



THE NEXT TWO DAYS *Oma Holly*

CHAPTER ONE

There had been power outage for a week before power was temporarily restored but the night was unusually silent, which was uncommon at Edo Street, Ekosodin, Benin City,

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where students dreaded walking at night but enjoyed competing amongst themselves on who had the loudest home theatre. He was calling her for the sixth time which was also unusual. He only called twice after an argument, then called again the next day, and she never picked until the next day. Just before she decided to pick the seventh call, there was a knock at the door. Her eyes immediately located the wall clock opposite where she was standing. It was 10:40pm. That was unusual. Nobody visited her by that time.

“Who is there?” she shouted from where she was standing.

“It’s Mr. Williams. I’m here on behalf of Jason. He was involved in an accident today and I’m here to take you to him.”

“Oh my God!” she shouted, her hands already on the door.

She opened the first lock in less than a second but stopped midway in opening the second lock. Something was wrong. She had a serious argument with Jason and he had been calling her line. Just then, her phone blinked. She left the door and walked the two steps back to her bed. It was a text from Jason. She had no time to see the context of the text as she was distracted by an unusual noise by the door. The phone fell from her hands when she looked towards where the noise was coming from. It was not a noise, it was the sound of an instrument cutting through the iron door. She did not have the time to analyze what was wrong. She ran into her bathroom which was closer than the kitchen. She switched off the light and went on her knees. She tried to understand what was going on but an unknown voice called her name. He was already in her bedsitter room.

“Cynthia..... where... are.... you.....? I promise not to hurt you... Jason took something that does not belong to him and we just need the only thing he treasures to get it back.”

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From the footsteps of the man, she knew the man was by the kitchen door. She could not think, her mind was filled up with fear. Her phone started ringing again, the footstep changed direction.

“He’s calling you.... just come out and pick your call.”

Something moved past her feet making her jolt up. Her left leg kicked a bucket as she stood up. Immediately, the bathroom door was being pushed.

“Got you” the voiced said.

Next came the sound of that instrument used earlier to open her entrance door. She immediately accepted her fate, with not seeing Jason before her death, as her only regret. Just when the door had been unlocked, and the face of her killer was about to surface, she heard someone calling her name, she knew that voice very well. Before she could respond there was a gun shot, followed by two gun shots fired simultaneously. There was another two gun shots fired almost the same time, then there was absolute silence.

CHAPTER TWO

Few seconds later, the door to the bathroom was opened. Her eyes were closed, she did not want to see who killed Jason and who would kill her. She just wanted the killer to be quick with her. Tears were already flowing from her eyes. Jason would never know what she discovered, that she knew the secret. She only wished when students came out to see what happened nobody would take pictures of herself and Jason’s dead body.

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Someone held her shoulders, it felt like the person was trying to calm her vibrating body. He was calling her name but she was too consumed with grief to listen.

“Cindy, it’s me, it’s Jason. Are you hurt, did they hurt you?”

She heard everything but it took a while to register. First was the realization that it was Jason speaking. Gradually, she opened her eyes. It was really Jason. The relief was instantaneous as she threw herself on him, but she pulled herself away almost immediately.

“Did you just say they?”

“That is not important, they can’t hurt you anymore. Cindy are you okay? You are still in shock.”

“I thought you were dead, I” Jason did not allow her finish her statement, he wrapped her into him.

“Sssh it’s okay, breathe Cindy, just breathe. I was afraid I won’t get to you on time. I got you that’s all that matters now.”

He held her and only pulled away a little when her body stopped shaking.

“Cindy I know you have a lot of questions but that will have to wait because we must leave here right now” Jason said raising her up.

He still held her as they left the bathroom to the room. Jason immediately scanned the room, next he started packing her clothes and basics into her laptop bag. She did not notice Jason packing because she was frozen where Jason left her standing. She was seeing two bodies on her floor, one not too close to the bathroom while the other by her door. Blood was still pumping out from the hole at the center of the first body. Somebody tapped her, she jumped and screamed.

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“Cindy it’s Jason, don’t look, let’s go. Take” Jason said giving her phone to her.

She took the phone but did not follow Jason.

“Jason, please I need to know something. People will soon come out to find out what this shooting was all about and they will find these bodies, and.....”

“Cindy, please I promise to explain. Don’t worry about the dead bodies, it will be taken care of, but if we don’t leave in the next forty seconds we may end up like them.”

That got her moving. Once outside the door, she saw another body. She looked away not wanting to see the details. The night was very quiet that even the nocturnal animals were silent. It was Jason’s car that broke the noise and as Jason drove out of Edo Street to boundary road, she tried to comprehend what had just happened within the past ten minutes but failed.

“You should at least tell me something. Who are those people? What did you get yourself involved in?”

They were already at University of Benin Main Gate.

“I and George were on an undercover mission but our cover got blown. I believe someone in the military betrayed us. I was out when we were attacked.”

Jason was silent for a while. She knew he was trying to organize what he would say next. That was typical of Jason.

“George was able to forward the evidence of what we discovered to me. They are after it after destroying the others.”

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After a long silence, she knew that was what Jason would tell her. She became more confused than before. So many questions she wanted to ask, but she knew Jason wouldn't answer. He hardly talked. Mum had once told her they had first believed Jason was autistic when he was younger. He could go a day without speaking to someone. The only thing that intrigued him was mathematics, shooting a bird down from the sky with a catapult until she was born.....

That brought her back to the secret she discovered. She had called Jason to tell him she knew the secret but Jason had said he would call her back because he was busy. She had immediately told Jason she wouldn't pick when he called back. She had ended the call and Jason had called her back few hours later and she had refused to pick. But he kept calling. That was when those invaders came in. Something was not right but she could not place it.

They were at ring road and Jason was on the route to Sapele.

“Where are we going?”

“To Lagos.”

“But you are driving the opposite direction.”

“Yes, for now. They are aware I'm going to Lagos. I need them to be ahead of me.”

The answer was worse than the former. It seemed like the more she asked, the more Jason confused her.

“Trust me Cindy, the less you know the better” Jason said as if reading her mind.

He did that most times. She had asked him how he knew what she was thinking about most times and Jason had told her it was written all over her face, but that was not true as her hostel mates

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and course mates always guessed the opposite of what she was thinking. She later got to know she was not the only one. George had told her Jason could somehow guess correctly what he was thinking and also during combat training, Jason had a way of guessing his opponents' attack by just looking at them. That was why he was one of their best both in combat and marksmanship, although George claimed he could beat Jason in face to face combat.

They had just crossed the by-pass when something clicked.

“Jason, how are you in Benin? I spoke with you and George yesterday and you told me you were at Onitsha?”

There was no answer. She remembered something else again.

“Jason where is George? You just told me that you were on an undercover missi.....”

She was not allowed to finish her statement as Jason suddenly brought the car to an abrupt stop. Her seat belt prevented her from being thrown out of her chair.

“Jason what the heck did....”

“They did not take the bait. We did not move on time.”

“What do you mean? Can you please speak English for once?” she shouted.

“We are being followed” Jason said coming out of the car.

CHAPTER THREE

All thoughts about her safety vanished with Jason's statement.

"What do you mean we are being followed?" she asked also coming out of the car.

She immediately went to stand very close to Jason.

"Get back in now and put on your seat belt" Jason said in that kind of voice she always obeyed.

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Jason had started the car before she closed the front seat door and the car was already in motion before she could belt up. Jason was on top speed by the time she finished belting up.

“Jason slow down. You are running one hundred and eighty.”

“There is a car I’ve been seeing since we got to Ring Road and that car is on our route now.”

“But it’s dark how can you tell it’s the same car?”

“By the headlights, pattern and the way the car is being driven.”

“Jason I’m scared” she said not sure if the fact that Jason might crash the car or their followers might get to them was what was scaring her.

“Listen to what I’m going to say. Our lives depend on it. Right now I’ve lost them but they will soon meet up. When I bring this car to a halt, you and I are going to jump down and you are going to run after me. Don’t stop till I stop.”

There was silence. She was gripping wherever permitted her hand to grip. The car must be flying...

“Cynthia, did you hear what I just said?” Jason shouted

She immediately understood the seriousness of their situation. Jason never called her Cynthia except when he was angry, no mad at her and that rarely happened.

“I heard you. Do I even have a choice? I don’t even know why you are angry. I’m the one that should be angry.”

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She was not expecting any response from Jason so she was not surprised when he did not answer but increased the speed of the car making her wonder why a car should have the ability to run that fast.

About a minute later, Jason slowed down, then brought the car to a halt. It was better than last time. Before she was out of the car Jason had already opened the back seat, taken out a very big back bag and her laptop bag. Just when she closed the door and was about to ask where they were running to, the car was back in motion. For a second she almost believed Jason had abandoned her. But she saw Jason opposite her controlling the car with a remote. Before she could comprehend what he was actually doing to their only means of transportation, Jason was by her side.

“Run” he said already running towards the direction of a bush. The only thing that made her follow him immediately was trust. She knew Jason would never hurt her and if he said they should enter the bush, there might be a secret passage to a secret house.

The night was almost pitch black, except for the half-moon light which looked like it was being forced to shine. She could barely see Jason. She was following Jason with her auditory organ. The bush was not that thick. From the way the path was a little clear, it could be a farm land, probably a cassava farm. Jason ran and she followed. This continued for a while before Jason stopped at a tree. She was on the ground immediately, panting vigorously. She just ran a race that would be difficult for Blessing Okagbare to beat. Jason held her from behind. He gently pulled her to his chest. He was on a sitting position and it looked like he was resting his back on the tree.

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“Cindy I’m sorry. If I had known that you will be involved in this I would have rejected the assignment” he said after a long silence.

She was now breathing normal. She was silent for a while. She just allowed herself to feel that sense of safety she always felt around Jason.

“And I was never angry with you. You are in danger because of me. That’s why I’m upset” he continued.

“I believe you” she said after thinking of how to respond.

“I need to set camp because it’s going to be a long night” Jason said standing up and raising her along with him.

“So there is no secret passage to a secret house?” she asked.

Jason did not reply but she swore he smiled at what she said. It might be funny to him but not to her. She had never walked through a bush path in daylight, but thanks to Jason she was in a bush she did not know and about to camp in whatever Jason was about to set. Jason moved a bit further from the tree. She immediately followed Jason’s movement, the closer the better.

“Here, wear this” Jason said giving her a spectacle.

Everywhere was looking blue after wearing the spectacle. But she could now see Jason and what he was doing. Jason was wearing one too. He measured a distance with his leg, dug a hole and repeated the action three times. Next he filled the holes with short poles that were at different locations at the end of a big bag after which he covered the hole. He inserted something that looked like a pump into a hole in the bag, he started turning the pump and the bag started

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swelling up. Within two minutes, Jason's camp house was ready. Jason unzipped one side of the bag and signaled for her to enter.

"After you" she replied Jason's signal.

Jason did not enter immediately. He brought out something from the big back bag. It was a toy bird but it looked real. Her idea of it being a toy bird lasted a few seconds when the bird started flying after Jason had pressed a button in another device he was wearing.

"What is that?"

"This is my eye and it's also a sound detector. I need to know what is going on around me" Jason replied inserting something into his left ear. That was the first time Jason's answer did not confuse her for the past one hour. But that did not mean the device and the fact that Jason, a Nigerian had a device like that did not confuse her. The spectacle she was currently wearing was no exception, then the car...

"Wait Jason, the car. Is it still in motion? Are they still chasing us?"

"No" Jason answered.

"Just no? Can you please explain?"

Jason did not answer. He brought out a bag from the big bag, picked up her laptop bag from the ground, bent down and crawled inside his tent. That pissed her off. She followed angrily. It was as if Jason knew she would follow because he zipped up the tent as soon as her whole body was inside.

"Jason you have not answered my quest....."

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It happened so fast. She was on her knees facing Jason but within seconds, she was spun back to the way she was sitting down under the tree, her back resting on Jason's chest, her head touching his neck.

"Like I said the less you know the better" Jason said with a tone of finality.

She would have argued with him and gotten all the answers she wanted but she felt exhausted the moment her back touched Jason's body. She decided to play along for the time being. She would get all the answers she wanted very soon. She relaxed her body as Jason rested his jaw on her head. She closed her eyes and used her ear to observe her environment. She could hear the hooting of an owl, the crawl crawl sounds of frogs indicating a gallop of water was nearby, she could also hear the whistling of crickets. She felt chilly and pushed herself closer to Jason who responded by holding her closer. Luckily for her, she was still moody and had not yet worn her night gown before the invaders entered her room. She would have been frozen by now. Jason released his hold on her to open her laptop bag. He came out with her sweater and helped her to wear it. His hands went back to holding her. This time around she was not relaxed. Even when she tried closing her eyes to sleep, she could not. She could no longer keep the secret she discovered. She could not tell Jason before now because she was worried Jason might not even be aware. But since the night was already unusual she decided to take her chance. She breathed in, counted one to ten before opening her mouth.

"Jason I know the secret, I've discovered the truth..." she paused hoping Jason would respond.

"How long have you known?" Jason asked after about two minutes.

She heaved a sigh of relief.

“About eight months now. I was arranging Mum’s things after the burial when I stumbled upon her diary of twenty years ago. She wrote about my father and my real mother.”

“How long have you known?” she asked after Jason did not say anything.

“Since you were sixteen” he answered her this time.

That made her pull away. Jason did not hold her back.

“You knew about this for four years and you never told me. Nobody told me. Why Jason.” Jason was silent but she needed him to talk.

For the past two years she had been thinking something was wrong with her. A year ago, she had confessed to her priest in school that she had feelings for her brother and had gone through series of counseling. She had been a little relieved of her guilt when she discovered that Jason was not her brother eight months ago. She had believed he wouldn't be aware or maybe would have discovered the secret after the accident. But now, she was getting to know Jason had been aware all this time....

“Cindy...”

“Don’t touch me. You have no idea the.....”

Once again she was interrupted mid-sentence when Jason covered her mouth with his hand.

“Ssssh Cindy, something is very wrong. We have people coming straight at us. I can hear them. They know where we are and they are close” Jason said releasing her.

“Tracker. They are tracking us” he continued.

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“But how?” she asked with a shaky voice.

“Did they have any contact with you?” she shook her head.

“Wait.....your phone. Give me your phone.”

Jason took her phone, removed the phone pouch and there inside the pouch was a tiny red blinking device.

“Oh my God Jason. What do we do?” She said already hyperventilating.

“You do nothing Cindy. I fight” he said bringing out weapons from his bag.

CHAPTER FOUR

He could hear their conversations. They were excited that they were going to take him unawares. One of them wanted him to be the first person they would kill because he had

something special to do with Cindy. That pissed him off, and he rarely got pissed because he was dangerous even to people near him. Everything became a mathematical puzzle, his body became highly sensitive to anything and he rarely became calm until he had solved the puzzle. The only person that had ever calmed him was Cindy. These men were now his puzzle and the solution was their death. The thought of any of them surviving sent shock waves to his body making him shake. He could not lose control. He had been trained to be able to control his sensitivity to everything and had been able to overcome going through a phase for a long time but at the moment, he found himself struggling for control.

“Jason, calm down...” Cindy said placing her hands on his hand.

Just like other times, the shock waves stopped as Cindy held him. She had always intrigued him from birth. He had refused to go near her afraid of feeling that annoying tinkling sensation he normally felt when touched. He had heard Mum tell Dad she thought he was autistic, then later she changed to mild autism, then he did not understand what that meant. He only knew the light was too bright, people’s voices were too loud and he hated being touched or touching someone. When that happened, it felt like tiny spiders were moving all over his body and he had always screamed, then Mum had always placed a puzzle for him, the more difficult the puzzle, the better because by the time he had solved the puzzle, he felt better. Sometimes he preferred targeting anything flying. So when Mum had gone to the hospital with a big stomach and had come back with a tiny little girl, he had refused to touch the baby. But he actually held her tiny hands one day after his inquisitiveness overcame his fear of being touched. He had instantly felt peace. It was like the feeling someone get when all the neighbors are disturbing the area with music and there is a sudden power outage. That was the kind of peace he felt. He became intoxicated with holding her. Although he was not that sensitive to Mum and Dad’s touch, he still felt a bit

uncomfortable. Holding Cindy brought peace and made him feel normal. It later became a habit that when he was triggered and the puzzles were not enough distraction, Cindy had been his drug. Although things changed when Cindy was sixteen. Now he was having that sensation that made him feel uncomfortable until the puzzle before him was solved and he had never failed to solve a puzzle. None of the men approaching his camp would survive this night. He was already calculating the distance he would allow them to get before he struck. Cindy was his physical peace and these men became a threat to his peace the moment they entered his camp.

There were a lot of options from his numerous weapons but the one he was sure was missing was a handcuff. His special team was trained to eradicate threats, there was no class on how to take in prisoners. Before they were sent out, their target had already been confirmed as a threat and their only instruction was 'eliminate.'

“Jason I don’t want to understand what you meant by you fighting. You said they, which means they are more than one. You can’t fight them. Let’s run” Cindy pleaded as he brought out his 9mm pistol.

He wished he could answer her, which was another thing he had to battle with. He hated talking, and it came with its own sensation. He could sense fear in her voice making him more upset. He brought out what they called “Flight 40” A toy-like rabbit. He removed the tracking device from Cindy’s phone and attached it to Flight 40. He unzipped the shelter and with a button from his watch, he sent the rabbit out into the night in the direction of angle 90, almost adjacent to his Circle. He had created his circle around his shelter in his mind and part of the puzzle was to make sure none of the invaders would enter the circle.

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“Jason, is like you are not listening to me. We need to start running now before they get to us.”

Cindy pleaded again, this time she tried pulling the hand with his android watch avoiding the hand with the gun.

“Cindy, your fear pricks at me. They will not stop chasing us, this is the only way to stop them. I stopped them last time” he replied wishing he had the communication skills George had. Pain and anger laced through him at the thought of George.

“You were lucky last time, I don’t know how you did it but the best thing to do right now is to run” she said trying to pull him out of the tent.

He would have smiled if it were possible. He had never gotten the concept of luck. His brain could not assimilate the meaning. Luck to him was having the correct math and position, and killing those bastards was the easiest math he had ever solved. They were too stupid and too sure of their numbers against him. It was as if each felt if his bullet didn’t hit him the other’s bullet would and because of that, they were too slow and had zero in targeting. He could kill five people with his 9mm before one of them could fire. The only smart one among them was the one by Cindy’s bathroom door. He had called Cindy’s name knowing it would halt any attack on her if she had not already been captured. But the ones coming right now, sounded different, like they were better trained. He was counting on their being smart for his trap to succeed and it looked like it worked. They had halted their movement towards the camp and from the sounds Flight 10 was sending back, their leader saw the change of the direction of their tracker as a distraction.

“Two of you follow the former position of the device, and you follow me. I think he’s aware we are coming” one of the men said, should be their leader.

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That was exactly what he wanted. He was right. They wouldn't send rookies like before to him. Last time was because they were just to capture Cindy. This time around, they had sent pros, and it was game on.

“Cindy do I need to explain to you that I’m a trained soldier and this is what I do” he said hoping his words will register but from Cindy’s vibrating body he just knew what he said didn’t penetrate.

He needed another tactic to calm her before she started hyperventilating.

“Cindy, its night and we are in an unknown bush. I can protect us from them but I can’t guarantee protection from snakes and you hate snakes” he said, hoping this would work because they were getting close.

He had to move fast on those coming towards them before going for those chasing Flight 40.

“We can take our chances. Please I don’t want anything to happen to you” she replied this time throwing herself on him.

He held her closer. He wished he knew what to say to keep her calm. She was not afraid for herself but for him, and how would he convince her that he was more afraid of something biting her than the people approaching. He was running out of time and there was no way he could leave her in her flight mood. When he moved for the kill, she must be at the center of his circle which was the shelter.

“What if we run now, then you can call George to join us later in the morning. I will be more comfortable if it’s two of you. Please Jason.”

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That strange painful feeling on his chest came again at the mention of George's name. He had had that once when Mum and Dad died. He never wanted her to find out about George but if telling her could convince her that the people they were facing would not stop chasing them, he was willing to take whatever came with it.

"George is dead Cindy. This people are not going to stop except I stop them" he said as the pain squeezed his chest forcing him to take a deep breathe.

Even before she reacted he knew he had just made a big mistake. He felt like cursing himself. He never made mistakes when it came to battle but had lots of them when it came to communication. She pulled away from him, her mouth was opened with an expression of shock written all over her face. If she was not hyperventilating before, she was now, all because he said the wrong thing.

"Cindy, Cindy, calm down, look at me" he said trying to pull her back to him.

George had been attacked just after they returned to their camp, after collecting the evidence they needed. He had intentionally lost the bet on who to get food because George had been losing all the time. Just when he had procured the food and was about to drive back to their camp, he got an email from George. Followed by a message. The text was short. 'under attack. download fast' He understood what the text meant. He had clicked on download as he drove straight to camp. He knew they would not go, but would wait for him. They were pros and the only way to win was to take the battle home, home meaning up. They had set their camp knowing they might need to defend themselves. It was an abandoned three storey building close to their camp. It took him less than three minutes to get to the top. He had picked out three of the men outside the camp before they knew they were being attacked. They had withdrawn immediately into the

Hilux they came with. He allowed them to drive away from the camp before shooting at the driver. The car crashed into a big tree after the bullet penetrated the hand on the wheel, exactly where he wanted the bullet to enter. He had waited for those who survived the crash to come out, then without hesitating he shot each of them. He had found George's body very close to the shelter they had set up with Black, his Desert Eagle pistol still on his hand. Apart from the three people he shot, eight dead bodies were also lying at different locations. Those were George's doing. Before dealing with George's body, he had collected the original file and the hardcopy from where they had hidden it, a little distance from their camp.

"You don't lie Jason, you are not trying to trick me, you won't do that, so let me just hope this night is a nightmare. I need to wake up" she said bringing him back from that painful memory.

"I'm sorry you have to know this way. We don't have much time. I need you to stay here. Please don't do anything. No harm will come to you if you stay here. I will be back soon" he said carrying his weapon bag with him. In it was George's Black. He bent down to crawl out but someone held him from behind.

"Don't go, don't leave me, Mum and Dad are no more, George is no more, not you too, I won't survive without you" she said crying, her head was resting on his back, her body was shaking and her tears were tearing at his heart.

He turned to face her, wishing he knew what to say to make her believe in him. He raised her face to meet his, confused on what to do. She opened her mouth to say something, he did not give her the chance as he covered her mouth with his. An unfamiliar fire like hot liquid overwhelmed him immediately their lips connected. He felt hot all over. A hunger he had not known existed took over his body. A part of his brain was screaming for him to stop, that he was

breaking his promise to Mum, but he was too far gone to listen. Maybe he would have stopped if she had resisted. He was already lost but he was hoping she would be the sane one. She did not stop him nor resisted him, instead she pushed her body closer increasing the fire burning in his body.

It was only the sound of people approaching and whispering on his ear that brought back his sanity. He gently pulled her away from him.

“Cindy, we have a lot to discuss. I just broke my promise to Mum, and I will be burning in hell for this. But before that, I need to take care of our visitors. When I come back I will answer all the questions you have for me. Promise me you will be here when I come back.”

She did not say anything but nodded.

“No matter what you hear don’t leave this place Cindy” he said leaving the shelter without waiting for her response.

The enemies were almost crossing the area he wanted to meet them. Without wasting time he moved stealthily towards his first battle.

CHAPTER FIVE

The approaching assassins had become stealth in their movement. They were no longer talking and he could hardly pick a signal from Flight 10. Any doubt of how skilled the assassins were disappeared, and he knew for certain that the people approaching were highly trained. Only few could move without making any sound. He had only one advantage which was his ability to feel, hear and see well, more than the average human. Major Ahmed had made sure he turned his partial autism which he had always seen as a curse to a gift. He had been gruesomely subjected to accept the sensations of having a heightened sense organs. After much training, he could actually commune with nature, the way Major Ahmed usually called it. The crickets were still noisy but silent at a particular distance. There could be only one reason. He moved towards the silence making sure his footsteps were as noiseless as a fallen leaf landing on the ground. He had switched off visuals from the bird so he could focus using his sense organs. A few distance from them, he stopped and changed course. He wanted the battle swift with none of them shooting. He might be able to handle these ones with his own element of surprise but he knew the battle could get ugly if there were gun shots to alert the others of a battle. Any gunshot would send the wrong signal because they were not expecting him there. The leader believed him to have taken off in order to keep Cindy safe. Any gunshot will send the message that they have been deceived and he will lose his element of surprise as the others would be ready for him, that was if they did not go on the offensive. Also, they were too close to the circle and he was not willing to take his chance with any stray bullet. He had a lot of things to discuss with Cindy, a lot of explanations to give and he was not in the mode for a long fight. He could still feel her and he was trying his very best to stay focused. He moved a bit further from the assassins, hid behind a tree, watched them walk pass the tree then followed behind giving them a little distance. He became more careful with his steps. He could afford no mistakes. From what he could see with his night vision

spectacle, the two men moving towards his circle, had their guns out and ready to shoot. They had a spectacle like his own. Although they were looking formidable, they were more focused on where they were going to and sometimes turned sideways but never looked back. That was part of his puzzle. He was counting on them acting exactly that way. This was not a game of fighting to show the strongest, it was a game of survival and they had been taught to eliminate threats using any method. Killing these men from the back was the best method available. He quietly brought out his suppressor from his bag. With his suppressor, he could kill one of them but the other would respond immediately. He was hundred percent sure their guns were already cocked. The sound of gunshots was not an option. If he could get closer, he could use the suppressor which was already in his 9mm on the smallest of the men and knock down the gun of the other simultaneously, but the night was too silent, even the frogs were silent. The owl he had earlier wanted to stop hooting, was silent now that it was needed. He tried to think of the best way to attack while having in mind that they were almost entering his circle. Suddenly, the biggest among the two jolted, might have been a creature he stepped on but that was not his concern. That few seconds was the only chance he could ever get and he took it. Before the biggest one could understand what was happening to his partner, he had sent his gun out of his hand. The knife in his back pocket was already out but the assassin dodged at the last moment making the knife to just graze his neck. He went for the second attack but his opponent was fast as his own knife was out and he escaped being stabbed straight at his heart by predicting the body movement of his opponent. The big man looked at him and smiled. This was not part of his plan. He did not want a long battle but the person before him was good. It could take time to defeat him which he did not have if he had to attack the others before they discovered they had been tricked.

“Nice to meet you in person Jason, I’m Ken. I’ve heard so much about you and you actually did well. I give it to you. You are good in strategizing but I think they over exaggerated your skills. You are not that good in physical combat. It’s a pity your talents would not be needed anymore” the man said.

Obviously Ken did not hear much about him, because if he did, he would know he didn’t talk and talks didn’t affect him, only puzzles did. He just watched Ken as he spoke. He could predict movements and also know the vibes coming out of someone at close range. From his observations, Ken was not afraid of him. He was excited, and people like him must be allowed to believe what they thought of their opponent. To defeat Ken, he needed to be defensive. Without wasting time, he took two steps back as Ken took a step forward increasing Ken’s excitement and confidence but reducing his caution. Without warning he struck with his knife, Ken still with the smile on his face easily dodged his attack by bending and shifting towards his left side but right where his left hand was waiting with another knife which went straight into his neck. He did not give Ken any time to absolve the shock as he sent the other knife to his heart. No sound came out from Ken’s opened mouth but the expression on his face before he died was that of shock.

Once he had confirmed Ken and his partner were absolutely dead, he took off towards the direction of Flight 40 making sure he was as soundless as possible. As he gained closure on Flight 40, he used his a button on his android watch to stop Flight 40’s movement. By that action, he had less than a minute before they discovered they had been chasing a rabbit all along. As he got closer, he brought out his 9mm and George’s Black from his bag, removed the safety and cocked both guns. He did not need to be discreet. He was going to shoot on sight making each shot count. He had stayed away from Cindy two minutes longer than planned and he was getting

The Next Two Days

an irritation, something was not right. He just had a feeling of dread. The other two assassins were just discovering what they had been chasing when he got within a shooting range. He fired the two guns almost immediately, the bullets hitting one on his back and the other on his head.

Ignoring all his trainings on confirming the target before leaving any scene, he ran fast towards his circle and the shelter. His suspicion was confirmed as the shelter came into view. Something was definitely wrong. The zip was opened, and when he looked inside Cindy was not there.

CHAPTER SIX

The gunshots brought silence to the noisy night. The noisy owl, frogs and crickets went dead silent. And just as it started, it ended. It ended too quickly. It took the nocturnal

creatures just thirty seconds after the last gunshot to resume their life but hers was in shambles. If she were to calculate the probability of Jason returning, she would have zero as her answer.

Jason never listened to anyone. If only he had heeded her plea, they would have gained a great distance from the assassins. The craziest thing he did was to tell her to remain in the shelter he had made. The assassins knew her exact location, they were coming for them yet Jason had made her promise to remain in the shelter no matter what. She could not believe Jason did not make any provision for her escape if he was killed. Just the thought of Jason being dead sent a panic to her body seizing her breathe. There had not been another gunshot but she kept having the feeling that something was not right.

“Please be alive” she whispered.

She had left the shelter few minutes after Jason left. She was not breaking her promise to stay. She left because Jason must have forgotten they knew where the shelter was. A normal person was supposed to tell her to run and hide, but Jason was not even normal to start with. She should feel safe where she was standing beside a tree but her fear for him was clouding her ability to think. She tried coming up with something to distract her. She closed her eyes and instead of seeing something in the past to distract her, she felt him, the way he kissed her, the way he held her. She shook her head before opening her eyes again. That was not a distraction. She did not want to handle her confusion concerning what had just happened with herself and Jason, and it was too much to sort or comprehend.

She did not hear nor see it coming, she just felt it. It was a knife. It missed her forehead and from the sound she heard, it must have gotten stocked in the tree. They had found her. She closed her eyes waiting for the assassin to shoot her with a gun or throw another blade that would

finally penetrate. Although she was visibly shaking, her killer would never get the satisfaction of hearing her screaming or begging. She had watched enough Hollywood movies to know that it never worked, instead, it made them excited.

Five minutes must have passed yet her killer had not done anything. What game was he playing? Did someone actually throw a knife at her or was she hallucinating? She silently thought. She could not take the tension anymore. She gradually opened her eyes but the person she saw standing a little distance from her, was more confusing that she could not feel the relief of seeing him alive. He looked like Jason, but there was no way Jason would try to kill her, except she was having a nightmare or he had been possessed, but that happened only in movies. Then it must be a dream, a nightmare.

“Cindy do you know you took three years of my life?” Jason asked still standing where he was.

That statement made her turn back to confirm her sanity. She saw the knife which meant she was not insane. What she saw next almost at the same time she saw the knife, made her jump and scream. Jason was immediately by her side but she pushed herself and Jason further from the tree before she succumbed to the feeling of safety that came with being wrapped in Jason.

“I told you to stay in the shelter. I told you I can protect you from them but I can’t protect you from snakes” Jason said holding her close, but it was not close enough. She pushed herself further into him, burying her face on his chest.

Gradually, reality started coming back but the image of a knife piercing through the center of a snake’s head, with its tail dangling and almost touching her hair, made her whole body shake again. She felt cold. Jason did not say another word, he just held her.

The Next Two Days

“I’m sorry, I should have listened to you” she said after a long time.

“Cindy, breathe, you are safe now, just breathe, I got you” Jason said.

She did not need an explanation to what Jason said. She just listened to him and breathed. She made up her mind to stay very close to him.

By the time they got back to their shelter, it was already 1:30am. They sat opposite each other and for a long time nobody spoke. With reality back in full force, everything seemed weird between them.

“Are you hungry?” Jason asked breaking the long silence.

