He removed them and wore them as he would with his clothing. He had a transparent bottle where he kept it with some water inside.

He was quite a maverick. He armed himself with a syringe which he injects himself at every illness; catarrh, flu, malaria without any consultations. And he got away with it as he got well thereafter.

Our fights came during the end of the year when he bought new set of clothes for his two children. He had no consideration for me. He would always refer to my parents to take care of me. My parents would in return request that since I have been benevolently farming for him, he should take care of me for my Christmas outing. Lobashi would bluntly refuse, denying me any responsibility. For all the farm work, morning, afternoon and evening, he denies me my share of recompense; my

reward for hard work and devoted sincere assistance to his farm engagement.

I traversed between my parents and Lobashi who remained recalcitrant to his objectives, making me look less than the regality of his children. I wept. But he would not bulge, no qualms. He remained proud of his mischief with his intentions to send me back to my parents. But I kept maintaining my stay in the hostility of that environment. My decision to remain taciturn in the premises I was loathed was peremptory to an unknown animosity against my innocuous self, a hatred that brewed against my lively inheritance, ordained by the invisible hidden force of divine help.

“I have brought your son back to you”, he told my grandfather. He clutched me on one hand after the royal greeting formalities.

“Is that so?” My grandfather answered him. “Thank you! You have done well” He appreciated his kind care of his grandson. He paused. Then he straightened from his royal chair. “You go back. I will send for you at the appropriate time. He is my son. I need him here with me more than being there with you to learn palace matters.” He quipped in emphasizing his royalty permitting my uncle to be aware of his subjectivity to him, his chief.

My uncle mellowed down. He was cut short of further verbiage. He slurred. And we came out of my grandfather’s palace. We went back home. He remained my loathsome uncle for daring his fangs on me. I divorced my patronage of my farming activities to my grandfather, maternal.

My uncle did not hide his disdain for my intransigence; looking for an opportunity to disclaim me. I came back

on a school outing one Sunday. I desired to suck some oranges as soon as I saw one of the hawkers, my appetite got aroused, a female from another ethnic group. This group loathed my ethnicity and it told a lot on my relationship with them. Down-right we were their inferior and they manipulated situations to our disadvantage. We settled the price and she removed the fabric of the orange as was the tradition. But opened both ends of the orange leaving a leakage from the bottom. It was a bad job of an amateur. This would drip cumbersomely into one's hand as he sucks ending the bad outing for a good juice suck. I protested for a change. She resisted my appeal insisting I had ordered her to prepare the orange. But it has not been done well. I pitied her anyway but was not too compassionate to let my money loose. She picketed on my body; squeezing my white-collar neck with her dirty hands. I was instantaneously infuriated. Anger rose up my steam. I was enraged, visibly shaken. In a reaction that was almost murderous, I did not know when I smacked her face with a thunderous slap. The tray fell off her head and oranges scattered to the ground. She fell and rose from the ground.

"Wai-yo, wai-yo, wai-yo..." she went on wailing. The other hawkers looked at her face, the imprints of my fingers had been made on her face. They all went with her wailing. "You have killed her-o! Let's call Police-o!"

"Let them come and take him. Enough of this nonsense!" My uncle retorted. He was willing to hand me over to the Police after all. This was against my paternal uncle who asked the victim's relations when they came to inform him of my extremities in reacting to wrongs against me.

“We are going to the police. See what you son did to my daughter. Look at her face.” Her face was covered with blood. I had hit her from the back and she fell straight, scrubbing her face on the hard dry ground. I was sadder seeing her look that bad. But it had been her faults. We had come home from farming that afternoon. We had visitors, in-laws, who came to assist my paternal uncle in his farm. He delightedly asked me to buy fresh fish to entertain his visitors. I went heartily to get this fish.

“How much?” after spotting a very good one. She gave me a price that was provocative. I swallowed hard and emptied my patience. I gave her a price that was most appropriate. A good market strategy would have been ‘Sorry, you may add something to that’ but she rather chose to be abusive,

“Your father, will not ever eat this fish.” *And it was true.*

“W-h-a-t”? A simple look on my face spelt danger in my eyes. I had just had the misfortune of burying my father about three months ago. It was such an insult I felt deep inside my bones reminiscing my orphanage status. She took a race away from the scene of sales. I gave her a hot pursuit, caught up with her and smacked her back with my hand, with an unreserved force. When she got up her face was bruised with blood *flowing* from her face.

“Wai-yo, wai-yo. Wai-yo...!” Was the same wailing sound from the same ethnic group. And they rose straight to their mother who first came to the house to report the felony.

“You said my son did this?” he inquired as if it was an allegation. He did not burden himself about what had

happened. “Well, unfortunately, both children are mine. Before you proceed to the police, let me first apply some first aid treatment less it gets infected. The police station is far from here.” He said in a confidently, well-mannered discussion.

He brought out a little wooden box. *Old Teacher*. It contained a pair of scissors, cotton wool, iodine bottle, spirit and other old medications becoming outdated items in their state. He picked up the scissors, examined it with the dexterity of a medical practitioner, which he picked the cotton wool, dipped it into the spirit bottle, dampened, he dapped on the face of the girl. “Am washing the stains” he said to them in a medical stringent courtesy. Then he brought out the bottle of iodine and warned, “It will pain!” He spoke. The girl gave a loud cry as soon as the liquid got in contact with the bruises. He went on and the mother began to nod her head affirming that her daughter was getting proper medical attention. Afterwards, he told the mother, “Take her home.!! It was like a command. They obliged his order and filed through the same way they had come, charging aggressively into the house. He never asked me what happened. My paternal Uncle got my admiration and respect ever till his exit from the world unto the ground earth.

Talking about Ruzoma, as he preferred to be called, the great uncle we ever had. A jolly good man! My sojourn with him on this planet earth had sort of defined my life experiences.

He was a teacher with some salary pay but we lived like great and poor farmers. We hardly, had enough to eat in spite of all manual efforts in the farm which got one laboriously exhausted each day of week to complement

his salary. I had then to depend on the charity of friends for meals such as the late Reuben Daudu. As a student I received no dime from him for any of my school days. Neither did I get any from mum. JUST GOD!!! I don't know how I made it but God made it!!! But Ruzoma still went about boasting like Sekpe would, that he was sponsoring a student up to the University. It angered some persons who approached me to tell them the worth of his scholarship to me that made him boasts so frequently as he often does of it. I allowed them to have his boasts perhaps by it I would get by. Consequently, my first big gown when I began work in the Civil Service went to him. He wore it so proudly around the town and was acknowledged wherever he went. Then I began sending him some money. He became proud of me. He loved me that I felt him as my dear father!

He contributed the money that built his house but the entire labour was mine to the end. I was grateful at last that I will no longer be hopping from one friend's house to the other in search of where to lay my head at nights having bided bye to the Lobashis and the 'zeal of my father's house consumed me.'

But then twice he had accused me of theft; His locally constructed pistol was missing at one time and he suspected I had stolen it for sale in order to get some money. At another time his room was ransacked upside down and some of his money was taken away. I was of course the closest suspect. You could imagine the trauma and treatment I went through as a result of these. But God vindicated me as Daku, a younger brother was caught with these materials after a whole lot of period and the sentence of defamation I had endured while my social isolation lasted.

You know you trembled when Uncle Ruzoma approaches the house from leisurely outings. But God gave us patience to endure his tantrums. He gets pettier and messier when he was tipsy beyond normal. He nags than necessary and quarrels at a louder voice with his wife irritatingly.

When he was felled as our last icon, it was demise full of sorrows. We have come to know him, loved him and put up with his nature and character. He talked about politics and the family Chieftaincy which bored me silly. He would wake me up early hours of the mornings and commence a dialogue about how fraudulent the Shigabas were in taking over chieftaincy whereas the Abus were the first to found Sheria. How in a scuffle, they fought, and how Abu put down Shigaba on the floor, near the cooking pods in one of their fights.

He goes a-fishing and gets some fish for our home delight. I almost took to that past time as it could get you some sweet little fish from the shallow waters in the evenings.

I listened to my maternal uncle, Lobashi speak his mind. *Let them come and carry him. Enough of the nonsense.* I sneaked quietly out of sight and hid myself somewhere in the primary school until it was dusk. It gave me an alert of my impending exit from this ancient family I had endured fraternizing with.

I stock with my grandfather until I ventured out of their premises at the exit of my father from the surface of this blissful but fateful earth. On that same date, my father's death, I moved out of the Compound with a mindset, not knowing what else would happen to me, never to return. But I was sure of some optimism coming my way, I was going to my father's house to take

over what was mine. I never went back to that same house again in spite of what grandma tried to influence, and persuade me. Dear, good old grandmother!

“You have no food there to eat” She would sadly declare to me. But we ate all the same irrespective of whether it was one meal in a day. I forgave my uncle when I began to work for a living; providing him with gowns and economy for his penchant desires, the palm wine odyssey in rumination.

Danco

He is tall, elegant and lanky. I fell in likeness with him for his superior Spiritual gifts as I did other Spiritual leaders. He epitomizes the faithful kindness of God. His deceptive looks were far over bearing for me. His mere appearance depicts the presence of God. Yet he was simply a seminarian in one of the major seminaries. A reminiscence of my years at the St Clement minor seminary, Lokoja spoke volumes of him and my wishes for his sacred vocation.

I carried my wooden box on my head with my other luggage in my hand. I came in late than others. I was not meant to be there due to the paucity of my finances. My resumption dragged long enough to a week before the money emerged to assume school. We entered the school gate, and was welcomed with the cacophony of noise “This is a coffin coming in -o!”

I was so proud of my wooden box which Dad had emptied his most valuable clothing from it to let me have it; a prized item of his hard labour. Like the lisping Dolly Parton, in her clothe of many colours, sang after the *Josephic*-adorning of his beloved father's gift, I was elated at this admission box. My excitement almost died. But I was encouraged by my chaperon, spurring me on, and not to allow their inanities weigh me down. "Stupid Boys", he concluded in consolation.

Danco, represented for me what many couldn't be in their lives' existence and their desire to serve God in the universality of the doctrinal enclave of the Holy scriptures. His voice resonated the heavenly adumbration of Angels, getting me into the eschatological realm of opium estate. He possesses the power to create an agenda that was beyond human reasoning but eternal warmth and hospitality.

Bearing in mind that Danco has the same celibate heredity with my younger brother, who was already a priest of the Catholic Church, it was easier for both to flow in tango. Both wielded much interest on each other. Their love between them was not lost. There was a synergy for the work of God from both of them in a relationship that was primarily not symbiotic. I had communicated my effort at redeeming his exit from the seminary thus;

We just came back from the Very Rev. Fr. Atado. He informed me that he has asked Francis to apply and submit his application to him tomorrow being 19th May, 2012. This we have written this

night awaiting day break for submission. His major worries are his newly ordained Bishop, Hassan Kukah who he thinks is one that follows the rigid rules to hear from Bishop Audu where Francis was coming from. Therefore, we need to pray further that the deposition from Lafia will be favourably disposed to his candidacy. I have however cautioned him to keep it top secret even from his closest friends until further notice. The testimonies will speak for itself.

I had written my brother who was outside the country.

I ventured into a more compromising relationship with Danco seeing that my younger brother had vested much of a companion in him. We called him our brother. In deed as Danco's father would describe the relationship; "My grandfather and your grandmother's brother came from the same lineage. Now can't you see you are my own?" He would conclude with deep overwhelming emotions.

It was on a project site where I had hoped to erect a domicile for my privacy opting from a rental apartment, the foreman approached me with this question, "What is your relationship with this tall boy that came in yesterday here?"

"Oh, he is my brother" I responded.

"Are you sure of that?" He went further. How could he ask me if I was sure of who my brother was. I do know that he had some reputation for insubordinations. So, I listened to another tale.

"He came here and said some nasty things about you"

It was not the first.

“Please, go home and settle the matter with your parents before you consider him for any giftings” he admonished. “He said you are providing this Boys’ quarter for him.”

“Yes!”

“And that, this was the only thing you could do in your life!”

And what was that coming from my ‘brother’ to a total stranger

“Then we asked him where he was staying? And he said in your house for the past five years paying nothing! And he still has the guts and temerity to pour out such nonsense here, knowing fully well that he was not paying any dime to stay with you! Does he know what it cost to pay for a room in Abuja?” he paused. Then concluded, “Think about it-o, my brother!”

It was a similar situation that presented itself when I was committing the house to God on completion. I had invited my neighbours from my previous apartment. We were all seated. In making his remarks one of my guests had this to say,

“I know Mr. Simon for some years now! I can testify of his positive attitudes. I was surprise however, when his brother told me a lot of negative things about him.” And he began to weep, openly amidst the guests present.

I thought about it for a while! I must admit that I have been too complacent about his lousy lifestyle. He had called me one faithful day to a meeting. I hosted him at a restaurant. And we discussed his coming to a new lease of life after his excommunication from the Seminary. He had to pursue a Masters’ degree in public

Administration and consequently, he had been offered a job opportunity in one of the oil industries in the country to serve as P.A. to one of the Managers. He was soon proceeding to Germany for training. I did not see the link! For being a Personal Assistant to a Manager, you needed a training outside the country? But I accepted his portrait of story, though not so convinced. I held my doubts to myself.

“My training outside is scheduled to commence next month and my transit particulars are being worked at right now.” I listened. He didn’t make any monetary demands of his project. So why was the meeting necessary at all? I was to later find out. Perhaps he saw my countenance and decided against any requests. Well, I had nothing to lose, even if he moved out of the country entirely. That was his pleasurable desire and to the rest of us, an exit of one burden away.

“Excuse me sir!” I turned to look at who required my attention. It was one of those females in my neighborhoods. She was not in my sultry mood but has acquired the consummate femineity to attract an attention to any ribald urge.

“I will come and see you later if you will be at home.” She was not requesting for an audience but a forthright meeting. I assured her I was through for the day, in-doors I will be.

Not quite an hour a knock came at the door. She came in when I opened the door for her. She was not careful to avoid sitting on my favorite chair. Lacking in absolute courtesies. All the same, she was now my guest.

“Emmm... Do you know why I have not been greeting you these days?” She asked me as if expecting me to give her the answer. But yes, I had the answer. “It’s because of what your brother told me about you” she said.

“Well,” I began. “I don’t want to know what he told you. But you became your own Judge in my case of what somebody told you about me and it did not come across your mind to verify it, but pass the judgement on me. It’s okay with me.” I paused. Then continued, “one thing with me is that you have succeeded in helping me tame my roving tongue from answering such banter which amounts to slowing my thinking pattern of Live’s trajectory. Tales of such nature does not give a clear picture of one’s true self, misjudging right mindedness, displacing apt position of another.” These individuals are technical killers.

“Did he tell you anything since you came back from your station?”

“No” I answered.

“He raped my younger sister!” She said bluntly.

“It’s a lie” I rebuked her immediately.

“Ask the people in your compound. They will tell you”

“How did it happen?”

“He called my sister into your room. And raped her”

“Just like that?”

“The police are looking into the matter and will be here soon to take him away

“Any witness to that effect?” I probed further knowing that it was not easy to proving a case of rape evidentially.

“Am telling you what happened”

"You have not told me anything. You can't just come in here and tell me my brother raped your sister. They must be evidence!"

"Well, I have told you what happened! And he wants to be a Revd. Father. He will not get it! He is wicked!"