She shook her head. She had already eaten before her life suddenly turned to an action, thriller novel. She was sure if she penned down what she had gone through in just a night, people would think she was writing a fictional story.

“Are you trying to avoid the main issue?”

“No. You can ask your questions.”

He was giving her a life time opportunity and she was going to maximize it.

“What did you promise Mum?” she asked, starting with the most important question.

“That I won’t touch you except we got married.”

So much for starting with that question. She just had to go back and ask from the simplest and less complex questions. Maybe Jason wouldn't confuse her with his straightforward answer if she did that.

The Next Two Days

“What led to that promise?” she asked after taking two minutes to construct how she would ask her question.

“I told her I had feelings for you.”

Good, at least she was getting somewhere. She just needed to go less and less complex.

“When was that?”

“Your sixteenth birthday?”

“You started having feelings for me on my sixteenth birthday or you told her you were having feelings for me on my sixteenth birthday?” she asked picking her words.

“Both.”

And it was going to be a long night.

“Jason can you please try not to be too straightforward with your answers. You are not helping.” she let out her frustration.

“You have no idea how much I’m trying” he responded.

“You could try more.”

He did not respond not that she was expecting one.

“Okay. You had feelings for me and you told Mum the same Day?”

He nodded.

The Next Two Days

“I know you were very close to Mum, but are you telling me Mum’s immediate response was to make you give that promise?”

He shook his head.

“What did she say?”

“That she knew it would happen.”

“Just that?”

“She had taken a decision with Dad and Pastor Sam to tell us the truth if something like this should happen.”

“Like this means we having feelings for each other.”

He nodded.

Mum told him but never told her. That was not fair, but then she remembered she never told anyone about her feelings.

“Wait, what do you mean by something like this? I did not tell you I have feelings for you?”

“You don’t need to. It’s written all over your face.”

She felt like an idiot instantly. How many times had Jason told her he could read her? She felt like hitting herself for not saying it out for such a long period of time.

“How long have you known?”

“More than a year ago. When you came to visit me and George.”

The Next Two Days

At the mention of George, she felt a throbbing pain in her chest, her hand unconsciously touched her chest. Jason was immediately by her side.

“Cindy, I’m sorry, I’m sorry I could not save him” he said as he held her close. She never knew she was crying until Jason wiped tears from her cheek with his palm.

“So George is really dead like Mum and Dad. This is not a dream. George is gone.”

Then more tears came. Jason just held her.

“Jason please what do these people want? What is it you have with you that George had to die? That so many people had to be sacrificed?”

She did not ask with the hope that Jason would answer and was surprised when she got an answer.

“You must be current with the latest news on Biafra.”

“Yes. They blew up a power plant few weeks ago, but there were no casualty. Their leader had already announced something like that would happen on that day, so people believed and fled” she responded.

She remembered reading about it in an online news. The government had said they were bluffing but nobody went to work the day the bomb exploded. Later, the leader of Biafra had announced that another bomb would explode very soon and it would be at a massive government building in Lagos. People were warned to avoid that area. She tried to remember the date but could not.

According to the online news, the Biafra leader had said he wanted a bloodless separation from Nigeria. And he wished for no human casualty. That was the reason behind the warning.

“The one people know is not their leader. There is another one who controls everything. He is called Faceless. Nobody knows him. The one you know cannot do anything without his consent.”

“And...”

“It’s not what you are thinking Cindy, he is not the bad guy, although he is wanted.”

“How is our predicament connected to him if he is not the one after us?”

“There is a foreign company supplying him the weapons he is using. The existence of some of these weapons have not yet been announced or tested. The gadgets you saw me use today are like a child’s play. They are powerful and they have eyes everywhere. Cindy they are the ones after us.”

“But why?”

“George and I were sent on an undercover mission after Major Ahmed got an Intel that there was something fishy.” He paused but continued after a minute.

“We were able to discover that this faceless leader had his goal different from the weapon company. He wants a peaceful separation but they want war. War means money. They are using him, although he thinks otherwise. There was a recent meeting they had with his second in command, that’s the one everyone knows. We followed the trail of the weapon company’s representatives to their boss. We were able to penetrate and get a video and document of what they plan to do.” There was another long pause.

“In two days, this faceless leader alongside the known leader will go live on their website. The faceless leader is going to make a call. That call will trigger a bomb to explode at Balogun Stadium, Lagos.”

The Next Two Days

“But everybody is aware of that. I remember now. It was announced on their website that nobody should be at the stadium by 11:00pm on Friday” she said.

“That is not the only thing that will happen when he makes that call. They only know of the stadium. They are unaware that if he makes that call, bombs will explode in four more different locations. I mean residential areas. Areas where Yorubas and Hausas are more in number. If that happens, the casualties will make the last explosion that happened in Lagos to look like fireworks. Then nothing will stop a war.”

“Jason, please tell me you are joking” she said in a shaky voice.

“I’m not Cindy. The only thing that can stop this war is getting the files containing the video and documents showing the locations of these bombs. Major Ahmed already have people distributed all over Lagos. What they need now is the location so they can defuse them.”

“Can’t you email it?”

“I did that but he never received it. There are powerful people in government and military working with the weapon company. That’s why our cover got blown. Right now Major Ahmed has cut off contacts with everybody apart from my team. He trusts us with his life. Apart from that, this company has a dangerous hacker, better than me. This hacker was able to hack my email just after I downloaded the files. All my files were wiped out and my email account has been deleted. I tried using another email to send the files to Major Ahmed but he never got it. He was attacked few hours after I sent the email. The hacker had already hacked his email and was waiting for him to go online to get his location. So we did a last call and we agreed to meet at a coded location. I could tell him areas where the bombs will explode but not the exact location. They need the map.”

The Next Two Days

“This hacker must be good.”

“I’m hundred percent sure he is like me but worse.”

“So all you need to do is to deliver these documents and files before Friday. Today is Wednesday.

Wait we are already in Thursday.”

“If we can locate those bombs before the deadline is another issue.”

“And if your team cannot?”

“The bombs will explode, then there will be nothing stopping a bloody war that will make the last civil war look like a fight. The weapon company will make money. Right now I’m the only one standing between them and their money and they will do anything to stop me.”

“So they want you alive?”

“Not anymore, they are too close, they want me dead. If I die, the files may be discovered later but it won’t change anything because by then it will be too late.”

At that moment he raised her face to look at him.

“Cindy, today is going to be worse than yesterday. I promise to protect you, but you have to listen to me. You must do what I say.”

She did not think before nodding.

“I promise, but don’t die Jason.”

“You need to sleep Cindy, later we can finish our discussion. We leave before dawn. They already know it was mission failed and they will be coming.”

The Next Two Days

He did not speak for a long time. When he thought she was sleeping, he spoke again.

“And I must be ready.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

It felt like she had only slept for thirty minutes when Jason woke her up.

“Cindy, we have to get moving” he said gently pulling her away from him.

The Next Two Days

Thirty seconds later, they were out of the shelter. As she battled with the heaviness in her eyes, Jason was already pulling down the shelter. She wondered if Jason slept.

The night was still the same. There was no sign of dawn when they started going to where Jason knew best. Jason had his big bag on his back. Her laptop bag was on his left shoulder. The time on her wrist watch was 4:15pm. Her wristwatch was on her right because on her left wrist was a pink hand band Jason forcefully gifted her. She followed closely. It was easier to follow Jason this time because of the night-vision spectacle she was still wearing. There were so many things she wanted to talk about. She even wanted to continue from where they stopped but the past few hours had taught her to know when to talk. She tried to be as noiseless as Jason but failed woefully. She never missed stepping on any stone or hole that at a point, Jason's back prevented her from falling face down on the ground. Of course he did not complain nor hurry her. He was all Jason throughout their walk.

After a very tiring long walk with Jason looking at his watch most times, they burst out on a road, in fact exactly where Jason stopped the car before they ran inside the bush. Although she was not expecting a car with a gentleman-looking driver in Jason's team to be waiting for them, she was still disappointed that there was no car.

"First, you have not explained what happened to our car. Secondly, please tell me we are not trekking to....just tell me we are not trekking" she said fearing what Jason would say.

"Our car is inside the river. I wanted them to believe we crashed into the river due to over speeding. That would have given us enough time to escape."

"And it turned out that they were actually tracking us. Great. Just great. The car is gone for no reason. So how are we going to leave this place?"

The Next Two Days

“We will hitch a ride”

“How?”

“Five minutes” he said and she just knew that would be his final answer.

She could wait. It was just five minutes, and their gentleman driver would come with a better car. That was the way it normally happened in movies. Jason must have contacted them when she was sleeping.

Five minutes came and with it, a petrol tanker. Jason waved at the tanker driver to stop. The man actually slowed down, but increased his speed after looking at them, the reason was best known to him. As the tanker disappeared from sight, Jason spoke again.

“Another one will be on us in three minutes.”

She seriously wanted to know how Jason knew when a tanker driver will drive by but she was more curious on why Jason waved the first one to stop and also the direction.

Just as he said, another tanker arrived, but to her great joy the driver completely ignored Jason when he waved for him to stop.

"Another in six minutes" Jason said.

"Jason I really don't want to enter a tanker. Even if I want to, nobody will stop for two strangers at 4:50am in the....."

Jason pulled her to him, then used his hands to wrap her closer.

"You are cold Cindy. I'm sorry" he whispered to her ears.

The Next Two Days

That was when she knew she was actually shaking from cold. Her sweater was not helping. She placed her hands on Jason's hands.

"Why are you even stopping tankers going towards Benin?"

She asked not because she was curious but because she wanted something to distract her from the feelings of being too close to Jason. It was becoming worse each passing hour.

"Because that's the way to Lagos. I can't run anymore."

A voice in her head told her that Jason's words had deeper meaning. She did not ask further because she was not ready for the answer she would get.

Another bigger tanker came by and surprisingly the driver stopped without Jason's funny waving.

"Are you stranded? Why are you taking a lady out at night?" the driver shouted from his seat.

He was an elderly man, not supposed to be driving that early.

"Come on, hop in, except you are going the other direction" the driver continued speaking, he was coming down from the tanker.

Jason's only response was to make her move with him to the passenger's seat, that was after he had seriously and inquisitively looked at the man.

"Thank you" she said to the man who had opened the passenger's seat for them.

At least the man would not conclude that they had no manners.

"You are welcome my daughter" the man responded immediately almost as if he was waiting for it.

The Next Two Days

The drive back to Benin was quiet. Too quiet. Nobody spoke. Just when they entered Benin, Jason surprisingly ended the silence.

“When did you retire from the military?”

“Ha, how did you know?” the man asked surprised.

“The army emblem on the driver's door.”

“That emblem have been there for a long time, since I started driving this tanker, but nobody have ever asked me about it” the man said in an exciting voice.

Jason did not repeat the question and the driver must have gotten the idea that he would not ask again.

“I retired few years after the end of the civil war, you kids were not born then....”

“Can I make use of your phone” Jason asked interrupting what was going to be a long speech.

She punched Jason on his shoulder with the hope that Jason would get the hint that interrupting an elderly man’s speech was rude. He did not bulge, only her hands suffered.

“Why do you want my phone? I don't like giving my phone to strangers” the man answered.

Jason brought out his ID and showed it to the man who glanced at it.

“You are in the army, oh! No wonder my spirit told me to carry you, my comrade. What rank are you?”

“It's very important I make this call now. I cannot use my phone nor hers because our lines have been compromised.”

The Next Two Days

The way the driver gave Jason his phone was funny to her. He was acting as if he knew what was about to happen in Nigeria in less than two days.

Jason dialed some numbers and was soon speaking to someone.

“Still compromised, straight to location, ready for obstacles” he said cutting the call.

She might have understood what he meant if she could hear what the other person was saying.

That was if someone was really at the other end. Jason gave the phone back to the driver without saying thank you.

“You can stop us here Sir, thanks for your help.”

And he was coming down just like that. Before she could properly appreciate the man she was lifted from her seat and found her feet on the ground.

“Let’s go” he said, taking her hand.

She really wanted to say something to him but she could not find the right words to use. The driver did not move immediately. She wondered what was on his mind. She looked around to understand her environment. They’ve not gotten to Ajip junction but she was sure they had passed Winners Chapel. They did not walk far before they got to Jason’s destination. The place was looking odd as if something was missing. It was when Jason pulled off a big clothe they used to cover a car she discovered what was amiss. They sold cars there but only the car Jason was already entering was there, the other spaces were empty.

“What are you doing Jason? You can’t steal a car.”

“Get inside Cynthia, we must move now.”

The Next Two Days

He was calling her Cynthia again. She did not need anyone to tell her danger was close. The car was on the road less than ten seconds after she entered. First thing she did was to put on her seat belt.

“It’s not a stolen car. It’s one of my back up plan. We always have back up plans for movement anywhere we are going” Jason said.

One could never predict when he would give an explanation. Jason was on top speed although not like the last time.

“How long before we get to Lagos?” she asked after some time, but did not get any response.

She removed her spectacle. It was becoming clearer.

“Put your SIM card in this phone and switch it on” Jason said giving her a techno android phone.

She did as instructed. Jason took the phone, slowed down, and threw it into a nearby grass.

“Hey, what are you doing with my SIM card” she shouted.

He did not respond but increased the speed of the car.

“Get down Cindy” Jason shouted pushing her down with his right hand.

Almost at the same time, bullets were rained on them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

He had seen the shooters seconds before the bullets were released on them. He was expecting an attack but not that early. Something was definitively messing up with his math. The car was an Armormax bullet proof car but from their shooting, their mission was very obvious. They were continuously firing at the car and from the indentations, he knew they were using an AP 9mm rounds. The latest ones could weaken the bulletproof protection with continuous shooting. They had been waiting for them to arrive in their Hilux which was now following his car. He needed to fully understand why

they were always ahead of him but that would be after handling the situation at hand. The car would not hold out and the fact that they were not shooting at the tire but at the windscreen meant they were very sure of their success. They were not in a hurry. They were also keeping up with his speed.

From the indentions on the windscreens, he had less than two minutes before the bullets would finally penetrate.

“Cindy, listen to me. Whatever I do, remain down. Don’t stand up till I tell you to” he said releasing his hold on her but she did not answer.

“Cindy please answer me. You are my world and I can’t lose you.”

“Okay” she replied with a shaky voice which tore at his heart.

He slowed his speed. They also slowed down but did not stop releasing bullets on the car. This made his earlier thought correct. They were not in a hurry.

Seconds later, he suddenly increased the speed of his car giving him enough time he needed to distance himself from the shooters. Without reducing the speed, he reversed to his left making the windscreen of Cindy’s door exposed. That meant they had to start all over again because they had been firing at the back of the car. He brought the car to a halt, brought out his F-Cass riffle with a 7MM MAG cartridge. The exact gun he needed for the situation. It was already loaded, and the safety was off. Before the Hilux met up with the car, he was ready. He had placed his rifle by the bonnet of the car. He pressed a tiny button on the lens of his spectacle, magnifying his targets. He studied the first three targets. One was shooting through the window of the front seat, another from the back seat. Their bodies were partially out of the Hilux. The third one was

lying on his belly on top of the Hilux. He released three bullets simultaneously. Knowing the bullet had found its targets, he withdrew immediately. He pressed another button on the lens of his spectacle and the image changed to what Flight 10 was sending. He counted one to two and at the third count, the shooters changed their target to where they must have guessed the attack on them came from. He was already by the booth side of the car. They were five left, including the driver. One was shooting from the back seat directly at the back of the driver, the other three were on the ground, one flanking the driver and the others by the passenger's side. The Hilux was no longer in motion. They stopped shooting after some time. The one flanking the driver gave a signal for the two opposite him to go look at his car. From the signal, they were coming to check if he was dead. He allowed the two to come a little closer before switching back to magnified mode. He brought out George's Black, cocked it and fired at their heads. Bullets were instantly released towards his location but he was already by the driver's door. Three more left. He switched back to Flight 10's mode. The one inside the Hilux was out. He was shooting and walking towards his car. Their leader was following behind. He waited for that pause that signified they were reloading but it did not come. Just as the leader's bullets finished, the other continued shooting while he reloaded. He needed to change tactics because they were now back to targeting the windscreen.

He entered the driver's seat, ignited the car, and started driving without closing the driver's door.

"Remain down Cindy."

He switched his spectacle back to normal mode, reversed the car in a semi-circle with his right hand on the steering wheel and George's black on his left hand. The leader was reloading his gun when he reversed. He shot the one shooting at him before shooting the leader. They both released

The Next Two Days

their bullets at the same time, his bullet hit the leader on his forehead. The leader's bullet missed him by an inch. It hit the side of the door.

The last target was the driver who had ignited the Hilux and was reversing. He shot at the two back tires. The Hilux came to a stop after some seconds. He closed up the distance. The driver was out with his hand raised up in surrender. He shot the driver immediately. He was not trained to arrest targets but to eliminate.

All targets were eliminated but there were bigger problems. They were not supposed to know their location. The feeling of being followed had been overwhelming from the time they got a lift from the tanker driver.

"Cindy, still stay down. I will be back" he said coming down but she gripped his shirt.

"It's okay, I'm okay. I will be back" he said gently releasing his shirt from her grip.

He needed to check out what the enemy had with them. With his 9mm pistol, he moved closer to the Hilux. A car was approaching from Benin just as he got to the Hilux. He did not wait long to find out more about the occupants of the car as the driver reversed and with top speed fled back to Benin. He checked his time. It was almost 6:00AM. The road would soon become busy and he needed to be out before then. Travelers must have fled back during the shooting but now that the shooting had ended, they would want to continue their journey and no body must see him. A phone was ringing. It was coming from the pigeon hole. He did not need to open the driver's door as the driver had not closed the door when he came down. When he looked inside, it was not the call that caught his attention but another phone on the driver's seat. A video was playing on the phone. The tanker driver was held by two men. A knife was placed on his throat by

another. The video was just five seconds. It was on loop mode. The video was interrupted by a call. He picked the phone and answered the call.

“Mr Jason I think we underestimated you. Nice and excellent job. Oh I forgot you don’t talk, but you can just listen. Come with the documents to the location that will be sent to the phone you are holding. You have forty minutes. If you don’t show up within the deadline, the innocent man who gave you a lift will be dead. You must have seen the video. Remember forty minutes.” Then the line went dead.

He was speaking to him as if he was watching him. Suddenly he knew the answer to the missing puzzle. He was not the only owner of a gadget like Flight 10. They had theirs who was watching him right now. The phone blinked. He opened the message.

‘We are waiting at your shelter.’

CHAPTER NINE

George had filled her in on things about Jason she did not know, but seeing Jason in action was terrifying. She had also seen the shooters a second before Jason pushed her down. She was a bit relieved when the bullets did not penetrate but fear took over the moment Jason stopped and engaged the shooters. First, it was fear for Jason, now it was fear of Jason. She shouldn’t have raised her head. She had held him back for fear someone was waiting for him to come out, but now that she had time to analyze what she saw, she wished she could erase what she witnessed but it was too late.

The Next Two Days

Someone opened the front seat door making her jerk. It was Jason.

“Cindy, I need you to drive, we are going back to Benin” he said but she did not respond.

She remained down, she was not fully ready to face him.

“Cindy, are you okay?” he said touching her shoulders but she quickly shifted away.

“Jason I saw what you did. Why did you kill him? He was armless and he surrendered.”

“Even if I answer, you won’t understand. We don’t have much time. I need to fix some things while you drive.” He gave his usual answer.

He opened the door to the passenger’s seat and brought out a silver case.

“Move over to the driver’s seat, we need to move now.”

“No Jason I’m not taking this anymore. You just shot an armless man and you won’t give any explanation. I’m not goin.....”

She was not allowed to finish her speech as Jason lifted her from her seat for the second time that day. But this time he did not drop her on the ground immediately but gently dumped her in the driver’s seat. The door was closed the moment he dropped her.

“What the heck Jason. How dare you” she shouted.

She tried opening the door but it wouldn’t bulge. Seconds later, Jason replaced her in her former seat. He was with the silver suitcase.

“Drive Cindy” he said opening the case.

What she saw made her to momentarily forget her anger. She tried hard to remember films she had seen where such suitcases were used but could not. It was like a computer used to defuse bombs. Her heart started racing with the thought of that word. Was there a bomb somewhere?

“Cindy, we can’t be late. Ignite this car now and drive. We are going back to Benin.”

“At least tell me something. Why are we going back to Benin? I’m no longer a baby.”

“I’ve been painfully aware of that for long time” he responded bringing his face close to hers.

It was too close, her heart was beating too fast and a fire she had already experienced was circulating her system. Before she knew what she was doing, she had ignited the car, reversed right and was on the route back to Benin. She felt cheated and that increased her anger.

“Stop the car. I need to pick the phone” he said closing the case.

As Jason went to the spot he threw her phone, she tried to gather the information she had gotten so far to see if she could understand some of Jason’s action but could not understand a thing. He was back within few seconds.

“Let’s go” he said opening the case again.

She was going nowhere until Jason said something. He needed to explain some things like the reason he had to throw away a phone with her SIM, or the reason he had to stop and confront those shooters when they were on a bulletproof car. There was also the shooting, no the killing of that innocent driver and then why were they going back to Benin. In case he did not know, it was less than two days to go.

The Next Two Days

“You know I hate being lost. Jason...”

“Cindy if we don’t get back to where we spent the night in the next thirty minutes, the driver that gave us a lift will die. Is that enough reason?”

“Nooo, not him...” she said igniting the car.

“But how? How did they know he helped us?” she asked increasing speed.

“That’s what I’m searching for. I think they have something like Flight 10”

“Like that bird I saw you use last night?”

He did not answer but concentrated on operating what was in the case. She could not see what he was doing.

“Cindy, this is not a time to cry, it will impair your vision” he said wiping tears from her cheek.

“I am a special trained soldier and I’m trained to eliminate threats. He was not surrendering. He wanted to make me see a video, and on his back belt was a gun with the safety off. He was waiting for a distraction to shoot. But that was not actually why I shot him.

“Why”

”That man was dead the moment he transported assassins to attack us.”

“Why are you explaining now?”

There was a long pause. He was busy hitting buttons on the case.

“Please don’t withdraw from me again. It destabilizes me when you do that” he said after a long silence.

The Next Two Days

“And don’t keep me in the dark, don’t tell me it will better I don’t know because I’m already involved.”

“Okay” he responded immediately.

That surprised her. She was not expecting an answer. To test his response she decided to ask a question.

“What is that you are operating?”

“My tool box.”

“English Jason.”

The answer she got was the sound of keys being punched and another sound she could not figure out.

“So much for not keeping me in the dark.”

They were getting close to their destination. They had just passed Aso Rock Junction at Isihor and Jason had not said any word. The silence was making her think of the innocent man that gave them a lift. What if they don't get there on time?

“Cindy, your hands are shaking” he finally spoke.

“I’m afraid we will not get there on time. I’m afraid you won’t deliver the documents on time and war will break...”

“I just got a hold of what I’m looking for” he interrupted her.

“Which is?”

“Their Eye. They have something like Flight 10 following us. It will take time to break through their firewall.”

“Are they are aware you have something like that?”

“I don’t think so but even if they know they can’t hack into it. It’s not operated with any network.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Flight 10 is operated with solar energy and mini Wi-Fi. When we got our gadgets, I and George reconstructed all of them. That’s my specialty. They are puzzles to me. When we do that, we become the only ones in possession of such equipment. The normal Eye is made to cover a long distance but it can be hacked because it’s controlled and powered using network providers. It can also work through network interface and it’s connected to WAN. Mine cannot go too far but can’t be hacked, it can carry a packet. It’s almost like a VPN.

She only understood the part he said his own could not be hacked.

“So have you hacked it?”

“No. I will but I need them to follow us. Once I get the driver I will close down all networks in Nigeria.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Exactly why you should let things be” he said placing his left hand on her shoulder.

“What are you doing? Jason I need to concentrate.”

“Same with me Cindy. Talking stresses me and you are the fastest way to get back my focus.”

That information shocked her. She knew Jason was slightly autistic. She knew he did not like talking but the last information was totally and completely new.

“Since when?”

“Since you were born.”

“I never knew, but you could have told..”

“Stop the car Cindy” he said suddenly.

She had learnt so much not to ignore his command. She stopped the car, turned to ask him what was wrong again, but what she saw stopped her from speaking. Jason had removed the spectacle he had been wearing. He was angry.

“I’m sorry Cindy. I’m very sorry” he said under his breath.

“Jason...”

“Flight 10 just arrived at the shelter. He is dead. It was a trap. I’m sorry.”

“No, no, no, not that man, no...” she cried out.

Jason pulled her to him and allowed her to cry. She never could have predicted her life would become a nightmare.

“We don’t have time Cindy. We have to continue before they become suspicious.”

“There is no need. We have to take those documents to Lagos.”

The Next Two Days

“They are waiting for us and I won’t disappoint them. I won’t function well if they are still breathing.”

This was one of the times she wished Jason was normal. Once he had set his mind on something he never stopped until it was finished.

“I understand how you feel but don’t forget you have millions of life to save. Please let’s go to Lagos.”

“Going to Lagos is possible but making it in time to defuse the bombs won’t be possible. The obstacles are much and it will be increasing.”

“So there is no hope?” she asked fearing the answer.

“There is.”

“Which is?”

“I’m going to meet those waiting for us, then I will close down all networks. That is the quickest way because it will take a long time to hack into their system. We will have one hour to disappear before network comes back.”

“Then?”

“I’m switching to plan B. I had hoped it will never come to that. I would have preferred going through the obstacles to Lagos but I must go with plan B if we must make it on time” he said.

There was definitely something wrong with plan B because she felt him tremble. She had never seen Jason scared. What could be so bad about plan B that Jason would prefer going through ten times the obstacle they had just encountered.

“What is plan B?”

“That’s the wrong question Cindy. The right question is who is plan B” he said pulling her closer.

CHAPTER TEN

He could have shut down all networks before attacking the three men waiting for him but he wanted their employers to know what happened to them, to know who they were dealing with. Maybe they did not understand he was a trained killer. He could see them through Flight 10. They were waiting for him to be caught in their trap and they were clearly amateurs which was one thing he found difficult to understand about humans. Each one sent had believed he was the one to put him down. The last ones had the numbers, they could have made the fight difficult if they had shot at his car’s tires but they did not. Somehow he knew why.

The company had no value for human life and they really knew who to recruit. They recruited those with twisted mind, people that got high in seeing their victim’s fear. To them, killing a

human was like a hunt. The longer the hunt, the more the excitement. It wouldn't have been difficult to convince such people to take a gun and kill someone. It was like they were getting paid to do what they love. This company must have a lot of them and they didn't care if they died as long as the battles would delay him. He just knew they would be sending more amateurs who didn't know the first thing about combat and he would keep killing them. He wouldn't be able to focus and function well if the three people drinking and waiting by the dead body of the driver they killed, were left to continue breathing. They were his new puzzle. Also, he wouldn't be satisfied if the company did not watch and see what he would do to them. He was going to kill them and make sure those watching would know he was aware they've been watching him. Maybe he too was twisted somehow. In fact he was already twisted from birth. People like him were already dangerous without any training. There was something else that was disturbing. Though most of the assassins sent to kill him were amateurs, the planning was too good. He had tried using Cindy's line as a distraction not knowing they were already ahead of him. But somehow, he was having the feeling that it was just an individual.

Cindy had started the car again and they had just passed the flyover.

"Stop the car" he said expecting Cindy to ask questions but surprisingly she stopped the car without any objection.

From the front seat, he opened the big bag on the passenger seat and brought out another case. It contained his personally upgraded Barrett M82. He immediately started mounting it.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Have you ever heard of TrackingPoint?"

“No.”

“This is a Barrett M82 George and I remodeled to work like TrackingPoint. It helps with target.”

“I don’t know why I’m even asking” she replied.

He wished he could explain to her that with his sniper rifle, he could hit a target at 1,000 yards without missing. But that would take a lot of energy and time.

“Let’s go Cindy” he said bringing out a small bag.

“Are they watching us now?” she asked.

He could hear the fear in her voice. That almost made him change his mind about letting them see what he was capable of but he could not, reason being he needed the high it gave him. He just hoped Cindy didn’t get to see all the twisted sides of him.

“Yes, but not for long” he answered walking towards the fly over, after wearing his sniper rifle.

She followed him closely without him giving her a convincing speech, which was also surprising.

“Please tell me I’m not climbing this” she said when they got to the left wall of the flyover.

“No. I am. You stay here.”

With that, he brought out his carabiner, his climbing tool which was already hooked to a long rope to aid his climbing down. He was on top of the flyover in less than a minute, his already loaded Barrett at his back. He did not want them to quickly pick up on what he was going to do. He was relieved no car was on the flyover.

The Next Two Days

It was not difficult to find his targets because he was already connected to flight 10. He was grateful the area was cultivated, there were no trees blocking his view. Few houses were sparsely constructed. The first tree he could see with the enhanced lens of his sniper scope, was exactly where the excited men were waiting. He could now see the driver's body with his sniper scope. He rotated the sniper scope to confirm there were no hidden traps. Although, Flight 10 had already confirmed that, he wanted to be double sure Cindy was safe on the ground. As he rotated back to sight his targets, he saw the large bird that was monitoring them, it was about 200 yards from his position while his targets were just 800 yards from his position. He magnified the scope to 5x as he turned his focus. After balancing his point of aim and impact, he released three shots. Only the third man died expressing shock. The other two had died without knowing what hit them. He immediately adjusted his scope to be directed to the bird. He pulled his face away from his sniper and looked at the direction of the bird, then he fired.

He was back on the ground in less than a minute.

"They are dead Cindy" he said after wrapping the rope and putting almost everything back in his small bag.

She did not reply which was unusual but she was crying. He pulled her to him while thinking of what to say.

"They will be coming for us now. We need to move Cindy" he said missing George all over again.

George would have known what to say.

One of the basic courses he studied during his special training was hacking. Although he was already good at it before studying how to do it. He and George had developed a software like Airtrack as their project. They tested it by infiltrating into all the Network providers and shut it down. It took three to four hours before the network providers could restore network. He was all set to do it again. But this time he knew it would not take time to get the networks back because that person like him would make sure he solved the puzzle. He could not tell if he was better than him but he had a feeling he would lose to the hacker.

They walked back to the car but this time, he took the driver's seat. He picked his tool box and clicked the last button needed to activate the shutdown. The computer started a ten seconds count down after which it gave a green circle signaling a success. To confirm if it worked, he brought out the phone with Cindy's SIM card, switched it on and waited. The only thing he saw was Emergency call. He switched it off.

"Belt up Cindy, we must disappear now" he said igniting the car.

Her silence was disturbing. She had entered the front seat and just watched him operate his tool. He would do anything to make her chatty again, and he preferred it a thousand times to her silence.

"Jason why are we not going back to Benin?" she asked after a long silence.

They had just passed Ramat Park.

"I told you I'm moving over to plan B. We are going to Asaba" he said.

He felt terror as he mentioned plan B. Something told him to turn back and take the easier route.

The Next Two Days

“Jason your hand is shaking. I’m afraid to ask about who this plan B is. I never knew anything can scare you.”

He wanted to explain to her that they were going to meet a mad man who was more dangerous than him. They were going to meet someone who would shoot them at first sight before asking questions, then would deliver the final killing shot if not satisfied with the answers. But he could not find the exact words to say, so he kept quiet.

The drive to Asaba took about one hour thirty minutes. He did not need to drive into the city because the man he was looking for, lived at the outskirts. He drove into a narrow lane that looked abandoned. After fifteen minutes, the road became hard to maneuver because of some thick shrubs. He had to stop the car. Cindy was still quiet.

“Cindy I’m sorry I have nothing to say to you. I promise we will talk if we come out of this place alive.”