I was not interested in the voyeurism of what happened. But having known that all men were sinners, she needed to temper justice with mercy even in the face of my disbelief of her story; a girl got invited into a house, sauntered into the bedroom without raising an alarm of her abduction and you want me to believe in that kind of fairy tale.

"Now listen to me," I began my conclusion of the matter. "We are all Christians and you are one of those I consider in high ranking. A "sister" in the Catholic Church. We must forgive each other especially against the background that nothing adversely had happened to your sister. Let by-gone be by-gone!"

"I have told you my mind," she objected recalcitrantly. "Go and think about it," I pleaded.

"Please, could I have a word with you?" That was how it all began with Danco calling my attention.

"I need a to do a meditation for two weeks and where I am staying for now was not conducive for me." I had no problem with that inasmuch as I was not going to be around bothering to crave convenience to anyone.

"That's alright! You may leave the keys behind with my neighbour on completion of your Spiritual exercise."

"No problem" he assured me.

Thus, I travelled back to my Station in faraway Katsina only to return two months after. My Spiritual brother

was still in my house. I wondered what happened to that exercise but I kept my silence to myself. And went back after two weeks with the hope that he was yet to finish his mission.

I returned in another three months, running away from the exhaustion of a new abode, unfamiliar environment forcing me the stress to learn a new language for transaction. My Brother was still in the house. This time around, he had another tenant with him, leaving me un-informed neither has he told me anything about his five months stay from the two weeks he had earlier promised.

This time around things were becoming berserk. My cooking pots were mangled. My two little generating sets had been knocked down without repairs. Even the one I had hidden from him for use when I saunter in periodically as I did, was not spared this rascality. He never said a word to any of these damages. Yet he never bothered even to help in off-loading my luggage on any arrival. He simply walked away to his pleasures. The Home Theatre musical box was charred. It was not the home coming I had anticipated. I had figured I would be left alone to cool off and relax from the exhaustion of my sojourn to the comforts of my home.

“There was a power surge and I wasn’t around to attend to it. But someone has promised to fix it back,” he narrated. I just had to put up with this unwholesome attitude until he finds his way out of my premises. He never did. I tolerated him much as I could, turning my bedroom to his dining room. Occasionally, leaving the apartment un-locked for his

outing or journeys. I was really becoming fed up with all these character instabilities.

Now I considered these matters intently. I decided to pray about them. And I got a revelation. I called him in one night and we sat together. Then I began,

“You see Danco, I have permitted some issues without making any remarks about their negative effects on me because the Lord has asked me not to bother you. But what will be my contribution to your life if I left you the way you are! I need to make an attempt at your confused life before it got out of the way” I paused.

“I have let you into my life without any hindrances. You took it for granted. Why will you take your visitors right into my bedroom, your elder brother’s bedroom, for whosoever he was. You have done this on several occasions and I thought you will come to terms with this. That’s not all, you have decided to turn my bedroom into your Dining room. Why? Courtesy demands that my bedroom is sacrosanct to any of your activities, except your clothing. Now you went out the other day without closing the door, no, the net, yet I was lying naked on the sofa. And co-tenants passed by.”

I relaxed to see the effect of my verbiage on him. He was nonplused. He kept staring at me. I went scriptural.

“Every day, ask the Spirit to lead you. You are, a child of God!” I said with emphasis on the *child* of God. “You can’t go wrong if you asked the Holy Spirit to lead you daily! To do the right things. Look at the effects of damage you have done to this house.” I shook my head ruefully.

He came down from the chair and apologized profusely and requested that I should pray for him. I really now know that he in deed, needed prayer. And I did.

In spite of this momentous lecture, when I had decided to pack out, I did so modestly, without letting him know that I had made enough provision for him to keep staying there for the next six months as I have paid the rent accordingly. And that I was leaving behind everything that would make life easier for him. "If you needed to stay beyond the six months you may need to source for your payments. All the beddings and kitchen and bathroom are all left at your convenience."

On the day of my packing out to my own mortgage apartment, ending the era of trepidations and hostilities of owners and house rent payments, exorbitantly not out of comfort but for the economy of the Land lords in Abuja, my friends and cronies came. Danco crossed one leg upon the other and pretended obviously that nothing was happening. He never cared to lift much of a spoon to the consternation of all who had come to know him as my accommodated brother. I left him to his dead conscience. Afterwards I called my immediate neighbour, one I had closely related with and shared banter with, even some secrets of life. I had even had amorous ambition to pick the younger sister, a reticent girl, a Masters' degree holder, yet fetching, basin on her head, water for the family use. A peculiarly humble girl, with a working capacity earning much money for her elder sister as a Bank worker. But my *lovely* brother *dissuaded* her from

having anything to do with an *idiot* like me. I had twice or so taken the children for a picnic at the *Amusement-park* and always bought onions as gift items for them on each visit from my station.

"Sorry to border you ma!" I began. I spoke to you of my impending movement to my apartment and contracted you to do the cooking"

"Yes Sir"

"But I am surprised that while I was packing you couldn't come or send any of your children to help me lift even a spoon. My people believe that even if I had done you anything bad, it was time for you to wish me pack out in a hurry. I might have done you some wrong, I please request for your forgiveness, I don't want us to part this way. In animosity..., please."

My neighbour burst into uncontrollable tears and ran wailing into her room. The children came and asked what I had done to their mother. They were right. I could have slapped their mother or poured some insolence on her to make her melancholy.

"Nothing, just normal talk" I insisted. "I am going, and am bidding her farewell. Possibly she did not like the idea. But I have to go anyway." That seem to have placated them. They left more soberly. People really never want to be reminded of their weaknesses.

He came to the house as the prayer was being held. Entered the boy's quarter I had promised him. He hung onto the wall, leaning over it like one in need. A need inheres in humility of character. I was exchanging banters with my guests and he came to him.

“Why could you not lift a pillow when I was parking out?” I decided to hear from his side of thoughts. He couldn’t answer.

“You see we agreed to a two-week spiritual exercise. Today is five years of that exercise. Not any explanation for that conduct.” I paused. Still no answer. “And was it necessary to bandy me all over the place?” I moved on to my next guests.

He had his next strategic moves to disrupt the relationship with my younger brother, the Rev. Father but he too had a stronger spiritual backing too.

Hmmm...!

Zaggy

Zaggy was my step sister’s first son. We were all happy at his birth. Much more looking like his father in all precepts and bodily built as he grew up. His father was fond of him. The first fruit of his manhood which produced two others from his loins. My step sister was the toast of the moment within and around as men flocked to our house seeking her attention. She shone in that nubile state with all the tempting of a fledgling girl. Dark in completion, slim and tall like our father and not the haunted image of her mother.

Many men came and they were those I felt were coming only for the fun of having her to them. However, she made a decision of her hers and that was Zaggy's father against all my uncle's protestations. He came in arrogantly and sleazily greeted people in the house. And straight he goes to his love net zone. This attitude kept annoying our uncle.

But we had been friends who had a sting with the Lower Benue River Development Board as casual workers. He was recruited as a Driver/Mechanic while I was a Clerical Assistant. We were not paid salary but daily allowances which kept us going in life. He was that close to the management of the Basin and consequently had some swell times with the Officers in their company of leisure and pleasure. He handled the official vehicle like it were his own and that gave him greater advantage than the rest contenders in the race for Namita, my younger sister. He was always there, moved her out with the vehicle and brought her back at late hours. Now it seemed he had the upper hand, the others kept gradually away from her or possibly she had told them to stay out as she had made up her mind for Zaggy's father. And their frequency and numbers dwindled by the days that followed.

His father was a likeable individual, reticent but with a personality that was not ignorable. His mere appearance in a venue threw light to the occasion or event as it were. His father was a retired member of a customary court in the region. This gave him additional recognition. He called me to his side one of those days and said "What is your problem? Am hearing concerning you and getting a spouse. I want to help you. It's a simple matter if you would allow me"

I mused over the matter and answered him conclusively. "I will let you know. Be assured that I most appreciate this onerous concern about my inability to secure a life Partner."

"Let me know when you are ready, please" he said with a worried concern on his face as he moved on.

Good things never last as the devil was only interested 'to steal, kill and destroy'. At her fourth birth, my step sister was struck ill. The twins she bore passed on within two months successfully, as they were both delivered in ailment conditions. That was when Zaggy's problem began. All insinuations were made to the medical unfitness of his mother's illness contracted to the father. Contrary to the obvious fact, that it was the other way round which was turned to believe in the evil it was portent to be. It was a graphic epic of slander, a false manipulation of grotesque level. It cascaded to the level of the family, my family integrity was high at risk and degraded. But those who knew, know it was a false impression of an uncharitable and unappreciative family. We bore the medical expenses of her treatment until her passage.

The father's family resisted the children from paying any condolence visit to us. The children were held closely from letting out to their mother's family. We buried our sister against custom which requires that the father's family take responsibility of all funeral rites and bury her in their compound. Non came to pay condolences or courtesies even to the glaring fact that the mother contracted the illness from their father who had sultry, connubial affairs that was at the risk of his health. The children were held hostage within their grandfather. But the female amongst them escaped from that grip to pay

us a condolence and see their mother's grave site. I don't know what became of her after that visit. Such is the tale of human tantrums.

Consequently, Zaggy had to leave the grandfather's house to stay with the aunty, away from the vicinity, in Jos. The aunty was married to a senior lecturer in one of the citadels of learning, a higher institution.

Darkness came down. The aunty also passed on. After a while the lecturer sent him packing. Why not. It was a difficult time for the young Zaggy. He had nowhere to run. His paternal grandma, his uncles, his aunties all do not reckon with the children of their brother, son and friend. He stayed working in a hotel, their laundry department; earning stipends. I craved his indulgence as one who was determined to make it in his life time.

He was quite prepared in life to make up for the negligence of his family members, most especially against the background of the death of their grandfather who incidentally, later became the paramount ruler of the land. I wondered how far he could have gone owing up to scholarship challenges. I recall my ordeal in this sad episode of my odyssey to School. He ran onto my path requesting for my aid, assistance and hospitality.

Having lost my dad in my fourth year in my secondary school, the challenges in getting school fees was more hazardous. My mum being a peasant woman was not apprehensive of my ambition to be scholarly. My aunty was less concerned about my being. My maternal home was far from being interested in my future life. Life was miserable for me. But I was determined to do something about my condition. I thought of several ways of raising an economic venture, especially in

farming. I thought of tomato and vegetable farm that could yield faster harvest. It meant that I ought to be more fraternal with the Hausa in this venture. What about sugar-cane farm? It meant a similar apprenticeship and trade. These were commercial farms.

I backed out of this tirade of adventure and narrowed to my cultural Guinea-corn farm. I did quite the cassava farm. Both of these blossomed. I sold a whole heap of cassava for meagre twenty naira. As I checked my Guinea-corn farm, I was elated at the flush. Then came the pudding, heavy ears were formed which facilitated my joy and I began to calculate the worth of the sales which could more than average see me through the first year in school. I kept visioning my potential economy each day as inspected the glowing formation. I gave it a three-day rest to quicken the ripening against my haste.

On the fourth day I was at the farm. I stood still not believing what I was seeing before me. Half of the farm ripening seeds were being consumed by birds. Only the chaffs remained, hanging loosely, lifelessly being tossed about by minor breeze. Not only was half destroyed but where the major yields were the targets of these illicit, complicit and treacherous birds. My knuckles buckled. My head swirled. My eyes dimed. I sat down on the floor. Tears began to roll down my cheeks. My hope was lost. My ambition strangulated. Who had done this to me. Whom did I do wrong to get this punishment. I had led a life of puritanism, minding and hoping to surprise my environment even in my spartan condition. And they knew not my effort and my estimated ambition.

I gathered what was left of my energy and slurred, dragging myself home. Few days later someone came

and reported an information that there were looking for those who would want to teach at a Community Secondary School with an attractive payment of N100.00 per month. I had no options against my reticent, shy self. I joined others and accepted the offer with an enhancement packaged that would assuage and make up for my shyness. The products of that stint as at writing have burgeoned to societal elites as Assistant Commissioner of Police, Principals of Secondary Schools, Immigration Officers etc. They received in a hurry qualitative class coaching in all subjects which made them excel as they enlisted in other schools for their WAEC Examinations.

Needless to say, four months of the six months payment we laboured to impart knowledge on the students, were paid without two and I traveled with two hundred Naira, as my savings to register at the University of Jos. What could two hundred Naira avail me in the staring face of Departmental registration, Faculty registration, Library, sports, medical etc. and not to talk of Hostel accommodation. Feeding? I had prayed before leaving home that God was my father consequently, he would sponsor me through this University scholarship. I decided to join the Train when the cost of vehicle to Jos from Makurdi was becoming too prohibitive for me. I joined the train coming from Portharcourt to Jos.

After take-off, as we had struggled in physical contacts and strength to get inside, we settled standing. The train was choked full. As we dragged by in motion, the train horn blared, and we moved on, in that musical diatonic, churning the ground to pebbles on a rail, one of the women shouted, "My money had been stolen-o!"

“How much?” someone asked her but she couldn’t give an answer. She was only weeping profusely. And I wondered why, if you had such huge sum of money, yet you risked to join the train. I decided to check my own money. My heart skipped as I found the landing of my pocket inside out. All of it was gone. I had argued that no pick-pocket will ever get at me. Prepared I was! With my pull-over, I would put my money in my breast pocket and slip my pull-over on. In the frenzy of the late arrival of the train, I forgot this procedure and trying to avoid eyes on my money being transferred for security purpose, I became a victim of my indulgences. “My money-o” I unconsciously, shouted too.

“How Much?” was the next question that came. It was all I had, the whole world. It could have been millions to me. I thought of going back to my village. But it was night. Moreso, I learnt you would pay for any stoppage. With which money anyway? I hung on to the train until we arrived Bukuru, Jos early hours of day break. I located my town man’s house after my initial visit to confirm the admission. He was excited about seeing me gaining admission into a university. I kept my ordeal to myself. It was my problem and I will not spoil the exciting moment for him. He gave me transport to the campus promising to see to my hostel accommodation if it came granted. I used the money cumulatively with others and registered my departmental courses and Faculty registration. I left medical, sports and other sundry registration fees unattended to.

Daily as I went to campus, I saw my erstwhile school mates from the Basic studies we had attended. They got in there before me immediately we had finished. Some gave me transport back to Bukuru. Others took me out to eat. As I trekked in the morning, some inhabitants

wondered why I should be trekking five kilometers to the campus and would offer me some money. Symbolically, I should put my trust in God who was the Father of all orphans and not in the flimsy two hundred naira that I had. On and on, life went until I had written my first semester exams.

Now Zaggy was here, at my heels asking for the kind of assistance I had earlier needed in life to proceed with his university studies. I was in a dilemma. Having declined to associate with my siblings and all that concern them, but here was an orphan. I still stuck to my decision. At this time the Lord spoke to me “Never mind. Nothing will happen to you. Go ahead and do the much you can for the young man”

That quietened me and settled the matter. I plunged into my best in providing a Five-Thousand-naira stipend every month for the four years his studies lasted except for a few months when things were a bit hard; putting up a place of resident for my mother did dwindle the sum to three thousand naira. Even then it only lasted a few months and was back on my personally conscious promise including sponsoring his escort tours and project work at the end of his academic years.