There was no response. He turned to look at her, she was biting her fingers. He took hold of her right hand and turned her face to look at him. Their eyes met and he saw himself falling, his right hand on his own was already on her cheek. She felt soft to touch and he was feeling that fire again but this time it was not all over his body, it felt like tiny hot threads were being passed through his heart.

“I wish we could continue from where we ended and I really want to feel you again but there are so many things you need to know. I can’t break my promise to Mum a second time.”

“Promise you will explain everything.”

The Next Two Days

“Yes. I promise, but first we must leave here alive for me to do that. We are meeting a dangerous man. You must do anything I say without any question. Promise me you will do what I say.”

She did not respond but placed her right hand on the hand touching her cheek. By that act, the fire started spreading. His hands started moving down but he stopped abruptly, opened his door and came out. Cindy came out seconds later.

“Let’s go. Follow my steps and do as I do” he said battling to control his emotions.

She did not reply but complied. It took ten minutes’ walk before a house came into view. It was a green bungalow that looked uninhabited. There were so many untrimmed grasses that it was almost growing into the steps that led to the door. He knew there was a probability of him not being around but from the Intel on him, he should be around.

Suddenly he had a feeling of being watched but before he could figure out the location he heard a voice.

“You both have ten seconds to choose where I should shoot or I will decide.”

And he just knew he was the crazy one because no sane person would go to a crazy man’s house.

“Jason....” he heard Cindy’s trembling voice.

Before he could tell her to lie flat, he saw her turning to see the owner of the voice. He pulled her down immediately, same time a gun was fired.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

She had never believed on the pictures she had seen of the devil, where he was drawn to have horns and tail. Because if the devil was that frightening, people wouldn't be enticed by him. So she had always wondered about what the devil really looked like, but now she had something to compare him with. He was very huge, must be more than six feet, then those six packs were just something she only saw in magazines, that was after they had been photo-edited. But this one was real. It was not that Jason was not tall or handsome, but this one should be taller

than Jason with a lot of inches. He was like a dangerous dark handsome prince or a handsome dark dangerous prince but soulless. Just her one second sight of him told her everything the devil must look like. Handsome and scary. The kind of fear that could make someone see death before they die. Jason was very right to fear this Dark Prince. She now understood his fears but what she would never know was what made Jason to visit the lion's den. Her brain could not explain where the word soulless came from, but after having a glimpse of him, she just knew it was related to him.

"Five seconds more" the man said with his deep baritone voice interrupting her thought.

Which was actually crazy, she could not believe all she had thought about for the first five seconds was how handsome and scary the man that was going to kill them looked like. He had fired when she turned, same time Jason dragged her down and covered her with his body. He did not look like someone who would miss.

Fear took over when it actually dawned on her that a bullet was released on them. She knew she was okay but Jason had not said anything. She tried turning to see if Jason was alright but was held back by powerful hands.

"Three, two...."

"My hair, Tamed, my hair" she heard Jason's voice.

Before she could scream her protest, another shot was fired and it was so close that she thought she must have felt it.

"Noooo nooo" she screamed.

She tried turning her body but same powerful hands still held her down.

The Next Two Days

“Sssh. I’m okay. The bullet just grazed my hair. Stay down” Jason whispered to her ears.

She had no time to feel relieved because the dark prince spoke again.

“Now, Jason you have another ten seconds to tell me why I should let you go.”

She could not believe he knew who Jason was and yet shot at him.

“We need your help Tamed.”

“I told Major I was going to shoot the next Circle that pays me a visit.”

“I need you to deliver something to Major. He’s with Wild because of a compromise” Jason responded ignoring his comment.

“Five seconds” was his response.

“Nigeria will collapse and millions will die if this document is not delivered today, they need time to defuse a lot of bombs.”

“Not my concern. Three, two...”

“You will have a lot of assassins coming after you if you are discovered” Jason said in a rush.

Her breath seized as she waited for that final shot which never came.

“How many?”

“A lot.”

“Where is the document?” Dark Prince asked after a long pause.

The Next Two Days

The way Jason immediately released his hold on her and stood up, told her Jason was not surprised that this dark prince who was not concerned about millions dying, would be more interested in assassins that would be coming for him.

She had gone through so many things in the last twenty four hours, she had escaped death and snake bite, but nothing was compared to what she was just experiencing. She knew he was soulless but calling him soulless would be an insult to someone soulless.

“You have twenty seconds to drop the document and leave. I won’t repeat myself” Dark Prince said again.

She was still down, not that Jason told her to remain down. She just preferred her position. She would stand up only if Jason said so.

“They are at Wild’s farm” Jason said.

That made her remember the name Jason called him. Tamed. It must be their form of a joke, but it was not anywhere close to being funny. She could just imagine an assassin being sent to kill someone named Tamed and the assassin on getting there with the mind of seeing someone little and lanky, then boom! He sees this dark prince. She had no time to complete her imagination as she was interrupted by Jason.

“Let’s go Cindy. This time don’t look” he whispered to her.

As if she was planning to feel terror again. She allowed Jason to pull her up, he spun her on the right direction and they were on their way out but Dark Prince interrupted.

“Has Wild seen that girl he’s been looking for?” he asked.

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And that was the only thing he said that was close to normal.

“Not yet” Jason responded without turning.

Her eyes caught an old pick-up van packed close to some palm trees. There was no other car in sight.

“Are you giving him your car?” she asked when she could see their car and when she felt it was safe to speak again.

“No, he has his pick-up.”

“How will he get to Lagos on time with that rusted, old pick-up?” she asked.

Jason did not answer but he smiled. He really smiled like she was asking a dumb question.

They were now by their car. Jason opened the front seat door for her to enter.

They were out of the street after few minutes’ drive, but they were not on their way back to Benin. He was driving into Asaba town. She had been quiet for a while because she was overwhelmed with the spontaneous activities. There were too many deaths and it was more than she could handle. But now she could not stand holding back. Jason had so many questions to answer. It was an emergency.

“Jason, please can you make me understand what just happened. Who was that monster?” she asked.

She was surprised at what she just asked. Of all the questions on her mind, like their new destination, the feelings they were yet to resolve and most importantly, her biological parents,

The Next Two Days

she could not believe the first thing that came out of her mouth was a question about the dark prince. Now she was sure he was related to the devil.

“You mean Tamed.”

“Seriously? Tamed? Of all the names you guys could call that Monster, you chose Tamed.”

“Everyman has a dark side to them. Some are darker than the others. People like us ‘The Circle,’ belong to the darker group. What differentiate us from monsters is our ability to tame that dark side of us. Major Ahmed have done a lot of work on us but there are limits he can’t exceed.”

“So what you're saying is that monster was one of Major Ahmed’s failures.”

“No, Tamed and Wild are one of his greatest achievements.”

Now she remembered there was another name that was mentioned, but she was not ready to dwell on that one.

“You can’t be serious Jason.”

“I am. You are the one not getting it Cindy.”

“Please make me understand.”

“Even a monster can be tamed Cindy. But there is also the possibility of that monster becoming a bigger monster if what is keeping him tamed is gone.”

It was not what he said but how he said it that made her understand everything.

“He was one dangerous guy I won’t dare fight with. He was already a trainer when I was recruited. He majored on combat and building and remodeling of cars. Even with all the training

The Next Two Days

and also with the fact that he was a trainer, Tamed was still out of control. He was called Beast then, but his named changed to Tamed when he fell in love. Then, he could not get there on time.”

Jason was talking about Tamed but she felt Jason was trying to paint a picture of what he would have turned to if he was not there on time the other night. She had seen a sane Jason in action and it was not a good sight. She tried imagining a monstrous Jason in action but quickly shook her head.

“What really happened Jason?”

“Right now, that’s not important Cindy. I’m stressing myself to tell you this because I need you to believe I have a monstrous side of me and you are the only one keeping it tamed. I can’t lose you. You must do everything I tell you to do. Please Cindy.”

“I will do anything you say. You don’t need to worry about that anymore” she replied almost immediately.

“We are hoping the day we must take down Tamed won’t come. For now he has not been declared incommodious because he targets only criminals, most of them on wanted list” Jason said.

There was a pained expression in his voice, she could literally feel it. It made tears fall from her eyes. It was no longer a new thing, the tears now came easily.

“I’m sorry Jason. But please promise me you won’t be among those to take him down. I can’t lose you too.”

He did not answer but drove into a street. That caught her attention.

The Next Two Days

“Wait! Jason where are we going to?”

“I’m going to Onitsha.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m tired of running. Even if Tamed gets to Lagos on time, they may still not have enough time to defuse all the bombs.”

“So?”

“I’m going to stop the real Biafran leader from making that call” he said but something told her Jason only said part of what he was planning to do.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Jason stopped at a very small house. It looked more like a store than a house, and it was the only house on the street and also the dead end of the street. The only thing to see apart from the house, were bushes and tall trees. He parked by the right side of the house.

“You can come down Cindy” he said already coming out of the car. He took her laptop bag with him.

“Where are we? This place looks scary” she asked but did not get an answer.

Jason opened the door of the house with a button on his wristwatch.

The Next Two Days

“I am not surprised this old house has the latest technology, not after all I’ve seen” she said following Jason inside.

There was absolutely nothing. The house was very empty and the ground was not cemented. She opened her mouth to ask another question but stopped midway when the center of the house started opening. It opened to about a foot and half, then stopped. She moved closer to where Jason was standing, his left fingers on his wristwatch. She took a peep at the big hole and saw a ladder, it was not dark and she could see the end of the ladder.

“Follow me” Jason said climbing down.

“Jason, you know I can’t stand closed places.”

Jason stopped his movement. Half of his body was already in inside the hole. He raised his head and looked at her.

“Cindy, I know everything about you.”

And that was all he said before continuing his descend to the ground. She tried countering his statement but could not find even a word. She followed Jason after thinking over the available options. It was either she stayed back and be exposed to danger or go with Jason and be safe.

“I never had a choice. At least it’s not dark” she said.

When her foot touched the ground, she got lost with what she saw that she did not notice when Jason sealed the hole. They were at the sitting room. The wall was painted sea blue. There were black cushion chairs arranged in form of a semi-circle, there was a glass table at the center, a flat screen TV was facing the chairs.

The Next Two Days

“Let’s go.” Jason said taking her left hand.

They entered a corridor with 'THE CIRCLE' written on top. There were doors both at her left and right. After passing so many doors Jason stopped at a door with JASON written at the top. He pressed a button on his wristwatch and the door opened.

“What can this your wristwatch not do?” she asked not expecting an answer.

Jason did not answer but entered the room. She followed immediately.

The paintings in the room were black and ash, the bed was very large and the bed sheet was black. There was a small wardrobe by her left and a door was adjacent the wardrobe. The bed was by her right and directly opposite the wardrobe so that what she first saw after entering the room, were a black and ash colour wall. The room was lighted with blue bulbs. It was like Jason’s room back home. Jason never liked sharp colours.

“Cindy, I need you to stay here and wait for me.”

“What now!” She exclaimed turning to face him.

“You are looking worn out and you need to eat and rest.”

“I never said I was tired and there is no food to eat.”

“There is food in the fridge. It just need warming” he responded to her last argument.

“Are you going to leave me here?”

“This is the best for both of us. Things are about to get bloody and I need to be completely focused.”

The Next Two Days

She did not know why, but she felt hurt by his words.

“Come let me show you the kitchen. You can warm the food. It will still be fresh. It’s not long we used it” he said going out of the room.

She did not move. Jason must have come back after noticing she was not following.

“Cindy, I don’t have time. I need to get moving.”

“Am I a distraction?”

He did not answer but dropped her laptop bag by the door and moved over to where she was standing. He took her left hand, then led her to seat down on the bed. The bed was so high that her feet could not touch the ground. Jason did not seat but faced her standing. He looked at his wristwatch.

“I will be in the kitchen. Take a shower and come join me in the kitchen. It’s not hard to find.”

He did not give her time to respond as he left the room after placing a kiss on her forehead, the way he usually do to pacify her. But it was not the same feeling this time. Once he was out of the room, she knew she never felt hurt but what she felt was sadness and loneliness. She had not seen Jason for three months and although the past few hours with him had been a life and death situation, she preferred being with him.

Now that she understood her feeling she felt selfish. Nigeria needed Jason to stop a bloody war but she wanted to have him for herself. There was a wall clock by her right hand side. The time was 2:P.M. She wondered how long she had with Jason before he left. Without wasting time, she pulled off her wrist watch, then quickly opened her laptop bag. Jason had added her towel, her undies, her blue pencil gown and her black satin nightgown. It was not the first time

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Jason had packed her clothes but it felt weird, she felt exposed. She did not dwell on the fact for long as she searched for the door to the bathroom. It was the door adjacent to the wardrobe. She quickly entered to take a shower. The bathroom had a bath tub and there were two showers having hot and cold written on them. She switched on the cold one because the hot one meant her spending much time in the bathroom.

She was out few minutes later with her towel barely covering her lap. Just when she was about to pick her night gown, the door opened.

“Jeez Jason I’m not ready” she said turning to face Jason.

Jason was standing as if frozen. There was something different with the way he was looking at her. She looked at herself to see what was wrong.

“Oh my God” she said pulling the heavy bed sheet to cover up. The bed sheet was pulled away from her almost immediately. They stood facing each other. Her breath was already coming in gasps. She closed her eyes and waited for what Jason would do. First, she felt his rough hands on her lips, it moved to her left cheek, then her jaw.

“Cindy.....you are not helping” his voice was deeper than it used to be.

That made her open her eyes

“What?”

“You have to help me keep my promise to Mum” he said slowly withdrawing his hands.

“Food is ready. If you are at the kitchen before one minute, I will tell you something about your real parents” he said walking out of the room.

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She was on her night gown in less than thirty seconds, she opened the door and walked towards the direction of the sitting room. Her former excitement had been replaced with ‘what’ Jason had to say about her real parents.

It had always been like that with Jason. He always knew the right thing to do to get her moving. Most times when Mum had gotten tired of convincing her to do something, she had always called Jason to help. She remembered one of such incidents. It was six months after her sixteenth birthday. Mum had wanted her to accompany dad to get some frozen chicken. Dad said he won’t be home soon and Mum needed the chicken to prepare the meal. She was reading for her math test and Jason had refused to help. She remembered he just came back from military academy. After many failed attempts by Mum, Jason had promised to teach her and he also promised he would allow her sleep in his room.

Jason had stopped her from sleeping in his room the night of her birthday and she had never adjusted to that. It was a habit she developed before she could pronounce her name. She just knew her room was to be used only in the day but Jason’s room was for sleeping and if her head was not resting on Jason’s chest she wouldn’t sleep. Mum had tried stopping her when she was twelve but gave up after she developed a fever three days later. It was very difficult to adjust when Jason started the University. He had studied in Lagos State University which was far from home. She believed Mum had a hand in it. For many nights, she could not sleep. She had never adjusted to sleeping without Jason. In fact she still slept in Jason’s room. She had cried the day Jason told her she was a big girl and should get used to sleeping by herself. He was back for her birthday. She never got to know how Jason was able to leave the academy for her birthday, but she had been happy Jason came. She had thought she was going to have a great sleep but it turned out to be her worst night. She never understood why Jason stopped her and he never gave

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an explanation. She remembered that she had immediately followed Dad after Jason made his promise but that night was very unusual. Jason did not allow her rest her head on his chest.

“You are a second late” Jason said interrupting her thoughts. She did not know how, but she was standing in the kitchen.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jason was sitting on a stool with a long table in front of him. A closer look showed that it was a table that was made in form of a table. There were many stools close to the long table. She chose the one directly opposite Jason's. The scent of egg sauce permeated her nostrils making her stomach to respond immediately. There were bread slices on a ceramic plate. The egg sauce was in another plate. Jason handed her an already made egg sandwich. She did not bother asking where the bread came from, she just took and ate. Jason handed her another egg sandwich after she had consumed the first one.

“Are you not eating?”

“I will.”

“Jason, I’m not a baby anymore, I can fill my own bread” she said ignoring the one Jason was giving her.

She took an empty slice but before she could fill it with the egg sauce, Jason took it away from her.

“Cindy take the one I’m giving you.”

“Why, because I will spill some on the table and it will disrupt your arrangement?”

He did not answer and because she did not want to start an argument she had never won, she took the filled one from Jason. It had always been like that with Jason. There was always a way the plates and cup should be arranged on the dining table. After Mum had arranged the chairs in the sitting room, exactly the way she knew she saw it last, Jason would say the chairs had been shifted from its original position by an inch. She was not dirty nor rough but Jason always said her clothes were not properly folded. She was not allowed to cook when Jason was around because she wouldn't put back the cooking utensils properly. The most annoying thing was Jason had a habit of keeping back her cup, plates, napkin in their right position even when they were still in use. Once she took a sip and dropped her cup, Jason was already shifting the cup. She had stopped hoping Jason would stop being an order and neat freak after reading that it sometimes came with autism.

“So shoot, what do you know about my parents?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“You promised.”

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“You were a second late.”

“Seriously?” she shouted already on her feet.

“Cindy....”

“Don’t call me” she said dropping her half eaten sandwich.

She angrily left the kitchen.

“Where are you going?” Jason asked.

He was already blocking her path. She did not even hear him move.

“To my ro..to the room you kept my things.”

He was smiling, something he rarely do. But there was nothing funny.

“What is funny?”

“That’s the corridor to our ammunition.”

Great, how would she maintain her anger when she was already making a fool of herself to the extent even Jason found it funny? She turned and walked back to the sitting room. Apart from the one she came out from, there were two other corridors. One was directly opposite her and the other was by her left. Her right led to the kitchen. ‘It must be the one directly opposite me’ she thought. She moved towards that particular corridor.

“That’s also wrong” Jason said from behind her.

She turned to face Jason but jolted. Jason was already close. He was closer than she wanted him to be and for a split second, she forgot she was angry.

“You are always cute when you are angry. I hope you don’t give this angry face to other guys.”

That was it. Her hand left her body and went straight to his chest but Jason held her hand before she could make contact. She tried using the other hand but was also stopped midway. She was facing Jason but within a second, her head was resting on Jason’s chest. That was because her height stopped there. She tried wriggling herself from Jason’s hold.

“Cindy, stop” Jason said huskily.

That froze her in place. A familiar heat starting moving through her system.

“I told you to help me keep my promise to Mum” he said bending his face to meet up with her own.

“You know you haven’t said much Jason, I don’t understand anything” she replied.

Somehow, her brain was telling her to move away but her body was pushing closer. She was going against every training Mum had installed in her, every single message Pastor Sam had preached, the chorister in her was even protesting but her body now had its own thoughts and the only thing her body wanted was to kiss Jason again. She turned sideways, then raised her feet to meet up with Jason and just when their lips were about to connect, Jason pulled away. The distance temporarily brought back her sanity.

“Cindy I have only thirty five minutes left before Flight 10 arrives. Come with me, I need to show you something.”

Jason said walking towards the flat screen TV. She did not follow immediately, she waited for all her sanity to come back before moving. Jason took the remote on the table and pressed a button. What she saw was different from her expectation. She saw a forest that was familiar. It

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was the forest outside the house. Jason pressed another button on the remote and the screen was split into three. The first one showed the image of the forest, the second showed the car that Jason parked by the side of the house and the last showed the empty room they had first entered before going down.

She had completely forgotten they were underground, she was supposed to be suffocating.

“Jason, why is the air so fresh? I’m supposed to be hyperventilating” she asked moving closer to Jason.

Jason did not answer but pressed another button on the remote. The screen was now into four parts. The fourth image was something that looked like a big shower head connected to a large pole that disappeared underground.

“That is our ventilator” he replied.

“How does it work?”

“Cindy, that’s not important. With this remote you can know what is happening up. You just need to press the numbers. The most important numbers you need now is numbers two and three. Give me your hand” he said taking her hands.

She ignored the feelings it was resurrecting and tried much to concentrate on what Jason was trying to do. He took her to a wall close to the TV. There was a wooden box on the wall. It looked like those boxes various companies installed outside for those that have something to complain about their services. Jason pressed something by its side. The box opened to reveal an android tablet. He pressed the power button. The tablet needed a password which Jason supplied.

“Place your right thumb on this circle” Jason said after typing something on the tablet.

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She did as Jason instructed.

“Fingerprint accepted” a female voice said.

“Now you are the only one that can allow someone inside” he said closing the box.

“Jason, can you explain? Is this place not safe?”

“It’s safe now.”

He did not explain further and she was getting tired of unanswered questions.

“Jason.”

“We have an underground house in all the state capitals including Abuja.”

“Who are the we?”

“Special Force.”

“How many people are aware of these underground houses?”

“The President and the Special Force. That’s where we stay during any mission.”

She really had a lot of things she wanted to be sure of, like the fact that she was still in Nigeria or the fact that Nigerian Military had such houses, but there were more important questions.

“I thought you trust your team.”

“I trust my team but not The Special Force as a whole. One or more of us is working with them. And every Special Force member knows the password.”

“I’m confused Jason.”

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‘That’s not important Cindy. What you need to know is that there is a probability of him coming here once he discovers my new route.’

“He? You know the person or you have someone you are suspecting?”

He did not answer.

“Why will he even discover your new route? I thought we’ve escaped their radar?”

“Yes. They won’t know where I am except I allow it.”

“Jason please don’t tell me you plan on doing what I’m thinking.”

“I need to. Tamed must deliver those documents. I don’t want them to keep looking for me that way. They may discover Tamed and that may delay him. I need them to believe I changed course because the road to Lagos was impossible.”

“You will be exposed Jason.”

“I know, that’s why you have to stay here. I need to fight knowing I’m not protecting anyone.”

“Jason, I don’t feel good about this at all. What if you don’t come back” she said in panic.

“I promise I will come back for you, but no matter what happens, don’t open the door for anyone apart from me. If anybody says I sent him, ask him for the password.”

“Which is?”

“Your favorite place.”

She could not help it, her anger was immediately replaced with a smile which turned to laughter.

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“That is not funny Jason. You seriously need to learn how to be funny.”

“You are very pretty when you smile.”

“Change the password. Please.”

“No. I have twenty five minutes more. Flight 10 is close now” he said looking at his wrist watch.

“I thought you said Flight 10 can’t go long distances.”

“Benin to Asaba is not a long distance.” And that was the explanation she got.

“You need to be sleeping before I leave” he said.

“So you won’t tell me anything about my parents” she asked knowing fully well he wouldn’t tell her more about Flight 10.

“I will tell you once you are lying down on my bed.”

He answered moving towards the corridor by the left.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Jason stood by the bed while she sat on the center of the bed.

“Why are you not sitting down?”

“Cindy you know why.”

She did not need an explanation to what Jason said. She was beginning to feel she was more into this than Jason. She was supposed to be the sane one but it looked like Jason was.

“So there is a room for every Circle and Special Force soldier?”

“No.”

“Explain.”

“I’m special.”

“Oh” She responded not needing any further explanation.

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“Take this” Jason said handing over a hair packer with three medium size black beads at the edge.

“What am I supposed to do with this?”

“It has a tracker, with it I can know your exact location at any time.”

“You said I’m safe Jason.”

“Please Cindy, I need to know you are safe. Just wear it.”

She tried using it to park her Bob-Marley-hairstyle into a doughnut but it was too tight. Jason was on the bed taking away the hair packer from her. He packed her hair into a ponytail.

“This will do” he said but his hands still lingered on her hair.

She turned to face him. She had seen his face more than a zillion times but she never got tired of looking into those crystal black eyes. His face was clean shaven. His tanned colour was a complete contrast from hers that was very light.

“Don’t” Jason said taking her hand away from his jaw.

She never knew her hand had moved on its own accord.

“Why?” she asked surprised at what came out of her mouth.

“Cindy, I want to. I’m right now at the edge but I need to keep my promise to Mum and also you are supposed to be helpful. And most importantly, it’s against your belief.”

“Jason, my belief, not our belief?”

Jason did not respond but left the bed and went back to his former position.

“Jason I thought Mum and Pastor....”

“Cindy, I’m not going to argue about the existence of God right now.”

“God knows Mum tried to make you believe that everything is not logic or math. God is not who you have to calculate and get a corresponding answer. You always said Mum’s favorite quote every morning Jason.”

“I believe God exist for you, for Mum. And that’s enough. I’m what I am Cindy.”

“Jason...”

“Your dad was a soldier.” He interrupted her.

Jason have never seen the logic behind Christianity or any other religion. Everything must be mathematical, not magic nor miracle. But Jason just said something about her dad. She immediately forgot about her argument which she, Mum, Dad and Pastor Sam never won.

“You mean my real dad?”

He nodded.

“How much did you read from Mum’s diary?” he asked.

“Not much. It was the last part of her diary where she wrote about my mum begging her to take me after she lost her baby. I saw a picture of a lady I look like and another man was standing behind her.”

“I left the diary and the picture for you to find.”

“That’s why I could not find her other diaries.”

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“How come you never got inquisitive about your surname and the stark difference in resemblance?” he asked.

She really wanted to go back to the fact that Jason prevented her from seeing all Mum’s dairy but it was no use getting angry when she was about to know the truth.

“No, grandma was fair. As for name, I thought I was answering grandpa’s name which was Dad’s surname while you were answering Dad’s first name as your surname.”

“Your dad’s name was Harrison. Your mum wanted Mum to foster you but not to adopt you.”

“You said my dad was a soldier.”

“Yes. He was killed almost nine months before you were born. The army barrack he was based in the North, was attacked. He was among the ten soldiers that died that day. But your mum believed there was something wrong. Mum met her at the hospital she worked at. They both had the same clinic days. Somehow, they became friends. One day, she opened up to Mum. She said Harrison, your father had told her that there was something big going on in the government. He died two days later. Later, she became more suspicious after one of the soldier’s wife died in an accident, another was said to have committed suicide. She ran away from the North the next morning and travelled very far. That was how she came to Benin. It was later she discovered she was pregnant. Mum was first to go into Labour and dad alongside Pastor Sam’s wife were the doctors in charge. The baby died few minutes after she delivered. Your mum delivered almost few minutes later but died from complications.”

For what seemed like a long time Jason did not say another word. Instead he held her hand.

Somehow she knew why he held her hand. She did not know what to feel or how to feel. She just

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got to know a little about the two people that gave her life but it felt distant, like Jason was talking about someone not related to her.

“Mum and Dad must have done a good work. I don’t even feel anything is missing. I never had any reason to think about the possibility of Mum and Dad not being my real parents. After everything you said, I should feel something. Right?”

Jason did not say anything, he just held her hands.

“Promise me you will never open the underground door for any reason, except it’s me” he said after a long pause.

“At least have some faith in me” she said.

She wanted to ask more questions about her parents, and so many other questions like the person Jason believed would come but her eyes were heavy, she also felt heavy. Jason must have been right. She was tired and worn out. As she closed her eyes after losing the battle to stay awake, she heard someone talking. It was as if the person was talking from a distance.

“Mum I want to stay with her but I know I have to leave. You know I’ve tried to believe in God, in your faith but it looks like a wrong math. Telling me to believe in God is like telling me to believe that one plus one is one. But I won’t mind saying your favorite quote we had to say every day before leaving the house. Trust in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not unto thy own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and he shall direct thy paths.”

The voice drifted away as if carried by a whirlwind. Suddenly, she saw herself somewhere else. She was no longer in the underground house but in their house in Benin. Something was wrong with her size. She was small. Immediately, she knew she was the right size for a six year old. She

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was with a notebook which was placed on the glass table at the center of their sitting room. Dad was reading a newspaper, Mum was in the kitchen. It was one of the few days Mum and Dad were at home same time. Jason was sitting on the tile directly opposite her, he was constructing a pyramid with rubber blocks Dad bought for him. She just finished her composition on her favorite place.

“Dad. What do you think about my composition?” she asked moving over to where dad was sitting.

Dad dropped the newspaper he was reading and took her note from her. She stood waiting for Dad’s response. After some seconds, Dad started laughing. She wondered if her spellings were wrong.

“Babe” Dad shouted Mum’s name.

She had never understood why Dad always called Mum a babe. Even after she had told Dad Mum was a woman and not a baby, he still called her babe.

“Yes” Mum answered.

“Please come and read what Cynthia wrote. You need to see this” Dad said still laughing.

Mum came into the parlour wiping her hands with a handkerchief. She took the note from dad, sat down on dad’s lap, and then she started reading her composition. That was another thing she never understood. There were more than enough cushion to sit down but Mum always chose to make Dad carry her. No wonder Dad had always called her babe. She waited to see if Mum would laugh.

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Mum's laughter was louder than that of Dad. She turned to see if Jason was watching what was going on, but of course, he was not. He was completely focused on his pyramid.

"What did I do wrong?" she asked almost at the brink of tears.

That caught their attention because they stopped laughing.

"Cynthia my love, you can't write this as your favorite place" Mum said.

"But that's is my favorite place. You said no lies are allowed in this house" she said, her eyes already gathering tears.

"I know Cynthia but Jason's chest cannot be a place. It's part of a body not a place" Mum said resuming her laughter.

"Wow! I never knew my girl can write so well. I have many favorite places but my most favorite is Jason's chest. It is the place I place my head to sleep on. If my head is not on Jason's chest I won't sleep well and I will have nightmeres of masqurrades pursing me" Dad said reading part of her composition.

Mum and Dad started laughing again. She had never seen them laugh so much that they both collapsed on the cushion. The tears started flowing out. She took her note from Dad's hand and ran to her room crying.

An alarm bell was ringing, first it was sounding from far away but now it was very loud. She reluctantly opened her eyes but discovered she was back in Jason's room. She was no longer six but her real self. It was all a dream but more of a memory.

"I slept off" she said stretching her hand and yawning simultaneously.

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The alarm which seemed to have stopped when she opened her eyes started again. She turned to look at the wall clock but immediately ran out of the bed when she saw the time.

“What the heck. How long have I been sleeping?”

She wiped her eyes with her palm and looked at the time again.

“10:46A.M” she said aloud.

“But how come I slept into Friday without waking up? Even if I was that tired, I’m not a deep sleeper....Jason. He drugged me.”

She was furious. It all explained why Jason insisted she ate his sandwich.

The alarm rang again. But it was not an alarm. Now that every haziness had cleared off, it was the sound of a doorbell being rang.

“Jason...”she shouted rushing towards the sitting room.

He must have come back. She became excited that everything was over. Jason was back and he was alive.

She rushed to the box, pressed the button Jason used to open the box. Once the tab was revealed by the box, she pressed the power button and waited for the tab to ask for her finger print. Just when she was about to place her thumb, she paused. Jason had told her about the numbers on the remote. She quickly left the box and went for the TV remote. She switched on the TV, pressed numbers two and three on the remote. Someone was standing inside the empty room looking straight at the camera she never saw while coming. But he was absolutely not Jason.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

There was no traffic on the way and with the way he drove, he got to Onitsha in less than twenty minutes. He had made one stop at a house a bit far from the underground house. There he switched to another car. Wild had once used the place as a hide out. Wild had given George and him the location in case they needed it. He had left after the drug took over. He knew she would be furious but he had to drug her because he did not trust her to keep to her words. He was at Nkissi because that was where their underground house was.

Once inside, he brought out his smaller tool box. It was now two hours since he left Tamed and from his calculation, Tamed needed three to four more hours and he knew Nick must be searching for him on that route and he was not willing to risk Tamed being discovered. Just before the long distance cut off his tracking of the documents, which was few minutes ago, Tamed had not been attacked. He knew because there had not been any stop. There were so many ways of revealing his location but he had only one option. He was dealing with highly trained and intelligent people and if he were to reveal his location by switching on his mobile and internet, they would know something was up. The best way was to use his small tool box and

attempt hacking into the company's website hoping it would backfire. With that, his location would be revealed. He also needed to find out who was at the other side. He had not gotten any time to test the skills of the other hacker. He knew from the very first time he attempted sending the documents that it was mainly the document that had the issue not just the fact that all the Circle Team's phone were hacked. He had downloaded what George sent and did not bother to open it, he had just sent it to Major Ahmed when his email was hacked. The document looked like an encrypted file. Normally, a file like that could not be opened except the original file was inserted in the system but this one was a big puzzle for him. The kind of encryption it had was connected to the internet. It could be transferred but would not open. Even knowing no one could open the document without using the original flash drive, this hacker still hacked all their Emails and somehow knew their IMEI. The information was Nick's doing but how he was able to do what he did in less than thirty minutes was not yet resolved. That was why he could not find a straight answer for Cindy because he did not have some of the answers himself. He only knew that Major Ahmed was attacked the moment he went online. Was Nick trying to eliminate his biggest threat?