Yes, he did appreciate quite interestingly and elaborately in his project acknowledgement sheet. Then came the conflicting era of father and son. He began cascading in his relationship down the line as I advised him against cigarette smoking. He took it personal. And it smeared the relationship for both of us. Little did I know that such brutal truth which I delivered diplomatically was going to cost me much harm in my future. I had successfully dissuaded many from such habit. I felt he would gain from it. He stayed away from

the house opting to join his comrades in the business of cigarette, inhaling the smoke in spite of my admonition on his health, clearly delivered. He continued in silhouette but his escapades got to me. I decided to let him be. Years of adolescence in a youth becomes most difficult to caution or advise in his life. A classical metaphor of bending a dry wood. But he calculated his recompense on me more negatively, eventually.

As we seated under the COVID 19 ban at home, each Sunday was our private worship. Places of gatherings were banned so also were worship centers. We adopted being at home to say our prayers every Sunday. I became the Rev. Father, Pastor or Chief Evangelist. As we prayed together each Sunday and I began to notice a conspiracy that was brewing around my members. My daughter was in a disliking with me in a manner that was becoming obvious; less attracted emotionally to the spiritual exercise we were hosting. It was obvious insolence on my part. She took a distance away from our gathering emotionally away and it was tearing me apart, making me uncomfortable. She was holding private discussions with Zaggy, yet detested the communal relationship we ought to have engendered. I looked forward to Zaggy given her counsel to her domestication at home as he hadn't any to search. I became suspicious of their meetings.

On this particular Sunday, as we followed the Church's reading calendar, we read from the Book of Mathew Chapter Number 25: It was about the Sorrowful mysteries that Jesus went through even in the hands of people he healed, fed and delivered from spiritual shackles that poured out their vexation against him: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him" they shouted. The pastor that I was, in my *homily*, I reminded my congregation

that even as at today we were still crucifying Jesus by our actions. For saying He was the son of God, they took offence against him but ate the food he gave them. So also, we crucify the people that fed us. This was insinuating their attitude towards me who had done so much for them in life. For the duo have benefited from my sponsorship, legitimate as the claim was, I was still entitled to some degree of respect, appreciation and dignity from these two than I was experiencing. I was flying my daughter on all trips, even when I had not seen what an airport looked like not to talk of patronizing an aircraft. I Deserved encomiums not slanders. Back-biting was allowed to the extent that it was dignifying and promoting the ego of the benefactor.

“For instance, Zaggy what was I sending you when you were in school every month?” Hoping that will quieten him a little bit.

“Was it not only three thousand naira?”

“Every month?” He nodded in weak confirmation. That was good for me! If I thought he was going to raise me to high, I got it all wrong. I regretted ever bringing such reminiscence. I was more enraged this time around at such insolent manner of his response. For somebody I was sending Five thousand naira every month even before I ever paid my tithe. He was my consideration before others, before even my mother and other siblings. I was miffed. If it was meant to disregard his person, he got there before me with arrogance and disrespect. I chewed my lips. I needn't to have brought up the subject matter at all, my mind set kept telling me. I was disoriented by such disproportional disregards to my efforts and sacrifices. Afterall, no one was giving me any dime while I was in school except for

Titus, my cousin who sent in by post four twenty-naira denomination, eighty naira. It was all I got from anybody as I maintained a spartan low life style on campus. Now even for the three thousand naira every month for four years was quite generous but unappreciated. He has become of age now; self-serving personality. Now could that have been the reason for his taking shelter over my roof? To let me know the less I contributed in his life time even against his parents who cared less for his existence in this world. He went beyond his boundaries casting aspersions to my spouse against whom he was to marry in life. Small boy with an over bloated mentality!

Having being so disillusioned, rousing from my gullibility of a true individual who could be trusted tomorrow, this scenario set the stage for my future attitude; nonchalance towards everything that concerned him. I became aloof to his stimulants except to look for an accommodation for him to stay away from me, assuaging the pathologies I was going through daily seeing him in my company. I had never bordered to be of such arrogance to the few people who had accommodated me. He was quick to realize that he was becoming a persona non grata in the house. He opted to stay with a friend of his and he never visited again.

YAKIM

Now I really get confused with this entrant into the generation of ingrates. Finding him very articulate and impressive in mind and character, I was shocked to find out what became of him in very late days of our union. Perhaps I had overestimated his capacity to overcome self-indulging. Quite an intelligent individual, full of integrity and self-worth. I don't know how he fraudulently evolved in this ignoble list, of this roll call. I feel pained to include this call on this write up.

Yakim emerged in my life in my civil service experience. An experience that took me to the North-Eastern part of the country on account of my disagreeing with my office leader on dealings of irregularity, illicit and obscure transactions in the office. It became an issue of cheating, lies and other forms of malpractice and manipulations against our late Head Officer. His Deputy saddled himself the task of burdening self with all the administrative suitability to his burial arrangements. I knew he wanted to benefit himself

financially for all the troubles he imposed on himself that were not necessarily his concerns but that of the family. He carried out alone from these secret arrangements.

The Head in the past had called us to announce what he was entitled to in the event of his passage from this world to eternity. He also announced for every group of people their entitlements based on their Grade levels as they exit finally from this earth. It was a Federal Government circular on the death benefits of all Staff of Federal Ministries, Agencies and Establishments.

His Deputy was busy collecting his salary for the three months he was in the referral hospital at the Jos Teaching Hospital without letting it off to the family members. All other payments that accrued to him as OPE was being collected by this Officer since this was a table payment arrangement. He disappeared from the Office at his death only for him to appear back to the office the following day that he had traveled to Abuja to inform Headquarters about the demise of our head. He only needed to have given headquarters the information about the demise of our leader. That was all. He never told anyone that he had received some money to facilitate the burial arrangement as was stipulated or that he had received the money as contained in the circular. He was all in charge. I was only involved in arranging a bus that would convey Staff to the venue of the burial, money he sourced from the A.I.E. he now controlled.

Subsequently, after the burial came through, the family met me to announce that they were given sixty thousand naira against the contents of the circular

which stipulated a one hundred thousand naira. He did not give them the condolence letter which stated the amount enclosed. Forty thousand short of the expected. I simply advised them to acknowledge the gratitude of what was given to them. They did. The bubble blew. I think he was asked to explain what happened. According to him, the family needed one who would manage the fund smoothly for the burial arrangement of their father. Thus, he took that part of the money for sundry expenses *without letting the family know about it*. When the children asked why he had not remitted the funds of their father's salary and other allowances that accrued to him over four months, he strongly defended his role in keeping the money safe for the family which would help them after all the family's burial expenses. "And yet we were short of money to give our late father the befitting burial rite he deserved," the first son queried.

Thereafter, he called me all sorts of names; lackey, informant, incompetent etc. as having irresponsibly brought his unfortunate and ignoble role to the fore. The consequence was his transfer to another State office and subsequently to the Headquarters. While at the Head office, he skimmed complicitly to have his pound of flesh. He believed rightly that the sky was so large that birds of the air could fly without conflicting against each other. True. But not at the expense of the others. He told the Chief Executive Officer that I had begged him on my knees, requesting to be posted to the North-eastern part of the country where a new State had just been created. A very obscure State to my knowledge; I had only known of the existence of that State when the posting letter arrived. I had no friends there, nor any of my relations or tribes-man

there. I wondered why these were happening to me in spite of all I had done for this Organization. A new state without facility and hospitality. It was a moment of sobriety for me.

“And so, what? I thought you were a Christian. Were you there when they took the decision to post you out. But was God not there and He didn’t refuse their decision? Run to the State my dear” That was the voice of Col. Olayinka, a class mate at my M.Sc. program. “And if after three months, nothing happens to change your life positively, come back here and I will throw my Bible away.” He drove recklessly furiously away from me in his car. I never got to see him telling him the prolific of his prophesy.

The Civil Service, derived from its non-possession of weapons of violence, strives much in subtle violence that has resulted in many calamities. Thriving on nepotism, religionism, regionalism, tribalism and all manners of aversions to rules and indiscipline. So regimented in Boards, Management and other career functions in service. A system full of back-stabbing, back-biting, lies against colleagues to procure favours; sundry benefits, closeness to power brokers, image damaging of friends for pecuniary purposes and fear of transfers to places of discomforts, away from areas called juicy posts. Selective policies to support mediocrity by CEOs. And sometimes outright denials of legitimate privileges and rights, a direct reprisal for being on the other side of fairness. And corruption rests on the ambits of the account and audit departments. Civil Servants are placed to play the drums or get booted out with no one to defend them with a cache, “if you can’t beat them, join them”, to survive. Such systems, giving individual to circumvent

rules to his own trivial advantage, making the CEOs larger than the institution.

“Abu!” The Director of Finance and account was talking to me as if he was addressing someone from a far distance. I was Secretary to the Procurement Board Committee, representing the interest of the Chairman, the CEO I served as Special Assistant. He was one determined to make a difference in an agency like this. He was not involved in the monetary decision except that which was presented to him according to the threshold arrangement.

“Place this on the advert Board,” referring to tenders for quotations from interested contractors. “Snap a photoshoot from this particular threshold. Wait till evening and thereafter remove it by end of day.”

“Yes Sir” I responded imagining what this was meant to be.

On the opening day of the tenders, five quotations were received under the obligated section, the least quoted and seemingly competent tender was picked. Incidentally, all quotations under this threshold were from the same contractor, a company owned by my Director of Finance and Account.

Well, that was the Civil Service I had joined. I sauntered into my new place of posting. Life was hard in the new State. But after three months I found the most pleasurable civil life in my career. Life became good; nee life was good. The environment changed for good.

That was how I met Yakim. A good man. All intelligent. Flawless English expression. Got me all admiring him. We discussed, charted and spoke on similar issues. No holds barred. We were free expressing our mindsets.

We had sensual matters displayed at no stakes. Most of our talk bordered on objectivity. We seemed to have come from the same mother as it were. He named his first son after me. What else do I need from a friend? Our endless ribald stories never had any dissensions. I was glad on a particular day a lady sauntered into the office premises which we shared commonly together at the Local Government secretariat. "Meet my wife to be" he said with the effusion of joy. Afterwards they got married and life became more convivial with them.

Afterwards, he had a visit from armed robbers at his residence one night. We paid him a sympathy visit. And I made a gesture of an assistance to him in his penury. He appreciated this much. And there began the true relationship. A friendship that was more than a brotherly relationship. I found a companion in a city that was too lonely for me. I found solace in all these pleasantries.

We exchanged visits in our localities. I have found a friend like no other. He was the best of best. Yes, as it were, I boasted and found him a gift to me for the wrong done to me. In compensation, he came up line to wipe up tears off my face. After my transfer from that vicinity, I invited him out to my village for the Easter break. He obliged. He left his family and came down and we journeyed together home. I was glad nothing adverse happened to us as we got home in dark driving without the benefit of clear illumination on our very bad road. We did that again with more friends joining us in the comfort of my newly completed apartment at the village. It was our fun time; my younger sister was at her best in culinary activities as she churned various cuisines from pounded yams, *amala*, corn fufu, rice, stews, pepper

soups of both fish and bush meat in their state of freshness and dryness, beverages, to bean materials, topping it up with palm-wine daily supplied by my associates and excited brothers. We loved to do this as frequently as possible, our own pick-nick stories, relaxing away from the hard realities of life and office oppression and suppression until the property was incinerated by communal conflict. And that put to rest the orgy of sensational trips we made home, to my cultural domicile with my true friend and friends.

Of a particular event that structured me awe, and I have really come to have found a brother than a friend was at the death of my younger sister, the same cook who did the chores; who fetched the waters, the wood, the condiments, who woke up early to prepare the meals, who slept late ensuring that everybody's interests were well taken care of, requesting for the temperature of water each needed for evening and morning baths. She was in all estimation the soul of all our visits. I called her a day to our movement to get ready the house. She cleaned up the dusty house; mopping the rooms and sweeping the compound for all round cleanliness. Yet with my unscrupulous objectionable dissatisfaction over minor inefficiencies on this or that blames. But life was not lost on her as she promises to do better next time.

Yakim was there in a jiffy. Traveling through the night to the village, daring all dangers. And he stayed! He slept by my side, tapping me up each time I went into a night mare. The incident was quite devastating for me. I couldn't find my appetite, sleep eluded me, I lost the existence of life. She was my only closest ally, my de-facto wife in whom I trust and hope to meet. For

her, home was sweet as she did everything to make my comforts and I became satisfied ignoring the tantrums of female attitudinal behavior towards my sensual inclinations. She mused. She became helpless over my state of loneliness in spite of numerous girls available all over the place, picking lesser dignifying partners. She wondered why a particular girl was aloof to herself despite my overtures and attentions on her. She couldn't stand it. Her BP rose but her medical assistant did not attune his mind to the calamity that was to befall us. He paid no attention to checking her BP but more on the symptoms that would make him richer in his bank. A medical misnomer which many have suffered untold tragedies. Consumed in the senseless thoughts of my being, my sister passed on in the circumstance of having seen the very girl as she was closing from her sales in the market. She slumped minutes thereafter. She couldn't be revived. I had just seen her two days earlier when I had gone for the burial of my friend's father. She loaded my vehicle with condiments if I needed to prepare any sauce. It was on a Sunday afternoon. Tuesday evening a call came through my most trusted friend in the delivery of such information, he will always be the first to transmit such information, ever in a hurry. Even when he had no credit to do so, he would take a loan. I had instructed them to get the best of drugs money could buy. "She died as soon as the medication arrived." He said in a sobber tone putting the phone on speakers. "You can hear the commotion in your house" he added, to emphasize on the veracity of his narration if I had any doubts.

It was one of those episodes in my perennial solitary life style that I met this girl. She was recommended by

my daughter. She was good looking, compactly built, fair in complexion, and I dubbed her as my eventual found love. She had a baby boy out of a failed relationship. I took advantage of her status to accentuate all reserves of my love affections on her. The baby notwithstanding, I plunged head long into marital proposition. Initially she didn't object to these overtures but gradually acquired an envious status from her relations, who dissuaded her from further consummation of the relationship, claiming I was much older. She threw in the towel. I was jilted again. I wasn't devastated. I was now used to it as part of a life I should live with. But God had a different perspective for me; the Avenger of all times, the Restorer of all lost glory...

Yakim stayed with me a full week before departure. The only friend who did me that irreplaceable and unpayable courtesy. At the end of that same year during Christmas, he invited me to join him in his native village for the yuletide. He was quick to understand that I will not need to go home anymore. The game was over. He found a guest house, conducive for me away from his family compound; a serene environment. Fresh sweet Palm wine was served me every morning for the day. I spent one week; one week of isolation from the world as there was no communication network to call friends and neighbors. It was quite refreshing to keep away from public domain to a rest. We traveled to Cameroun Republic. I was deemed to have disappeared from this world, and my people worried. They anticipated this. The agony of my sister's passage from this earthly world was all and more excruciating, as she had been my solace, obviously. They all acknowledged this.

Life went on sweetly with my gifted friend from my presumed punitive zone of posting. On couple of occasion, he traveled to my place with female companions who were either his relations or acquaintances to see if that will cure my ailing social life. In most cases at my funding. Nonetheless, I appreciated his efforts and concerns.

I was indeed sad when his wife became ill. He travailed with her up and down. So was my mindset with him. He eventually triumphed. She got better but after a couple of years. And life stabilized for him.

Subsequently, we began to worry for his progression in the civil service career. He first got posted to Nasarawa. After a stint of three years, he was moved to the Headquarters in Abuja. It was gladdening that after one week of his visit, he was back and I wondered why he had come so sudden without the usual information about his coming. "I have been finally transferred to Abuja." He broke the news concealing his excitement. My joy knew no bounds. It called for celebration. Our age long desire and prayer had been met. Long ago as I built my apartment, I had allocated the boy's quarter, attached to him if the impending movement became a reality. And now here it was. We will have all the time to ourselves. I was just fond of him. We thought alike. We talked alike.

I usually woke up rather late in the morning, augmenting my sleeping hours before going to work. That now must change as I had to convey him to his work place every morning and pick him up at close of the day. I noticed that even at the cost of the fuel

situation he grateful to be chauffer driven at no cost for all the period of his duration except on emergencies either from both of us. I delighted in doing this as we kept remarking on those things that drew our attentions. It was such an insensibility I least thought of. After about ten months he announced to me one day that he wanted to see me in one of the parks from the normal one we patronized. Good gesture. I was there and he was already waiting. It was not his fault that the *isewu* was not well prepared. I pretended to savor it and called the menu alright.

"I have decided to park out!" It was like a bomb shell delivery. My body riveted. It was unexpected. I had planned that he would leave my house straight into his own personal apartment as I had. Why use the resources you could pay for a piece of land to launder it on a landlord? It was a wasteful venture. I sat in stipulation.

I remember quite remotely, related to the effect of an ailment he had. It prevented him from travelling for the end of year usual yuletide journey. I did not know that when he gave me some two phone numbers, that there were emergency numbers. He told me if anything ever happened to him, "call these numbers." I, however remembered telling him that he was lucky the ailment had met him in my house and that he was not permitted to degenerate from that status. He would live. I prayed for him. No sooner was he better than he brought up this idea of vacating the premises that has given him comfort, convenience and protection. He was afraid of any further possibilities. To acquire such an accommodation for the period he stayed, would have cost him much, being a fresher and just surviving on salary as at the time.

I gave in to his idea. Then on a Monday morning he informed me he was moving his luggage to his rented apartment. That was the last I saw of him. He never came to pay the usual courtesies or visits I noted him for nor did he make any invitation to his new home. I became a wondering image of what was unfolding. I did not need any consultations to know something was getting amiss. Occasionally, he would call on phone but he never at any moment called my wife to say "Thank you" even for the cooking she did on my behalf. No matter the animosity between them, I figured now that he was out of the environment, it was over. He insinuated a pastor had told him that there was somebody in his environment who was planning to deal with him; destroy him. Later on, I didn't doubt that declaration as an orchestra was being played to justify a false theory vindicating an incident or give vent to principal occurrences. But certainly, it wasn't any member of my house hold. A lady prophet came to the house and said so in the direction of that declaration. Even those who threaded on me while I was in school, I still showed them my gratitude; buying wrappers, sending money and paying them homage as my protégés. But one's principles of life was not the same with the other. When I left the North-East, I usually sent the wife petty gratification and assisting in procuring one predilection of her kind. So why was his case a different one? Yes, different strokes for different folks. When I saw his sms that he had lost his dear mother, it was a long thought of what it should be. Simultaneously, my wife was too was at the hospital theatre, being operated for our last born. He was battling the exit of his mother, I battling to welcome my son to the world.

That was how we severed relationship with an erstwhile friend, I had christened indispensable.

Princess

Princess, candidly speaking, is a girl gifted with a free-will heart.

I am fully convinced too that she neither knows me. Yes, because I have not met an opposition that has lost all senses of emotional reasoning and attachment. I was brought up without love and emotions by my maternal uncle. And relating thereto makes little nonsense to my person. Just do the right and that which is permissible within the range of convivial fraternity.

I am simply an average adult about to retire from civil Service of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I have children and Mercy happens to be one of them, the second in that command. My first son

was younger than my first grandson from my first daughter.

I come from a royal family but incidentally grew in penury as my father exited this world while I was still a teenager, and only in Form four, Secondary School. I grew in poverty and knew poverty as it scares me daily in all ramifications of life! I had no friends, but I guessed enemies were lurking by my sides unknown to me. Some times for no obvious reasons you were hated by your house mates; for being smart, for bearing no grudge against anyone, for being handsome or ugly or simply for just being yourself. I had to sponsor my education thereof from form four to my tertiary levels. I farmed for people who paid me enabling me buy "*garri*", (treated cassava flour), to drink at school. My mother being a poor peasant woman was my responsibility. I had to support her even in my conditions.

But today, that is history. I still take care of her but now more in many respects and dignity. God has helped me more than I had expected.

Mercy, my daughter was born in my transient life from Ladi, a lady I truly loved and who honestly loved me. Call her, the missed love of my life! I was much of an urchin, tardy and all, village. Against all these odds, she preferred hanging on me to the numerous suitors that thronged her house. That notwithstanding, to the capacity of my financial status, she bore the baby for me and stayed in Lagos until an ex-army officer took the baby away from her, surrogating her parenthood.

Now for a long time we searched for them, I and the grandmother to no avail until the mother surfaced again on a fateful Christmas sojourn home telling us the story of her life. By coincidence I was also home for the yuletide. We made amends, confessing that the baby was alive with the Ex-army Officer. She took terminally ill and a controversy ensued between I and the mother, medical personnel for that measure, regarding the method of treatment she had adopted for her daughter. But it was bound to happen the way it went. Nobody knew where the Baby Mercy was until a prophetess declared her whereabouts in the valleys of Lagos! It then occurred to me that Mercy was still alive. My pastor further declared that the baby was looking for her forebears and should make haste to look for her, confirming the words of the Prophetess, my friend and beneficent assignee.

Consequently, I needed no one else to tell me my parental obligation towards Mercy since God has thus spoken. And the search for her began earnestly; sponsoring people and paying for their journeys to Lagos; their accommodation and feeding expenses etc. as long as the search for her lasted and at several occasions as news of her was coming that much.

Hopelessly, but encouraged by the word of God we kept praying and fasting for her to locate her ancestral home and be joined to her kith and kin. God answered us miraculously, referring to the Holy Books, Ezekiel 37;7, 'and the bones joined themselves, each to itself, not one against another.' She sauntered into Lagos looking for her mother, now late but unknown to her, or by possible frailty

vision, gotten the feeling of her lost mum. That was how her journey began home ward to her bosom.

She was in her first year in the University and we kept doing our best to assuage her educational cost and social outings. Never was there anything she ever asked for that I didn't make available; her accommodation was much costly than mine, the computer, the generating set, the room fan etc.

Conflict will always ensue in any relationship especially of that nature or any at all. And we had numerous of them. I dissuaded her from traveling on road to Lagos as she always took flights at my expense to and from Calabar or to Lagos as she desired. When her surrogate father died, I did my best to console her but fell short of attending the burial ceremony for security reasons. Then came the COVID-19 era! We had our first major encounter. That was when hell let loose its sarcastic pangs! She insisted on going to Lagos from Abuja when it was most unsuitable and dangerous. I resisted the temptation attempting to let her go; insisting that it was not rife, it was risky traveling by road and the quarantine captivity of those found violating such order and would be so inclusive in pains for one you love. Rather Mercy chose to quarantine herself in the house and refused to talk to anyone, cocooning herself in the room all of 24hrs and refusing to eat her meals or interact with any member of the family. Such manner of protest was not conforming to my heritage. But she could have picked it from me, anyway.

Against my culture and pleasure, she made my house a ghost of itself by such attitude. Everybody was intimidated of the other. The home was no longer friendly! I detested that life style! That I refused her going to Lagos at a time it was perilous was not out of disdain to her person but out of love for her safety. She poured out all manners of behavior to my degenerating self-esteem.

I thrive in honesty and sincerity! I could go miles with you.

Mercy procured her NYSC posting against my wish for Abuja where I had been promised a better posting and possible absorption but she ended up in Lagos by her ploys. Yet I did not abandon her to her exuberances, I kept sending her stipends to assuage the little that was being paid her. She instantly forgot that her other siblings too needed attention just like her and therefore she ought to thread softly as the more advanced in age and her higher educational training.

She came home for Christmas in December and as usual! I settled her indebtedness which she had incurred and requested for "Christmas Money". Candidly, I did not know what to make of it or what she meant. I know that at Christmas one would require money for transport to visit friends or visit places of interests any of such frivolities. I had no problem with that. I had no idea of what "Christmas money" was. But I let her understand that I had spent quite a lot of money sending to my old mum at home and equally to my father in-law for the yuletide. Her step mum was due for

delivery of the baby in her womb and the children's impending School Fees, all for January.

I was wrong! Mercy went berserk in spite of my sitting her down and telling her about how we all began, how life took a gradual process to being what we were today; small, small and from a life of humility from sublimity to where we have found ourselves in the social strata of society today. It was not lost on my mind to tell her what her loving mother was to me and how prettier she was; 'fine - fine baby, you no go fine pass your mother!' It was an absolute absurdity and madness to boast that you were prettier than your mother, no matter the elegance you wore!

That was the end of Mercy as she travelled January, post yuletide she had not bothered to make any courtesy calls or sms or even to ask about the welfare of her family. She has blocked me out of all her channels of communications. She looked for an avenue to disengage and she got it cheaply from me.

I felt used and dumped!

For one that God has gave a name to her distraught life needs an appreciation to her Maker. Out of origin is so sad for me. Negating God's ordinances and mercies and to living a prodigious lifestyle is worse and so painful for me.

I have not discussed her pathologies in her relation with me and others. But just to show her the other side of life! Life does not inhabit in a hall of roses. Any individual without family values is like a vagabond! Life was here for tomorrow! If I had not labored to pay my School fees, I wouldn't be

where I am today. Humility is the hall mark of a greater tomorrow. She has a bright future with her progenitors but not without me. "I can do it on my own" Yes, but you need to have an origin no matter how Spartan!

DINAM

Let me go to the Eastern part of the country where there are these senses of a traditional mentality. Or is it called “being Smart?” A sense I consider in all religious and traditional ramifications, foolish and more the less, senseless. An act of cheating in order to be better could not be aptly described as a traditional sense of any people. In some descriptive parlance, they call it “Open eye.” One thing I do know is that “Vanity upon vanity is all vanity.” It bears on all attempts to live above board at the expense of humanity; no sacrifice, no generosity, no consideration for others wellbeing except self and family.

A little excursion here will probably interpret, expatiate or convey a message of my odyssey, a privy into the live style experience of these my friends. Quite a likeable and socially interactive and intelligent group of people, whom I have shared a lot of banters as friends and associates in schools and my community. Easy going to deal with compared to other ethnic nationalities, I can attest to their conviviality. I get easily lured into their company forgetting their antecedents, most probably out of sheer gullibility to their straight forward life style.

Way back as a little boy in my village community as we grew with them, their commercial mastery as a people who came for trade venture was absolutely phenomenon. They owned the business shops that sold all sorts of items for our needs, even those our

people did not need as it were. Some new items were now being introduced to our people hitherto unknown of its use. The first strike of their attitude was their sense of arrogance, aggression and being physically built in a larger percentage of them made their appearance quite unique to my people. They changed the tide of history for our people in many respects. They were closer to the missionaries who bore names like John, Matthew, Jonah etc. Church going was strongly advocated as peripheral relationship with them. They brought in a form of celebration using their masquerades in display as they celebrate what was called Christmas. The masquerades stormed peoples' houses without any symbol of common respect. They entered the market and scattered and shattered peoples' wares unchallenged. They destroyed yam sets, okra bushels, maize and crop sacks, upturned tables in the excitement of a Christmas celebration. I know many a people got bruised in their aggressive and arrogant moods perhaps galvanized by some alcoholic spirits.

More of concern was the impunity at which their items were imposed on the natives without proper and appropriate negotiations. In many sad scenarios for mere window shopping, "You were looking at it, meaning you like it!"

"Yes, I like it. There is no money!"

"No, you must buy it."

"But I said there is no money. I like it"

He removes the item from the slot and thrusts it over to the admirer. "Pay me my money!" Should there be any further disagreement he turns the matter into a criminal case.

“Thief, you carry my ware and you think you can run away with it? Pay!”

No one believes the story of the native even by the natives themselves. They all get awed with the display of intelligence of the seller. The culprit either is forced to pay or borrow to pay.

These acts made me first, dread them and eventually disliked their mischief. But they were everywhere, ubiquitously applying their pranks unchallenged in this community. At the civil war time, our people sang a far well song for them as they sold the very items that were imposed on the people with generosity and at very give away prices. Those who couldn't go home were hidden in the magnanimity of the Bassa man's bans at day time, only to be released at night time or some were taken to the farms where they stayed for the day time as the search for them by the Hausa became frenetic. Their safety must be carried with caution and discretion for a people so traumatized for their notorious adventure. Well, it was not in serving them well, but it was a recompense for their atrocities.

I had my stereotype about them and thus my distaste for them became my dismay. But we still get to meet thereafter, in church and fellowships, schools and other places of unionism. They carried on with that aura of superiority above others, displaying wildly, their senses of vanity. Sunday Chukwuma, an Abia by indigeneship was born in Basaa. He spoke Bassa with the eloquence that beat a diasporan Bassa. I initially assumed he was a Bassa boy when we first met at School. I argued he was a Bassa boy and they laughed at me. “No, he

was born at Jegwere and grew up there.” I liked him and we became bosom friends even post school days, inviting me to his business escapades at Akure and Lokoja. He related so generously, perhaps having been adopted by the Bassa traits, imbued and permeated in him. Joe, was another class character who was less accentuated by his regional character. He came, I was already out of school. He had nothing on him in his sojourn to my community. He practiced patent medicine selling. He slept on cartons of his contained drugs. He made a bench and we sat on it and told stories. After three weeks he bought a mattress. And on and on he grew up to buying a motorcycle. He became a big boy, popular and known as “Big Joe!” He made it in a jiffy. Most probably as a result of his fluid interaction with the people, and “Big Joe” sauntered into greener pasture and left the village. These two cases are nonetheless typical of a non-generalization of this episode.

Case 1

I met Ogu in Makurdi where I found an accommodation. He was my neighbor’s son. Handsome, like his father elegant and smiles easily and charming. He departed from his mother’s structure wooed by obesity. He was friendly to be with. He laughed out loud and hearty. He had other five siblings of a brother and four girls. Every Sunday I did a cuisine that invited them to my rooms. I was fortunate to have acquired a television from my NYSC. We watched the matches, Olympic matches; the Okocha, the Kanu, the Daniel

Omokachi, Ronaldo, Beбето etc. It was fun to have them all around me in my room. Fresh fish and rice for each Sunday, to the extent I wasn't comfortable eating without them.

Their father whom we had shared the Biafran war stories suddenly passed on from an ailment that had pathologically brought him gradually down. I felt sad for a neighbor. I found pity and solace with the children and gave each of them some amount of money. They returned from the interment. And I became more intimate with them as they have become what I became over twelve years ago. I reminiscence with them what life used to be like; solitary, with no one to care. My father's friends abandoned me. They had all promised to see me always and come, visit me with the assurances that all will be well. I was elated but that was all and how it ended. Till some of them passed on, I never saw any of them any longer.

I was always with my neighbor's children discussing and having light of issues as we forged ahead in life. Some were still in school. Ogu took to being a sales man in a pharmacy shop. I paid him visits after office hours daily in the evenings. He was good to be with. Then on a particular day I bought an injection. Paid for it. As I detoured, he made me understand that he too could now inject people. I thought otherwise that not on my body was he going to experiment his apprenticeship. But he insisted that he "had injected several persons". He assured me profusely. I gave in my buttocks. He worked over it. And it was over. I advanced to go home and said a cultural 'good night'. But he queried me "You have not paid me yet."