First, he located the domain the attack on his email came from, then he attempted logging into the BlueAI Company's website using codes as one of their worker. He failed with the first attempt and that was enough. They would try to backtrack to where the attack came from and his location would be discovered. He did not even wait long, his screen changed from green to red. Some codes started appearing. The guy was trying to hack into his tool box. He watched closely, looking at the format the hacker was using and saving it in his memory for later use. It took less than thirty seconds and his tool box was no longer his. The hacker was good, too good. The hacker's programming language was better than Python which was the best programming

language for hacking. With the hacker gaining control of his tool box, they would know he was the one trying to gain access to their company because his photo and George's photo and some other information were there. He watched his screen being operated. First, the hacker opened his document with the name classified, and then he opened another file that had Biafra inside. The whole file was wiped off. He left the hacker to continue with what he was doing. He now knew how he worked. He would just take everything back using a reverse method and not just the control of his tool box. Knowing that Tamed would not get any distraction, he picked their secured phone from his big bag. The phone was like a Nokia touch phone. It was too limited but helpful. That was the phone he used to send the areas they should search for the bombs. He needed to find out if they had succeeded in defusing at least one of the bombs. Even though the line was supposed to be secured, he could not risk contacting Wild. He was with Major Ahmed. He was very sure Nick was behind the compromise and he was not going to risk exposing Major Ahmed's location. For all he knew, their secured line must have been compromised by now knowing Nick must have revealed more about the Special Force. Apart from Nick, there were others that were working for the BlueAI Company but he was very sure none of them belong to his team The Circle. Out of all his Circle colleagues, he knew the right person he could risk contacting. He switched on his phone. The network was back. He could not check to find out how long it took the hacker to restore network but he was sure it was not up to an hour.

'Hey Ghost, find the bomb?' he wrote the words backward. That was their simple method of communication.

He waited to see if Ghost would receive the message. The message changed from one good sign to two. He was right to contact Ghost. He just knew that among the few who would still have their secured line on, Ghost would be one of them. He did not wait long to get a response.

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‘Nah, we’ve combed the locations you sent but nothing, that company is a bomb in concealing weapons. Glad to know you guys are safe.’

That sent a piercing pain to his chest. None of them, apart from Major Ahmed and Wild, knew George was dead.

‘I’m on plan B. You know this line is probably not secured anymore and some killers may be on their way to you now.’

‘You mean I will soon be sending some guest to the Underworld can’t wait.’

‘Stay safe’ he sent his last message and switched off the phone.

He had the information he needed. As for Ghost, he was exactly his name. He was a former pick pocket. None of them in Circle Team have ever found Ghost, Ghost always found them. If you saw Ghost it meant he wanted you to see him.

He had now confirmed what he had earlier believed. Those bombs were BlueAI’s best. They had never been tested before and it looked like Nigeria was their testing ground. If all their equipment could not lead them to the exact location of the bomb without a direct map, then Nigeria was in big trouble.

He went back to check his small tool box. It was off. He tried switching it on but nothing happened. The hacker had crashed his small tool box. There was no time to analyze what the hacker did, he needed to get out the underground house fast. He gathered back all the things he removed from his bag including his real tool box. He left the fake one that was just crashed.

He drove to the Main Market, his temporal destination. He had to plan his form of attack and also he needed rest. He was already tired and worn out, and if he was going to carry out his

planned attack he would need all his strength. He drove into an old bungalow located at the middle of Bida Road area which only he and George knew the location. Major Ahmed had once taught them that the best place to hide is within the crowd. They had stacked up weapons inside knowing there would be a battle. When they were fully investigating, they went to their temporally camp at Obosi where George died, sometimes they went to Akwukwa. When they were not investigating, they lived like human beings. There was no furniture, it was a two bedroom flat. Underneath the two rooms were weapons they had modified. The sitting room had their bed and clothes. George's bag was still hanging on the wall. He ignored the pain in his chest and went straight for a shower.

He ate some sandwich he had prepared at the underground house in Asaba. That reminded him of Cindy, not that she had ever left his mind. He checked his wristwatch, there was no movement, she was still sleeping. He wore his spectacle and switched to Flight 10. After monitoring his environment and finding nothing suspicious, he brought out his tool box. When this was over, he was going to wipe that company out of the internet. But he was not going to do that now. He had so many plans to lay out. He needed to know the current location of the faceless leader. He was at Obosi but that was all he and George knew. That was after they had succeeded in infiltrating their last meeting. They had no knowledge of his exact hideout and he must find it. If he could eliminate the faceless leader, the war would never happen. From what he and George gathered, the man was with the phone and the phone was programmed with voice command. He was the only one that could operate the phone. Killing him meant killing a large army. He was always and heavily protected. The only weapon he knew would do the work would be Tracking Point. Once he knew his location, he would get to a high point and with Tracking Point he would send a targeted missile which he was already setting using his tool box. Now was not the time to go out

in search of the faceless leader's location, they must be looking for him now. He was too tired to fight and he knew from henceforth, he would not be fighting amateurs. He would be fighting the Biafran Forces and the BlueAI company men. Probably people trained like him.

After finishing his set up, he went to confirm the weapons. They were still there. The most important thing he needed at that point was a long rest.

He woke up the next day by 7:30AM. He felt refreshed and strengthened. He dug out the weapons he needed and started installing them. He was through within an hour. He carried everything he needed to another car, which was parked at the back of the house.

After one hour search, he had not yet located Faceless. He had wanted to contact Ghost again to find out how things were going on over there, but he changed his mind. It was too risky. They would be busy trying to defuse those bombs and fighting those placed to protect it. He had a huge doubt they would be successful before the time ran out.

So far, he had sighted many Biafran soldiers and also some of the company's mercenaries but Flight 10 had not been able to locate his target. After another thirty minutes search, he changed direction. He was now sure the man he was looking for was not there after Flight 10 sent him an image of the known leader. He had one more place to check. That was Akwukwa at Ndemili South. He could get there in less than thirty minutes if he drove fast. He got there at exactly 10:30AM. He saw some of the Biafran soldiers. He was still on track, he tried circulating discretely to try find his target's location before Flight 10 met up with him. After a long survey, avoiding the attention of the soldiers, his wristwatch made a sound diverting his attention. He clicked on the button making the sound. It was coming from Asaba. There was someone at the

underground house. He was sure it was Nick. After some time, Cindy's location was no longer static. She was on the move. Fear he never knew existed gripped him.

"Please, don't open" he said in his mind.

But something told him, it was not an ordinary soldier that was there. It was Nick the strategist. He had once witnessed Nick convince a kidnapper to kill himself in one of the missions they were sent together. Nick knew he must have left Cindy there and he must have changed the password, yet he still went there. There could be only one reason. He had a plan, a plan that would make Cindy open the door for him. For the first time in his twenty six years on earth he wished he was wrong, he wished nothing would make Cindy open the door, and most importantly, he wished it was not Nick, but the more he wished, the more his fear increased.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

There was something she planned on asking Major Ahmed if she ever meet him. One of his criteria for this Special Force people must be their handsomeness. The person staring at her through the camera she never saw at the empty room was freaking handsome. He was fair, his hair was cut short, he had those side beards that looked as if it was artificially installed making it neat and properly aligned and arranged. He had a straight face with pointed cheek. She had never seen him before, not that she had seen any of the Special Forces apart from George and recently that Dark Prince. She did not even know anything like that even existed before now. All she knew was that George and Jason were Nigerian Soldiers. George had followed Jason back to Benin one day, and it took time for them to believe that Jason really had a friend. He had stayed with them for a week and somehow George became her only male friend. Then after Mum and Dad died in a ghastly accident, she had packed into a hostel in Ekosodin because it was closer to Faculty of Law, which was her faculty. She only went home whenever Jason and George were coming to visit. They hardly discussed anything about military and found a way to avoid it anytime she had asked about their training. Her most lonely period was when they had travelled to America for a special training. Only once was she allowed to visit them, for just a

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day and during that time, she never had contact with any other soldier or any other Special Force soldier.

How long was she lost in thought? He was saying something but she could not hear. He placed his left hand on his mouth, then on his ear and on his hand. She immediately understood what he was trying to say.

There was something to press that would make her communicate with him. She studied the remote for the first time. It was not like a normal TV remote not that she was surprised. There was a button with a volume symbol. She pressed the button but only the volume increased but still no sound. There was another button that had voice and V written on it. She pressed it and that worked. She could hear him. She moved closer to the TV, maybe there was something there that would transmit her voice to him.

“Hello, can you hear me?” the handsome guy asked.

“Yes” she answered.

That was not actually what she wanted to say. She wanted to say more, but she felt a bit entranced by his voice. This guy had it all, beauty and great masculine voice.

“I’m Nick, you must be Cynthia.”

Wait how was he speaking as if he could see her?

“Can you see me?”

“Yes. You switched on the TV. I have been here for long. What took you so long?” he asked smiling.

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He even had dimple cheeks. It should be a sin for guys to be that handsome. Only God knew the number of girls that had fallen for those dimples.

“I am Jason’s new backup. I’m sorry about George.”

She felt that pain again. She would mourn George properly when all this was over. She rubbed her chest subconsciously.

“I’m sorry too, you also lost a comrade.”

“Yea, it’s very sad. Can you open the door? I can see Jason changed the password to protect you. I need to pick up some weapons.”

“But how were you able to communicate with Jason?”

“Through our secured line, we can only send texts and call” he answered still all smiles.

That dimple was really a distraction, she thought as she moved over to the box. She had almost placed her thumb on the circle but stopped once again. Jason said there was no communication and he never mentioned a secured line. Could it be the line he contacted using that driver’s phone? Again she felt sad remembering the driver.

“I’m waiting” he said.

“Oh, wait, the password. You are supposed to give a password” she said remembering.

“When did Jason give you the password?” And he was still smiling.

“Before he left.”

“The last time I communicated with Jason was yesterday in the morning.”

The Next Two Days

She was right, that was the phone call Jason made but how did he know to come to the underground house in Asaba? He had also called her Cynthia which was her official name.

George had called her Cindy from the first meeting.

“You must be Cindy” George had said.

And when she later asked him why he called her Cindy instead of Cynthia, he had said that was what Jason wrote in her picture in Circle house. She had never understood that statement until now. Nick was definitely not among The Circle team. And Jason had said he only trusted his team.

Her gut told her something was wrong. What she was very sure of was she would never open the door without that password. Jason was very meticulous and he wouldn't have forgotten those details.

“Jason told me that you have this kind of house in every state capital. Onitsha is not far, you can take the weapons you need there.”

“Cynthia, I don't have time, I need to take those weapons as reinforcement. Just open the door.”

“Sorry I can't” she said taking the remote to switch off the TV.

“You could have chosen the easy way Cynthia” he said all smiles disappearing.

She opened her mouth to ask for an explanation, but stopped midway. Someone was pushed in front of the camera. It was Osamagbe her course mate and hostel mate. She was the person that was almost her friend. Her face was swollen and there were black dots on her left eye. For it to be showing on someone as dark as Osamagbe, it meant it was bad. She was visibly shaking.

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“What is going on?”

It was not Nick that responded but Osamagbe. She raised her head to look at the camera.

“Is that you Cynthia...please help me... they took me on my way to the Police station.....I..I.”

“Sssh” Nick said placing a knife on her lips.

She immediately stopped speaking but her shaking increased. She did not know how to react to what she was seeing, somehow she was beginning to feel headache. She wished she could go back to sleep and become six years again.

“What do you mean by police?”

Maybe she should have asked something else but her mind was not okay. It was Nick that answered.

“How can you forget the disaster Jason left at your doorstep? Your best friend here wrote about it on her Facebook account and declared you missing. She wrote she will be visiting the police station to report you missing. My men and I picked her up. We had already taken care of the disaster. We did not want the police involved. I never knew she would be my backup plan.”

He was smiling and his dimples were still visible but it was no longer beautiful. How come she had never thought about the aftermath of the shootings on Wednesday night? She had not even thought about school nor lectures she must have missed. She never thought that somebody would care to notice she was missing. They were not that close. She was not close to anyone and her hostel made closeness almost impossible. There was no corridor connecting the rooms. Each room was independent of each other. Osamagbe had always been the one to initiate a

conversation. She was in trouble because of her. The death of that driver was enough, she would do anything to save her.

“What do you want Nick?”

“Now we are talking. We need you to take back the documents your boyfriend stole from us.”

Boyfriend! Nick thought Jason her boyfriend. What did Jason tell them about her? Just then, she remembered what George asked when he came with Jason for the first time. He had also thought Jason was her boyfriend, then she had no feelings for him. She had corrected George.

“There is absolutely no sibling resemblance” George had responded.

Again her mind had deviated from the issue on ground. Nick also mentioned the document. It meant they were not aware Dark Prince had the document.

“You have ten seconds to open that door or I will slit her throat” Nick said lowering the knife to her throat.

“Cynthia, please help me, please just open the door” Osamagbe was now crying.

“Five more seconds.”

She could not open it, she had faith Nick wouldn’t kill her. There must be some humanity left in him.

“Time up.”

She watched as Nick cut into Osamagbe’s skin, enough to bleed but not to kill.

“Stop it” she screamed.

“I’ll open it. Just promise me you will let her go. She did nothing to deserve this.”

“Deal. You are the one I want. You for her.”

She felt tears flowing from her eyes as she placed her hands on the circle.

“Command accepted” a female voice said.

Next came the sound of a door being opened. It was coming from up, where she had climbed down from. She watched as a ladder touched the floor.

“Let her go.”

“Not after you come over.”

Her head was screaming a big no but she found herself climbing the ladder. When she got to the top, she saw two men that were not visible to the camera. Nick was holding Osamagbe close to his chest, the knife still on her throat. He was smiling and she hated that smile.

“Wow, you are prettier in real life. Pleased to meet you.”

She ignored him and took a closer look at Osamagbe. She had bruises on her hands, her legs and mostly her face. The top of her gown was torn exposing a part of her breast. Her hair which looked like she did a packing gel was scattered and some dried blood was stuck on the left side of her hair. She was looking at her. Her lips were moving, she was past the stage of fear, she was now hysterical.

“Osamagbe I’m sorry, it’s okay. You will be fine now.”

“Search her” Nick told the two men by the door.

“What do you mean, I don’t have anything with me.”

But they were already on her, one held her down, while the other used what looked like a bug detector to rub on her body. She knew what it was because she had watched it in movies. He was very meticulous. She felt harassed but her worry shifted to something else when the detector picked up an interference. It was the hair packer Jason gave her. He roughly pulled it out of her hair.

The pain she felt made her believe he must have pulled a hair along with the packer. The man threw the hair packer to Nick who caught it.

“I am always right. I knew he won’t leave without bugging you.” His smile now looked like a smirk and she wished she could wipe it off his face.

Nick placed the hair packer on the ground and smashed it with his foot. One of the beads had something red blinking on it. One of the men went and picked it up.

“Destroy it” Nick said.

The man nodded and left with the tiny device.

“Now he knows I have you. I’ve always wanted to beat Jason in his own game. This is fun.”

“Let her go, she is bleeding” she said trying hard to avoid thinking of how Jason would be feeling now.

“Okay sweetheart” Nick said.

She felt relieved, at least one more person wouldn't die for trying to help. She raised her head to reassure Osamagbe but gave a piercing scream. It was not real, it was horror. She saw everything

thing. Nick had opened Osamagbe's throat with his knife. Blood was gushing out, her face will torment her forever. Her eyes were wider, her mouth was opened, her face was stretched as if pulled up. Nick pushed her away from him. She watched as Osamagbe fell backwards, her hands holding her throat, trying to stop that river of blood. She did not know how but she found herself joining Osamagbe's hands with hers. Maybe they could stop the bleeding. Osamagbe's eyes were still opened even after there was no pulse. The lifeless eyes were staring back at her. There was blood everywhere, her hands looked like she dipped them in a drum of blood. It must be a nightmare. She screamed hoping she would wake up but nothing happened. Anger she never knew existed before took over her body. She rushed at Nick, hoping to gouge out his eyes. She could not even land any strike, not even one. Nick held her but she fought, she tried to use her feet, her body anything to fight but she was so powerless. He was still smiling when he easily overpowered her, twisted her and forced her back to rest on his chest. She could no longer see him but she could still feel his ugly smile. She became furious and used all her strength to try wriggling her body from his grasp but Nick was not affected, she was not sure he knew she was fighting him.

"Sshh, as much as I like your invitation I'll rather have you in one piece for now. But don't tempt me further" he said, his voice becoming husky.

Suddenly, she understood what he was saying. She became aware she was on her night gown and she was not wearing bra. Nick's right hand was already moving. Fear replaced her anger. She tried again to get free.

"Looks like you don't get it Cynthia. Oh you like it rough" he said grasping her left breast.

The Next Two Days

It felt repulsive, like tiny bugs were moving all over her body, she was going to throw up. She tried holding it back but could not. She threw on the ground. Nick released his hold on her with such force that she fell. She remained down even when she had emptied her stomach.

“Party time is over. Let’s get moving.” She heard Nick say.

She raised her head to look at him. She wished he could see all the hate and anger she was feeling towards him.

“Jason is going to slice you limp for limp and for once I’m going to enjoy watching everything.”

Nick came to her back, knelt down and forced her to turn. He raised her jaw so she could look at his face.

“There is something you should know about Special Force. Every single soldier is a killing machine. Each of us have been trained based on everything about combat and how best to kill an opponent but what is great about us is we are made to also develop more of our skills, what we are good at. Major Ahmed calls it honing. Jason is best when he is up with his sniper, I also know he would beat me in combat but I’m the strategist. They fear me because I can kill without throwing a punch. That’s why I’m never going to meet Jason. We kill using anything possible, and right now you are the only one that will make Jason reveal his current location. Once he shows his face...you can fill in the missing link. We don’t need him alive. So get it into your head, your wish will never come through. At the end it’s those with wit that survive more than the strong.” he said smiling.

He roughly pulled her up and dragged her outside, not that she was resisting, her fighting spirit was dead. He took her to a black Toyota jeep parked exactly where Jason had parked his car. The

back door of the jeep was opened and she was pushed inside. The car was in motion seconds later.

"Where are you taking me to?" she asked not sure why she asked.

"To meet Faceless. Trust me, it's a man you should never wish to meet and right now he's pissed."

She did not need to look to know he was smiling. If he was the reason Nick was smiling, then she did not want to meet him.

She felt empty. She should have listened to Jason, she felt guilty. Jason was going to die because of her. At least Nick was not aware Jason was no longer with the documents. That was it; there was still hope even if Jason died. But only the thought was tearing her heart. She could not imagine a world without Jason, she would rather be dead, which she was already sure of. At least she would not be alive, she would not feel pains of loss. Suddenly, a thought came to her mind, or maybe a face. The dark prince's face. She remembered what Jason had told her about the dark prince. Then, she could not picture what Jason would do if she died, but now she could picture it, there would be many dead bodies. Jason was no ordinary person, she had seen him loose control when his autism had shown his ugly head. When she was seven, she fell and scratched her palm while attempting to capture a bird that was perched on their corridor. That day many birds died and she had feared Jason. Now she would be glad if he lost control again, for George, for the driver, for Osamagbe, she was going to make it happen.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

She had never been to Onitsha and she did not have the strength to study the route. She did not even know how long it would take to get to Onitsha but she knew it was not far from Asaba. Once during their journey, Nick made the driver to stop. He wore something on her head that covered up to her mouth. He shifted it and she could breathe through a hole cut in the cloth.

“If you don’t want me to be rough with you, don’t touch that thing” he said.

She did not answer him, she was not planning on removing it anyway. There were so many thoughts going on in her mind, how she was going to make sure Nick and everybody who had made her life a living hell pay. Nick wouldn’t kill her now because they needed her to get Jason, but she had to do something before they made Jason reveal himself. So any provocation from her would not work, she would rather get hurt. It was better one of them died than two of them dying and she had already made up her mind to be the one. But how to actualize it was what she could not fix. She had not yet gotten a plan when the jeep stopped. She thought Nick wanted to do another thing to her but was surprised when she heard the sound of the door being opened. Before she could ask what was going on, she was dragged out of the car and almost immediately, her hands were roughly pulled back and handcuffed.

“We are here baby, he can’t wait to meet you” Nick whispered to her ears.

“So quick?” she asked.

The only answer she got was being pulled towards a particular direction. A door was opened after few minutes' walk. There were steps that one had to climb before getting to the door but she only knew when she kicked something strong. She felt the pain instantly.

They were now inside. There was no sound coming from anywhere.

"Where am I?" she asked panic already setting in.

Nick did not answer, but continued pulling her towards the unknown. At a point, Nick raised her and placed her foot on what felt like a ladder.

"Slowly descend or you will fall which will be fun to watch" Nick said.

After a long downward movement with Nick holding her, her feet touched the ground. She did not need her eyes to know they were in an underground house. Nick continued pulling her. She could hear a male voice. After another few seconds, the voice was clearer.

"Just who I was waiting for. Good job Nick" she heard a male voice say.

"What is the status?" Nick asked.

"No luck yet. Are you sure this man you talked about is around this area? We've combed this place but none of my men nor your company men have seen this man." The man had an Igbo accent.

"Like I said we are trained on how to be discreet" Nick said pushing her to the ground.

Her knees hit the floor with force, it felt like something shocked her knees.

The Next Two Days

“I don’t think somebody can be that discreet. My men searching for him are the best, and if he is even at Onitsha, they would have detected him long ago. You guys from BlueAI are making mountain out of a molehill” the man said.

“This girl will make him reveal himself” Nick said.

She heard footsteps coming to where she was kneeling. She tried hiding her fear but her body had its own response because she felt herself shaking. He held her jaw and raised her face up but did not remove the blindfold covering all her face apart from her nose.

“How?”

Before Nick could answer someone walked into the room.

“Sir he has revealed his location. His line is on. He is about fifteen minutes’ drive from here just by that plantain plantation.”

Her heartbeat was suddenly too fast. She knew who they were talking about.

“Good, get the men ready” Nick responded.

There was a pause, nobody spoke for some time.

“The line is not connecting. That’s typical of Jason. He wants us to locate him in person not on phone.”

“That’s not a problem, I’ll just send some of my men very close to that area to pick him up.”

“That’s not the plan Faceless. The plan is to kill him once he reveals his location. There is no point for hostage taking. You can’t even take him hostage.”

The Next Two Days

“I’m in charge here” Faceless shouted, making her jolt.

“We are on the same side, I’m just trying to help” Nick responded.

“I’ve sent a message to six of my men close to that plantain plantation to pick him up. If he shoots at them they can kill him.”

“Faceless, I brought this to you” Nick said.

“What is this?” Faceless asked.

“A classified file on The Circle, a sub team of The Special Force. You need to understand the enemy you are dealing with.”

There was silence again but she knew Faceless was reading through whatever Nick gave him.

“Wild. Leader of The Circle. Strength-Combat and Motors, psychologist, guns and others. Ghost, Mark, Doc, blabla...Simply Jason. Okay, 26, Family-Fiancée-Cynthia...”

She was no longer listening to what Faceless was saying. Did she just hear Faceless call her name as Jason’s fiancée? Why would Jason do that? That explained why Nick called her Jason’s girlfriend but it still left a hundred and one unanswered questions.

“I don’t see anything special in this classified file” Faceless said bringing her back to the situation on ground.

“It’s because you did not read the details.”

“There is nothing to read. Nigerian soldiers are powerless. The only thing people fear about them is their weapon. If not, an average Nigerian can beat them in a face to face combat. The other day

The Next Two Days

you told me that there is a Special Force Team who are killing machines, which you were a part of. Now you are showing me a classified documents of another team called The Circle. What are you trying to prove?”

“That there are some Nigerian soldiers you should fear. Twenty of your army is one of them.”

He was answered with a thunderous laughter.

“I fear no one. That’s why I really want to meet him. I want to kill him with my bare hands”

Faceless said.

A phone rang. It was coming from the area Faceless was talking from.

“Yes.”

There was a long pause.

"Okay.”

“So much for The Circle. My boys are with him now and there was no resistance. He only wants to confirm she is okay” Faceless said.

“Put the phone on loud speaker” Faceless said.

He must have also switched his own phone to loud speaker because she could hear the man speaking from the other side.

“Sir, he can hear you. You don’t have to speak to him, we can bring him forcefully if you want.”

The Next Two Days

“Jason, I’m pissed, I’ve been planning this for a long time and a boy like you can’t stop me. You will soon find out what I do to my enemies.” The way Faceless spoke was enough to send chills to her body.

“Where is she?” she heard Jason voice.

“Jason” she shouted.

“Cindy, are you okay?” Jason asked.

“He killed my friend, I could not save her.”

Suddenly, all the tears came out. That was never her plan, but she could not stop the tears from flowing.

“Did he touch you?” Jason asked.

“That’s enough” Faceless said preventing her from answering.

But he still left the phone on loudspeaker.

“I’m not through talking to.....”

“Sssh you have no say in this I’m the one in charge and I make the....”

Just as Jason was interrupted, Faceless was also interrupted by a gunshot, it turned to gunshots, there were more gunshots. She was not counting, she was filled with dread. She had no idea what was going on. She could not see but she was sure neither Faceless knew the reasons for the gunshots.

“What is going on Nick?” Faceless asked.

The Next Two Days

“Show time” Nick answered.

After what felt like a minute someone spoke from the other side. It was Jason.

“Cindy, are you okay?”

Shit, that was bad, Jason was not sounding like Jason. He sounded like he had lost it. He was panting.

“Cindy answer him now” Nick shouted.

Almost at the same time she felt a cold metal on her throat. And before she could stop herself, her mouth opened.

“Jason, calm down, I’m okay.”

Just that word made Jason’s panting to stop. She could not believe she was a coward. That was the opportunity she had been looking for. She should have kept quiet, Nick might have killed her and her plan would have worked. She felt guilty.

“There are no rules Faceless. Everything is just a game. Here is the deal. If you want to stay alive keep her safe if not I will wipe Biafra from existence. You will witness it with your own eyes. Then I will kill you.”

“What the heck just happened? Ekene, Chuks. Where are my men?” Faceless asked.

“They are dead. You have nothing to worry, I will come in exchange for her. Send me the address. As for you Nick I am going to kill you” Jason said ending the call.

“Nick explain what happened?”

“What the fuck do you want me to explain? You only needed to follow my plan. Now you know who you are facing. Believe me, he meant every word he said. He has partial autism but Major Ahmed developed it to a skill. The Special Force Team are highly trained and a criteria for entering is defeating ten Nigerian soldiers in a face to face combat. The Circle are the best of The Special Force apart from defeating thirteen Nigerian soldiers in a face to face combat as just one out of ten criteria, he or she must be able to defeat six US Marine in a face to face combat. All their training methods are basically for killing, they don’t capture, they just kill. Jason is a member of The Circle. He just have to climb somewhere high and with his upgraded weapon and his high math skill he can pick a target from a thousand yards. It means he just need the location of this place, then with his missile, he will wipe out this building. Forget about being underground, his missile will find its way here. If you die, the bomb won’t explode. Trust me, your six dead men is considered nothing within the Circle Team” Nick shouted

The frustration was very clear in his voice.

Jason had told her a little about The Special Force but this was totally new. Suddenly, somebody slapped her on her left cheek. Before her body could react to the pain. Her face was roughly raised up. She felt something on her forehead.

“I just lost six of my men, give me a reason why you should not pay” Faceless said.

It was Nick that answered.

“Because Jason cannot lie. You can’t deal with Jason the way you deal with any soldier. He has autism, everything he does is calculative. If something is below fifty percent chance of succeeding Jason leaves that thing. So if you give him any signal that he cannot rescue Cindy you will lose everything. Like I said, he thinks differently, and he will wipe out Biafra if she dies

The Next Two Days

first. I have witnessed it before. A Circle member's wife was killed by a notorious and dangerous drug Lord before he could get to her. The drug Lord and hundreds of his crew no longer exist. If you kill her, I'm very sure he will know. I know your anger, trust me, I am mad at him too but she cannot die first."

She knew he was talking about Dark Prince.

"I guess you have a plan" Faceless said removing the gun from her forehead.

"Now you want my plan."

"Say it" Faceless thundered.

"Send him the location but before that, we must make sure he never gets to this place. Give me few minutes to set things in motion, after that, you can send him your location."

"I want to know."

"Know what?" Nick asked.

"If you were a member of The Circle?"

"Nope, even after you pass all criteria, you still have to be chosen by the team leader Wild. I was not chosen."

"Why?"

"Jason. He told Wild he did not trust me."

"And he was right" Faceless said.

"Like I said Jason cannot lie" Nick said.

"I will study the classified document you gave me. I want to know exactly who I'm up against."

"Good for you. I will send you a text when I'm ready to receive Jason" Nick said.

He was leaving. She knew because she heard his voice from afar. She became afraid, what if Faceless changed his mind?

"As for you" Faceless said pulling off her blindfold.

The influx of light made her blink many times. There were others in the room. About seven more soldiers. They were standing at different locations. She turned her face to look at Faceless but discovered he was really faceless. He was wearing a mask. She could only see his eyes, nose and lips. There was something wrong. He was staring at her, like he knew her and was surprised to see her. Even though she could not explain it, it felt different. But it was gone within a second, replaced by anger. But the feeling that she was missing something was overwhelming.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Things were falling apart not because his predictions were not coming through but because it was. Nick and Faceless had Cindy. The thought alone was making him loose control again. Every training he had gone through to learn how to control an outburst was failing. He could not think straight. The problem was not Cindy being held captive but who was holding her captive.

If he had any hope of saving her, he had to move. He was in the car he had earlier parked a little distance from where the six men saw him sitting down on the grass and resting his back on one of the plantain plants.

He quickly opened the passenger seat, took out his big bag and was on the run. He ran as fast as he could. After about eight minutes nonstop running, he was deep inside the plantain plantation. He paused to take a deep breathe, then he continued running. The big bag was very heavy, heavier than it was because of the newly added weapons. He could not feel the pain of running with such weight because there was another pain he was feeling. After another five minutes run, he saw a small but very deep pit, which made him stop. He quickly brought out his climbing tools. After a few steps down, his whole body was already inside the pit but his hand could get to

the top. He brought out their camouflage grass. It was George's creation. It looked like a folded mat but there was a battery attached at the middle, under the mat. The front had artificial grasses which could deceive even a farmer. He placed it up, and with a button on his wrist watch, the mat started unfolding. It covered the pit completely making it dark. He continued his decent and sighed when his foot touched the ground. He brought out his spectacle from his pocket and after wearing it, he could see clearly. George made sure he made the mat to still allow airflow, so there was no issue of oxygen. He switched over to Flight 10 mode. It was still circulating the area. He saw more of Biafran Soldiers, but no sign of Faceless. It was just a normal bungalow and there was no serious activity, but he was sure Faceless was within that area, but not in that bungalow, except it was an underground house. He should have known, but it was too late. His plan was to send a non-targeted missile which would wipe any living soul there but he could not anymore. Cindy was there. The only way he could send a targeted missile or controlled bullet was to have control of the cameras inside the underground house and that would not be possible. All was still connected to Nick. Nick knew exactly what he was planning to do and Cindy was the preventive measure. Nick was not someone to have as an enemy. He had been the brain behind everything. No wonder they were one step ahead of him. If Faceless had any idea of who he was dealing with, he would run for his life, but he wouldn't because he still believed he was in control.