“But I have paid you” I protested.

“No, for the services” he said calmly. I thought this was a kind of joke but it wasn’t. I least expected this turn of event. I did not request for his services. He offered it and did not tell me it went for a cost. That Ogu will turn in to charge me for injecting me after I had told him I have a nurse at home who would do just that and for free. Ogu now extorting money from me fraudulently?

“How much?” I asked him casually indicating my frustrations. I could have gone to the pharmacy closer to me and saved myself this extra cost from one I thought I was patronizing.

“Ten naira” Maybe he would not take the money after all. I brought out a ten naira note and handed it over to him.

“Thank you,” he said as he collected the money gleefully. I felt aghast, shocked and unbelievable.

But more shocking was the ill -fated revelation that came from the younger brother after narrating my ordeal with his brother. “Ogu was a struggling man.” “A *struggling man!*” I laughed! With a man that was your neighbour, with whom you have shared fantasies, laughter and felicitations. Ate at his expense, free access into his room. No wonder the sister had donated the same amount of money I had assisted her, out of compassion to help augment her levied church contribution without adding a penny of hers. What manner of people!

What manner of sense was this? Vanity upon vanity, all is vanity, says the scriptural Shibboleth.

Case 2

Somewhere in Abuja where I stayed, a woman who sold fruits was by my way in and out of the street. She had a baby. Not much of her physiology but her husband felt her pretty enough. She was not neat rather she was prominently tardy to be honest with her. I patronized her for convivial exchange of banters in welcoming me back from my itinerary. The appearance of a man could be deceptive against all purposes until one had a close encounter with the other. She was good. I bought her a wrapper once to assuage her tardy looks.

On this day, I decided to buy lime from her. A therapy I had saved and developed a long time ago to curb the excesses of typhoid fever. Moreso, medical science believes it improves immunity in the system. It has become of perennial use, like a culture to strictly practice the art of taking it every morning adherently. It served as an energy enhancer, keeping you agile when split and boiled with Lipton, and taken steaming hot.

It was a therapy I was gifted simply on one of my lunch breaks. An Ibo man, *note my permissive attraction to these people*, sauntered into the restaurant where I was already into my lunch menu. Just two of us were in the room. He took a table away in my opposite side. And we faced each other. He ordered for a beer drink. He struck a talk that was a distract from my normal delicacy. Moreso, a man that was into beer this early afternoon. I was not interested in his probing interactive discourse. But he was quite animated by my responses.

“Sometimes it is not the drug that make people impotent.”

“What other things?” He inquired.

“Supposedly, you had typhoid fevers; you could hardly do anything to a consummate woman.” I told him the real truth I know. And he laughed.

“Was typhoid a disease?” he carelessly put in.

“What?” I screamed. I was currently suffering the effect of typhoid that has debilitated me over six years. It had routed my body system and economy, having treated over and over again to no avail; eating complacently without appetite, nightmares at night, living a threatened life, buckling knees etc.

“Have you been attacked by typhoid fever in your life at all?” I queried him.

“There was a Civil servant that was to be relieved for low productivity because he was a victim of typhoid fever.” He began. “I requested that he should be given another two weeks.” I did not know where he had encountered that.

“I asked him to boil some sliced lime and Lipton together into a tea cup and drink, steam hot, first thing in the morning and wait for one hour before eating. In five days’, he was back to work strong, hail and healthy.” He concluded. He went on sipping his beer! Then He resumed, “Where do you come from?”

“Kogi State”

“Which Local Government?”

“Bassa”

“O, Mr. eem, Kpongbo is your traditional Ruler”

“Yes. You know him?” H ignored the question and asked again,

“Where do you work?” I told him. “Ah, that’s where Mr. Sam Saba heads”

“You know quite a lot of people in your life” I asked him consternated.

“I walk around” In deed he walks around, *doing good*.

I was astonished at his knowledge of my people all around me. He kept sipping his beer. I excused him for my work. I went with a hazy mentality. What sort of man could know people like this. “I walk around,” he had said so. But the Lipton and lime mixture was for me a calamity, a killing substance, a destructive machine, since I had stomach ulcers which had reduced my foods options to a few. No more Coke, *agbu*, *Garri*, Cassava, even oranges. No beer, red wine or any drinks of acidic and alcoholic nature was allowed into my stomach systems. I delightedly run away from such appetite no matter the temptations. It amounted to a disaster that hemorrhages me to frequent uncontrollable stooling. I had no need of any medical advice to keep away from all peppered sauced foods. The effects were horrific and corrosive. Consequently, I did not give his therapy another thought.

After about three months however, my typhoid condition was deteriorating to an alarming stage. I began having a feeling about trying this therapy. I feared much for the sake of my stomach. That notwithstanding, it was my only hope. I gave it a try. One morning having bought the items which for long I have denounced, I went into its preparatory stage. Ready. And I prayed, “Oh God, my Father, may this medication not ruin me. They

are the works of your creation, which thou giveth for man's medication and healing; may it not bring me harm but health in my systems. Amen!"

I drank it with utmost fear of the unknown. Went to bath, and started for the office. I climbed the stair cases seemingly easy, without the usual panting and clogging of knees. I went to eat at the local eating place, and I ate copiously with ease against the usual. I was wondering what had gone good with me. Then I remembered it was the therapy I just drank that had improved my appetite. I repeated it the following day. And there was no effect in my systems. I became addiction to this therapy, ever. I never missed it any longer, daily, every morning. It took care of that stubborn impediment to my life; ailment that had limited my physical abilities and restricted my meals, all as I endured it many years in penury. And my friend, who had observed my over obsessive indulgence in this act cautioned me once, admonishing that I was abusing the therapy. Quite true! But I had to and must abuse that notorious disease debilitated my life all this while. Talking about handling the lesser devil. I had recommended it to people with similar ailment and it had worked for them. It never failed. Pointing to the divine origin of this therapy.

It was an Angel that gave me this therapy to save the many years of my travailing! How come he knew everybody around me! Oh, divine helps inhabit by the nature of the Creator and His mercies.

I was used to buying the lime cheaply as I thought from another economic environmental clime. Just

a few naira would have gotten me more than enough for a drink. What she presented to me was abominable and provoking. I needed triple of that for my delightful feel. Nevertheless, she had explained the current cost of things in the new capital city. I submitted to her argument.

But when I traveled to my base, it was nonetheless far cheaper. So, I bought the much I could and gave her on my return.

“How much will I have to pay for these?” She inquired with trepidation. It was almost a half full polytene leather bag.

“No, just use it and sell it. These things are far cheaper where I got them from.” And she was excited. I did that severally with her hoping that she would make more money with that considering how she sold it. Then One of those days I brought the lime, I was much in a hurry to compassionately, please her that I forgot to pick my portion of what I would need. I went back to her.

“Give me some lime to buy. I couldn’t pick for myself two days when I brought them.” I requested with appeal in my voice.

“How much?” I gave her the money. She counted exactly the few lobes she would have sold to any customer. I felt slitted, for what I had bought, and brought to her out of charity, and now to buy it again as a customer even costlier again. She had no simple regards for my effort, labour and magnanimity; even for the inconvenience of going to the market, transporting it home and driving under the traffic to Abuja. This was callous, wicked and irredeemable vanity against my own property.

I turned down the offer, retrieved my money telling her, "I think I kept some somewhere." It would pay me and assuage my bitterness to purchase it from another source than to pay higher for the same product I had already bought.

I left her dismayed to an Iggede woman I did the same act of favor with, sharing the same ware with her, each time I returned from my trip.

"Buy what? No be you just bring am two days ago?" She brought the whole leather bag and dropped, thrusting it towards me saying "*Abeg*, (meaning I beg) take the much you want. Buy ke?" She spoke in her knowledgeable broken English. Thereafter, she gave me one of the corns she was roasting and fetched the groundnuts she had put for sales. Case of two women from two ethnic groups with different approaches to life existence and relationships. Different strokes for different folks, so coined the Philosopher.

I had a different view of the Eastern woman till today. Unless money was involved! And I dare to ask, was money everything?

Vanity upon vanity, says the Shibboleth, all is vanity!

Case 3

My next encounter with this obnoxious wisdom for money against relationship was a woman who ran a restaurant by my neighborhood. Still within the same geopolitical zone. I patronized her a lot not because her cuisines were delectable but I was not in the kitchen design as it were. Women too, were not left in this craze for money matters and likes.

This one overwhelmed me with a typical chagrin of character, the desire for money could do to people's relationships. We both came to the community at the same time under a similar circumstance. Our initial abodes were demolished forcing both of from different locations to roost in this environment for shelter. The El'Rufai saga in his bid to clean up Abuja from touts and slums meant that areas be leveled to give room to a sane environment. And I felt we should be streaming together in view of our novelty to our new environment. A job he did clinically well and all manner of people paid for their greed and graft. Consequently, the city of Abuja carries a more decorous phase than it was; the jamborees that was becoming the city with all manner of recklessness and indiscipline. The effect of that action is being enjoyed today by successive government. I had flawed the sticker on my uncle's car which read 'A hard man is good to find', having found it conveniently to invertedly say, 'a good man is hard to find'. El'Rufai's hardness was good to find in making Abuja a more tolerable civil environment for a Federal Capital City to dwell in a convergence of all world leaders, appealing to minimum international sanity.

All my visitors fed at that cubicle called a restaurant at my expense. At times I ate and left the change as my tip. At other times, I left the change to continue my payments thereafter. On this particular day, I had two visitors who had come simultaneously with me having returned from my station. I took them there immediately to have their fill while I went to look for money to settle

the bill afterwards. I did so. But there was no change to collect. I requested that she should keep the change for my next meal. That was it. I actually went back the following day in the afternoon to have my lunch and still received the remainder of the change.

Subsequently in the evening, I was seeing a friend off my house and the maiden accosted me, "My aunty say you should come."

"Tell her I will be coming back" I responded feeling irritated. She couldn't wait for my usual dinner with her. Perhaps it was urgent, I thought.

Later on, I was there. She had not ambushed me that way before. "I am finally here. So, what was it there for me," I inquired heartily animated as I would in my joking form.

"I miscalculated the amount you were supposed to pay," she began. "I didn't calculate the cost of plantains they ate." I kept quiet.

"I am talking to you," She barked.

"So, what do you want me to do now," I asked her.

"You must pay me my money-o!" she retorted angrily.

"Assuming I came from somewhere in Nyanya, will you have followed me there to collect your money?" I asked her more calmly.

"Ah, I made a mistake. Na only me go make mistake?"

"So, how much was the amount?" I requested.

"It's Fifty naira"

I heaved a sigh of relief. I thought it was one staggering amount of money. I could have simply given her the money as requested to avoid further complications. But then I jokingly asked her, "What

if I refused to pay. It was never my fault. I paid and you had my change with you up till yesterday. I even received the balance of that money this afternoon. You know I will always come here to eat. Was it necessary to send for me over this matter?"

She adjusted her wrapper. "You must pay that money-o. My fifty naira. I do not run a charity restaurant here. Else you will dieeee!" She went on angry tirade that was alarming even before the customers that were eating.

I couldn't imagine the passion that had overtaken this woman whom we had both shared jokes and laughter together. She had forgotten when I had dropped a hundred naira severally and left. Not once or twice, which should have assuaged the cost effect of a fifty naira. She had forgotten just in a hurry how I had laboured to bring fresh plantains for her business to thrive at no cost to her to her. There was on this fateful day, I was there to eat as usual, two men got in and requested for rice, asking if she had plantains to go with it. She complained that plantains were becoming costly in the market beyond her reach. The clients left the venue disappointed. I felt she had lost a good market.

On my usual weekends, I came across a bunch and felt they were cheap enough. I bought them for One thousand, two hundred naira. Took them home and transported to Abuja. I did the off-loading at home and sacked them conveying the burden to her venue.

“And how much will I pay for these?” She inquired as if she would pay otherwise reject the trade.

“No, you don’t have to pay for anything. Just to help you promote your kitchen business and improve your cuisines here. The other time I remember some men who came and refused to eat because there were no plantains.” She greeted me profusely. I was excited and repeated this gesture even on a more costly bunch that I found cheaper than the Abuja price. Conflated, the cumulatively cost totaled about Two thousand, eight hundred naira.

But now I was being threatened with a death warrant if I failed to pay fifty naira that was not my making or in anyway, committal to any offence. I was just a victim of a woman’s poor mathematical business calculation. I prepared not to have her get away with this verminous character of a nagger. It was not easy to come through for me in responding to her verbiage but I managed and stammered it out, albeit all who were listening to this insolence.

“But you remember, how I got you bunches of plantains here on two occasions without asking for one naira from you to trade well with your business. And now you are threatening me for fifty naira.” I mustered those words out. She was quick to respond,

“Is that why your people will come and eat and will not pay?”

“You said you made a mistake, not me. I paid you what you calculated and requested for”

“How much was your plantain? Tell me now and I will pay, now!” She shouted bringing out her pause.

“If you wanted to pay now, the money was fifty naira.” I said calmly and stood, gazed at her in the eye squarely. I was not proud of my action but it proceeded fortuitously. Afterall, there was no rubrics that says I should not tell my stories the way I felt it should be delivered. We all have our bad days. We all do. And this was one of bad days. Everyone in the restaurant dropped their cutleries. I had dropped a bomb shell. I walked out deprecated in disappointment of a lady I thought was convivial all the while. Money, money, money. Money without humanity.

That was the last I ever went there until an eastern visitor asked me why. I told my story. “Yes, na. It’s business!” I got more infuriated with these set of human beings. Conscienceless. No humanity. Vanity upon vanity! But the next time she saw me, after many months of being on the same street, I guessed her knees buckled as she went down in greeting, “Good afternoon, sir.” I didn’t care to look if she fell down or not. I just kept moving. Keep moving man!

Case 4

Still coming from the same economic regional enclave, just to do a recap, was this male friend of mine. We met in a circumstance that was almost my making to get a friend to fraternize with at a predominantly different environment and religious communion. A son of member of a Fellowship we prayed together. He had just returned from the UK.

Quite a reticent individual. I took him out on a date once and we finally got to Abuja and repeated the same outing at a popular fish joint around the Karu axis of the city. He doesn't drink wine nor red wine like I do neither does he womanize. He lived a detestable woman life that brought me concerns. But that was never my problem anyway. He defers that spirit of generosity and appreciation that makes approval of man's mental health was all my cravings.

"I just got an employment. And I need a place to stay." He said and further stammered, "I don't know if I could stay in your place?"

Certainly, I was glad to offer whatever kind of assistance I could to this individual, my fellow member in prayer. Beginning a life of his own as new horizon beckons on his social milieu. Moreso, I was not married yet. Consequently, I will not leave in a house hollow, when there were many rooms. Eventually, he stayed in the adopted boy's quarter; containing a parlor, bedroom, toilet and kitchen. An apartment with running water, fenced, where he parks his car and sleeps with both eyes closed, does all his domestic activities such as washing his body, clothes and vehicle and cooking. Such measure of convenience for a friend was not more exerting on me. He lived a life of comfort with all my utilities like kitchen utensils, Television set, Mattresses, pillows, curtains, sitting chairs etc.

I was usually in and out with those that were in the newly built house. More persons came to take refuge in the house and leave thereafter. I equally expected that my friend will eventually leave. But

he wouldn't. He had no friends. No body visited him. He was a solo individual. He neither bought anything; a transistor radio, a flat screen television, and of course I expected him to have bought things that would make life more comfortable and convenient. He never told me he was embarking on a building project anywhere. Which would have been my delight. His self-worth was to go back to Britain from whence he came forth.

I began to get worried that a man was not putting his house in order. Facilities began to deteriorate in the house but he was less attentive to the dilapidation. I went on amending some of the items even in his rooms including fixing light bulbs. The plumbing materials were giving way to no replacements. He could manage every bad end of things until I became fed up and stopped fixing any further damages. After all he was the one enjoying their benefits. He however facilitated the installation of two prepaid meters in the house. What else could he, as a superior Officer of the Electricity company do. I did not expect less. In fact, it took him longer than I had pressured to achieve this demand. Subsequently, twice he sent in twenty thousand naira by cash. But this did not happen as the bill from my tenant who stayed in the house for seven years without asking him to pay any dime for his period of stay until he moved away seven years after he had successfully married.

This was how it happened. Our encounter took several considerations and thoughtfulness for a man to do a detour in his morality and mentality in order to put preferred dignity intact without being

prodded for some sort. My wife had resisted that I should ever talk to him on the matter. But I felt he could be a victim of negativity if he went on to such assaulting behaviour. I requested to have a word with him. He agreed. So, I began,

“I want to thank you for choosing to be with me all these whiles. I knew your father long before I ever got to know you, and you structured me as one I could be comfortable with. In deed I am. But there are certain attitudes of yours I find unacceptable. And I thought of informing your father about it. On the contrary, I imagine it will embarrass you. That is why I have decided to have this meeting with you.” It was an introduction I had rehearsed. He listened quietly in his natural self-respect.

“You see,” I continued. “You have stayed in this house close to about six years now. I am not taking any money from you for the rent. No, for me it is a fulfilment of what God has told me; to give me a place where people will stay for free. And He did give me this place. When you applied to have it, I found myself in the right decision.” I paused.

“But why I called you to this attention is based on the fact that I haven’t seen you buy anything for yourself nor are you even enjoying the benefits of this apartment. You do not go out; you don’t buy things that would make life lively for yourself. That is on your own personal self. But come to think of it, when facilities that we all enjoy here gets bad, you remain aloof. What I mean is that you don’t give any damn about how it could be rectified, managed or replaced; you are so unconcerned. And when we rectify it, you don’t border to ask

how we came about it. The overhead tank broke down, the makeshift arrangement we made and eventual fixing it never crossed your mind to ask how we managed it. For you, it was normal; business as usual.” I was feeling the deep impact of my lecture, delivery punches on him.

“Twice, the bump got damaged you never cared about its replacement or repairs. Yet this is a place you were not on rental payment. Six years down the drain. You could not help in the maintenance of a place you are staying for free. Yet, you are a superior Officer where you are working. To me this is irresponsible. You could not even for a day take me out to buy me a coke. You could not even buy some meat for a sauced meal and say, “madam cook this sauce for us and let’s eat.” What kind of life are you living? This mentality of Ibo sense is tantamount to foolish frugality. And you are a Born-Again Christian. Do you think you can make heaven with this attitude? Or do I call it selfishness?” I queried, raising up my voice in complete disagreement with his behaviour.

He quietened. Sober in somber reflection. There had been a deluge earlier in the day. The floor was wet. He stooped down and began to weep. I joined in the weeping too. Because I never expected his reaction this way.

“Nobody had talked to me this way!” He confessed. “Not even my father. I am in deed sorry for all these negligence. I have ever been thinking what I should do to pay you for your generosity. I am candidly sorry. I even thought of asking my father

what I could do for you before now.” He went on wailing.

“I did not mean to evoke your emotions please. Forgive me. But if I do not let you know this, I will be sinning as I kept thinking of this illicit manner of yours. More so you could become a victim of ill treatment someday somewhere if you continued with this character and nobody tells you it’s bad enough.” I concluded and we both straightened up.

I just couldn’t make any sense out of the whole scenario of a responsible man in this character. A senior Officer of the Electricity government owned company. I still have a phobia of these people as I see them daily on streets and gatherings. But they are quick to telling me generalization was not fair to them. Quite not fair but I have had quite a fair share of their mischiefs.

Jecho

“Those people are terrible set of human beings.” Echoed one of my friends having told him the ordeal I had gone through with one of such individuals. It was one of those outings that enraged and stupefied me at the change at which persons are prone to their silly consciences. I still went ahead with illusions hoping it was situational prevalences that had positioned this individual to what seemed to have been a mental case of his life.

I knew Jecho just for four years but it was enough that I had known him and tolerated him that far. A young man to my estimation as a serving Corp member of the Nigeria National Youth Service. His lodge was adjacent my apartment in one of those estates I had found habitable during my numerous civil service postings in the Northern part of the country. A serene environment, away from the hustle and bustle of the city life. And you could be lonely in such an enclosed environment.

I woke up one morning to discover that my vehicle was a bit sparkingly, neat. I began wondering what had happened; it was a dusty period. The December wind blowing the hazy dust all over the place and must have been coated with lot of dust. Who had done this? I supposed that he was lurching somewhere coming to ask for his remunerative labour in handling an unassigned

duty. I looked round, no body showed up or accosted me as usual. In Abuja somebody would emerge from a corner and own up to the different look of your car obsequiously for a tip. Since there was no such a person, I left gladly with my seemingly neat looking car. The frequency of having to keep the look clean was time consuming except planned.

Later in the evening when I got back from work, a young lanky fellow showed up in my veranda apartment. His smile was convivial with all the accentuation of a friendly type. We exchanged banter introducing himself as one of those in the quarter serving in an NYSC capacity. Further inquiries prove that he was from the same State I came from but with a different dialect as was always my case, a minority.

"I graduated from the Abdulsalam Polytechnique, Zamfara State last year" He informed me.

"What did you read?" I extended the discussion.

"Public Administration, Sir" He got more excited.

"I found my car unusually neat this morning." He gave a wry smile and added,

"No! Just one of those early morning exercises."

He got me now more intimate for a young man of his disposition displaying such humility of character. The coast was clear thereafter for a smoother and harmonious relationship. I began trusting him more with the platitudes of my life, banal and trite as we often met.

This young man shocked me again. Rather, I was under a delusion. I came back from work and a group of boys was gathered in my premises. They

had cleared the weeds all over my compound unrequested or undirected to do so. They had no permission to do what they had done; nonetheless, the compound was looking neat. They requested for their pay. We settled for what it ought to be theirs. I pleaded with them to come back in two days' time but they will not oblige my request. I insisted that they came unrequested, unannounced and with no negotiated terms, that I would need these two days to sort out my financial balance to settle them. They refused to bulge or give in to my counsel. One said he was traveling the following day. The other said he was going to help the brother in the farm out of the city. Compassionately, I was confused to throw these little children out of disarray in their penchant ambition to get something for the day. Truly, I had no dime on me. I was struggling to make ends meet at this particular moment in my life. We engaged ourselves in words into squabbles.

"What was happening here with these children?" Corps Jecho sprung behind me. I gave him the narration and how I am fanning for an industrial action against the minors. "They are intimidating, harassing and are out to extort money from me at no agreed terms." And thereon I lamented my financial penury as it were.

"Don't worry; I will settle them until it was feasible on you to recompense me." It was with great relief that the boys left heartily. I scorned at my financial incapacity to be of good cheer to such minors who were not begging for money but seeking an outlet for their beneficence labour to live a life. They could have chosen to criminality for their ages but

had a wise choice. I could have missed my way to contributing self-quota to nation building as it were.

“Children will not understand your condition. For them, life was normal every day.” He spoke. “My father used to tell us that children were like faithful Saints who believe their father cannot fail them in all things.”

“Sure! Sure!!” I said nodding my head mindful of the humiliation I just woke up from.

“We were brought up in hardships because my father had no money. Even now the little allowance that comes my way is being shared between me and them. Sometimes when we were in school, we stringently obeyed the rules over hunger for a little piece of *garri* to survive. Well, we just pray that we got something doing when we finish this NYSC thing by His grace.” The message was set and clear.

“My brother, your condition was not worse than mine. You will get something doing, by God’s grace.” I said as I began my charge.

“When I left home for the admission, I had only on me two hundred naira; for accommodation, departmental registration, faculty registration, sports, medical, library and other sundry registrations. With just *two hundred* naira, that was impossible!” Emphasizing the *two hundred* naira; he was now listening with rapt attention. I went on,

“I had no one to sponsor me or to give a dime or to support my education. I simply plunged into the orbit of an unknown horizon.” I paused, then

continued. "My father died when I was in form four, secondary school. And since then, I have borne the scholarship for my education; from secondary school unto SBS, the Higher Studies, and unto my university degree education." I noticed he was finding something strange in my story. I was encouraged by his attentiveness. I zoomed on.

"I used one trouser for my years in school; jeans trouser and I often washed them twice a semester because I couldn't afford more to my robes due to my condition. Even the two Hundred naira that I had saved from home for this project, being the savings, I made from the Community Secondary School I taught, was stolen on the rail way journey to Jos where I had gotten admission."

"Ah!" He exclaimed, getting his mouth gapping for a long time. I knew he was skewed by this challenge I faced.

"Yes. I did not need to trust in the filthy two hundred naira. I needed to trust in God alone for all my supplies. And He did it in His own ways. Each day as I go to school, I will encounter a stranger who would accost me, demanding where I was going. And such a person will give me some transport fare instead of trekking. The money built up to my expenses. God's mysterious ways. I had prayed to Him to secure my scholarship as 'He was the Father of all the Fatherless. Thus, the sponsorship was His own.' He needed to take away the money with me in order that I depend on Him entirely. Sometimes people would come to my hostel room telling me I gave them my room number. So, they have come to pay me a visit as

promised. That was how I survived it until I graduated.” I concluded.

“Hmm!” He simply sighed some relief, still astonished at my story. I dared to tell him how I got my job.

“Don’t you worry, God is in control. You will get a job like He gave me this.” I know he was visioning how he could be fixed in getting a job and timely too.

“You see, when we had finished the final semester and our NYSC posting came out, I was posted to Borno State.” I did some painful memories of issues that took place. I became emotional.

“That was when I had problems with my God! Posting me to Borno State was the saddest thing that ever happened to me. And I forgot the God that saw me through school. Borno? I had the opportunity to have chosen my posting to Lagos but I chose to allow God do the posting for me. And this landed me in Borno State.” I was shivering with the sarcasm that greeted that posting. ‘Where were you posted?’ My mates would ask. ‘Borno State.’ ‘Borno what? Hey, the heat there, the dust dunes, the flies, the para...’ The list of the ‘this’ and ‘that’ went on to my sorrowful orientation.”

He looked at me expectantly to continue my story. He wants to know how it ended after all. The ordeal of a man was better told by himself.

“More so,” I continued. “I never had the transportation to Maiduguri, the venue of the camp center. There was a deluge of bad news for me. I wept. God, this is how you pay a man for

trusting in you? Let me be myself now. To know that the consequences of my action were strictly my faults and not you. I seized praying, going to Church or even reading the Scriptures as it were.”

“Ehnnn!” my audience reacted ruefully, shaking his head in total unbelieve.

“Well, my cousin, Danjuma, now a famous Lawyer and lecturer in Keffi, Nasarawa State University gave me the sum of twenty naira which I bought the Borno transport fare ticket to Maiduguri. All through the NYSC camp, I never knew the way to Church or any fellowship.” I paused to feel the effect of my communication, then went on.

“After the postings to our places of primary assignment, I encountered trouble with one of my colleagues. We were both posted to the same school. His treatment of me was of a second-class citizen. He resulted into open insolence of my person in his native *nmgbati* language. He became aggressive by each day and I became horrified of his hostility. In fact, I was scared, and scared stiff of him. The only alternative I had was to go back to God for help and assistance in neutralizing every diminutive personality he had on me without ruling some effects of voodoo. I feared much. Then on this fateful Sunday morning I took my Bible, dusted it and went into town looking for a Church, of no particular denomination. Just Church.”

He laughed.

“And I found where some people were entering with their Bible. I went in with them too. I never knew the name of the Church’s denomination but later got to know, that it was Church of Christ in

Nigeria, now changed to Nations, COCIN Church. From Hausa service, I stayed to the English Service. And continued worshipping there until we finally ended our Service year. I was quite reticent, not indulging much into boisterous relationship and concluded that nobody knew me. I paid my tithe quietly, moved in and out quietly. But somebody knew me. He invited me to a Sunday benediction after service one Sunday. He had seen me where we had our send-forth party at the Local Government Secretariat. I obliged him and was detailed to pray for the children who were being sent forth to school after their holidays. I don't know how I managed the prayer but I guessed it was good. Then the Pastor, an elderly man emerged from what I considered to be his sacristy and announced 'we are now going to pray for a big one here. There is been an NYSC member who had been fellowshiping with us here. And he is rounding up his service years.' My heart skipped a bit. He appointed a young man from the choir to pray for the Corp member. And asked me to stand up. He began, 'Thus says the Lord! Though there are no jobs in the market, this one shall not look for a job!' They all chorused 'amen!' while I laughed."

Both of us laughed in unison at this comedy that played itself. "The reason I laughed; I had no relation who could tailor my way to any appointment. I had no parents, no aunty, no uncle who could strategically place me on a job. My sisters were not married to rich men. They picked their pregnancies from the streets. So, 'how could this be?' like Mary who had asked the Arch Angel

Gabriel. Well, I did not bother to come home after the service. I stayed and roamed the streets of Maiduguri till it was a month afterwards. I decided to go home. I did not get home before applying for this job I am doing today. We finished NYSC in September, October I headed home dropping the application, November I was invited for the interview. In December, those coming home for the Christmas festival brought my appointment letter.”

“Cha cha cha cha cha cha...!” Went my friend in shock and disbelief and probably in a laughter of hopeful positioning.

“In actual sense I failed the interview. And when I came with the appointment letter and inquired why me? The CEO asked, why the question. ‘Sir I failed the interview’ He brought out my folio, ‘look you failed woefully, but you are the one I need. Now I know I have found the person I have been looking for; a sincere, honest and truthful individual and you have just demonstrated it. Come let me show you your office.’ And he took me to a large expanse office well-furnished than the one they wouldn’t allow me enter in my Local Government secretariat. I wept asking him in between sobs what I could do for him for all this generosity” “No, just a ‘Thank you’ was enough,” he said. That was how my journey to the civil service of Nigeria began and got me to this place that we are both meeting today.”

He felt like weeping. And I assured him that the God that did it for me was still alive and capable of changing things in the life of people. “He will do it for you!” I assured him. He nodded his head in

believe. The rest depended on his faith and his philosophy in life.

His service year ended in December. He had to leave for other engagements of life and what it could provide. I bought a rope for the father and a wrapper for the mother. Equipped him with some gifts for all the fraternity we have both enjoyed from each other. Against the cold season of the weather, I had to drop him off at the park as early as 5.00 am in the early hours of the morning at his departure date. Soon, I was in Abuja too for the yuletide. And I got a long SMS from him detailing how he wished to stay with me in Abuja. The village was his ordeal; all his mates have relocated from the village. He was the only one left in the village with his parents. He passionately wished to leave the village but has no one to stay with. I told him to hold on a while but he kept on deluging me with 'save my soul' messages wearing me out of patience. I told him to come over.