He knew something was very wrong the moment he did not immediately receive the text on their location. Nick must have told him to wait. He would never get that text message because Nick would never allow him to enter that compound. Nick was going to use any weapon available to bring him down, then he would just tell Faceless not to bother sending the text because he was dead, then Cindy would be next. And if there was a way of convincing Faceless that he was no

longer in control, it was all blown with the death of his six men. He hadn't plan on losing control, but he could not take being interrupted from knowing how Cindy was faring. The six men were too relaxed and only two could fire at him after he had shot three with George's Black and with three bullets, not missing his target. The gunshots from two of them killed their partner who he had pulled to himself knowing he would be fired at. Even as their bullets touched their partner, he was already firing at them. Two more bullets was all he needed. He regretted his action as soon as Cindy calmed down his nerves. Faceless would never listen to him.

He had to find out what was happening in Lagos. He brought out his real tool box, switched it on and using a cord, he connected his secured line to his tool box. He had at least ten minutes if the line was no longer secured. His tool box would prevent it from being tracked for at least ten minutes but the person being contacted would not be protected. He thought of who to contact and still ended up with Ghost. He needed to find out if he was still alive.

'Hey Ghost, hope you've not turned ghost.'

He waited, the message was sent, it later gave a double good symbol but he was not yet relieved.

'How can a Ghost turn ghost?'

His relief was instantaneous. He was still alive.

'Guess the line was still secured.'

'Nah, could only send four to the underworld.'

'Then your phone should be off. They can track where you are.'

The Next Two Days

‘Then how will you contact me, I’ve been waiting for another party but guessed they feel it’s not worth it.’

‘What is the good news?’

‘We’ve been able to locate the bombs with the map Tamed came with.’

‘Bad news?’

‘None have been deactivated. It’s beyond our comprehension. I think only you and George can defuse these bombs. Although Mark is trying his best.’

Everything suddenly became clearer, the attacks, Nick was not trying to stop him from delivering the documents, he was trying to stop him from getting to Lagos.

‘You know Nick is our guy.’

‘He was recently suspected after his team leader confirmed him missing in action with some others. That was after the two helicopters with Forces members on their way to Onitsha was shut down from the sky. This is bad, too bad man.’

‘Seen Wild to know his next move? Time’s ticking.’

‘Nah, hidden with Major, but saw Tamed. *They are seriously trying to figure out how to destroy those bombs. Tamed surprisingly did not join them, he said there is no fun in trying to stop the bomb from exploding the normal way. Wild, Fast and I guess Doc is with Major cracking their heads to see how to stop this bomb. # Me, I’m just ghosting around with other Special Force to monitor the number of enemies we have. Stay safe. You and George. Looks like there is another party.’

This was meant to happen with Nick being in control. He studied the message again, Ghost indicated a * before writing that long sentence. It meant he had to read everything but giving it the opposite in meaning. They were no more trying to figure out how to destroy the bombs. Tamed was with them but they wouldn't stop the bombs from exploding the normal way. Wild, Tamed, Fast and maybe Doc were together. And if they were no longer planning to defuse the bombs it could only mean one thing. They were coming to Onitsha to stop the call from being made and to Tamed it was going to be fun. He did not say they had already moved and if they were already on their way, it would take about six to seven hours to get to Onitsha that was if they were not discovered. It was already past 12:P.M meaning they would probably be around by 8:P.M. That was if Fast was driving. That was about three hours to the deadline. Even if Nick saw the conversation he just had with Ghost, after reading everything backward, he would still not understand because the * and # code was used only by the Circle Team. Ghost also used the # code. He read through the message again. Ghost had a way of making serious things look simply, # meant he should read it as he wrote it, but only a Circle member would know he meant they were taking down the enemies one by one. They had gone offensive.

Now it was very clear the battle all along have been exactly where he was. Nick the strategist had completely fooled them. But he was a bit relieved they caught on with his game even though it was not early enough. They would not take helicopter because it meant everyone in Special Force would be aware of their movement. If many soldiers went AWOL with Nick, then there should be more who were sending him information from the inside. Wild and Major Ahmed were wise to limit their operation to only The Circle and some few trusted Special Force soldiers, might be from Stud's python team. He would know when they arrive because Wild had his kind

of android watch with up to thirty tiny buttons all having different functions. The distance would be close enough to communicate.

He went back to Flight 10 mode, and with his android watch, he changed the direction of Flight 10. He switched back to normal. He needed Flight 10 close to him. And he also needed a plan to counter Nick's plan but at the moment there was absolutely no plan. He just knew how Nick would operate but there was no way of stopping him because Nick always had plan A to Z. It would not take long before he felt the impact of his plan 'B' because Faceless must have prevented his plan 'A' from being carried out.

He did not wait long as he heard the sound of a helicopter, next were sounds of simultaneous gun shots. He knew his car was gone. He quickly switched to Flight 10. He was right, the car was on fire. Nick wouldn't end there, he would certainly send someone to confirm his bones and ashes. It was part of their training. And they would continue searching. He was running out of time and he had never been in a situation where he was this helpless. There was a blink on his wristwatch. Flight 10 was being fired at. It had been discovered. Only an expert could shoot down Flight 10 because it was created to dodge attacks and also the plantain plants were obstructing their visuals. He could not see Flight 10 but only what Flight 10 was showing him. He could see the guys on the helicopter targeting their gun on Flight10. Those were not just guys, two were members of Special Force but only one was in Nick's team. It meant they were many of them that deviated. They were shooting at Flight 10 not just to destroy it but to find out if he was still alive. Nick. It was all Nick's plan. Now it was obvious they already knew about Flight 10 before now. He could not risk being discovered but also he could not risk Cindy. If Nick could confirm he was dead, Cindy would be dead in less than five minutes. He allowed Flight 10 to continue dodging the bullets, while he quickly mounted his mini XM25 rifle. If

USA and Russia knew what he and George had been doing with their weapons they would ban Major Ahmed from purchasing them. They bought, destroyed and recreated a better one. The original XM2 had laser sight and timing mechanism within the bullets but theirs also had camera and a battery. The only thing common with that of the US rifle was the bullets exploded after hitting target. With Flight 10, he was going to fire back. He opened the mat with his wristwatch. Raised his gun up. With the camera of the rifle which was connected to that of the bullet, he could turn a bullet to a missile. With the buttons on his wrist watch, he created a link between the bullet camera and Flight 10's camera. He zeroed in on one of them, the one called Trix, he was the one piloting the helicopter. He fired. He closed the mat again and watched the movement of the bullet with the camera of his rifle that was fully charged. It took just thirty seconds for the bullet to find its target. The bullet tore through the glasses protecting the Pilot. It hit him on his head. The helicopter crashed causing a quake on the ground. He felt it where he was. Immediately, he doubled the speed of Flight 10 away from the area. He started a ten seconds count down in his mind and at ten, there was an explosion. For some reason, he felt sorry for the owners of the plantation. He was far away, but even if the fire got to where he was, he would only feel the heat. He had experienced worse. One thing he was sure of was Nick would be back and he would smoke the whole area to get him. He gathered all his tools back to his big bag. Then with his climbing tool, he climbed out of the hole. He took his mat and without putting it back in the bag, he ran as fast as he could. He continued running. He had left the plantain plantation but he could not dare stop running. The area was like a village part of Onitsha but some believed it was not part of Onitsha. He could see some settlement. He turned the other direction. Nick was losing it and he would not mind killing civilians as long as he was part of the casualty. He had few more minutes before Nick changed to Plan C. He was

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not that far from where he had once camped with George. They had dug a pit and used it as their shelter. He increased his speed. He got there two seconds to his own deadline. He descended into the pit as fast as he could and covered it with the mat. He dropped the bag and sat down panting.

The place felt weird without George. The pain in his chest was back again. George died because of Nick. He had always wondered why George could only take down few men before he was killed. Now he knew. Those men waiting were not the ones that killed George, it must have been a shot from a helicopter while he was battling with those on the ground. And not just anyone one but a Special Force member. He felt anger not at Nick but at himself. He thought he was good at strategizing. He remembered what Nick had once told him.

“You are good with combat because you can predict someone’s movement but George is natural, you are good with strategizing because of your silly defect, I’m way better than you because I’m natural. One day we are going to play this game and I’m going to beat you to it because that is what I’m good at. I don’t need to face you to kill you” Nick had said.

It was during training to become a Circle member. He had defeated Nick in less than thirty seconds in a face to face combat. Nick never liked him. Nick saw him as a cheater and he hated him more when he prevented him from joining The Circle. Now the game was on and he was losing in every way. Cindy was in Nick’s hand, and Nick would never allow him see her again. She was still alive, he could feel it, but how long would Nick hold out? He could not just continue flaunting Nick’s plan without having a plan of his own. Being on the defensive was not good and he could not go on the offensive because of Cindy.

Nick would use Cindy to the end, and if at the end, all his plans failed, he would make sure he took Cindy with him. He could think of all the possible methods Nick could use, a bomb connecting the both of them so that if he died Cindy died would be Nick's best method.

He kicked his foot on the wall of the pit in frustration. This was the problem with what Major Ahmed was doing. There was the possibility of someone going AWOL. Although that was one reason The Circle was created to remove defaulters, it would be difficult killing someone as skilled as a Circle Member. The only reason Nick could not join was not because he lacked the skills but because he failed in the trustworthy test. He had once wished his prediction would not be true but it happened exactly as he knew it would happen.

Now the thought of what Nick would do was fearful. He felt lost. He wished he were normal, that he wouldn't have an idea of what would happen to Cindy. He closed his eyes feeling hopeless. The world would know of him when Cindy dies. He tried to change his thought to if Cindy died but could not. He could picture Nick's layout. Suddenly, a memory came into his mind. He had just finished an argument about luck and miracle with Mum.

"Jason, I understand you, I'm a doctor. I understand how your brain works. I've once wondered why God would create children like you who are so logical and sensitive but I no longer wonder because with you I experienced a miracle. I prayed to God to send someone that will make your life normal and he sent Cindy. Believe it or not, she is your miracle. Many autistic patient I've studied can't have this feelings you have for her. The next prayer God will answer is you."

"What about me?" he had asked.

"Jason one day you will be faced with a challenge which logic or math can't solve, everybody must come to that point in life."

“Mum, humans are the architect of their own misfortune. The right thing in the right place always work out. We always turn to a deity after an improper planning.”

“One day, proper planning, logic and math will fail you and I pray that you will drop science and turn to the One who can help you. That you will experience a miracle. You would know because you will not be able to explain it. And you will believe” she had concluded.

Mum and Dad died three days later in a ghastly motor accident and he had wondered where God was when it happened.

But why was he remembering that event. He knew there was no plan that would save Cindy. He might stop the bomb from exploding, but as long as Cindy was with Nick, there was no hope.

There was only one way in, a way to gain access to Cindy’s location but only Cindy could activate it. Cindy would not know to activate it because she must not have taken his words literally. Somehow he found his mouth moving.

“God I’ve never prayed to you before but I’m doing it now because Mum had a strong believe in you. None of my plans can save Cindy, but can you save her? I need her to activate her hand band” he said breathing fast.

That was a lot of talking, not just that, his mind and body was against the prayer. For the first time he wanted one plus one to be three. It was ridiculous, but he was desperate for his prediction of Nick’s plan to fail. His prediction had never failed even when he had wished it earlier but now it was more critical than the other time. Cindy was running out of time.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

She had been in a dark room for some time and no one had shown up. Faceless had called one of the men named Nnamdi to take her to his room because he had plans for her.

“You only need to be in one piece and that does not mean I can’t have fun” he had said.

She had tried fighting Nnamdi but her handcuff prevented her from doing anything. Nnamdi had pushed her into the dark room and before she could get to the door, it was shut. She had been laced with fear since then. Though she could not see the face of Faceless, she was sure he was pissed off. The room was too dark and she had sat down after kicking a wood. Her leg must be swollen. Jason had said Faceless was not the bad guy but he was wrong. She would never allow Faceless touch her. She made up her mind to provoke him enough for him to kill her. She would rather be dead than to be raped by Faceless.

She could somehow understand Faceless anger. Six of his best men dying in less than a minute, in the hands of just one person was enough to piss him off. And also, the fact that she was related to his new enemy was enough motivation to get revenge. She tested the handcuff by pulling her hands but she stopped when she felt a piercing pain like something was cutting into her skin. She was already feeling pains from Nick’s manhandling. Her foot was not exempted and her back was paining her. Her hands were already strained from being pulled back. She shifted her

body backward looking for something solid to rest on. Her hands touched what felt like a wall. She immediately rested her back, but her handcuffed hands prevented her from completely resting her body. She closed her eyes, not that opening it was of any use.

She tried to run through what had happened within the last three hours and wondered what she could have done differently that would have resulted to something better. She should have known that opening the door wouldn't have saved Osamagbe. She should have listened to Jason. He had told her not to open the door no matter what happened. But she had opened it and Osamagbe still died. She was a captive and Jason was going to put himself in serious danger to come for her. Images of Osamagbe's lifeless eyes staring at her, clouded her mind. She tightened her eyes hoping to stop the image from invading her mind. It was worse than torture. Even if she survived, how was she going to live her life free from the memories of the past hours? She tried thinking of Jason, maybe that would stop the images. She let her mind travel back to just the day before, when she had been with Jason in the underground house. She had thought things were complicated then, now she knew better. She wished she could go way back to when she was six, when she just had to rest her head on Jason's chest and everything would be alright. She remembered after she ran inside crying because Mum and Dad found her composition very funny, Jason had been the only one she opened the door for. Mum and Dad had failed in convincing her to open the door. She had shut the door immediately Jason entered using a stool because her hand could not yet get to the bolt. She had thrown herself on Jason and resumed her crying.

"You will feel headache if you continue crying and it makes me mad if you are in pains" Jason had said wiping her tears with his hands.

He had taken her to the bed and within ten minutes she had slept off, her head on her favorite place. She held on to that memory. She was not ready to face reality, she did not want to think about Jason's current situation. Nick must have told Faceless to text Jason the location. That meant Jason was coming not knowing there was no plan for any hostage exchange. He was going to walk into Nick's trap and he would be dead because she could not just listen to one simple instruction. The image of Osamagbe came back but not the lifeless face. It was the face begging her to save her. How could she have ignored that face?

There was a noise somewhere, like a door being opened. The image of Osamagbe immediately disappeared as fear took over. She pushed herself closer to the wall hoping the wall would open up and swallow her. There was a sudden influx of light in the room. Even though her eyes were closed, she knew the room was no longer dark. She did not open her eyes but she waited in trepidation. She remembered the snake episode, how it had turned out to be Jason, maybe another miracle had happened and Jason was the one by the door.

She heard footsteps coming towards her, it was getting close. She could now feel the person's presence. Her fear must be visible because her body was vibrating.

"Jason. Twenty six years. Good in combat because of his ability to predict opponents moves. Best Circle sniper. Can shoot a target from more than a thousand yards without missing. Jason plus George are time bombs with weapons. They remodel any weapon purchased to suit their taste. They can hack into any database and most of their remodeled weapons can be powered with solar energy. And so on. I've read all of them."

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It was Faceless that was in the room. He really studied the files Nick gave him. If her situation was not serious she would have thanked him for the information because she too was just hearing those information. She kept her eyes tightly closed.

“If I had not witnessed the death of six of my men, I would have found the information in those files funny you know. I now believe Nick was right. But Cynthia. Who are you?”

That got to her as she opened her eyes to look at Faceless. He was sitting on a bed, covered with white bed sheet. She had been resting her back on the wall close to the bed. The room was painted all white. She did not have time to study the room as she was suddenly lifted up by Faceless. His hands were on her throat and she was almost choking.

“I won’t repeat myself again. Who are you?”

“I don’t understand your question” she responded.

She was pushed further into the wall and her hands were taking most of the pain. Faceless increased the pressure on her neck.

“From the information I have, Jason and the dead George had been on an undercover mission in Onitsha.”

He was quizzing tighter. She could almost not feel any air entering her lungs.

“Please...please...” she begged.

“George must have known who I was and told Jason. I believe Jason sent you here to distract me. The George I knew and the picture I saw was different. That was another of George’s skills, he was the best in camouflage. Good with silicone mask cloning.”

“I don’t un..derst..and” she managed to cough out.

She wondered how long she had before she finally stopped breathing. But it felt weird to die without knowing what she was actually being killed for.

“Don’t lie to me” Faceless thundered.

He pushed her down with force. Her knees hit the tiled floor with momentum that she felt the pain in her head before it registered on her knees. Her throat must be sore. She was in pains, the kind she had never experienced before and it was becoming unbearable. She gasp in air simultaneously to recover from the air she had missed. Faceless did not give her time to assimilate the pain as he was back. He bent down and raised her jaw up. No need for mask, he was really pissed off, it was clear in his eyes. The only thing missing was the reason behind his anger. She was sure of one thing, his anger was not connected to his six dead men.

“So Jason sent you, because George is dead. But how did he do it. The technologies I’m seeing these days is driving me crazy. The BlueAI have once showed me a video of someone cloned to look like another person. All they need is just an image and they can recreate a silicone face of that person, and someone could wear it and look exactly like that person. Was that what Jason did with you?” Faceless asked.

“What?” she asked because she had nothing more to say and she was too shocked with the question.

She had seen it in movies but not heard of it happening in real life. Faceless dropped his hold on her jaw and started laughing. Things were becoming scarier.

“And they thought they were the only owners of that cloning technology. Nick should have given me that classified file earlier. It was boldly there. The real face of George and the face he used for his undercover. They killed one of BlueAI representatives having the same physical qualities with George. In the last meeting I thought I was discussing with Mr Matthew. Even BlueAI were all fooled. If not for Nick my twenty years plan would have gone into the drain. Now it’s you. George must have taken her picture. But how? No one knows except Ebuka and Nnamdi. I think I’m going crazy” Faceless said moving around the room, his hands on his head.

"I am going crazy" he kept on saying.

He was still moving round the room. It was too much to comprehend at once. Jason had said their cover got blown. Could it be the very day they were attacked? She was almost beginning to believe Jason must have covered her face with the face of the person Faceless was talking about. Maybe that was why he drugged her. She turned around to see if there was any mirror. She needed to see her face to confirm. There was no mirror. Safe for a large wardrobe and a door that should lead to the bathroom, the room was absolutely empty. It was all white, even the tiles were white. The wardrobe and the door were the only brown colours. She heard footsteps approaching her and before she could turn, Faceless was already on her. He raised her up and pushed her to the wall, his hands were back on her throat.

“How does it work? Is it worn or operated on. If I cut your face will it pill off?” he shouted.

Before she could react to Faceless rhetorical questions, she felt a sharp pain on her cheek.

Faceless was using his sharp fingernails to cut into her skin with his free hand.

“How do I remove this silicone face?”

“Stop it, please stop it. You are hurting me, please” she said already crying from the pains Faceless was inflicting on her.

She felt liquid dripping from the left side of her cheek, close to her ear. This was getting out of hand.

“Then tell me how to remove her face from you. I don’t want to see it.”

“I wish I understand what you are saying.”

“He even dared to give you her name. How dare you wear her face and answer her name” he said holding her throat tighter.

For a split second all pains were forgotten.

“What do you mean by my name? My name is Cynthia, it had always been Cynthia” she struggled to speak.

“You lie, you are wearing her face and answering her name and I’m going to strangle you if you don’t tell me how to pull it off” He thundered.

Again, all pains were forgotten. She was more than confused. She remembered his reaction when he had first seen her. She also remembered the name Mum had called her mum in her diary.

“Did you know my mum?” she coughed out the first thought that came to her mind.

It worked because he released her immediately.

“I look exactly like my mum. She was my age when she gave birth to me” she quickly added before he changed his mind.

She knew part of what she said might not be true. Mum did not write about her mum's age but she was guessing based on the picture she had seen. It was as if she was the one in the picture. Faceless moved a step backward. His expression was that of shock. She could not see his face but his body movement was enough.

"It's not possible, it's not possible, I confirmed before I completely disappeared. Cynthia is dead and there was no baby." He was shaking his head as if in denial.

"My mum is dead, she died after giving birth to me" She said, hoping she could understand his relationship to his mum.

"It's not possible. Cynthia was never pregnant and she died in an accident in the North alongside many of the wives of the dead soldiers."

If she was confused before, she was more confused with Faceless' new statement. The person she was right now grateful to, was Jason. Jason had told her little about her parents. Maybe Faceless knew her parents and there was no harm in telling him what Jason said.

"My dad was a soldier, his name was Harrison. He died alongside nine other soldiers but my mum ran away from the North after she discovered the soldier's wives were mysteriously dying one by one. She ran to Benin and only discovered she was pregnant later. She met Jason's mum, a doctor at the hospital she was visiting for her antenatal. She too was pregnant but lost her baby. My mum made her take me before she died. I swear I'm not wearing any silicone face. Maybe you knew my mum but I'm telling you the truth. I know this because I've seen my real dad and mum's picture in my mum's diary" she said very quickly.

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She waited, tensed and afraid of his reaction. She expected him to hit her for lying but instead he was pulling off his mask. That never ended well. She knew for certain she was about to die.

There was no way he would allow her live after seeing his face. She quickly shut her eyes maybe if she refused to see him, she had a chance of surviving. She felt his palms on both sides of her cheek, it was surprisingly warm, and there was no roughness to it. Her body was feeling relaxed on its own but her mind was not.

“How old are you?”

She did not understand his reasons for asking, but if telling him would delay his attack, then she was okay with it.

“I’m twenty.”

There was a long pause, his palms were still on her cheeks.

“Open your eyes” he said after what felt like one dreadful hour of waiting for him to strike.

His voice was surprisingly calm, too calm. There was something in that voice, emotions she could not place. Gradually she opened her eyes. She was frozen on the spot as soon as she saw who was staring back at her. She knew that face. He was older but the face had not changed.

She opened her mouth to speak but only one word could come out.

“Dad?”

I'm not your dad" he answered.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Jason had always driven her crazy with his ways of answering questions but she might have found someone worse than Jason. She had asked him if he was her dad as a rhetorical question, but he had answered and the answer he gave was more confusing than any answer Jason had ever given her. He did not say another word as he was immediately unlocking her handcuff with a key he brought out from his pocket. She did not feel any relief immediately. She felt the opposite. It was as if her arm close to her shoulder was already used to the new position. She tried stretching her hands to allow blood to flow back into her numb muscles and at the same time she followed Faceless' movement. He was opening the wardrobe. He brought out a first aid box and was back to her in a jiffy. She allowed him take her to sit on the bed and reacted as she felt the sting of methylated spirit on her cheeks. If he was Jason, she would have already asked him tons of questions but she was still afraid of him. She just waited to hear what he had to explain. No one had told her the man with her mum in the picture she saw was her dad, but common sense meant he was her dad. But on a second thought, he could have been his mum's brother. She just wished Jason had allowed her to read everything. Another sting on her knees

brought her focus back to Faceless. He was cleaning her knees. She took another look at his face. Her eyes were not deceiving her, he really looked like the man in that picture, although older.

“Cynthia never told me she was pregnant. I saw her few days before the incident. I had even asked Harrison if he was soon going to be a father, but he had said no. I came back for her, but I was told she died in an accident alongside some soldiers’ wives on their way to meet an Alhaji who called them. I was told they were given mass burial because their bodies were burnt beyond recognition. She never tried contacting me. If I had known she was still alive, I would have looked for her. I’m sorry.”

That statement just answered nothing on who he was. At least she now knew Faceless was acquitted with her parents, but before she could ask him who he was, she found herself wrapped in the body of Faceless. He held her so tight that she could almost not breathe and the pains she had been feeling all over her body increased. She tried pretending she was okay but failed.

“Ouch” she said hoping he would get the message.

He just got little of the message, he was no longer suffocating her.

“I’m sorry, Cynthia I’m sorry. This feels like a dream.”

He was crying, like real tears. He called Cynthia but she was not sure if she was the one he was apologizing to.

“Living without them was like hell for me” he said, his voice now steady.

“You knew my parents?” she asked hoping he would finally clarify his relationship with her parents and also explain why he was the one in the picture with her mum and not her dad.

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He gradually released her and made her sit back on the bed. For what felt like an hour, he just stared at her.

“You look just like your mum, exactly like her when she ran away to meet Harrison.”

“Sir I’m confused. You look like the person I saw with my mum in a picture.”

“That’s not me. That was Harrison, my kid brother.”

“You are my Uncle?”

“Yes both from your dad and mum’s side.”

“What?” she asked.

“From what you said, Jason’s mum raised you but you are listed as Jason’s fiancée. he said.

That answered almost every question she wanted to ask.

“Your parents raised my mum?”

“My mum only. There was an orphanage here in Onitsha which was not far from our house.

Every time my mum was coming back from the market, Cynthia had always helped her bring her goods home. There was a particular week she never showed up. My mum went to make inquiry, she discovered Cynthia was seriously down with malaria. With permission from the orphanage, she took Cynthia home, she never went back to the orphanage. She became my little sister, she was same age with your dad so I had two younger siblings. I was three years older. Your dad wanted to follow my footsteps, he joined the army immediately after finishing secondary school. Cynthia was helping my mum with her business, she was supposed to go to the University the next year. One day, I got a message from my mum that Cynthia was missing. I had to come

home from Lagos which was my base. My mum did not report her missing because most of her clothes were gone, it meant she left by herself. A day later, we received a letter from Harrison that she was with her. She was twenty one then. I had to travel the next day to Kano where Harrison was based only to discover they had already done court marriage. Apparently they could because they were of marriageable age according to the law. There was nothing I could do. I stayed there for a day. Harrison told me that there was something fishy going on. He gave me a file he had stumbled upon. He never told me how he got the file. I told him to ignore it and stay safe. I got a message from Cynthia three days after I had gone back to Lagos that Harrison's barrack was attacked by Fulani herdsman and he was killed alongside nine other soldiers. I could not leave immediately because I had to get another permission from my commander. By the time I got to Kano which was six days later, I was told Cynthia died in an accident with four of the dead soldier's wives on their way to Kaduna to meet one Alahji. My mum died a month later. She fainted and never woke up. I never looked at the file Harrison gave me until after the incident. I opened the file and discovered Harrison and others were murdered. There was an ongoing coup plot, that was during the Third Republic and Babangida was ruling. He had not yet handed power to Shonekan. Harrison had gotten hold of a document that showed how their plans would be carried out, and he was killed for it."

Why was she crying? She did not even feel anything when Jason told her little about her parents, but now it felt as if those emotions were waiting for the right time to come out. She allowed Faceless to pull her to his chest.

"The coup was successful as Abacha took over power in December. There was something else I read in that file that was disturbing. One of it was the marginalization of the Igbos and Niger Delta. Power will completely be held by only the Hausas. There was another plan to Islamize

Nigeria. Although there were many Hausas that were against that plot, most of them were even Muslims, those who believed in Wahhabism which is an extremely strict form of Sunni Islam, were more. Boko Haram is a product of that plan. I had to do something to protect my people. Major Ahmed was my partner. I even showed him and two others the file. He was against it but never openly spoke against it when we were with other soldiers. I think he was the one who wanted me out. After I was attacked, I faked my own death and disappeared.”

She tried following everything he said but could not comprehend all. What caught more of her attention was Major Ahmed’s name. He knew him.

“I’m sorry Cynthia, I loved your mum, and I still miss her. Your dad was my only brother but I’m sorry I can’t allow Major Ahmed and his men destroy my twenty year plan” he said gently pulling her away from him.

Two things registered. First, he loved her mum, and second, he would still attack Jason.

“No, no Uncle, you cannot, please, you cannot attack Jason. They are not the bad guys” she said grabbing Faceless hands.

Faceless held her face with his palm, she tried shifting as a result of the pain she felt, he understood and placed his hands on her shoulder. She looked at him pleadingly.

“Cynthia, there is nothing I can promise you except that I will keep you safe. You are my niece, from the two people I cherished. I can’t hurt you but you have to know this is war. I have gone through a lot to get this far and I won’t let them stop me. You need to know that this fight is for our own good, you are a Biafran too.”

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The way he said it made her case hopeless. It was obvious there was no way she could convince him to change his mind. There was something but she could not remember.

“You will stay here till this fight is over. I will send somebody to get you something to eat, and some clothes” he said standing up and walking towards the door.

He was almost opening the door when she remembered.

“No” she shouted racing towards him.

He paused and turned to face her.

“No, you don’t understand. You cannot make that call, if you do, millions will die.”

“Is that the lie Jason told you? There was no casualty the last time and this one won’t be different. Everyone have been told not to be around the Stadium today.”

“No Jason does not lie. He does not know how to lie that’s why he is not sociable.”

That was not the way she wanted to put it, but the right words were not coming out.

“There is no match that will be played at the stadium today. Jason must have been deceived by Major Ahmed.”

“No it’s not the stadium. You have been deceived by Nick and the weapon company. There are four other bombs in residential areas which will explode when you make that call. Jason’s original plan was not to come here. He was supposed to take the files containing the exact location of the bombs to Lagos but the attacks were delaying him. He had to change course which is to stop you from making the planned life call” she said very fast.

Faceless was no longer by the door, he was by her side.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know much about The Circle but I think they won’t bother if the bomb will explode like last time. Jason told me the weapon company supplying your weapons want war because war means money. You said it yourself that George impersonated one of them. They discovered there were four more bombs in areas housing Hausas and Yorubas. They are all connected to the call you are to make today. Once you make that call, the bombs would explode.”

Faceless went to sit down on the bed after her last speech.

“Are you sure?”

“Nick himself said it, Jason cannot lie. He was not told by Major Ahmed. He and George discovered the true intention of that company by themselves” she said joining Faceless on the bed.

But Faceless stood up from the bed, he moved towards the wardrobe. She did not wait long to find out why as he started punching the wooden door. For no reason she was afraid again. She knew he believed her but she could not talk to him about Jason in his current situation. And Jason should almost be at the premises. She wished there was a way to tell Jason that there was a trap. She wished she could tell Jason that she was safe and he should not come. Her eyes caught her pink hand band. She started rubbing it absentmindedly. Jason had given it to her after Mum and Dad’s burial.

“This contains my heart. It means no matter how far I am from you, my heart will always be with you. So anytime you miss me just press the middle of this hand band and I will be there” he had said.

At first she did not want to collect it because it was pink and larger than the normal rubber hand band. Jason knew she was not into pink, yet he made a pink hand band for her. Jason had said it was pink because nobody will suspect a girly colour. He never explained what he meant neither did he explain the meaning of the heart statement. It had felt weird then. She was already having feelings for Jason but felt it was one sided. Then, she almost believed Jason had feelings for her but after Jason had said no one suspected pink colour she knew Jason was just being a brother. She had never removed the band from her hand because Jason made her promise not to.

Her hand was vibrating, it was like the feeling one get from touching a vibrating phone. She had been pressing the band tightly with her right hand as she stared at Faceless while her mind was on Jason’s predicament. She quickly looked down to see what was causing the vibration. It was the hand band. The middle was opening. She watched in shock as it opened up to a device that looked like a small version of Jason’s wrist watch. It was like those wrist watches that had calculator with up to fifteen tiny buttons but flat. This one did not only have the numbers 1, 2, 3 written on the buttons. The buttons looked like a Nokia touch phone buttons. The first button had letters A, B, C and number 1 written on it. The tiny screen was displaying blue light.

“What’s that?”

She jolted and almost fell off the bed but was held back by Faceless.

“I have no idea. It was a gift from Jason. I think I might have activated it” she answered showing Faceless her hand.

She pulled her hand back after Faceless had studied it. She had no idea what to do with it. But there was one thing she was sure of. The buttons were not there as decorations. She typed the first thing that came to her mind.

‘Jason.’

Nothing happened. She studied the buttons again. There was a button having the word ‘send.’ Without wasting time, she punched it and watched as the word she typed disappeared from the tiny screen.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

He had once sat in an enclosed space for more than fifteen hours and never felt it. He had only been there for less than an hour and he had never been this apprehensive. He did not believe his prayer would work. He only prayed because Mum had said he should pray. Right now, he was waiting for Nick’s plan C. He found it difficult to organize himself. Thoughts of what Cindy must be going through filled his mind. He was brought back to the present by a blink on his tool box. The tool box was designed to pick up any interference, as far as three hundred yards, as long as that thing was connected to the internet. Something was moving towards his direction, like it was searching for him. He connected the signal to Flight 10 and followed Flight 10’s movement with his spectacle. He watched in horror as he discovered the helicopter crash and the fire had attracted some of the villagers. Some brought water tanker to the scene and they

were doing their best to quench and stop the spread of the fire. If only they knew their lives were in danger. Flight 10 had left them as it flew towards where the signal was coming from. He knew the device. It was created to help locate weapons. It was flat and cylindrical in shape. It was made up of AB monomer and some other components. It had a tiny camera and it was controlled using a network provider. It had an affinity for weapons and bullets. There was a big tire at the center and it moved in circle. Theirs was different. George was usually the one in charge of the hardware while he took care of the software. They called theirs gun magnet although it did the opposite. They were still yet to find what could magnet a bullet to itself. The Russian company they bought it from called it weaponry locator. Theirs repelled bullet from getting to target. In addition to what the original one had, their Gun Magnet contained Kevlar and a little of titanium. A little was used in creating Flight 10. George had also added Neodymium, a rare earth magnet in the creation process. They had tried using eddy currents but discovered it would work against the user. Its components also contained elements that have a little affinity to copper and steel, which were components found in bullets. It was George's idea of protection. It was not yet tested. He could hack into the weaponry locator and destroy it, but he was not ready to battle with the other hacker. He quickly mounted his XM2, but instead of the explosive bullet he inserted a Lead Round Nose, connected the bullet's camera to Flight 10, then he opened up the mat and fired. Since the distance was longer, it took forty seconds to hit the weaponry locator. It exploded on contact. He immediately understood Nick's plan C. If that thing had gotten within a yard of him before he shot it, he would have been dead. Good thing the gadget was far away from civilians, there would have been numerous casualties. But the villagers now had a bigger fire to quench, he wished they would take it as a signal to run but they wouldn't, except someone died. He closed the mat and sat back wondering why Nick was being careful. From his form of attack it was clear

Nick was trying to prevent civilian casualties. The only possible reason would be the documents on their undercover which George had sent to Major Ahmed. Nick must have read it. For a while they just studied the Biafran Soldiers, their Push factor.

Throughout their undercover mission, they were able to learn something about the Biafran soldiers. They were loyal even unto death. It was both unique and intriguing because must loyalties found in Nigeria were linked to religion. The undercover mission Ghost and Fast went in the North concerning Boko Haram showed that they were loyal to religion. It was very easy to convince Muslims who were followers of Wahhabism form of Sunni Islam to kill non-Muslims especially the uneducated ones. You just had to tell them they were fighting for Allah and they would fight and kill even their own people who were non-Muslims. They were few in numbers but ten armed persons were more dangerous than fifty unarmed persons. Ghost a Hausa by tribe, had reported that the average Hausas whether Muslims or Christians were the best tribe to live with. They had the simplest form of living and were good host to visitors. It was only the few extremists that killed and maimed and the unfortunate thing was those behind them were politicians using religion to propagate their agenda. That was because there was no other way to convince them to carry weapons. According to the report, if the extremist were more, Nigeria would have been a war zone with countries like Syria and Iran looking peaceful when compared to Nigeria. He remembered the news that followed Ghost and Fast visit. The army had intercepted some Boko Haram members on their way to invade a small Christian community. Forty of them were killed and the army lost no one. Fast had said it was better Nigerians believed it was really a large Nigerian army and not two men that intercepted them. Fast had also said many of them only knew where to press to shoot a gun and they lacked training, they only had zeal. But the Igbos were different, it was not a religious fight and they did not care if one was a

Muslim or a Christian, as long as the person was an indigene, he was a brother. They would never kill their own. They obeyed their leader to the core and nobody could deceive them. Even though he wore a mask, there was a code and a mark they used in recognizing Faceless. Except that person masking as Faceless had that large scar on the back of his arm and could speak that language with their native tongue and accent, then they could be deceived. Nick knew very well that if a civilian died from the attempts on his life, Faceless would cancel the life call and that could ruin so many things, because it had to be very obvious to all Nigerians that it was Biafra that started the war.

There was another blink on his wrist watch. His attention quickly shifted to his watch. It was Cindy. She had activated the hand band. He stared at his wrist watch in shock. This was not possible, there was no way Cindy would know to activate the device in the hand band. It needed an application of force on the middle. Before he could logically unravel how Cindy was able to activate the band, a message came from her.

‘Jason.’

He did not know when his knees hit the ground, something liquid was coming out of his eyes. He used his right hand to wipe it off. There was no logic to this, something had happened, a miracle had happen.

‘Cindy are you okay?’ he quickly responded.

His watch showed that she was typing. But how was that possible? Maybe she was kept in a room and left to be there by herself knowing fully well that she wouldn’t be able to escape.

‘Don’t come, please go back, you won’t believe Faceless is my Uncle’ she wrote sending the messages bit by bits because of the tiny screen.

He read it more than three times but could not understand the message. He tried remembering Mum’s diary but there was no mention of an uncle, although Mum had written that Cynthia was very reserved, that the things she did not say were more.

“You will know because you will not be able to explain it.” Mum’s voice played back in his mind.

‘Was this what Mum meant’ he thought as he connected his tool box to Cindy’s signal. He would know her exact location in ten seconds.

‘I’m relieved. Is he aware he is about to murder millions of people?’ he wrote still yet to accept that everything happening at that moment was real.

He now knew her exact location, it was few minutes’ drive from his current position.

‘I won’t let that happen. Faceless.’

It was real. Faceless was Cindy’s Uncle. What a turn of event. She was kidnapped and thrown to a dangerous man who turned out to be her Uncle. He would have time to analyze that later.

‘You can’t stop them Faceless. You need us.’

Suddenly, the relief he just had moments ago ended abruptly. He had almost forgotten Nick.

‘I am going to cancel the online call’ Faceless responded.

‘No you can’t let him know’ he replied almost immediately.

If Cindy was in danger before, she was now in a critical situation.

‘Why?’

How was he going to explain that if Nick discovered who Cindy was, he would use her against him?

‘Cindy has to get out of there now, you can’t handle Nick. He must not know who she is.’

They had to be sending their messages bits by bits because of the tiny screen being used.

Cindy was the one in danger, more than Faceless. Nwankwo their known leader would never make that phone call except he was told by Faceless and Faceless would have to explain the reason behind a change of plan, because Faceless was supposed to make the call with Nwankwo by his side. He would rather die. That did not change the fact that Nick was dangerous. If he got suspicious, Cindy would be used for negotiations. She had to get out of there.

‘Who is with the phone for the call?’ he asked, trying to know which path to follow.

‘I’m with it.’

‘Send me the IMEI number.’

But even as he sent the message, he knew that wouldn’t change anything, the bombs all had a cellphone inserted inside and they were all linked to each other. They had customized Faceless line to be the only line but there was also the fact that they could change it. But he could hack into the phone and use it to stall. He would have to contact Ghost to find out what was happening in Lagos.

‘Why?’

The Next Two Days

‘I need to hack your phone and prevent the call from being made.’

‘Don’t worry about that I will handle it. Just know your Fiancée is very safe here.’

This was getting out of hand.

‘Faceless, BlueAI have been planning this for long. Nick is now in control, he has plan A-Z. If you cancel that call he is going to suspect Cindy and he will use her to make you do that call.

You and the known leader are safe because he knows none of your men will obey anyone one else apart from you, and you must be alive to make that call. Cindy is now your weakness.

Forget about being in control as long as Nick is there you can’t win. There is a guy inside controlling everything software and internet, Nick is controlling that guy. They have weapons that can open a door in less than five seconds. You have to work with me and my team to end this. But you can’t let him know you are aware of their plan. Please you have to believe the people you are dealing with are extremely dangerous. The only thing you can do now is to play along and give me time to handle Nick. But Cindy has to get out of there.’

‘I am going to listen to you because Nick told me you don’t lie, you act base of probability.’

Even though he should not feel relieved, he still felt a burden had been lifted. Nick had done something that was now helping him.

‘Is there a way to get her out without Nick knowing?’

‘Yes. But there is only one way Nick won’t know.’

He waited for what he was going to send next. Something told him he wouldn’t like it.

‘Do you know our place at Obosi?’

The Next Two Days

That was the area George was killed few minutes after they had returned from a meeting where George impersonated as Mark.

‘Yes.’

‘This place has a tunnel linked to that house. Nobody except two of my men is aware of it. I’m going to send her to that place with one of my trusted men. It would look like an escape. You try and pick her there. What next?’

‘Can’t you escape with her? I will blow up that underground house.’

‘Never. I won’t abandon my men.’

He had almost forgotten about that. That was why they would die to protect him.

‘Okay, so I have to meet her there?’

‘No, there is an abandoned hut not far from the house.’

‘I know it.’

‘Pick her there.’

‘What are you not telling me?’ he asked after receiving the IMEI he asked for.

‘I know you can track her movements, you must be there at the exact time she will get there.’

‘And?’

‘Give me some time to prepare her escape.’

‘Do me another favour.’

The Next Two Days

‘What?’

‘Plug the phone to one of the computers in the monitoring room.’

‘You can’t delay’ he replied.

That reply was sending the wrong signal.

‘Hope your room is not bugged?’ he asked fearing the worst.

‘No one enters except my trusted men.’

‘Use that band to move round the room.’

He had to know for himself. He waited and after some time he got a message.

‘Done.’

‘Nothing, it’s clear.’

‘How do you plan on getting to Obosi to pick up my niece?’

‘Worry about getting her out of there.’

‘That’s all then, please don’t let anything happen to my niece. I will still kill you for my six men.’

‘Let’s stop the death of millions first.’

‘Jason.’

He just knew Cindy was back.

‘I will see you soon. Don’t hold the band tightly.’

‘I love you. Bye.’

That was so unexpected. It was not new because it was something his family had always said to one another while growing up. Mum and Dad had always created that atmosphere of love but this was different. She wrote it but he heard it. Emotions that were better left dormant especially that period surfaced. From hearing it, he felt it, felt her body on him, felt those long years of tortures, having to allow her rest on his chest, then doing all night wake-keeping, then he felt the taste of her lips, the emotions were too much and for someone like him it was overwhelming. The distraction did not last long as thoughts of Cindy not yet out of danger transported him back to reality.

He tried to analyze Faceless messages. He was going to send her to him with escape as the medium. That he knew, but how he was going to plan the escape was something he could not fathom. As he waited for the signal to show Cindy was on the move, he brought out weapons from his big bag. He had a lot of cartridges to choose from. George’s Black was fully loaded and there was another weapon he was going to use, that may be the only way to get to Obosi alive. He brought out their gun magnet, he was going to use it for the first time.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

She sent the message because she felt she might not have another opportunity to tell Jason how she felt. There were many 'what ifs' and she wanted Jason to know how she felt in case they never saw each other again. But the thing she could not place was the reason behind those sudden feelings of never seeing Jason again. She was still afraid even after knowing she would be safe as long as she was with Faceless. 'It must be connected to Jason' she thought. She was afraid for Jason but she did not know why. Faceless had been looking at the small screen and saw when Jason replied and what he wrote. He had pulled the hand band from her hand after Jason had inquired if he knew millions were about to die. She had no idea what they talked about. It was an empty screen she saw when he gave the hand band back to her. It was as if messages don't get saved, they just disappeared after someone clicked the send button.

He had not said a single word and had been pacing around the room since then. She studied the gadget again; maybe there was a button she could click on that would reveal conversations. She gave up after studying the buttons and having no clue what to press. It was better she left things be than to press a button that would disconnect her from Jason. She still wanted to chat with Jason but she felt it would be a distraction. She raised her head to study Faceless. He had stopped pacing, but from the way he was staring uninterestingly at the wardrobe, and also the way his right palm was placed under his jaw, she knew he was deep in thought.

The pressure to send another message to Jason was increasing and her hand was moving on his own. She wrote 'Jason' but before she could click the send button, Faceless was suddenly in front of her.

"Cynthia, I'm sorry."

He was kneeling down and holding her hands. Between his statement and his position she could not tell which was more confusing.

"I don't understand Uncle. What are you sorry for and why are you kneeling down?"

"I'm sorry. If what Jason said is correct, then this is the only way."

That answer was not helpful but before she could ask for more explanation, she was pushed into the bed by Faceless and her nightgown was being torn. She was too shocked that she did not feel the sharp pain of being cut until she saw blood flowing down from her shoulder.

"Uncle what are you....."

Her question was stopped by a punch to her cheek. Pains suddenly became part of her.

Everywhere hurt, including the former pains but her heart was in shambles. Faceless left the bed.

The Next Two Days

She tried gathering her torn gown to cover her exposed body but the pain on her shoulder was too much. Blood had already flowed into her gown and the white bed sheet. If she did nothing about the blood, she just knew she would die from loss of blood. Forgetting her exposed body and the pain, she pulled the gown to her bleeding shoulder to serve as cotton wool.

Faceless came back to the bed. He brought out his phone and took a picture of her. After typing something with the phone he placed it close to his ears like he was making a call. She shifted away from him but he quickly covered up the space.

“Ebuka, are you still in the control room.... Did you see the photo I sent?.....I need you now”

Faceless said looking everywhere but at her.

“I know, but you are the only Doc I can trust, I guess I was too rough and Nick said she must not die.”

In the midst of her pain, she tried to understand what Faceless was talking about.

“Yes you can tell him why you are leaving, this is my place and I decide who lives. Jason killed six of my men and he does not expect me to keep her in good shape.....she is seriously bleeding. You have to come fast.....tell Uche B to replace you at the control room.”

There was a long pause.

“What do you mean he wants to take her away from me? She is my hostage. I only agreed to keep her alive and that’s all I can promise.....I don’t. I want you in my room in three minutes” he shouted.

He removed the phone from his ear and after dropping it in his pocket he raised his head. She did not know what to make of the expression on his face, was it pain or was that how psycho faces

looked like? Her pain was back, the cloth on her shoulders was getting soaked. She applied pressure on the cut and bit her lips to stop herself from screaming. She succeeded in not screaming but could not stop the tears from falling. Faceless was no longer on the bed. He was by the wardrobe, he came by with a black long sleeve shirt, then he wore it on her. He was very gentle and careful with her injured shoulder.

“Why are you doing this to me?” she asked.

She could not hold it back, she was crying. Faceless suddenly pulled her to him. She tensed waiting for what he would do next, but he did nothing. She raced her face to look at him. He was crying.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry” he said, gently pulling her closer.

He pulled her head to rest on his chest. She was supposed to be afraid but somehow her fears disappeared. She was beginning to feel weak, she had not eaten anything since morning and her body was tired. Her brain was also tired. She did not try to understand Faceless recent action, she just accepted the present Faceless who was holding her the way Dad used to.

There was a knock at the door. The door opened after a second knock. A tall lanky fellow came in, he was on military uniform but not exactly like that of the Nigerian army's colour. He should be in his late thirties or early forties. He had a big box with him.

“Ebuka help me, please help me” Faceless pleaded.

“This is totally opposite of what I was expecting. Faceless what is going on?”

“Please treat her first.”

The Next Two Days

The man was beside the bed with his box. Faceless released his hold on her but did not leave.

The man removed the piece of her night gown she was using to put pressure on the cut causing a new wave of pain.

“This is going to hurt” the man said to her and before she could respond, she felt the pain of a hundred injection before she could smell methylated spirit.

She tried bearing the pain but saw herself losing as darkness clouded her vision.

He was all set but Cindy had not yet moved. Obosi was far from Akwukwa and the shortest route was through Ekule River. The Biafran building was at the extreme end of Obosi. This meant the tunnel was built to boycott the river and continued close to Ogbaru L.G.A. One of the most important thing they did during an undercover mission, was they studied their environment. It bothered him that they never considered the possibility of an underground house and tunnel. Not that it was surprising because most criminals on the run usually had more than five escape routes. That tunnel must have been in existence for long but the underground house should be something new. It would take Cindy and her escort more than an hour to get there if not hours. The hut he was talking about was not very far from their hide out where George was killed. There was also an uncompleted storey building close to their hide out. They had never suspected anything wrong with the hut because there was no suspicious activity but he had always wondered why such a damaged building was still left untouched in such a civilized place, now he knew.

As for him, he was going to take the shortest route. He was already very close to Ekule River. Ten minutes of running was all he needed. Nick was the strategist but Wild was the master planner. Before Wild started any mission, he first studied the place and placed everything needed for a way out, and most importantly for a way in. He had also taught them the importance of having everything in place in one of his trainings. As a result of that, they had placed cars and ammunitions in different locations after they had studied Onitsha and its environs. Cars for movement and ammunitions for defense. George had suggested they got a boat after touring all the rivers close to and inside Onitsha.

“You never know when we will get to cruise through River Niger.” he had said.

Now he was going to be cruising through River Ekule with hundreds of bullets raining on him. He could get there within an hour if all went well without any confrontation which was only going to happen in a dream. He never believed a day would come when he would act on luck and probability because the gadget he was about to use to cross Ekule River had been somehow tested, but not under a life and death situation. He could not risk using it during his ten minutes run because the battery life reduced fast and solar energy was not powerful enough. He would need it full when crossing the river. He brought out their personal bulletproof vest and their bulletproof helmet. They were the best but even a bulletproof material had its limitations. He could withstand the BlueAI mercenaries but not with one of The Special Force. They were trained to target anywhere but the chest if someone was wearing any protection, and they still had bullets that exploded on contact.

The only plan available was to move discreetly. He knew Nick had people on ground searching for him. He had not heard the sound of any helicopter since he shot down the last one but he was

very sure one would visit the river. Coming out of hiding meant exposure to their bird, and that meant attack. He switched over to Flight 10 to see what was going on. The fire had reduced, the villagers were doing a great job. He also saw five BlueAI mercenaries patrolling the area in a disorganized formation. They were far from him and were going the opposite direction. Just a look at them told him all he wanted to know. They had no sense of danger which was very essential, that was because they were high on drugs. Flight 10 passed them and flew a bit closer to him but not too close. He counted about twenty more of them and only group five were closer to him, one of them was a member of The Special Force. He was called Bull because he acted like one. He shot before thinking and failed to join The Circle because he had no control of his anger. One dangerous thing about him was his instinct. It was higher than the average human. Bull had looked up as Flight 10 flew by, he had even fired at the bird. No wonder he was closer to him than the others.

Apart from the first and second group, every other group had a Special Force member in it. He wondered what Nick had promised them that so many had to defect. It took him less than ten seconds to figure out the problem. Every Special Force he had seen and encountered had tried joining The Circle, but they had failed not because they were not capable but because they failed in character test. Nick must have convinced them to join him to show The Circle what they were made of. They did not understand that what made them good and different was not just their skills in battles but their patience, self-control, and most importantly, they were trustworthy. Character as they were thought was the most powerful skill a soldier could possess. He remembered Bull had found Wild's favorite quote funny.

"Fear is for the brave, it is a personality and cowards can never stare it in the eyes" Wild always said before any training.

"I fear nothing" Bull had replied Wild after few trainings.

"Wisdom is only for the wise. Only the wise will understand" Wild had responded.

He did not understand that statement until later. He later got to know that Wild was not referring to cowards who run away when they were afraid, he knew none of the Special Force would do that. The coward he meant were fearless soldiers who would never confront fear because they would not even notice it when they see it. Only the brave would know it, locate it, and then confront it. People like Bull, Nick and others would never see meaning in that word. They depended so much on their skills and found it insulting that they were disqualified from joining the best of the best because of a default in some character traits. He remembered he and George were drugged by a retired soldier who Major said they could trust. Later, they found themselves being forced to choose between exposing the Special Force or death through torture. They had actually thought it was a test but changed their mind when the torture started. But they did not cave in. At the end, they were welcomed to the Circle with a warning to never disclose their last stage and their test to anyone except to Circles. Later, he got to know everyone had different test, Nick was the only one to pass but Wild had listened to him not to accept Nick. There would be more of Nick and colleagues and it was going to be a big issue for Major Ahmed to handle.

He sent Flight 10 to fly ahead of him to view the Ekule River. The boat was still there. It was located where people normally avoided. The path was a bit bushy but manageable. They had paid a young fisherman to be maintaining it. George had set an automatic weekly payment because he believed if he paid everything, he would abandon the maintenance. The young man was not there but the boat looked okay.

His hand that had the android wrist watch was vibrating. He looked at it and knew immediately that something was wrong with Cindy. He could monitor her pulse rate with the gadget she was wearing and it was too fast. ‘What the heck is going on?’ he thought as he watched the pulse rate drop back to normal then went fast again. They had been trained on how a humans' pulse can indicate fear, joy, anger and others. He could not explain what he was reading. He could not endure not knowing. With his tool box, he took control of the hand band. He switched the device to audio, he could manipulate it enough to hear what was going on. Cindy would never permit that but it was not the time to decide what was wrong or right. He had wanted to do the same to Faceless’ phone but it was dangerous. It could destroy their plan on Faceless remaining ignorant to BlueAI Company’s plan. He inserted his wireless earpiece in his right ear and connected it to his tool box. He could hear two voices, one belonged to Faceless, and the other was unknown.

“Let me get this straight. The Cynthia you told me about thirteen years ago, was actually alive but died giving birth to her?”

“How else do you want me to explain?” That was Faceless speaking.

“I’m not doubting you because she looks exactly like the picture you have at Obosi. But are you sure is not silicone mask?”

“No you and Nnamdi are the only ones that I’ve told about my personal past and there was no way they entered my room at Obosi and opened up my drawer. She knew too much, even things I did not say. I never told you my brother’s English name but she knew it.”

“This is something. But how can you trust Major Ahmed and his Circle team?”

“Because they would have nothing to gain.”

“Explain.”

“I know Ahmed. He had always talked about separating talented soldiers and making them better. I had thought he was joking but I think he made his dream a reality. I don’t think he knows I’m alive. They have nothing to gain or lose if there are really four more bombs. I would rather take the risk of preventing the bomb from exploding than taking the risk of finding out if what Jason said is true.”

“You were pretty good. I would have never been able to guess what you had in mind. But don’t you think Nick will become suspicious on how Jason knew she was going to escape?”

“No. I’m going to ask him if Cindy’s watch was just an ordinary watch after the escape.”

“I don’t understand.”

“That thing that look like those watches that have button was not there before. It was just a pink hand band. She had accidentally switched it on. It opened up to reveal that gadget. I saw it with my own eyes. Cynthia was also shocked. She had no idea what it was. When I asked Nick if she was bugged, he had told me they had removed it. He will understand when I ask him.”

“Why do I have a chill? This Jason guy is something else.”

“That’s why I believe they can handle Nick and his crew, once he gains control of their system, he will have control of their gadgets, then the fight will be even.”

“Now I know why you are our leader.”

“But I can’t believe I hurt my niece, the shock in her face would hurt me forever.”

“You did the right thing Faceless. And I will escape with her.”

“Ebuka I hope you know what that means.”

“I know Faceless.”

He switched off the sound, he was losing control from getting pissed and he needed to concentrate on meeting her and not what Faceless might have done to her. He did not need an interpretation to understand Faceless’ plan and how he went about it. The man was good but he was going to kill him for hurting Cindy whether it was the only way out or not. He tried thinking of something to calm him, but the more he thought, the more his mind went back to the fact that Cindy was in pains probably knocked out because of Faceless and maybe Nick. His body started shaking and he just knew he might not be able to get himself back. From nowhere a memory came to his mind. The day he had promised Cindy he would allow her sleep in his room if she followed Dad to collect the things Mum needed to cook. He just knew if he could survive that night without breaking his promise to Mum, he would pass any other test life presented him with. He had made sure she did not rest her head on his chest and had tried keeping his distance but none of that had worked. He had felt he was just taking his first breath in nine hours the next morning when Cindy had left. But it was funny how the human body worked because he never felt any of those things two days later after Cindy became seriously ill. She had slept on his chest throughout, till the fever went down. He had even pulled her closer, he wanted to be very sure she was okay and the closer the better. Somehow he was gaining back control.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

It was the voices of people that pulled her out of the dark. She opened her eyes and discovered she was still in the same room, still on the same bed, although it looked like the bed sheet had been changed. Even the black long-sleeved was still on her. Her torn night gown was still intact. There was a bandage where Faceless cut her. A drip was flowing into her body through her left hand. But the pain was still there.

“Are you sure you can deal with this Nick alone. I read that file you gave me and those people seem dangerous?” the man asked.

“Ebuka I’m not going to handle him alone because you are coming back. You must come back” Faceless said holding the shoulders of the man.

“Of course. I won’t allow a stupid company destroy our years of struggle. Just make sure you are still alive when I come back.” the man responded.

She tried standing up but screamed as she felt a sharp pain on her shoulder. Faceless was beside her almost immediately.

“Cynthia, Thank God you are back” he said gently raising her up.

“It hurts” she said as she rested her head on Faceless' shoulder.

“Ebuka can you give her the pain relief shot now?” Faceless asked.

“She is still weak, she needs to first eat a little food” Ebuka said bringing out a flask from the box.

Faceless took it from him and opened it. It was jollof rice.

“Cynthia, you need to eat fast, so he can give you an injection to stop the pain. We are running out of time.”

She took the spoon and started eating while Faceless held the flask. She ate not because she was hungry but because she really needed the pains to stop. There was a long silence. After some spoonful of rice, she raised her head to see what Ebuka was doing. A part of the wardrobe was opened. It had a lot of weapons neatly and well arranged. He was mounting weapons, some he kept in a back bag. Amongst the weapons was a local bomb. She knew it was a bomb because she had watched it in movies. It was in form of a calabash shape, black and very small, it exploded once the tip was opened. She suddenly lost appetite.

“What’s is going on?” she asked Faceless.

The Next Two Days

“Cynthia, eat your food.”

“At least you can tell me something. You keep changing..” she could not finish her statement as tears started flowing again.

“You are going to meet Jason.”

“What?”

“Jason said you are not safe here. I needed something that will make your escape reasonable.”

“By hurting me?”

Faceless did not answer immediately. He looked like he was in pains.

“I’m sorry, I needed a reason to bring Ebuka here. Nick has to believe I hurt you and Ebuka escaped with you after seeing what I did to you. I need to protect my men. I can’t be placed in a position where I will have to choose between you and my men. I am going to live with what I did to you. I won’t forgive myself.”

Men don’t cry, she had never seen Jason cry. Even when Mum and Dad died, Jason did not shed any visible tears. But this man she had been afraid of, was crying. Looking at him alone, she could tell his tears went beyond the injuries he inflicted on her. She wished she could do something about it, it was very disturbing.

“I’m set Faceless” Ebuka said.

Faceless did not respond, he was staring at the wardrobe. Ebuka removed the drip from her hands.

“I’m pleased to meet you Cynthia. Faceless have said so much about your mother. I have seen her picture and you are the exact replica of her.”

She was too concentrated on what Ebuka was saying that she did not feel the injection he gave her on her shoulder.

“I’m done Faceless. You have to leave us now so it will look real” Ebuka said to Faceless.

“No. I think we can handle Nick. I change my mind on this stupid plan, I can’t do this” Faceless said standing up.

“Look at me. You were right, this is the only way. I’ve been in that control room, that white autistic guy is too good. I’ve been suspicious for a while. This is not because Jason said so. I know so now. You may still be in charge of the soldiers but you are no longer in control of any gadgets. After reading that file, I checked my phone to confirm something. For some time I had been thinking I opened some of my messages subconsciously but it’s not true. Ever since I plugged my phone in one of the systems in the control room, my messages are read before I read them. I’m sure Nick was listening to that conversation we just had. He had something plugged in his ear. He was angry before I told him Cynthia was manhandled by you, and I’m sure he had seen the picture before I showed him because he was looking at his phone. We outnumber them when it comes to fighters but we are outnumbered where it concerns weapons. You told me that Jason said he would handle Nick. Please let him handle Nick. From what I read in that file, I believe only Jason and The Circle can help us out. We can’t let them know we are aware of their plan, if that happens they will kill our men and keep you and Nwankwo hostage till you make that call and they will use her against you. I was angry after seeing that picture and after your call, it was unlike you. Even Nick saw my expression. This plan will work. I don’t regret fighting this

The Next Two Days

Biafran war with you. I know we will overcome at the end. But this is the only way out Faceless and I'm doing it on my own freewill" Ebuka said.

Even after Ebuka's long speech she still could not comprehend everything.

"I shouldn't have suggested it. I can't let you do this."

"I'm not doing this for you Faceless. I'm doing this for Biafra." Ebuka said carrying the bag with weapons. On his right hand was a pistol.

"Cynthia, I have to leave this room now. You have to go with Ebuka. I can't be in the room when you escape. I'm sorry our meeting was not pleasant."

"Will I see you again?"

She had so many questions she wanted to ask but that was more important.

"Yes my dear. When this war is over I hope to see you again if you want..."

"I want to. Promise me I will see you again. I will need someone to work me down the aisle."

She must have said the right thing because Faceless was smiling.

"Sure. I will see you again" he said placing a kiss on her forehead.

"Can you walk?" he asked raising her.

She still felt a bit dizzy but the pain was completely gone. She could manage.

"I think I can" she answered taking two steps.

Faceless left her and went over to Ebuka. He gave him a bear hug.

The Next Two Days

“Ebuka just do one thing for me.”

“What?” Ebuka asked.

“Don’t die.”

'This was getting more confusing', she thought as Faceless left Ebuka and walked back to her.

“You too. We both have a promise to keep. Make sure you stay alive Cynthia” he said hugging her.

He released her, picked the mask he had earlier dropped on the floor and wore it back. He started walking towards the door.

“Uncle.”

He paused but did not turn.

“Did you tell her?”

She asked because she needed to know if her mum knew about Faceless' feelings.

“I wanted to tell her that month but it was no longer important.”

“Thanks.”

He turned to face her.

“For what?”

The Next Two Days

She wanted to tell him, she was grateful he loved her mum enough to still remember her. She was grateful he still loved her dad even after losing to him, she was grateful he was alive. But she would never say enough to portray how much she meant it.

“For everything. I can’t wait to see you again” she said.

Faceless nodded, opened the door but before he could close it, she called him again.

“Uncle, I don't know your name.”

“I will tell you when we meet again” he said as he closed the door.

Her heart heard the sound the door made more than her ears.

“We have to go now” Ebuka said after few minutes.

“How?”

“Through the bathroom” he answered opening the other door and entering.

She followed him inside the bathroom. It was really a bathroom with white tiles on the wall.

There was no other door to go out. Ebuka pulled at one wall and it shifted and gave way to a tunnel. It was very dark and it looked endless.

There was a blink on his wrist watch. It brought him back to the present. Cindy was on the move. He too had to move. He directed Flight 10 back to the fifth team looking for him. They were getting too close. It was as if Bull knew exactly where he was. Of course, he

knew. Bull could track invisible foot mark, even the ones they could not see. The other teams were far away. He just had to deal with Bull's team and hope the other team wouldn't catch up with him before he got to Ekule River, because that was where he would experience the main battle. He quickly used his XM25 rifle, and with the laser sight and timing mechanism bullet, which he connected to the camera of Flight 10, he fired at Bull. It was meant to hit him on his head but Bull's instincts made him dive seconds before contact but the bullet still got his waist and exploded on contact killing all the men with him or maybe not all but maiming some. He quickly climbed out of the pit after gathering everything back to his big bag. And then he was on the run, he ran as fast as he could. The right eye of his spectacle was connected to Flight 10 who was trying to sight the closest enemy. As he ran, he found himself quoting Mum's favorite quote. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."