He couldn't wait. He came without any consultation even when my house project was still on-going. I had to accept him sympathetically as a loner like I was. It's quite void thinking that if you were of no consequence to anybody you hardly had friend to come by in life. We stayed in my one room apartment until my house project was a bit put in order for accommodation. We both moved in. I was grateful that I had a companion now better than the previous one who was all together turning things upside down for me. This one was most willing to do everything I wished and he did them very well, excellently by my standards; fixing worst cases, arranging even my bedroom,

electricals and other minor chores. I couldn't have been more blessed than one who obliged to domicile with me on this account of no pedigree. His parents have not known me. What would be their impressions of their son being with a complete stranger? Will he not one day decide to make a dubious account of him? I had to be more careful with this strange relationship.

I went back to my station leaving him alone in the apartment, giving him some money to take care of himself feeding wise. "Buy foods!" I told him. I thought that sank well into his membrane thinking that food was the utmost thing in life. I came back after some two weeks. He was starving.

"What happened?" I queried especially that there was no food for me to eat in the house.

"Some adverts came requesting that we should bring money for appointment," he said.

"Look, these are mere gimmicks played by these people. When your time comes to get employed, you will not need to spend any kobo. Stop wasting money," I cautioned him. He doubted me as he seemed to have resolved the matter of his destiny and engagement in his own way. He kept spending all the house keep money I gave him. I got the feelings bad enough but will not leave him in hunger. I prepared to ignore giving him money for any of my feeding items but decided to be on my own and leave his penchant for an appointment being swept away in a flurry of deception, nee, 419 code of the criminal records for justice.

No, Jecho offended me!

One day in the evening hours, he came back wailing. He laid straight on the floor outside where we were relaxing. He was uncontrollable. We calmed him down and was ready to state the matter. Initially, I had thought most probably, that his fiancée had ditched him. I got scared. It was not uncommon for these girls to either get even or simply pitch a tent with a strange fellow who had deceived them like the devil did to Eve. It was their tradition and very few men got away with not being jilted in the course of a marital proposition especially for a struggling man trying to make ends meet. But no, it was something else. He spoke through wailing and the message came clearer. He had been swindled by some smart fraudsters who told him that his bank account had a problem to be rectified. They requested for his BVN, Bank Verification Number which he obliged them. Subsequently his alerts came and all his money was gone.

“Haven’t you heard that you should not divulge your bank verification number to anyone?” We jointly asked.

“Unma no” He answered in his dialect that he was not aware of this amidst tears freely flowing from his eyes. I doubted the sincerity of his story especially against the background that every withdrawal you made you were warned not disclose your BVN to anyone even bank officials. But for an adult to have rehearsed and dramatize this scenario was becoming factual in the sense of it. More painful was the fact that the money was not his, a friend had given him the money to keep for him in his account for safe keep. One that was

employed would give a nonworking man money to keep in his account. Many puzzles to solve.

“Have you called your friend over what happened?”

“Un’neke” ‘I can’t’ He cried the more. I became convinced that truly he had lost the money to some con men.

“How much was the money?”

“Twenty-five thousand.” That was much to an applicant.

“When did he want the money?” I asked. He had not told him when he would need the money.

“Don’t worry, we will find a way of refunding the money before he asked for it.”

“Oh, thank you sir! *U’leku, U’leku meh...*” He went on sobbing that he was dead.

When I got to my station, I scooped some money from my savings and sent to his account with a view that even if it had not been a deception, God will assuage my condition one of these days for some good done to one.

That notwithstanding, he began selling the water from the bore hole in the compound whenever I was at my station. He resisted freely given water to my neighbour under the pretext that I had ordered him to do so, maligning me insidiously. I felt pained as to how to extricate myself from such allegation. I had promised my neighbour that water would run down his house, twenty-four hours. Then my movement to Abuja finally came two years later. Every weekend was a jamboree; with *ise-ewu*

pepper soup. We lived well. I told him to accept any offer of appointment even if it meant being a guard at hotel or business premises. He finally got one in a pharmaceutical company. He was quite doing well. His relations began to visit and commended my effort at being his guard. He decided it was time to marry. His father had arranged a village girl for him. So, he dares not refuse their choice. What an obedient boy I thought.

He began the preparations to a crescendo. I felt I had neglected to contribute my quota. I asked him how much was the cost of his wedding suit. I paid. I gave him some other money for sundry expenses. He made me the chairman of his reception at the wee hours before Christmas. I travelled at a very exorbitant fuel cost, leaving my young wife all alone at home driving through to a remote and very obscure village. I gave the father some money, gave the mother before driving home, a distance of about a hundred and ten kilometers. At the end I had spent over a hundred and twenty thousand naira sponsoring his wedding. At that same period, I had enlisted him to employed by the Central Bank of Nigeria who had requested for our nominees. He was contacted but could not be reached while galivanting to consummate his marital proposition. He lost the opportunity. I had also forwarded his name for an interview with National Agric Insurance which he did poorly beyond consideration. His place was taken over by another.

As he came back from his wedding proper, he decided to move out of my premises. I tried to dissuade him; requesting that he should furnish

himself with enough property before opting out so as to give his wife some minimum comfort. He rejected my appeals bringing in one flimsy excuse or the other. Finally, I let him do as he pleases. Life was never a bed of roses. He would soon be confronted with the realities of living with a quasi-job.

He left but left a bitter taste to my chagrin. He couldn't not stay because I was irresponsible. He had requested for a mattress from I denied him. Yet I had no wife neither could I father a child. I had no woman. He was married just after three years of his post NYSC service. What was I doing not being married after several years of working. He poured out all vituperations on me. He assisted those who never knew me to stay away from me. I was bad-luck who could not help anybody in life.

I got married. I invited him for the naming ceremony of my first born; he turned down the invitation. I sent another one on the presentation and thanksgiving ceremony he jettisoned the invitation without excuses. I did not consider these manners of his life. Regrettably, I kept sending him food stuffs for his wellbeing. I had to pay off his wife's whooping medical bills at the Nativity hospital. Hoping these would assuage any wrong, unimaginably I had done to him but he kept telling the parents and his friends how bad I was who gullibly accepted his tirades to their eternal shame. And some stayed away from me without asking questions. I leave him to his conscience. I have tried my best for humanity. One who does not know my proteges. I have not done my best for my tribesman the more I did for him. It was alright!

Jecho became a 'big boy' by circumstances I consider unworthy of integrity or any of such an individual. He invited me to come and commission his house when I knew that he had no job. But I let him know however, that whatever he became in Abuja today or tomorrow, was thanks to me, attributed to my contributions in his life.

Since he left my house, he has not bothered to pay any courtesies in a visitation. He simply sent his wife to come and deliver the set of keys to the quarters he stayed while he waited outside the gate. No words of appreciations, no pleasantries from him for an apartment he stayed for three years, free of rent till this moment.

Not that it mattered but it is just necessary for a mentally balanced individual.

Ozigi

In life, wonders shall never end, it is often said. If in the whole gamut of existence, your travel is limited within your environment, then you could as well be limited in your vision and experience of what it entails in dealing with the human species; characters of different orientations and beliefs. Bankrupt in reminiscences, deluding in appearances. Behaviours originating from a background that I kept imagining, where it was all, coming from. I often get gullible to peoples' first impressions about themselves which in many trying circumstances, they fail to meet up to the challenges of their integral disposition; they start in improbable delusive manner, and others weakling in their approach to face the realities of life.

Ozige, would have escaped this list, in the roll call of those I consider standing on the part of indignity. Suave, and a dandy in life style. But more fundamental is his wealth of knowledge, high communication skill, flawless spoken English. All these qualities attracted me much to him. I adored him but I was a bit more comfortable than he was. But that does not matter in a relationship that I intended to gain from his wealth of knowledge for my own. There are lessons one got outside the University walls that were deeper than you could have gotten from within. And I did maximize and

got quite a lot from him. After all, it is said, life consists in moments of friendship. I savoured much his capacity offered.

I really did not have friends that were kleptomaniacs in nature. I abhorred them and they rarely come close to me. There was a Mike, Ogu and Fidel. The trio were humorous friends when I stumbled into them in a friend's house, I often paid visits. There were a good company to keep. Hilarious. Life bustled with them as young men. Three young boys who worked with the Banks. One of them had a live-in lover, who incidentally, was a younger sister to Ogu's elder brother's wife, Mike's elder sister. And Mike's life was attached to the apron link of Zainab from whose disengagement would cause him eternal loss dismally. But Ogu was a kleptomaniac, unknown to us. He was always tilting his fingers into Fidel's purse, causing him to accuse his numerous girlfriends of thievery. It dawned on him that not all his girlfriends could be thieves, and he had them a lot. He began to think otherwise on who was dealing this obnoxious dread on him. Much as he tried, he failed. You could not suspect Ogu. He was craftly gifted in the art.

One early morning, Ogu was in my house as early as quarter to seven. I was already up, preparing to live for work which was then by 7.30am, arrival. You were late if you came after that period. I was surprised to find Ogu so early in my house. It was quite unusual, for a work man to pay such a visit that early. I kept wondering what had brought this young man to my house this early morning. We just got paid the last day and was planning to take

him out, visioning him being reticent and calculative, speaking less while others shouted at themselves. We exchanged banters and found out about their welfare; they were all fine. He was on his way to see the elder brother across my house.

Suddenly, I felt like going to the convenience. I excused myself from his presence. Promptly, I did not waste much time from the convenience that was outside, I was back to my room only to find Ogu in my bedroom, my holy of holies, when I had left him in my parlour. I sat stealthily observing his movements inside my bedroom. Then he emerged, shocked at seeing me back so soon. "Ah, I was looking for that your pomade, to rub on my palms, it smells so good." I did not answer him. I was objecting to his behaviour. I began to have a feeling that something had gone wrong with me by the presence of this young man in my house this early morning. I went in and did a search on my money. The pack was slack. But it had been firm yesterday when I got it. I had not pinched it yet. Or had I? Confused. I pretended all was well. He was now humming a tune of satisfaction and decided to shave his beards with my electrical shaver. That act gave him up. As he bent to connect the cable, the pile of mint notes expanded the vent of his breast pocket. I strategized how to confront this malaise. What if he denied taking my money, the friendship would be ruined. But he had come, not with this bulging pocket. What would a friend be doing in my inner room without waiting for me to come back from the convenience. What audacity has he to saunter into my inner of inner as just a friend. I was distraught. Then he excused himself to leave

for work. He was late. For one who had wanted to see the brother, was now heading to work straight. Well, it's a welcomed possible change of mind.

"Please, help me with your new notes for some change that I needed." I requested from him. He obliged me. I went into my room and compared the serial number with my notes. They corresponded with the ones in my depleted bundle. Now satisfied, that these were my notes, and equipped with the bundle in my hand, I confidently ordered him, "Bring out my money you took, and hand it over to me." He obeyed more eagerly like a servant on duty as he brought out more notes from behind his back pocket.

"This is not complete, bring out all my money" I spoke with a lethal tune. He stood up and ransacked his pockets bringing out the piles he pinched from each bundle into various pocket sizes. I continued with a curse,

"If you were still holding any of my money which you are refusing to bring out, you will be disgraced" I concluded with a threat.

"I swear that was all I took. Please, do not tell Fidel or any of our friends. I am sorry for what I have done. Please, forgive me. Pray for me. I will not do it again." He pleaded.

It now dawned on me he had been the cause of Fidel's sorrow and crisis in his girl friends' relationships. Twenty years after, I met Ogu at Abuja, he was P/A to a white man. His friend Mike has died. Zainab could not marry Mike for the obvious reasons. "He had married another girl. But he died," he said. I felt sad for a trusted man living

behind a thief alive. He requested for my phone lines, I refused him this request and we parted, instantly.

But surprisingly, Ozige was my junior, both academically and in the civil service that we had found ourselves. That was how we met. He came looking for Record of Service, a record paper that spelt out all your antecedents, both before and during your service career being recorded within; movements, postings, promotions, disciplinary measures, Annual leave including casual. And I had much of the paper stuff with me. "You could come back anytime you needed more." And he came back as often as he needed these papers. We settled to acquaint ourselves, gradually leading to extending visits to each other's houses. It prevailed to having a hang out, occasionally, and in most cases ending up in my picking the bills. At other times, a loan from me was necessary to sustain the life of a fledgling youth, struggling to make it in life. And in deed he lived a life that was best to me, described as moderate; far better than his colleagues as I visited him in his house. And he told me stories that astounded me imaginatively. They varied from politics to the mundane fairytales, the weird and the mysteries, and still itching to hear more from him. And they came flooding in their varieties with every new one as we kept meeting seamlessly and easily expressed in his gifting. For instance, he was the first to tell me about the death of Gen. Sani Abacha, "The man is dead" as he ran to eaves drop this topmost information.

"You know in earlier part of this year, the Bishop of Akure in Aprill, congratulated his congregation,

telling them that a new year had dawned on Nigeria.” He said as I saw him off excitedly in tow to his house, keeping the story alive. It was new year in deed. That leader that traumatized this country for selfish reasons. All Five political parties endorsed him as their sole candidate, “five leprotic fingers of a man,” the slogan in private quarters sang. It was an offence to oppose such a “man the cap fits.”

“What happens to the madman that was picked for having the guts to write “On M. D. Yusuf we trust.” M. D. Yusuf was a contender on to the presidential seat of what was seemingly becoming apolitical in the country’s political history. M. D. simply ventured as there was no one to challenge or contend with such dictator. The “Three-million-man-match” organized by friends and political cronies and those looking for what they could scoop from the system, demonstrated support for the man. It was an aberration to talk otherwise or anything contrary, or negative about the Military leader. The madman was picked for his role in simply supporting another candidate other than the ‘man the cap fits’.

“He will be released and all political opponents that were held hostage for their various opinion in the emerging milieu.” He stated affirming to himself the end of a saga. The excitement was palpable. He rushed back to his house and with great relieve we saw the emergence of a new era. The country regained its confidence once again. Gen Abdulsalami became the new head of State. The Nation continued, and this led to the emergence of an Obasanjo as the elected President

of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1998 and sworn into office on May 29th, 1999.

My friend was quite an exciting personality to be with. Never, a dull moment. I once told him, with his knowledge, having now advanced his Education by evening classes and weekend programs, the sky was going to be his starting point if he got to find himself in Abuja. He did find his way to Abuja and my prophesy came through. I am still waiting for my tithe from him which in all honesty is a far cry from the man I know. He is now a big boy; with houses both in the village and in the cities; Makurdi and Abuja in their respective multiples. He boasts of a fleet of cars to his hangers.

He began his spartan lifestyle in my accommodation where I managed to make ends meet, living a life of doubts. "There was this female Director who asked me to do chore for her today. After that, the woman gave me Ten thousand naira."

"It's just the beginning" I assured him. And gradually, one day he went on a weekend and never came back neither did he tell me he had found a place to live. I decide to trace him to his office.

"One of my cousins is on leave and had asked me if I could stay in his house until he came back."

"Oh, that's okay. I thought I should know." I returned his statement. But I kept thinking it would have been better if he had informed me instead of stressing me this ordeal. At any rate he was entitled to his choice of place. He came telling me his brother was in town but he could not go and

stay with him and his family. I obliged him his request wishing I had some money to secure an accommodation for him as such staying together could break a hitherto good relationship. I tried to manage the relationship until one day he tuned on the small gen-set I had, leaving the choke drawn. And I drew his attention to it. "Next time, return the choke back, to its normal position. So says the manual."