For the first time, he said it and believed it.

He could see their own Flight bird with the aid of Flight 10, it was following him, which meant the others would be running towards him. He increased his speed after seeing the weapons the fourth team was carrying. They were already running towards him with Andrew as their leader. Andrew was a very good marksman and he did not want to confront him now. He was by the river in less than ten minutes. He quickly unhooked the boat and removed the anchor. He ignited it with his keys and was very pleased when it worked at the first try. The river was not very deep but it would work. George had made sure it had tires that could run on land. He was three yards away when Flight 10 sent the image of Andrew's team. They were already too close. With one

hand steering the boat, he opened the gun magnet which rather repelled bullets. He switched it on and put it on flight almost the same time Andrew fired.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

They had been walking for long with nobody saying anything. That was after Ebuka had brought out a torchlight from his bag and switched it on before entering the tunnel. Even though she hated enclosed places, she had followed Ebuka when he entered the dark tunnel.

“I don’t like enclosed places” she said after few minutes of walking.

“This is the only way Cynthia, you have to try”

“Okay” she stammered rubbing her hand band.

The tunnel was beginning to come closer to her as if it was going to compress her. She could no longer breathe. She was beginning to hyperventilate. She found herself bending down.

“Cynthia are you okay” Ebuka asked.

He must have discovered she was no longer following because he came back to her.

“The wall is compressing me. I can’t.”

“It is in your mind Cynthia. Okay if you stand up I promise to tell you things about your Uncle.”

It worked because she found herself standing up.

“What do you know about my Uncle?” she asked after they had resumed walking.

“What do you want to know?”

“How long have you known him?”

“More than twenty years now.”

“That should be before I was born.”

“I guess so. But it was about few weeks after Abacha took over office. My uncle was a retired Biafran soldier. He fought with Ojukwu during the Civil war. Faceless had come to him for refuge. He had said his life was in danger. He later showed my Uncle the documents Emeka, your dad discovered. I was just sixteen then and Nnamdi was eighteen. He was my uncle’s son.”

So Emeka was her father’s native name.

The Next Two Days

“What did he tell you about my mum?”

“I got to know of your mum seven years later after we became brothers. Then I just graduated as a medical doctor.”

“You are a doctor!”

“Yes but never practiced.”

“Why are you with Biafra? Why did you join them instead of practicing?”

“Because there is no relationship between Biafra and Nigerian. Our culture, system of government is different. We are always being marginalized. There have never been any Igbo president and they won’t allow it. Biafra can stand on its own. We are continuing from where Ojukwu and my Uncle stopped.”

“Why was my Uncle crying?” she asked the most disturbing question.

“Only Faceless can answer that” he answered after a long pause.

It was as if he was thinking of the right thing to say. She was now feeling better and could see the tunnel clearly. It was looking old. The wall had green moss. The ground and wall roof also had the same moss. Never in her life would she had been able to predict what she was experiencing. Ahead was a gate.

“Is that the end of the tunnel?” She asked pointing at the gate.

“No, we just started. The gate was made by Faceless. It was part of his precautionary measures” Ebuka responded.

“This tunnel must be very old.”

“Yes, nobody can accurately point the date the tunnel was created but my Uncle said it had been there before the civil war and it was used during the war. Faceless brought the idea of building an underground house which will be connected to the tunnel. That was ten years ago.”

They were now at the gate and it was obvious the gate was not too old like the walls. Ebuka brought out a bunch of keys from his bag and with one of the keys, he opened the padlock of the gate. She was not expecting to see sunlight but she was still disappointed that the tunnel was still endless.

He was comforted for the first time since George’s death. This was because George was still active. The gun magnet whose name he would change later, was on course. The bullet Andrew fired did not get to him. It landed on the water and exploded but he was not affected. When George had designed the gun magnet, he had made sure it had the four basic forces needed for flight. Andrew fired again but instead of him being the target, it was the gun magnet he fired at. He was applying what they were taught. Major Ahmed had said most of the gadgets weakened faster when they were pressurized. That was going to be a very big issue because from what he could read from the tool box which was connected to the gun magnet, the battery wouldn’t last up to eight minutes if Andrew continued firing at it. He wished he was in one of the Niger Delta Rivers which had trees and tall shrubs covering someone on the run. He stirred the boat with one hand and operated his tool box with the other. He could not fire back because the gun magnet would repel it. If he survived this war, he was going to manipulate the device to have a part that did not repel, that part would be facing him. Right now he only needed to get to Obe

and use a car they had placed there. But that would take more than eight minutes even with his speed. George had been crazy about fighting while cruising the river that he had forced him to go with him in the middle of the night to place ammunitions and cars in different locations close to the river. There were two boats in different locations at river Niger and also they had buried weapons in many places. He checked his tool box to find out the closest. There was one at the center of Obe which was about twenty minutes run from the river bank of Obe. He could not fire from where he was because of George's gun magnet, but he could fire at Andrew using their hidden weapons. It just had to follow a different trajectory. Andrew was still firing at the gadget with a sniper rifle. He used his tool to open their hidden weapon at Obe. George had studied Ballistic missiles and had suggested they created one that could be operated from afar but instead of a weapon that could cause massive destruction, they could limit the effect to that of their laser bullet. They had built it in the shape of a cruise missile jet and it was loaded with enough laser bullets. Of course powered by solar. One could shoot the bullet from afar using their computer which they called tool box. It would remain dormant until activated. They had planned on removing everything after their mission was over. Thanks to Major Ahmed's brother in law who was their major sponsor. He had donated most of his building in different states to The Circle. And he also gave money to The Circle to add to what the government made available. It had been easy to purchase weapons and raw materials as a result of that. They had a lab house in Lagos where majority of their weapons were built. Every hand had always been on deck to help them create or recreate the perfect weapon.

As he opened up their small jet riffle, he remembered how George became his friend. He had always been on his own and many did not talk to him after many failed attempts. George had

given him a paper asking for his phone number. He had always ignored him but gave up after George continued persisting.

‘Heard you are dumb. Let’s talk like this’ George had sent as his first message.

He had replied that he just did not like talking. George had asked him to talk through chats. And that was how their friendship started. They had spoken more with each other with text message than with their mouth. With time, he discovered they had the same interest in technology and weapons, and that had sealed their bond.

Just when he was about to target his missile at Andrew, he heard the sound of an approaching helicopter. If they joined Andrew on his mission, the gun magnet would not last at all. He changed his target to the helicopter.

“Fear is for the brave, cowards can never stare it in the eyes. Identify it first before you face it, cowards never know that” He remembered Wild’s statement when he was welcoming the qualified candidates to The Circle.

Right now, the biggest threat was the helicopter and not the others that had joined Andrew to shoot at his gadget. It looked like BlueAI gave them sniper rifle and from what he could see with Flight 10, one of them in each group had something that looked like his XM25 rifle containing laser bullets.

Their bird was very visible and was following him. There was a possibility that they could connect their bird to their weapons, but he disregarded the thought almost immediately. They would have done that earlier and it was difficult because theirs navigated using the networks available. Although it seemed to be powered by solar it was not almost independent. It could

dodge weapons like Flight 10 because he was seeing the same bird he had shot. His bird was linked to his mini WIFI only, which was his tool box and every equipment was linked in a chain like network and could be operated within three hours driving distance. But he knew if that bird continued on his tail, they would send their missile from their control room using the bird to know his location. BlueAI had sophisticated weapons but they did not know The Circle had more. He used Flight 10 to focus on the helicopter. Since all his weapons and gadgets were connected, with his tool box being the channel, he quickly created a link between their jet gun and Flight 10. Flight 10's work was to send the images of targets to the camera of the already active jet and its bullet. With the network link and the camera, the missile would locate the target even if Flight 10 flew away after the missile had been launched. The tool box alerted him that the gun magnet had four minutes left. He would have been in a worse situation if the boat had been located in the open river where his enemies could have followed suit after hijacking a boat. The shooters were just three and it would have touched him even with the distance he had given them, because the river was too open and the people shooting could hit a target at six hundred to eight hundred yards.

Four minutes was enough for his puzzle to be solved. The jet had been opened and the images of the target had been sent, the only thing remaining was the launching. One bullet was enough because he was just going to hit the pilot and he was going to make it count. Laser bullets were very expensive and there were future battles to be fought. He launched the missile and as his tool started its ten seconds countdown, he powered more bullets, his next target being Andrew and teams.

The helicopter was already on him, one of them had fired at Flight 10. They were up to five in the helicopter but none of them was familiar. Either Nick was being careful or he had used up

all the defectors. Immediately they were close enough, They opened fire on him. The bullets were all repelled but the gun magnet battery's reading went down to two minutes almost immediately. The shooters were concentrating so much on him that they did not see what hit them. It took the missile fifty five seconds to hit target. And the trajectory was from the opposite side. It was not repelled because the path was different. The helicopter exploded few seconds later, and he sped up the boat to avoid debris from hitting him. Flight 10 was already by Andrew and the other teams, and as the images connected he launched. The battery of the gun magnet had exactly one minute, thirty seconds left when he launched four laser bullets to locate Andrew's teams. With the aid of Flight 10, he saw Andrew run into the river, it was fifty seconds after the missile was launched. Before the others could figure out what was wrong with Andrew, it was already too late as the bullet missiles found its target at exactly sixty seconds.

He had no time to watch the destruction the missiles caused because the gun magnet just repelled a bullet. It did not come from Andrew's team and the helicopter and occupants were in the water. It could be only one way. They had shot him using their bird. Just like he predicted. And he had just twenty seconds left. He knew they will fire again and it would hit its target. It was obvious because the bird was very close to him. It was as if Nick was trying to make him aware he was the man behind it.

"I don't need to face you before I kill you." He remembered Nick's statement.

If only Nick knew that bringing that bird close to tout him was a big mistake. His tool box could jam any interference within five yards. He quickly clicked Jam on his tool box. It was not something he had to set, it was already set. The second missile hit the water a few distance away, same time the gun magnet's battery died. He quickly navigated the boat so the gun magnet could

land on it. They wouldn't be able to send anything. And he was not going to stop there. The solar battery helped the bird stay in the sky but all the intelligent work needed network. It was like a phone, it could be used without network, but to browse, a network connection was needed. It would not be able to dodge any bullet. He was not going to waste his laser bullet on the bird. He took George's black and shot at the bird. The bird fell and landed on the boat. He brought out a laser knife, which could cut through metals and slice the bird in pieces. He brought out the controlling chip. At first he wanted to take it but changed his mind. It would have a tracking device and there was no time to figure it out. He dropped it into the water. He just knew the rest of his journey would be peaceful. Nick had lost too many men and he would need reinforcement before he came for him again. He navigated towards his destination with Cindy on his mind.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

"How long do we still have?"

"We are just starting, we still have nine gates to cross." Ebuka answered.

It must have taken up to twelve minutes before they had gotten to the first gate. This meant they had hours left before they got to their final destination. She was not feeling any pain and the dizziness had reduced but she knew she would not be able to make it that long. She wanted to protest but could not. Ebuka was escorting her back to Jason and she should be grateful.

Her fear came back again as Jason popped into her mind. If they had hours to walk through an underground tunnel then Jason must have the same time and he would be exposed. What if he could not make it? She shook her head with the hope of stopping the terrible images her mind was forcefully producing. 'He will be safe'

“Who?” Ebuka asked.

She did not know she had said it aloud.

“Jason” she answered.

“I too I’m wondering how he is going to meet you at the hut. The distance is not that far but considering the people he has to fight, it is very long.”

“You know you are not helping.”

“Hmm, I read those files about The Circle and the things written about them are not attributes of average humans. How much do you know?”

“Nothing, you should know more than I do. I just knew Jason was a Nigerian soldier and had met George during military training. I only discovered who he was on Wednesday.”

“I was there in that last meeting and I never doubted the man we were calling Mathew was an imposter. We discussed where the bomb should be located at the stadium and how we were going to do the life call. We got to know he was an imposter through Nick. Nick had arrived few minutes after the meeting. He had told Faceless to leave them to him because we cannot handle them. Faceless allowed it because it was BlueAI company representative they killed. Later, we got a call that George was dead but the other was nowhere to be found. Nick had told Faceless that the missing soldier was extremely dangerous and the only way he would come out was to

get you. Faceless had approved it with the mind of just keeping you hostage, because Nick made us believe Jason was going to Lagos to defuse the bomb.”

As Ebuka spoke she tried to digest every word. Things were getting clearer. She had seen what Jason did to the assassins who had ambushed them on their way to Lagos and had wondered why George could not get out. Now she was beginning to fix the puzzle. It was Nick and his men that went after George. From the conversation she had heard between Nick and Faceless when she was brought to the underground house, Nick had the criteria of The Circle Team and it meant Nick was very good. If only Major Ahmed had known the dangers of what he was doing.

They had crossed up to seven gates after a very long tiring walk. It was remaining three. Ebuka had not spoken another word since he ended his long speech. They were both lost in their thoughts.

“If those things I read are true, I believe you will see Jason. He was the one that suggested it. I think he would have done his math already. I read he has partial autism” Ebuka spoke again.

He must have thought that was what was occupying her mind not knowing that he just brought back Jason and danger to her mind.

“Okay. She said.”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Okay.”

“Is there any probability that what Jason said about the bombs are not true?”

The Next Two Days

“No. Jason is a stock human being. He does not know how to make jokes. He takes everything literally, although I think he is changing. But I’m very sure of the bombs. You said it yourself. George had impersonated one of BlueAI representative. That must have been how they got the information and if not for Nick, they would have defused those bombs long ago.”

They were already by the ninth gate.

“I just hope Jason and his team will be able to handle Nick.” Ebuka said after closing the eight gate.

They continued walking with nobody talking. The pain on her shoulders and knees was coming back and Ebuka must have noticed it.

“The Diclofenac is wearing off. Take this” he said giving her a malt drink he brought out from his bag.

“Thanks” she said after gulping a mouth full.

Ebuka brought out paracetamol tablet from his bag.

“Take this with the malt” he said giving her the drug.

“Cynthia, let’s go” Ebuka said after she had finished drinking.

“My friends call me Cindy. You can call me Cindy.”

“But Cindy and Cynthia don't sound the same.”

“They are not the same. It was Jason that gave me the name. He said Cynthia is not suitable me.”

“Okay Cindy let’s go” Ebuka said smiling.

They had not walked for a minute when she heard an unusual sound. It reminded her of Wednesday night when her door was being sliced with an equipment. Ebuka heard it too.

“They now know.”

“I don’t understand.”

“They have discovered we’ve escaped. They are coming. Can you run?”

“I think so” she stammered

“Run” Ebuka said already running.

She immediately followed suit. But her mind was trying desperately to understand what was going on. They had just one more gate to cross. There was that sound of that instrument. It was close. It was coming from the last gate they just passed. Even though the distance was not close, she could still hear that horrible sound. They were too fast.

“Hurry up Cindy” Ebuka shouted.

He was already opening the last gate. She doubled her speed. They were just entering the other side when she sighted them. One of them fired same time Ebuka closed the gate.

“Cindy, listen to me. I know the drug you took won’t hold out the pain but you have to bear it. You have to run like you’ve never run before. You will see a ladder, climb it till you get to the top. There is a horizontal door, and this is the key, open it as fast as you can then close it when you are out. I pray Jason will be there to pick you” he said giving her a key.

“Uncle Ebuka I don’t understand. Why should I go by myself? We can make it together.”

“Cindy, this is the only way, I will withstand as much as I can. Go.”

“Is this why Faceless was crying? The both of you knew this was going to happen. You did not tell me. You did not give me the opportunity to make my choice. No, I’m not going anywhere except you come with me. I can make my own decisions too. I can’t let another person die because of me.” Tears were already coming out of her eyes.

“Cindy, we don’t have time. Don’t let your uncle and Jason’s effort to be in vain.”

“No, I’m not going.. please come with me.”

“Then we will both be dead.”

“So be it, I can’t allow you to die, please lets go” she cried pulling at his hands.

“Cindy please, I’m begging you, help me, help us, help all the Biafran soldiers. This is the only way we can protect them. Please go. They are close. Go.”

This was hell, it was worse than torture. She threw herself on him.

“How do you want me to live with this? How?”

“Live with honour, Cindy Biafran soldiers will live because of you. Take it as a sacrifice. Go Cindy” he said gently pulling her away after kissing her forehead.

He bent down and started bringing out weapons from his bag. She could hear sounds of approaching footsteps. Ebuka turned and signaled for her to go. She turned and started running. She was a coward, she was saving her life with the blood of another she barely knew. She almost felt like turning back when she heard the sounds of gun battle, but she ran, she had to believe Ebuka, she had to believe it was the only way. Her shoulder felt like it was being sliced over and

over again, her knees felt like it was being scrubbed by a sharp stone but she ignored everything and ran, she would never allow Ebuka's death, no efforts to be in vain. She should not be thinking of his death, there could still be a way out, she could see the ladder. Jason would be there waiting for her and he would come down and help. With that tiny hope, she doubled her speed. She was already opening the door few seconds later. Just as the door gave way and she was almost at the surface, there was a bomb blast from where she was coming from. The bomb blast shattered both her tiny hope and her heart. It shook the tunnel and she was almost falling back but someone grabbed her and pulled her to the surface. It was Jason. She should be happy but there was no joy in her anymore. He pulled her to himself, he was saying something but she could not hear anything, she was tired, tired of everything, tired of the nightmare that wouldn't stop. She felt darkness enveloping her. As she welcomed the darkness that would give her mind a little peace, she prayed she would wake up to discover it was only a nightmare.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

She woke up in a room she had never seen nor been before. She was lying down on her back. The first thing that caught her attention was a bag. It was hanging on the wall. She had seen that bag before. It belonged to George. She turned her body to her right and winced in pains. Her shoulder hurt. Jason was on the tile operating the computer he had called his tool box.

“Where I'm I?” she asked.

Jason was by her side even before she finished her statement.

“Cindy. How are you?”

How come he was looking okay when she who had not fought anybody, was feeling terrible?

And how did they get to where she was? She thought.

“What’s going on? Where I’m I? What is going on?” she asked trying to remember something.

Jason did not answer but gently placed his palm on her cheek.

“How are you feeling?”

“Like my shoulder is about to separate from my body.”

“I’m going to hurt him” he said with an angry tone.

Suddenly, she remembered. She remembered Ebuka, she remembered the shooting, and she remembered the bomb blast that shattered her hope of ever seeing Ebuka. Then the tears came, she joined it with her voice.

“Cindy, please don’t do this to me. Please my heart is tearing up.”

“He is gone. He doesn’t even know me. He just met me today, yet he willingly gave up his life for me. He is gone” she said almost wailing.

Jason joined her on the bed and gently pulled her to him.

“I’m sorry you have to go through all this.”

“George, that driver, Osamagbe and now Ebuka. Your heart is tearing but mine is already torn.

Jason, mine is shattered. I may be okay if you can tell me this is a nightmare.”

“I’m sorry” he responded.

The Next Two Days

He held her till her tears subsided.

“I bought food and drugs. Your temperature is hot.”

“I don’t have appetite. I want to feel this pain. I don’t want to ever be comfortable, not after Osamagbe and Ebuka died because of me.”

“Do it for me. Please Cindy.”

“I can’t eat, I won’t take drugs.”

“I need to get Nick. Your Uncle and his soldiers are depending on me to help. But I can’t do that without you.”

“I have nothing to offer.”

“You know you do. If you don’t eat and take pain relief drugs I won’t be able to focus. Your Uncle is depending on me to help rescue control from Nick. Please I can’t function if you are this way.”

Ebuka had said something like that. She knew Jason well to know he was not trying to flatter her into eating. He was saying it the way he felt it.

“Okay, but you have to promise me one thing.”

“What?”

“Don’t allow Nick escape.”

“Okay” he answered standing up to get the food.

The Next Two Days

It was rice and stew in a take away plate. She forced herself to take few spoonful and took the drugs Jason gave her. She was lying back on the bed few minutes later.

Jason kissed her forehead and went back to his tool box. The pain had reduced.

“Jason where are we?” she asked again.

“This is where I stayed with George during our undercover mission.”

So she was right. That was George’s bag. He always carried the bag with him whenever he had visited with Jason. He said his mum bought it for him when he was coming to Nigeria.

“Jason, are his parents aware?”

“No, not yet. They left London for a vacation in France.”

So it was not a nightmare, it was all real. She wished she could return to her normal life. Even if she survived, she would have to learn how to cope with everything she had experienced. At least in all this, she had her Uncle. She remembered Ebuka again, she could no longer prevent the tears from falling.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

She was crying again and it was one big distraction. He understood why she was crying before, but now the tears where affecting him on a personal level. He had not have time to think about how the message would be passed across to George’s parents. It was going to be difficult because he was their only son. George had always fantasized on becoming a soldier when he was young. Then his family was still in Nigeria. They had all moved to London just after he had completed his primary education. But his dream did not change. His dad was somehow a close

friend of Major Ahmed and George had seen him as his idol. It was Major Ahmed that brought him to Nigeria. The second thing he did after he had seen George's dead body, was to deposit his corpse in a mortuary, then he drove straight to Benin.

"Cindy, please" he said.

He did not even know what he was begging for. She stopped crying bringing a little relief and concentration. He had not yet hacked Faceless phone. He was preparing his tool box's firewall to prevent a retribution after he must have hacked BlueAI's control systems.

"How did we get here?" she asked.

"By car."

"You know what I'm asking about. There is no way Nick did not attack you and you are not superman. There is no way you will drive all the way from where you were hiding to this place without getting attacked."

She was right, he was not superman which was just a movie character, there was nobody like that. But the right gadgets could make one. Like he had predicted, there was no further attack till he got to his destination. He had almost lost it when he saw Cindy. She had blacked out on him after almost falling from the ladder after a bomb blast. That part of the tunnel would be damaged and there was no way the person that released the bomb survived. He now knew who he was.

He had been careful after getting Cindy. He made sure he changed in the hut, then he had worn a silicone mask before driving to their house.

"Cindy you need to rest. I will explain when all this is over."

The Next Two Days

“I’m happy you are still alive” she said after some time.

There was blink on his android watch. He removed his eyes from his tool box to look at what was going on. It was unbelievable. The time was just half past six but they were close.

‘Where are you guys?’ he sent a message to Wild who had same gadget.

‘Less than an hour’ Wild replied.

He could track them within three hours distance but he had set the watch to alert him when they were close.

‘What route?’

‘Benin.’

‘What is Fast running?’

‘200.’

‘You know one can die by car accident?’

‘Not with Fast’

‘Took Cindy hostage, got her back.’

‘How?’

‘Faceless is her Uncle. Temporally on our side.’

‘Let’s say I believe you cause you don’t lie.’

‘About to hack his phone using his IMEI.’

The Next Two Days

‘Good. Nick?’

‘Still alive, Andrew too.’

‘Okay, what are the odds?’

‘Right now, 30/70 till I get hold of their system.’

‘Okay. Stay safe.’

For some reason, he felt energized. Help was on the way and they were going to end everything before the deadline.

Within twenty minutes, he was accessing Faceless’ phone. He raised his head to look at Cindy. She was already asleep. He wished he was there holding her. He had to force himself to look back at his tool box. He did not want to take control of the phone. He was very careful, because there was a possibility the phone had already been hacked. He just connected his tool box to the phone. There was no other device after few minutes’ search. There was something not right. His location was no longer at Akwukwa. From what he was reading, Faceless was at their big building at Obosi.

After browsing through to see if Faceless’ phone was plugged to BlueAI computer and discovering he had not, he took full control of Faceless phone. He immediately installed their listening app and opened it. He wanted to find out what was going on.

“Faceless you just have to believe me. I could only help when Cynthia was here and when Jason was still in our radar. But we’ve lost both. You need to make the call now” he heard Nick’s voice.

The Next Two Days

“You said we should immediately evacuate the Akwukwa building because Jason would soon blow it up because Cynthia is no longer there. I listened to you. I stationed someone to monitor from afar. I’ve not gotten news that the house had been blown. Now you want me to do a call already fix for 11pm.”

“We just arrived, and the missile that will destroy that house is not something you shoot like a bullet.”

“All this wouldn’t have happened if you had discovered she was wearing a gadget.”

“Our device can only interfere with an active tracker. You are the one who is yet to understand the enemy you are facing.”

“But I can’t make that call now. Many people will still be by the stadium by this time. Remember I said, no civilian should die. The best we can do is to trust your reinforcement to find Jason before he destroys my plan.”

“See, this is Lagos Stadium right now. No single soul, people are boycotting the road. You need to do it now before Jason track us here.”

“Okay, if this is really Telsim Balogun Stadium, then I agree. But how do will deal with Jason, making this call won’t prevent any attack?” Faceless asked after a short pause.

“That’s why I said we should do it now so we can disappear.”

“Are things set already?”

“They are on it.”

“Nnamdi, call Nwankwo for me” Faceless said.

The Next Two Days

“I need to plug my phone. The battery is low” Faceless said.

“Okay, I’m coming” Nick said.

He breathed a sigh of relief. He was almost thinking Faceless still wanted to make the call. For Nick to believe Faceless with no idea of Faceless' role in Cindy's escape, meant he was very good. The big problem they had now was the fact that Nick believed Faceless was not involved. But there was still hope. He waited for Faceless to plug the phone to the system.

He was almost switching off the audio app when things started falling apart. First there was a gunshot, then there was a distance voice shouting Faceless’ name as if he was being chased by a wild animal.

“Faceless, you can’t make that call” the voice panted.

“Nalu, what is going on?” Faceless asked.

“Ikenna is dead and I know why Ebuka escaped with that girl” the new voice said.

“Explain.”

“We were doing patrol when we heard two of the BlueAI men discussing about four more bombs that will blow up when you make that call. Ikenna went to confront them and he was killed.”

“Lies.” That was Nick. He was not yet out.

“Your men killed my man Nick, and you call it lies?” That was Faceless voice and he sounded angry.

“Faceless” another unknown voice shouted.

“Nnamdi, what is going on?”

“I think Jason is around. Ikenna is dead” Nnamdi said.

“No, it was Nick’s men that killed him” the first voice said.

“What the heck is going on?” the one Faceless called Nnamdi asked.

“Nick can you explain why your men killed my man if this is all a lie?” Faceless asked.

“You are the one I don’t understand. You want separation from Nigeria without war?” Nick responded.

“That’s not what I asked” Faceless said.

“Hey, tell your man to drop that gun” Nick said.

There was a gunshot, followed by many other gunshots. He was already up from where he was sitting. He ran to their storage and brought out some weapons which he kept in his big military bag. Bullets were still being fired and there was no way to know the number of casualties but he already knew the side that would lose.

Everything he needed was already in his bag safe for his tool box and their secured phone. The shooting had stopped but nobody had said anything.

“You should have known you will lose before engaging with us.”

That was bad. Very bad. He knew that voice and it was not Nick, nor Andrew. He was once a member of the Circle. Even before he joined. But he was disqualified and even court-martialed for civilian casualties during a mission. He was to be tried for the death of civilians but had

escaped. He was called Tiger. All the Special Forces he had faced were never part of The Circle but this one was. He majored in combats and he had 99 percent target accuracy. There could be more of Special Force Team and Faceless and his men did not have a chance.

“The only reason why you are alive is to make that call. As for this Nnamdi, we don’t need you” Tiger said.

“No don’t kill him. Not now” Nick said.

“I will never make that call” Faceless said.

“We shall see” Nick said.

He quickly searched the phone for the number Faceless was supposed to call. It was saved with Lagos Stadium. He copied it to his tool box and deleted it from the phone. That would delay them even if it was just five minutes, it could mean a lot. He temporarily closed the audio app. He switched on his secured phone and connected it to his tool box to prevent it from being tracked. After that, he sent a message to Ghost.

‘Ghost, still alive?’

He did not wait long as the response came almost immediately.

‘Yeah, just few businesses to finish.’

‘Can you try and defuse the bomb?’

He was very careful of what to write. Nick must not know he was already aware of his new plan and the shooting.

‘How?’

‘You can try. Find the phone inside the bombs and switch it off.’

‘I got it.’

He switched off the phone a bit relieved Ghost understood what he meant. During one of their trainings, after they had joined The Circle, they were told to stop a system from completing a one minute countdown that would ignite a bomb blast. Some of them switched off the system, some disconnected it from the power source. He and George hacked the system. But Ghost shot the system. According to him, his mission was to prevent the bomb from exploding and that was his way. Ghost would not be able extract the phones from the bombs, instead he was going to make sure the call wouldn’t go through. He would not be able to hack into networks and close it, but he was going to blow up all the mast of Nigerian network providers close to the bombs. Especially the stadium.

Next he sent a message to Wild. He needed to get there and hope The Circle would join him soon.

‘Things fall apart.’

‘How?’ Wild responded.

‘Biafrans now hostage, Nick has rescheduled the call time.’

‘What are your plans?’ Wild responded.

‘Will try hack the system, but I’m going there right now.’

‘Okay, we are almost there. Make sure to delay Nick till we come.’

The Next Two Days

‘Tiger is with him.’

‘That’s bad.’

‘See you soon’ he sent his last message.

Cindy would be safe because they had cameras installed almost at every corner and he could protect Cindy from anywhere. He went to meet Cindy on the bed.

“Hey, Cindy.”

“Jason, I must have slept off” she said opening her eyes.

“Your Uncle is in trouble and I need to go help.”

Cindy was too involved, he did not have the time to explain much.

“You are leaving me?” she said almost panicking.

“You are safe here. Don’t go out till I come for you. If there is any suspicious activity press this” he said wearing his security band on her hand.

“Wait, my Uncle is in trouble?” she said trying to stand up but he gently pulled her back.

“Yes. And I need to go now” he said placing a kiss on her forehead.

He stood up after putting his tool box in his bag.

“Jason” she called stopping him from opening the door.

“Please don’t let my Uncle die. Please come back for me.”

He nodded. He opened the door and within forty seconds, he was on his way to Obosi.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

It had not been long he got to Biafran house at Obosi. He was not surprised to see Nick's reinforcement. Many were not known but he saw up to three more Special Force defectors. He was still putting on his bullet vest and he had also added his shocker before coming out of his car. He was not going to ignore the fact that Tiger was with Nick. He was afraid of him for a reason.

Andrew was nowhere in sight, neither was Tiger. He quickly brought out Flight 2, a beetle-like device and sent it in the direction of the house. It was produced mainly for sound. Flight 10 could send sound but it was too risky. He had to be very discreet. He was going to distance himself from Faceless' phone immediately the beetle gained entrance to where he was. That was his first plan. The next was to use the hacker's method to hack into BlueAI system. He had watched how his fake tool box was hacked and destroyed. He knew their pattern and he was going to do it in reverse. It was like one of their trainings where they were taught that one could untie a rope if the person watched how it was tied. Same principle worked for hackers. While Flight 2 located Faceless' current location, he brought out Flight 5. It also looked like a beetle but it was bigger and it had a camera. It was risky, it could be easily detected. But he could risk it because he still had the location of the control room where Faceless was about to plug his phone. There was a probability, hacking the BlueAI system would take long. Flight 5 was his plan B.

He had connected his tool box to his Bluetooth's earpiece and there was currently no audible activity going on where Faceless was. He could only hear somebody's fast breathing. Flight 10 was very far away, he could not risk it being discovered. He wanted to take them unawares.

"Now shall we begin" he heard Nick's voice.

"I will never make that call" Faceless said.

"You know you should be dead. Anybody can wear your mask. The masses don't know you. But if I kill you, Nwankwo will never make that call, no matter what I do to him. Nwankwo is here with you, the camera is here with you. The computer to go live is here, so let's start."

There was absolute silence.

The Next Two Days

“Okay, the hard way then. Why do people choose the hard way for something they could have done the simple way” Nick said.

“You came with a proposal, to sponsor everything I needed concerning weapons because your company understood our suffering and we needed to defend ourselves from the enemy. I refused to get free aid from you. Although you subsidized the prices of the weapons I purchased, I never collected any free weapon from you. Now you want me to make a call that will kill millions of people and you tell me you understand our suffering.”

“Blab blab blab. I was not there when you made the deal. Turn the computer for them to see” Nick instructed someone.

“What the heck is this” Faceless shouted.

“It’s very obvious Faceless. But in case you are confused this is your store room not far from here. You see all this your soldiers, they can see and hear you. One of them will die anytime you refuse my proposal.”

“Don’t do this Nick. You can’t kill your own people for a foreign company.”

“Point of correction. They are not my people. I’m a Nigerian. Are you ready to make that call and reveal your identity?”

There was no answer.

“Okay. Rick” Nick said.

He knew Rick. He had applied to join the Special Force but could not meet the criteria. He remembered him because Rick had left the army after that.

A gunshot and Faceless protest brought his attention back to what was going on at Biafran house.

Jason had been gone for some time now. She had tried sleeping but the pains and her disturbed mind would not let her sleep. The pain was not like before she took the drugs, but it was still there. She tried standing up to explore the house, to give herself a distraction but she felt dizzy. She slept back on the bed. She raised her left hand to study what Jason had worn her. It was a tiny black band with just a round button. Jason and George had always worn it, though she had not seen it on Jason since Wednesday. Memory of Ebuka clouded her mind almost suffocating her.

“Ebuka I’m sorry. I wish you rest in Pe...”

An unusual sound prevented her from completing her statement. There was a flat screen TV by her right. She quickly crawled towards it. She picked up the remote and pressed the power button. The screen was split into six. There was nothing suspicious on any of the six cameras but she could still hear the unusual sound. It was getting closer.

After some seconds, she could now see what was making the sound. It looked like a cylindrical plate with a transparent cover which was emitting light as it spun. She saw it in camera six.

Although she did not know the outside of the house, she could tell it was still far away. It was beginning to attract people’s attention as some of them followed it from a distance. She was sure it was looking for her. But how? Jason had said to press the button on the black band if there was any suspicious activity. She was not willing to gamble if she was right or wrong. She immediately pressed the button and watched as it blinked a red light three times.

“One gone, you have one minute to decide” Nick said.

He was already contacting Wild before Nick ended his warning.

‘Big problem. Where are you guys?’

‘Very close. But there is a little traffic. Burial.’

‘I’m going to connect you with Flight 10. Find a way to get to the location of Flight 10.’

‘Why?’

‘Biafran soldiers are being used as negotiation. Rick is among them.’

‘Okay, on it. Your plans?’

‘Still on point.’

‘See you later.’ Wild wrote.

Using his android watch, he connected Flight 10 to Wild’s android watch. Then using the map he had of that area, he sent Flight 10 to their storage location. From their investigations, the storage was not for weapons but foodstuffs. It was about five minutes’ drive from his current location.

There was an alarm on his wrist watch. It was the alarm every Circle member got when one of them was under attack. They usually pressed the only button on their tiny black band. Any Circle member who was three hours distance could locate that person. He checked his wrist watch to find out who was in trouble. It was his hand band. It was Cindy. He quickly brought out his tool to find out what was going on. He could not believe he completely forgot about BlueAI’s

weaponry locator. He had destroyed the one sent to locate him but they had more. This one was going directly to his house. There might be other houses with weapons but the pull to his own would be more. For now only he and Wild could track Cindy because none of them still had their android phones that was hacked. They had destroyed it so the hacker could not make use of it. It was part of their training. He quickly mounted his XM25 rifle with laser bullets, connected the camera to his house camera but before he could shoot, he saw himself falling. He had been hit.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

The scary device was now in camera three, it was getting closer. Any doubt about where it was going vanished as it approached camera two. Jason said he could protect her as long as she remained indoors, but what if she ran away? She stood up and struggled to the door but stopped herself from opening it. She remembered the last time she had left where Jason told her to stay and how she was almost bitten by a snake. She went back to the bed but did not lie down. She typed a message to Jason.

‘Jason there is something coming. Where are you?’

She waited for his response which never came. She took another look at the TV. Fear like she had never known gripped her. There was someone spotted by camera four. She knew him. He was with Nick when they killed Osamagbe. The device was now in camera one and it was very loud. The other cameras also had faces of people on black, they were carrying guns and they were not trying to hide it. Some sensible people started withdrawing while some still stayed behind to observe what was going on. There was another door which she quickly opened. It was empty with things normal. There were so many weapons that she quickly closed the door and went back to her bed. She checked her hand band to see if Jason had responded, but she saw an empty tiny screen.

She heard the sound of something hitting the wall as if it was trying to gain entrance. It was coming from the wall of the other room. She immediately knew how they were able to track her. The device could track weapons.

‘I should have ran out’ she thought.

She quickly moved to the door to confirm if it was locked. It was locked but the lock was looking strange.

She went back to the bed. There were numerous gunshots. She looked at the TV to find out what was wrong but saw nothing. They had shot down the cameras.

She tried to believe Jason was going to protect her, but that changed quickly. The door was being cut with that unusual instrument. She became terrified, her fear froze her on the bed. It did not take long before the door was opened and the man he had seen with Nick entered.

The Next Two Days

“Hmm Cynthia, nice to meet you again” he said smiling.

She was still frozen with fear and could not stand, she tried raising her hand to see if Jason had responded.

“It’s of no use. Your boyfriend is dead. He is not coming.”

Suddenly her body could move.

“No. You are lying.. he is coming and he is going to kill you if you touch me” she stammered shaking her head.

He did not say another word but moved closer, making her shrink into the bed.

The shooter knew he was wearing protective vest and had shot his left arm. It was not a miss but exactly where the shooter had targeted. He had been very discreet and there was nobody that would have discovered him except for Tiger. It was a clean wound. The bullet did not penetrate the bones but it tore his skin. He was bleeding fast. He removed the Bluetooth earpiece from his ears, then he brought out a bandage from his bag but did not have the luxury of tying it.

“Jason, I heard you’ve been giving Nick a tough time” he heard Tiger’s voice from his back.

He ignored him and focused on his attempt to bandage his bleeding arm.

Tiger had always been the one to fish him out from hiding during training. He was an expert in being discreet during a mission. No wonder he had no idea Tiger was working with Nick. Even before Tiger saw his documents, he had known he had autism.

The Next Two Days

“Not too pronounced but it’s obvious you are autistic. You don’t look like them but you still give out the aura. I can pick your kind from a thousand yards, you just have one way of doing things and it bugs me” Tiger had said after a week of training to join the Circle.

He later got to know Tiger’s two siblings were autistic. No matter how discreet he had been during training, Tiger who was already a Circle member had always discovered him. He said he had a pull to him. He knew that very well and he also knew there was no way he would be able to defeat Tiger in face to face combat. He had beaten him to pulp during combat training which was Wild and Tamed class. There was no way he would forget that Tiger had broken his left wrist and it took a month to recover, three months to fully recover. He had never understood Wild, Tamed and Tigers interest in breaking people’s hand. If it were possible they would destroy all weapons and go back to the olden days of face to face combat. He had known there was a possibility of meeting Tiger and he knew Tiger would prefer killing him with his bare hands, he was counting on it and his plan was working.

“Major Ahmed keeps fooling you people. You protect civilians who don’t deserve your protection. Do you know the money you and George could have made with your combined skills? Fools” Tiger said.

He was very close. He was through with the bandage. What was remaining was the tying of the last edge which required his mouth. Tiger did not allow him as he picked him up like he had no weight.

“Time up Jason. George is waiting for you. I hope you saw the bullet on his head. I put it there. Extend my greetings when you see him.”

So he was the one who gave George the killing shot. He did not get angry, there was no need for anger because he was about to put George to rest. He raised his right hand to hit Tiger but Tiger seized it. He raised his left hand which protested with pains. Tiger also seized his left wrist. His hand touched exactly where he wanted him to.

Before coming out of his car, he had put on an insulating robber gloves, powerful enough to absorb up to a current of 200 mill-amperes and on it was their shocker. It was a device which when fully charged had currents of 15 mill amperes which was powerful enough to freeze a person and render the person immobile. Tiger could not see it because he had worn his normal long black glove to prevent the sensation that came with body contacts. Immediately Tiger held his wrist with the intent of breaking it, the shocker was ignited. He had watched those who thought they could kill him die with their face expressing shock but Tiger's own was mixed with fear. He was very aware of his environment but he wouldn't be able to do anything, at least for some seconds. As his body vibrated from the shock, he brought out George's black from his pocket. He had planned on using a suppressor like Tiger but had immediately changed his mind after what Tiger said about George. He cocked the gun and showed it to Tiger. He would know it belonged to George because 'George's Black' was boldly written on the pistol. He shot Tiger exactly where he had shot George.

'Fear is for the brave, cowards can never stare it in the eyes' he thought as Tiger's body hit the ground. So much for not doing same thing over and over again. They were all the same. If not, Tiger wouldn't have tried breaking same wrist. The only difference was he knew his fear and prepared to face it but Tiger did not know his fear. That was the only reason he was dead.

The sound of the gunshot would soon attract unwanted visitors and he needed to get to Cindy. Panic enveloped him immediately and within thirty seconds, he had tied his bleeding arm which had already soaked the bandage. He quickly gathered his gadgets back to his bag except his tool box and XM25. He checked Tiger's pocket and saw his phone. Tiger had sent a message to Nick.

'Jason has been exterminated.' The message had been sent but there was only one symbol of good indicating it had not been received. The second good appeared as he held the phone. He dropped it back. He had wanted to send a message to Nick but Tiger had helped him. He wouldn't have been able to write it like that. He quickly opened his tool box, he had to save Cindy. There was a big problem, the cameras were no longer active. He checked his android watch and saw Cindy's message. His tool box and his rifle was in his bag in less than five seconds.

He ran as fast as he could to his car. He ignored the pain he was feeling on his left arm. It was not the first time and he had experienced worse pain. In fact no pain could be compared to not getting to Cindy. But as he ignited the car and sped up to Main Market, he knew he was already too late. But that did not stop him. He had lived his life based on probability except when it came to Cindy and for the second time in one day, he was hoping against hope.

CHAPTER THIRTY

“Do you know how much you and your boyfriend have cost us?”

She tried to control her body from shaking but could not. The more she moved inside the bed, the more he came closer and his facial expression was changing. It was as if her fear was making him excited.

“Girls are very pretty when they are like this” he said closing up the remaining space.

“Now that your boyfriend is dead, how do we celebrate it?” he asked smiling.

“He is not dead” she replied.

“He wouldn’t have allowed us to get close, he would have attacked us using his cameras.” His smiles turned to a smirk.

She tried moving back while shaking her head but her back hit the wall. There was nowhere to run to, there was no escape. He raised his hand to touch her cheek but her hand hit him on the face. She had already hit him before she realized what she had done.

“Oh you want it rough. I like rough.”

Before she could react to his statement, he pushed her roughly and she found herself lying on her back. Her clothes were being torn. She had not even noticed she was wearing a different long-sleeved shirt, until the man roughly tore it from her body exposing her breast.

“No please, please, I’m a virgin, please, don’t do this.” She fought and begged.

But the eyes of the man she was begging showed that he did not hear a word of her pleading, and he did not feel she was struggling. Her night gown was already torn and it was very easy for him to remove the remaining pieces. The only thing left was her undies. She had never been this exposed to any man.

“Wow, so this is what Jason had been enjoying. No wonder he would do anything for you” he said as he tried pulling off her remaining covering.

She should give up struggling, her shoulder was on fire, and she would not win but would get hurt if she kept struggling but she could not. She could not let this man touch her, she would

The Next Two Days

rather be dead. In the midst of her struggle she remembered Mum's favorite quote. Why her mind said it, her mouth pleaded with the man. She held on to her last dignity and tried kicking him with her legs.

After putting in her best, she was overpowered and just when her remaining covering was about to be ripped off, she saw the man's back hitting the wall. Somebody else appeared in place of him. It was not Jason, it was Dark Prince. He was wearing a jacket with hood. He removed the hood, took just a glance at her before turning to the man at the wall.

"Tamed" the man said.

There was raw fear boldly written on his face.

"Andrew" Tamed replied.

"What are.. you..how?" Andrew stammered.

"Civilians must be protected, but women come first. That's rule number one. For breaking that rule I Justice Obinna will carry out the punishment."

"You are not eligible, you left long ago."

Tamed did not respond but moved closer to Andrew.

"Like you protected your own woman" Andrew said.

He was no longer emitting fear, it looked like he was looking for a way to distract Tamed. His gun was lying on the floor, he might not be able to get to it but there should be more weapons with him.

The Next Two Days

It worked, because Tamed's body movement changed. Tamed rushed at him. That was the distraction Andrew was looking for. Andrew brought out a knife from his pocket, it started glowing after he pressed something on the blade. He dodged Tamed's blow, then attacked Tamed with the glowing knife. She tried screaming but no sound came out from her mouth.

Tamed easily dodged the weapon. He took hold of Andrew's right hand which had the weapon and bent it. She literally heard his bone break. Andrew's scream was like that of a wounded animal. Tamed took the weapon from him. Picked him up like he had no weight and threw him to the wall.

"For breaking the most important rule of the Special Force, you are not fit to live" Tamed said moving towards a groaning Andrew, the glowing knife in his hand.

"No please, Tamed, don't, Tamed nooo" Andrew screamed.

She shouldn't have watched, but her eyes refused to stop looking at what was happening to Andrew. Tamed used the knife to pass through Andrew's throat. Within seconds his head was out of his body.

Blood was everywhere. The dead body was still shaking and her eyes refused to stop looking at the man who almost raped her. She should feel sorry for him but she felt nothing. Maybe she had seen so much that she could not feel again.

Someone was calling her name. But she must not stop looking at Andrew. There was a possibility it was all faked and he would rise up and come back to finish what he started. If she continued looking, she would be able to see him coming back. That was the only way she could escape another assault from him. The person calling her name had stopped but someone was

touching her. It was okay, as long as it was not Andrew. The person was not trying to hurt her, the person was even being careful. The blood was almost covering everywhere in the room. When was Andrew going to put his body together? She must watch and wait, she would not be deceived.

“Cindy. Look at me. Hey, you are in shock, but you need to come back now. Jason your Fiancé needs back-up. We have to move now” the person said.

“Jason” she said finally taking her eyes from Andrew to the person who called Jason’s name. Her mind told her Jason was now more important.

“Good, you can now hear me. Jason needs us to help save Faceless, your supposed uncle.”

It was not a person, it was Dark Prince. But how was he in the room where Andrew was about to rape her? She looked away from Dark Prince and saw Andrew’s head and body. Dark Prince turned her away from the body.

“Don’t look at him. You are still afraid, he will never hurt you again. We need to go now. Can you walk?” Dark Prince asked.

She raised her head and looked at Dark Prince. He was a bit far away when she had seen him the other day, but he was very close now. He was kneeling close to the bed. His eyes were red, but that was not what caught her attention. It was red and empty. She could not fathom how she knew, but that was what she saw. The emptiness she saw was pulling at her, she could almost empathize with him.

“Can you walk?” he asked again.

Was that gunshots? Something told her there had been gunshots before Dark Prince entered the room but she had been too distracted to notice.

“Yes, I think so” she answered standing up.

She sat back immediately. She had forgotten she was naked. She tried covering her breast with her hands but touched clothes. It was a male black T-shirt. It was way past her knees. It should belong to George. He was very tall. But how did she put it on?

“Let’s go” Dark Prince said moving to the door.

She followed him as she tried to remember wearing the black T-shirt.

The shootings that seemed to have stopped started again just when Dark Prince got to the door. She started going back.

“Don’t. Stay behind me” Dark Prince said.

He walked out into the war zone and she had no choice but to follow his instruction.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

Dark Prince had shot someone before she could even see the person. Suddenly, he pulled her to his front and turned back, then shot someone just when the person was about to pull the trigger. Even before the man he had shot fell on the ground, he spun her to another angle and released two bullets to two different locations.

‘This was definitely not real’ she thought as Dark Prince continued spinning and shooting. She had seen Jason fight but this Dark Prince was on a different level. It was as if he was doing his hobby. She should be afraid, but she still could not feel anything. A gunshot that was not fired by Dark Prince made her look up same time someone fell from the roof of a building. It looked like he was about to shoot them. Someone else appeared on the roof top and it was totally not what she expected to see. The person was female. She was on a red flare gown that stopped before her knees. Her natural long hair were packed in a ponytail. She carried a black back bag, which she had also seen Dark Prince carry. It was same with Jason and George. But theirs was very small compared to Jason's bag. She had a gun on one hand and the other hand held a rope that had what looked like a climbing tool. She was on a damn high heel. And the thing she could never mistake was her beauty, she felt ugly with just looking at her. She must have been the one who shot the man that fell off the roof and also the one causing all the gunshots she had been hearing.

‘But who is she and how the heck is a beautiful girl like that a soldier. And why those black heels?’ She thought.

It took less than three seconds to observe everything about her. She summersaulted using the rope but before her heels touched the ground, she had shot two people. Then she was spinning like a ballet dancer same time shooting people she was not even seeing.

She was spun again by Dark Prince who she had lost count of the numbers of people he had shot. Even after Dark Prince had changed her position and she could not see Warrior Princess, she bent her neck to look for her.

“Doc” Dark Prince shouted.

The Next Two Days

The Warrior Princess docked same time Dark Prince fired at someone about to shoot her. Then there was absolutely silence. But they were still pointing their guns at different directions.

Warrior Princess removed the edge of her gun, she wished she knew what it was called. She replaced it with another in less than five seconds. She would later ask her how she did that.

Suddenly, another man on black came out from the back of a thick hibiscus plant. It was exactly where Warrior Princess was pointing at. She could not shoot because he had a fat woman in front of him.

“Drop your weapons if you want her to live” the man shouted pulling the woman to the wall close to the plant. His back touched the wall making it impossible for someone to attack from behind. The woman was so fat and tall that one could hardly see the man talking.

“Jude, let her go” Dark Prince said.

If Dark Prince knew him, then he must have been a member of the Special Force.

“I am going to count to ten and if you don’t drop your weapons, she dies. You know women come first. You must obey the rule” Jude said in a panicked voice.

“One...” he started the countdown.

The woman was shaking and at the same time screaming in Igbo. Dark Prince started talking to the woman but he was not speaking English. He was speaking Igbo. She could not hear Igbo so she could not understand what he was saying to the woman. But it was working because the woman stopped screaming. Dark Prince lived at Asaba which meant he might have come from there. That could explain why he could communicate with the woman.

“Five...six...drop your weapons or I will shoot” Jude shouted.

None of them listened to Jude. Dark Prince was still speaking in Igbo. It happened so fast.

Suddenly, the woman docked and within that second, a bullet hit Jude on the forehead but it was not fired by Dark Prince nor Warrior Princess. There was a red beam of light reflecting on the wall Jude was resting his back few seconds ago. While Warrior Princess rushed to meet the woman who had resumed her screaming in Igbo, she followed the red beam as it left the wall and landed on Dark Prince's arm that was holding her, then it landed on her body.

"Jason she is safe. I still have my android you know. Nick never thought of me. Wild and others are on the rescue. Just go back to Obosi. Doc has to see her first. We will join you later" Dark Prince said.

He also used his hand to demonstrate what he was saying.

There was no relief that could be compared to knowing Jason was alive.

"Jason, Jason" she called turning to locate him but did not see him.

The red beam of light was lowered to her stomach. She watched as it was used to draw a love symbol, then it disappeared. Before she could fully digest Jason's message someone called her.

"Hello Cindy, you are prettier in real life. I am called many names but you can call me Sabrina" the warrior Princess said extending her hands.

"Hi" she said shyly shaking Sabrina's hand.

"Please permit me to treat your shoulder" Sabrina said.

The word shoulder restored the pain that was supposed to be there. Dark Prince released his hold on her. Within a minute, she was sitting on a mat Sabrina had brought out from her bag and her

shoulder was being attended to. While Sabrina attended to her, Dark Prince went to meet the fat woman who was still shouting in Igbo.

“You guys don’t speak military language” she said.

Sabrina used a knife to open the neck of the T-shirt covering her injured shoulder.

“You know military languages?” she asked smiling.

“I watch action movies and I read novels too” she responded.

She winced in pains as Sabrina peeled off the bandage.

“Military language is a coded language and it is general. Any Nigerian soldier can understand it but we speak normal and sometimes in coded words when it comes to Special Force, and most importantly The Circle.”

“Why?”

“Guess.”

“Jason” She said making Sabrina laugh.

“Jason is one hell of a soldier. He said the slangs and code did not make any sense. Except when it was necessary, he never used it and somehow we stopped too except when we are working with the average soldier. The Circle communicate more with writing than talking. And we have our way of communicating.

“Wow you are a member of The Circle. I’ve heard Nick tell Faceless how one can join the....” she stopped midway after mentioning Faceless.

“Wait... my Uncle...Ouch” she shouted as Sabrina robbed her shoulder with something she had never seen.

“Sorry. It hurts but its way better than Methylated Spirit. So he is really your uncle?”

“My father’s elder brother. Jason said he is in danger” she panicked.

“He had gone there to help him. Now stay still if you want us to be on our way to join him as soon as possible” Sabrina said. There was no command in her tone, it was like she was pleading.

She immediately became still. Sabrina injected her shoulder.

“This is to stop you from feeling any pain. I going to sew your shoulder”

She nodded but did not say anything. It was true. The pain completely disappeared. She did not want to watch Sabrina sewing her shoulder so she looked towards Dark Prince’s position. The woman had left and Dark Prince was coming to meet them.

“Done. Do you have any other injury?” Sabrina asked.

Her knees still hurt but she could manage. Treating her knees would take time. Time her uncle and maybe Jason did not have. She shook her head in response to Sabrina’s question.

“Okay, let’s move” Sabrina said same time Dark Prince joined them.

She followed them, ignoring and trying her best to hide the pains her knees gave her. Within a minute, they were in a black jeep on their way to Jason and her uncle.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

It took every will in him to go back to Obosi without climbing down to meet Cindy. If he had come down from the roof he was, he would have taken her far away and forgotten about stopping the war. Even as he drove back, he still felt like going back. She was so battered and still in shock. Her shoulders was bleeding but it seemed she did not notice. He tried not to think

of what had caused the trauma that was visible in her face. He should be grateful. Just in one day, he had experienced the impossible concerning Cindy. He stored it somewhere in his brain that he was owing Tamed a debt. Doc also inclusive. He had known there was no way to get to her early. The gunshots he heard as he got close made him believe something was going on. It was confirmed when he got a message from Wild.

‘Tamed and Doc on the rescue, hope you’re safe?’

The relief he got was instantaneous. He had quickly climbed the roof of a building. From there, he could help. He had almost missed out on almost everything.

He stopped his car at a secured location, brought out his bag and used a route not too known to get to the uncompleted storey building he had used to kill those waiting for him at where he and George had camped. From there, he could see the Biafran house with the binoculars of his Barrett M82 which had been remodeled to work like tracking point. He brought out his tool box and checked the location of Flight 2, it was already by Faceless phone. He stopped the movement of the beetle, then he closed down his presence in Faceless’ phone. He then connected his tool box to Flight 2, then to his Bluetooth earpiece.

“What the heck is going on?” Nick’s voice was the first he heard.

He was angry but there was panic in his voice. There were indistinct sounds of gun battle but he just knew it was not coming from Biafran house. It must be from the store house because it was not very loud. Wild and team were busy. The gun battle stopped and almost the same time, he got a message from Wild.

The Next Two Days

‘Soldiers safe. Had help from Biafran soldiers that were not taken hostage, few casualties from Biafran side. You?’

‘Nothing yet’ he responded.

‘We are coming.’

He was distracted by laughter from Biafran house. It was Faceless.

“Jason is not dead. You’ve failed. There will be no bomb blast. You’ve lost” Faceless said.

He had someone being shuffled as if they were searching for something.

“How is that possible? How did Jason know what has been going on?” Nick asked.

There was a pause but the shuffling continued.

“Your phone. He used your phone. You were working with him? All this was all an act?” Nick shouted.

Next came the sound of someone being hit. It must be Faceless getting hit, but he was still laughing. He heard the phone being smashed on the ground.

“You thought you were the master of deception? I never trusted you Nick.”

“Faceless is the master of deception. Nick you are still learning. You can kill me. I will go to my grave in peace knowing your plans failed” he heard a new voice. It was Nwankwo the known leader.

There was another sound of someone being smacked.

“You think this is over? I don’t lose. You are still going to make that call?”

“Never” Faceless said laughing.

There was something in that laughter that was disturbing. If he were to interpret it, Faceless must have something up his sleeve which he was yet to fathom. He checked for Flight 5 but nothing. It must have been discovered and destroyed. There was no time to waste. Nick was right, he never liked losing. If he failed, he would take everyone along. While he logged into BlueAI Company, he listened to what was happening with Faceless.

“Get to work” Nick said.

“You will never win. Your time is up Nick. Thanks to Jason and The Circle, my men are safe. They are coming for you.”

“Shut the fuck up.” There was another smack.

He had succeeded in logging in. In less than thirty seconds he had gained control of their system.

“What the heck are you doing Nick?”

“I’m sure you know what this face look like. This is Nwankwo’s clone. It’s a silicone mask. As for you, he will just wear your mask and I will make this call on behalf of Nwankwo” Nick said laughing.

“Oh, you thought you are the only one that can make the call?”

“No you can’t, don’t do that, you can’t kill innocent citizens.”

“Remove his mask, set up the camera let’s get to work” Nick said to someone.

“Nick don’t do this to your own people” Nwankwo pleaded.

“No, Jason I know you are listening. Do something. Please” Faceless said.

He was in a state of panic.

“He can’t hear you. I’ve destroyed your phone” Nick responded.

He hurried up with what he was doing, he now had access to their system but that was not the current problem. They were not using it for the call they were about to make. It looked like it was Biafran system. The only way to stop them was to hack into Biafran website, then stop them from going online but that would take time. He still had the option of shutting down the networks available but that meant he had to set up the process again. He was lost on what to do.

“My soldiers are already aware of your plan, people would know that call never came from us” Faceless said.

“Nobody will believe them. The Yorubas and the Hausas will be on Igbos immediately after the bomb blast. Tie their mouth, I don’t want their voice to be heard when I make that call” Nick said.

He had to try. He quickly initiated the network shutdown process. His tool box gave him ten minutes countdown, ten minutes he did not have. He went online to view Biafran website. They were online, he could see Nwankwo’s face on Nick’s body. Someone was wearing Faceless’ mask.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is our final warning to the government of Nigeria. Let Biafran go, let my people go. Give us our independence. I present to you the real Biafran Leader” Nick said giving the one wearing Faceless’ mask a phone. He was good in impersonating Nwankwo’s voice. There was no visual on Nwankwo and Faceless.

The Next Two Days

The man took the phone and dialed a line. He had never felt hopeless. After all their struggle and battle, the call was still made. He had failed Nigeria.

Suddenly they went offline. It was over, the bomb had exploded and Nigeria would soon become the center of attraction.

“What the fuck was that?” Nick shouted bringing back his attention to what was going on in Biafran house.

“Sir, the call did not go through. The number is not available” a new voice said.

‘Ghost’ he thought. ‘He did it.’

He quickly brought out his secured phone. He did not bother hiding his location. As he typed a message to Ghost, a message came from him.

‘Mission accomplished. We are on the run, being chased by the police.’ Ghost said.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

‘You just saved the lives of millions. Don’t be caught’ he wrote and sent to Ghost. He put his phone back in his bag.

“Jason, I’m going to kill you. I’m going to destroy you” Nick shouted.

“Why are you laughing?” It was still Nick.

“You’ve lost” Faceless said.

Nick must have removed what was used to tie Faceless' mouth. There was a smack and it was very loud. But Faceless was still laughing. It was disturbing.

“Please do me a favor. What is time? Nwankwo hope you are ready?” Faceless asked laughing.

Suddenly, he could guess why Faceless was laughing. Bomb. There was a bomb. Faceless had ignited a time bomb. He was going to take down the building alongside BlueAI mercenaries and weapons. It was Faceless plan B.

“How many minutes left you fool?” He heard Nick’s voice. He sounded like he was shaking Faceless.

Faceless was still laughing. He heard sounds of retreating footsteps.

“Jason I know you can hear me. He has run away. Don’t let him escape. I ignited that bomb immediately I got to Obosi. I had planned it ahead in case you could not help. I never knew I will be tied to a chair and trapped. I want to thank you and The Circle for your help. Please don’t come over. It’s too late. The bomb will soon explode. Please do me a favor. Can you record my voice?” He paused.

There was no way to answer him. His tool box had been set to record information from their Flight gadgets once connected. He was already by the door when Faceless told him not to come. Faceless continued after a pause.

“Nnamdi, the baton is now yours. You have to continue from where Ebuka, Nwankwo and I stopped. Cynthia, I’m sorry I could not fulfill my own part of our promise. But don’t worry, on that day when you walk to the aisle just know I’m beside you. And if you don’t want to forget me, name your first son Ifeanyichukwu Edwards. I’m happy I met you. Jason, tell Major Ahmed I’m grateful and don’t ever hurt my niece. I’m living her in your care. Long live Biafra. I die a

warrior's dea...." He did not finish his statement as there was a blast that shook the whole building.

Even the uncompleted storey building felt the blast. He went back to the window he was before. With his right hand, he wiped the tears falling from his eyes. He used his binoculars to look at the building. It was aflame. Someone was spotted by his Barrett M82. It was Nick. He had escaped the bomb blast and he was exactly at the place George died. It was about 900 yards from his position. After seeing Goerge's dead body, he had sworn to never say the words Special Force said to their departed. He would only say it after he had killed those involved. He positioned his riffle and adjusted the lens. His left arm protested as he zeroed in on Nick and fired at his leg.

"He had answered the call, to protect his motherland..."

Nick fell on the ground, stood up and started limping. He fired at his left leg.

"Against those who want to destroy her. Against those who do not want peace. But today, his work has ended...."

Nick started crawling. He fired at his hand.

"Today a hero goes home, a hero will rest from his labour. Worry no more about your motherland, for we will continue from where you stopped. Rest in peace."

He fired one last shot that hit Nick on his head.

"Rest in peace George" he said collapsing on the ground.

The Next Two Days

His left arm was on fire but he ignored it. He still had one more thing to do. He picked up his tool box and in a minute, he crashed BluAI website. A blink in his android watch showed Wild was very close. He struggled to stand up. With his left leg resting on the wall close to the window, and the right side of his back resting on another window, he raised a sniper rifle and looked through its binoculars. They were all racing towards the storey building. Cindy was with them. He used the beam to follow her movement, she was crying, somehow she already knew.

The war was over, he would soon defuse the bombs. The first thing he planned on doing after that was to visit Pastor Sam with Cindy. He had fulfilled his promise to Mum. It was Pastor Sam's turn to join them in holy matrimony. Blood was beginning to seep out from the bandage in his arm through his torn black long-sleeve. But he would survive. Although they had lost those close to them, he was a bit satisfied. There was something to celebrate, for the war that would have lasted for years had ended in just two days.

[THE END]

[The Circle series continues. Next is **“Un-Tamed.”** Tamed is on the edge of losing it, he decides to end his life to prevent him from becoming those he hunted, but an unexpected message brings his plan to a halt as he finds himself fighting for his life and the life of a complete stranger.]