"In my house I leave the choke drawn" he said.

"But here it's the opposite, in my house," I retorted at that statement. "I have used this gen-set right from Jalingo and I have always returned the choke without having any problems." If there was any need to introduce these changes, we could have talked about its benefits first and foremost instead of such impositions.

Perhaps that had annoyed him to look for another apartment to stay put. Well, he was not advising me but was making a rule for me. Somebody I was accommodating with all the carefreeness, inconveniencing self to attending to the comfort of a visitor, taking him to the office. And a deluge of his very interesting stories came flooding over me.

"I have a friend of mine, well, we are cousins. And he has this girl friend." Usually, we were not into ribald stories but he was more experienced about women than I did. "The spirit husband has not allowed my brother to rest." I got into rapt attention. Those moments have come again. Moments of his mysterious stories.

"There was this day," he began. "The girl visited him and as there were together. All of a sudden, he

found the girl on the sofa moaning voyeuristically. And he watched as the girl was in a love making session, with all the sensual body movements to a man he never saw. And when it was over, the girl came to her senses. It kept happening over and over again.”

“But won’t the boy live the girl?”

“Hmm, this thing happened in Makurdi here. At another date, the girl friend was coming back from school, and they had arrived Makurdi, when they had off-loaded, a man was clutching her bag assisting her out of the park. Hmm!” He said in an expression of mystery. “And the girl shouted. The man dropped the bag and disappeared.” I was awed, scared now. The girl told the uncle who was a Professor at the University of Agriculture, Makurdi, the disbelieved such a tale. And one day she was in his house, a man appeared uninvited. The uncle requested her to get some coffee for the strange visitor, seated. As she went to get the coffee, the man he was discussing with vanished, disappeared from the room. That kept him wondering in agreement to the mysteries of the spiritual husband with such an obnoxious visitor, courageously appearing in his house.” He believed her.

At another event the brother, my friend’s cousin, was arrested, bruised, detained and released after three days by the police for no offence recorded against him. At another point where she had gone to the market to get meat, somebody had paid for the meat. And many more of such stories about a

troubling spiritual husband. And I was all ears to the listening, his amiable audience.

When I left Makurdi, I handed over my vehicle to him; to use and take care as I will not be needing it in a Federal Capital territory, capital of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I did not consider it road worthy in my capacity to travail on its rickety nature. The next time I saw the vehicle, it was in a wreck. My anger blazed and was aghast. What manner of maintenance was this. Even if you could not maintain an item, you could just keep it off usage to save your image before the owner who had entrusted you with his treasure. I shed tears at the sight of my car, now seriously dilapidated. I wondered whether he had used it to spite my inner will at a man I so invested my trust, basking in his ability to take good care of a friend's property, the way he had used the vehicle with less attention to its status. I retrieved it where I found him; in a drinking parlor and drove straight to a mechanic who would fix one or two things that had been grossly ignored and undermined to decay.

What manner of man was this? I no longer trusted him with anything that was mine, unto him until he sauntered into Abuja as a newly posted Staff of the Road sector. He made his progress in life I never cared about how he made it and how he made it. I was no longer interested in that character of a man. I just got fed up with men and their funny behavior. Failing severally, to get me into his location, with all promises of faith to no avail, having catered for him while he suffered want of an accommodation, he would not show up with no apologies till this moment.

Just got fed up! Fed up with the delusive mentality
of a man!

Mohammed

Now this episode of acknowledging the unconsummated tragedy of ingrates cannot be concluded without an exceptional case. There are quite other cases but this stands out in deed. This is a case worthy of emulation. A man I cannot describe in words but by the mere mention of his lifestyle typifies and idolized this individual. All the case studies listed here are people of same denominations; my own variation of worship and songs who have dastardly, ignored the path of glory and honor turning ecclesiastical motives on their heads.

But let me first of all appreciate my Dog; the great friend from the animal world.

The dog as an animal, a mammal according to my little Biology study. It has life and possesses the characteristics of a living thing. It is a four-legged animal and according to English definition it's a 'Canis lupus 'familiaris', of the genus 'canis' that has been domesticated for thousands of years, of highly variable appearances due to human breeding'. Other dictionary definitions classify them as domesticated animal with a long muzzle whose characteristic call is a bark. They are identified by terms such as pooch, hound, bitch...! Their little ones are called puppies! The dog is a man's long-term friend and it's his best friend till this day!

It's so gifted with lots of abilities and well suited for many advantages to man and society. The sensory organs are as sharp as lightening. Many of these canine species are used to sport around. They go by other names; Alsatian. The hound the enemy; the strangers to the house in deep canine aggression disdaining the offer of friendly gestures, attacking ferociously uncareful strangers.

They keep man in relatively good company and safety. The Police Force finds them useful in investigative and other security assignments. Their fast and speedy movement helps in the pursuit of animals for a good meal in the rural areas. They are guards around the house keeping man safe from attacks within his territory. They know a visitor from a member of their house hold.

They are semi-nocturnal animals; sleeping when not busy, day or night. They feed based on dietary training given to them. Otherwise, they feed carnivorously or omnivorously. Unlike other pets or domestic animals, they are cheap to maintain. Some cater for themselves eating whatever they could find edible. Yet, they do not beguile their masters in their manners.

Man's best friend, the dog is far better than some human beings. They are a good company to be with. Their playful inanities could wear one out. They know when one was sad; their generic gestures tell the happy moments in a home. They know how best to welcome their masters' home. They alert their masters on dangers ahead of them. They know how to appreciate their masters on good done to them; they wag their tails, a symbol

of their gratitude! Seldom, do they attack their masters even at a provocation! They are very faithful and loyal friends! Thus, they have become man's greatest pets, nee friends!

Can men learn any lessons even from the dog? The elites keep them as pets. The dog was your best friend! Some times better than your fellow human being; jealous, enviable, hostile! My dog welcomes me home with all furs, jumping from one end to the other, purring on me. While my own, my very own, the very ones I feed, accommodate and keep in safety shelter, takes a cautious distance away from me, being angry that one was home safe from the vagaries of societal behaviour, ignoring my presence in whatever benevolence I have craved for them.

In the morning, she looks forward to my breaking forth from sleep, kissing my feet, pinching me, drawing my attention to her, looking intently into my eyes with the hope of finding pleasure in those eyes or prying for sadness. She is happy. My fellow mates in the house, hide themselves under the sheets, waiting until I got out for work before surfacing to the kitchen to eat what I had bought for the house or just relax to watch movies that provide leisure to such souls than my presence, my voice, my visage, my communication, my tutoring.

I could sleep deep allowing her to alert me in the case of some uninvited guests, yet sleeping outside. My own, my dear own, consumed in the loftiness of my apartment, with the solace of providential softness of a foam I bought, hardly ever get to mind if there was any threat to the

house or make inquiries to any noticed dangers at all. Eating the best part of meals than the dog does, as they unmindfully do. My dog eats from dirty plates feeling happy but my very own eats from ornamental ceramic plates, and yet jettison the contents within. She eats the same meals as I do and is excited but my own, attack me for not providing a better table for their physical well-being and morphology even in their less contributory scale to domestic cares.

My Dog, my Dog! Making the family our rallying point as everyone plays with her, suffering the lashing of temperamental individuals to cocoon in her abode, melancholily. Taking the brunt of transferred anger from an aggrieved member of the family. Sheltering in wait for any adventurers. Taking the chase for an overbearing protection of a visiting stranger to the house, family member's friends. She snarls even from the shadows of passersby. Sometimes even from a shaky rag being tossed about from mild winds, patrolling the compound in a self-assigned duty of her territory.

My Dog!

Now Mohammed! Real name, not an acronym. I find it difficult to describe the personality of this individual; a gentle man with a humane heart. Doing things not to impress any individual but just to satisfy the inability of the other in sacrificial gesture. He told me one of the stories, "You see that girl?" She had a crippled hand, call her handicapped, one with a disability.

"One day, I just decided to give her five thousand naira. After a while she called me that she needed

help. What was the help? She needed a machine which would cost her two hundred thousand naira.”

“And that was when you saw her predicament and tried to assuage her pains in life” I said rather sarcastically. “She should have observed how you pass by her daily to work, on foot. To be able to conclude that this one was just a good man.”

“Well, I don’t have that kind of money anyway. Sometimes it takes a lot of consideration to be of any help. It could be misconstrued, giving meaning to other form of imagination.” He concluded. “Let me tell you another incident that happened at Sheria. I saw this boy when I went visiting home. Others were at school in the morning and he was dropping off at home. So, I asked him what was the problem that he couldn’t be in school like his other mates. And he said he has to pay school fees, buy his school uniform etc. And we calculated the amount to be eleven thousand naira. I simply gave him twelve thousand naira to resume school. Three days after the father called me to his house. I went. Then he began, ‘I have some problems. I want you to help me’”

“What? Not even appreciating the did for his son who was out of school?” Interjecting him furiously at the behaviour of people’s ingratitude. “Why do people think making sacrifices out of burden amounts to free will from abundance.”

“I allowed him roll out his numerous problems. At the end I told him I have heard him. I left. I never went back there. In fact, the following day I took

my bag out of Sheria.” His narration was quite a template but I choked in laughter.

Mohammed and I grew up within the same environment. The proximity of our homes was that close, sighting each other from outside. Just two homes in between. It was more of a family set up even though we spoke different dialects. I was more comfortable at a meeting which warned, portending grave danger with my continued relationship with him in the existing fracas between my people and his people, and told them this “If this man could harbor any ill feelings towards me, then I don’t deserve to live!”

I am a car freak. And I lost my car to the nature of its ricketiness. I couldn’t use it in my pride to the new place I had been posted. I preferred to be more dignified going on foot than face the appalling regalia of a tardy looking car. I applied for a loan to assuage my penchant for a vehicle. The loan was slow in approval of my request for a bank I had traded with all my civil service life. They stood the chance of profiting from the hidden charges of their illicit trade agreement that gives me no choice after all. Then I went on window shopping one of those days. I found a relatively cheap car, being sold by a desperate owner. I called him expressing my find.

“So, how much do you need now to make up for the balance to complement the payment” He requested. I told him. “Send me your Account Number”, he simply said. In a jiffy, an alert came in. I settled the matter of my desire. ‘Where there was a vision, there was a way’ it’s often said. So, it was.

Yet, he had no good car of his own but he preferred I had something better. What a mindset.

In my melancholy condition of loneliness, he was always there to lend credence to whatever moves I made. He never recommended any but was always in full support of whoever I brought forward as an intended spouse, giving all necessary, including monetary assistance to such fraternal individual. And they all liked him.

When I was transferred back to Abuja, I found it convenient to stay with him in his one-bedroom apartment, in a housing provision called the body guard quarters. His family was far away in Makurdi while he stayed alone in his villa allocated apartment, which quartered their service nature. I had severed relationship with my erstwhile spouse. The waiting room was quite spacious enough to accommodate as many as possible. I began to enjoy again the gains of bathing under the shower and living a life of bucket-lessness. The plumbs were in good functional capacity. Water flowed freely all of twenty-four hours daily. And since he operated on shift bases, I had twenty-four hours to myself alone in the apartment exchanging banters with his colleagues. It was a moment of newness. I eased him off by going on weekends to Makurdi where I had no one to communicate with but to avoid friction, curbing damage to a relationship. But it was better not to indulge him with excessive familiarity.

Two months after my assumption of duty in my new posting, Mohammed was posted out of the villa to Makurdi. It was like we were exchanging

seats. I kept being at his apartment until one day he came. It was time to permanently disengage from the villa and Abuja to relocate himself in Makurdi. He parked a few things; his praying mat, radio, box, rug and few other inconsequential items. Everything well tucked up in his little car. And he said to me,

“I am off, going to be with my family after all these eight years of sojourn in Abuja. The State Office has posted me to do the VIP thing to the Speaker of the State House of Assembly. And people were getting agitated, wagging their tongues over the posting. I said look, I served the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in that capacity. Was it not demeaning to serve the Speaker now in the same capacity?”

I saw the logic. He was being probably compensated in the posting for being out of the villa. Perhaps, his goodwill was working favors for him in postings; from Government House, Makurdi to the Villa and now to Speaker of the House of Assembly in the State.

“As soon as I drive out of this premises,” he went on. “Everything left behind is yours.” He said it so compassionately carelessly. I turned my ears to hear him well.

“What did you say?” I pressed on.

“Look, as I drive out of here,” he repeated, “whatever I have left behind are all yours.”

“You mean the bed?”

“It’s yours”

“The television, the set of upholsteries Chairs?”

“It’s yours”

The window blinds, kitchen utensils, the stove, the pots spoons, etc.”

“There are all yours!” This time with a tone of impatience, and a desperation to leave. I was astounded. Inheriting a whole furnished house. There was nothing else to buy. It was a generosity I so magnify without quantification. My joy blazed excessively. Perhaps I was day dreaming. No, it was a reality. Never seen such a gesture before. It was an act I replicated when my posting was reversed from Katsina back to Abuja. ‘One good turn deserves another’ as often said.

“There are two miniature generating sets, pick one and give the other one to Kundu, the Security guard in my office, you know him?”

“Yes Sir!”

“Keep the mattress, the curtains, the rugs, the water pitcher, electric stove, the two televisions, the decoder and the antenna and every other thing I leave, they are all for you.” I concluded in a similar tune to one of those who have frequented my house in visitations, and kept me company at the least moments of my stay in that desert habitation. But I had done much generous acts, more than this to his family; transporting them home, many States away on vacation, paying their hospital bills, buying Christmas wares for spouse and children, even including himself. He was with all intents and purposes, a big boy in town now. Owning two televisions; one in the waiting room and another in

the bedroom, with sitting chairs, never dreamt of, expensive curtains and connecting to world-view, with a decoder machine. But my friend sold all these in want of one thing or the other.

Mohammed's sojourn in his career took him to Maiduguri at the heat of the boko haram insurgence. We worried for him and his dear life. We kept praying for his immediate removal from that enclave. It took a whole gruesome five years, through thick and thin, of daily heart palpitation, escaping from one bullet or the other at whiskers, being chased out of bed at night naked to run into the bush, by the arm bush of militants before he was finally relocated to Abuja once more. I pleaded with him to stay in the apartment I had put up in one of the suburbs.

"Choose any of the rooms, including my bedroom, it's an in suit, to stay." I campaigned, winning against the sister's competing request to stay with her. When he chose to stay in the Boy's room, all the items I had inherited from him were all there in their intact except for those degenerated by my 'brother's poor handling and maintenance.

"These were the items you entrusted to me, as gifts. They have caused my life very well pleasurable pleasantly, rented convenience for me and my guests. I have kept them safe enough, short of my people's misuse, there are all here as you may wish to come back home to your house again. We can't thank God for His goodness in securing you back to this place alive" He simply smiled off benignly, the influence he had in my life.

And life was back again for us as it were. It was not fortuitous that we had no issues to settle. But it happens naturally and the schism in terms of irritations are broken down sooner than it had begun. I wished I could do more to rectify the relationship in terms of being a benefactor but he was always contended with his lifestyle.

As it is often said, a friend in deed was *better than a brother. And so, he was! He ranked in my record of service as my next of kin, until I began to own a family. A man's worth does not inhere in the abundance of what he has but in the character of selflessness. Nemo dat quad non habet*, the Italian proverb which says you don't give what you don't possess. And many don't possess it. Many really, don't possess it. It's easy to fructuously be extensive in kind and art than to be hard on your people and environment.